

Before the shovel goes into the ground



HUGH HERON
**ON-SITE
INSIGHT**

It's always exciting when new home buyers sign their Agreement of Purchase and Sale. That document represents an important life step that will carry them into the future.

For the developer and builder, however, the Agreement is a different kind of step — one part of an ongoing journey that began many years before shoppers were offered the opportunity to buy.

We hear the word "vision" a lot in the media today, and for new home developers, it's far more than a buzzword. When we consider a piece of land for residential development, we have to purchase it far in advance of the actual development.

It may already be zoned for residential; if not, the developer has to apply for zoning. Then the process begins, with negotiations with the municipality and province for subdivision agreements. These specify where the roads will be installed, the various sizes of lots and types of homes to be built there, and even where these homes will be placed on the lots.

We have to consider community amenities such as parks, schools, commercial centres, etc. while adhering to municipal requirements and creating homes that will appeal to potential purchasers. The approvals process for all of this can take years, so developers must have vision to realize these plans in the future.

A great example is Heathwood Homes' completed Milton community, Traditions, which sits at the foot of the Niagara Escarpment. We purchased the property at the west end of Old Main Street in 1987, but it was 2006 before we could actu-

ally begin offering the community for sale. In addition to the usual municipal and provincial approvals that had to be met, we consulted with the Town of Milton, the Region of Halton and the Niagara Escarpment Commission to ensure a harmonious natural setting from the Escarpment to the community's front gates.

Also, there were no services in place coming north from the lake, so the building of new infrastructure had to be agreed



The approval process for creating homes that appeal to a wide range of buyers — plus adding schools and amenities such as parks — can take years.

upon by politicians, which took some time. We went a step further and asked area purchasers what they were looking for in a community and home. The resulting design resembles old English towns and reflects the old Ontario feeling of the historic area, with widened roadways, bicycle lanes and parklands. This all took time, and the result is spectacular.

Another example that comes to mind is our plan to build a new community in Whitby, where we previously built 1,000 homes in our completed and established Williamsburg neighbourhood.

Years ago, we purchased land

across the street from that community — land that was already designated for residential development — and we had hoped to have a shovel in the ground by 2006. Now it looks as though it will be 2016 before that happens.

Our new community of luxury homes in Richmond Hill, Forest Hill on the Green, turned out to be a lot quicker. This enclave is situated steps from Yonge Street, just south of Jefferson Side Road, and really is "on the green." We reserved one-third of the property for parkland and green space. We bought the land in 2011, recently sold out, and will begin building in 2016.

We never know how long the process may take. The bottom line is that developers and builders need vision to operate. We have to be able to see the potential in a piece of land years in advance and determine the feasibility of bringing it to reality, which involves risk.

I remember many years ago, a colleague said that the building industry was the only one where he saw true cowboys, and I loved that reference. We do take the risks, and as far as I'm concerned it's well worth the wait. As a builder and developer, for me, there is nothing like walking down the street in one of our completed Heathwood communities, meeting residents and hearing how happy they are.

— *Hugh Heron is Principal and Partner in the Heron Group of Companies, President of Heathwood Homes and Chair of The Mikey Network, as well as a former Member of the Board of Directors of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and a Past President of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.*

5 aspects of a kitchen renovation that affect price



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As the hub of the family home, the kitchen may be the most desired room on your renovation list, but it's also often the most expensive to renovate. eieihome.com spoke with Andrew Bridi, owner of On Centre Design Build, a custom home builder and renovator in the GTA, to discuss the top five decisions that can impact the cost of a kitchen renovation.

Design

Changing your kitchen's layout is the easiest way to drive up the price of your reno. "When you change the location of things, then plumbing and electrical has to be redirected, so it's going to be more costly," says Bridi.

The trend towards open concept living spaces means removing walls. But crumbling walls can quickly break your budget, especially if they're load bearing. Building permits are required to remove walls and structural engineers often have to get involved. Getting engin-

ered drawings can easily add upwards of \$4,000 to your renovation budget.

Cabinet and counter material

While laminate countertops generally cost \$15/square foot, higher end finishings such as granite or quartz cost around \$60-80/square foot — a 200 per cent price difference. Bridi says those on a tight budget would be best suited to opt for white melamine cabinet doors instead of the more expensive wood-grain raised panel doors and staying away from cabinetry extras such as sliding basket systems and magic corners.

Appliances

Bridi sees many homeowners opting for a wall oven and separate cooktop instead of a single range; a design decision that comes at an elevated price. "A good range can cost \$1000 but when you switch that to a single wall oven and a cook-

top, that price can easily double," says Bridi. Switching electrical appliances to gas can also increase your renovation cost.

Plumbing

Adding a water filtration system or garburator can cause your budget to overflow. Selecting high-end name-brand finishings such as a Grohe or a Graff faucet instead of a lower-end Moen will also drive up cost.

Electrical

Adding pot lights to your kitchen design will increase the cost of your kitchen renovation. While a single lighting fixture may suffice in a small kitchen, that same space would need eight to 10 pot lights in order to get the same amount of light coverage. Under and above cabinet lighting are also additional costs. "Just by adding those, you can probably add \$1000 to the kitchen," says Bridi.

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