



## Revisiting new urbanism in Cornell

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The way Cornell residents tell it, giving neighbours tea and sympathy is a way of life in this Markham new urbanist community.

Homeowners wanting a serious dose of such palliatives, however, can head to Bur Oak Ave., where Jayme Collier Moniz has made a career out of dispensing such things.

Moniz and her husband, Mo, run a storefront called Integral Temple. She's an herbal practitioner and blends teas for what ails your body, and provides lifestyle counselling and meditation coaching to ease your heart and mind.

Mo Moniz is a tattoo artist with a large and loyal following across the GTA, including his wife, who displays large swaths of delicate, intricate designs on her back, legs and arms with pride.

Crisp spring sun pours through the store's picture window across a dark gleaming floor. Delicate exotic fragrances waft through the air.

Bur Oak has zoning for mixed use, which allows residents to run a business at street level and live upstairs. The Moniz family occupies a spacious two-storey, three-bedroom apartment. They relocated from Toronto's Willowdale area two years ago.

Moniz says she'd never heard the term "new urbanism" before they came to Cornell.

"The real estate agent took us to Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Maple," says Moniz, who grew up on a big farm near London, Ont. "They were nice but they didn't feel homey."

New urbanism lays out new communities along the lines of old European towns. It clusters houses, businesses and



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Ryan Creese uses part of his lunch hour from his home-based job to teach his son Ethan, 4, a stick handling trick or two. The family has lived in Cornell four years.

important services, such as schools and recreation, so residents can get to them without having to drive.

New urbanism guru, Andres Duany of Miami-based Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., helped to design Cornell's 600 hectares. The team finished its work in 1995, construction started in 1997 and people began moving in a year later.

Today it has a population of some 12,000 in 400 units but has a long way to go before it's finished. Markham city planners project it will eventually accommodate 40,000 people in 16,000 homes.

That will take another 20 years, according to Dan Leeming, a partner in The Planning Partnership and a member of the original Cornell planning team, who continues as a consultant on the project.

Leeming responds to criticism that Cornell hasn't lived up to the promise to reduce car use by urging patience.

"I would say Cornell is still a child. Communities don't grow overnight. But it's got really good bones, great open spaces, and its (four) neighbourhoods are all within a five-minute walk of centres and transit. As the body fills out it's going to function just fine," insists Leeming, a specialist in urban and sustainable design.

In fact, a recent study released by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. supports Leeming's argument. It examined each of four pairs of Canadian new urbanist communities to nearby traditional suburban developments, including comparing Cornell and Woodbine North.

CMHC found people living in places built on the principles of new urbanism walk or bike at a rate 2.5 times of those living in conventional developments.

"The new urbanist neighbourhoods were built differently and they did tend to have better pedestrian connectivity, higher densities, better access to daily destinations and people were behaving differently: walking more, driving less and they were interacting more," said Susan Fisher, a senior CMHC researcher, in an interview.

But Cornell residents won't get full use of their new urbanist home until it gets the critical mass of people to support more local services.

To that end, Markham's secondary plan for Cornell includes medium and high density along Highway 7, now referred to Avenue 7.

Although the notion of putting highrises in Cornell has made some residents nervous, Susan Taylor, president of the Cornell Ratepayers' Association and a realtor who does 40 per cent of her business there, welcomes it.

"When you look at some of the good things it will bring, they'll come around — as long as it's warm and inviting and in keeping with the rest of Cornell, we're okay with it," says Taylor.

Taylor, who moved in nine years ago, now lives in her third Cornell house and says more people will bring more stores and services, including a grocery store which needs high turnover to survive.

She also suggests highrises would also help ease the shortage of "smaller apartments" in Markham.

Leeming stresses the placement of tall buildings will not interfere with the two- and three-storey areas. The tallest buildings — 12 or more storeys — will sit closest to the main corridor and will step down to four storeys on the edges of neighbourhood centres.

Most important where new urbanist principles are concerned, Leeming says a larger population will support more public transit options.

“Most folks, I’m sure, will need or want two cars until the full transit system is working. But the groundwork has been laid,” he says.

Viva, York Region’s rapid transit system, plans light rail along Avenue 7 that will stretch all the way to Brampton. Cornell itself will have a Viva terminal.

For now, residents can take Viva express buses, which Taylor says have wireless Internet allowing riders to work during the commute, or local buses with stops through Cornell. They can also take GO Transit at the Unionville or Centennial stations.

Not everyone commutes, though. Ryan Creese, for example, works from home. On a bright winter day, the four-year veteran of new urbanism, glides around the skating rink in the village centre with his son Ethan, 3.

He’s taken a lunch break and uses the time to give the boy stick-handling tips, to which the child responds with enthusiasm.

Over at Cornell Chiropractic, chiropractor Laura Rowe holds her 1-year-old daughter Jillian. She and business partner Richard Alexander opened the practice 12 years ago, straight out of school. The practice thrives.

In fact, the Rowes and Alexanders live on the same Cornell street. Alexander’s mother, Novellette Alexander, also lives in the community — and works the reception desk at the clinic.

“I don’t know that (Cornell) is for everybody, but people that do come, well, it’s one of the happiest places,” Alexander says.

The middle of a working day in winter may not be the ideal time to look for evidence of how much people in Cornell use their feet. Even so, here and there people hurry along with dogs on leashes, and children bundled up in colourful snowsuits enjoy the playground next to the skating rink.

Two 15-year-old high school students ambling along Cornell Common Rd. agree to stop and chat about their neighbourhood.

“It’s a peaceful neighbourhood. We’re all accepting of each other,” says Tyler Bewley, speaking from his seven-year Cornell experience.

“Your parents trust you to go outside because it’s a good community and everybody knows each other,” adds Dylan Dunbar, a four-year resident.

Cornell ratepayers take pride in creating opportunities for folks to get to know each other: they hold a big annual picnic with rides for kids and places for local merchants and home-based entrepreneurs to display their wares; a 5-kilometre race each April helps raise money for the Markham Stouffville Hospital.

“Cornell has a lot of community spirit,” says Leeming. “At the end of the day, designers like me and developers go and it’s the people that take over the community and make it work well. That’s what’s already happened here.”