

Living the dream on Main Street

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John Webster, whose family has lived in Markham for three generations, remembers when tall Maple trees arched gracefully over Markham's Main St.



SUPPLIED ILLUSTRATION

Sierra Building Group's new condo, 68 Main Street, will be one of the centrepieces of the redevelopment of downtown Markham.

Then to accommodate increased traffic, the trees were cut down and the boulevard was paved over. But now Main St. is returning to its roots with a development that will put more shops and people in the area and trees back along the road.

Sierra Building Group's condominium, [68 Main Street](#), which will feature 143 suites with retail on the ground level, is seen by Webster as a catalyst for the growth and development of Markham's heritage village.

"Bringing this project onboard has put eyes on the street," says Webster, who is the Ward 5 councillor in Markham as well as the town crier. "This is exactly what businesses here need. This condo will be the beginning of a whole new era on Main St."

It has been an advantage to develop the condominium in a heritage district where it will be surrounded by buildings that are 200 years old, says Morris Kansun, president of Sierra Building Group.

Committed to a building that would fit seamlessly in with Main St., he worked with architects Flanagan Beresford and Patteson to create a tiered design, like a wedding cake, with three storeys at street level, four storeys stepped back and six storeys stepped even further back.

"If you're standing on Main St.," Kansun explains, "all you'll see is a three-storey building which fits in with the rest of the street. "This design also allowed us to create huge outside terraces on the fourth and sixth floors."

Members of Markham council have embraced 68 Main Street, which will replace an existing strip mall, says Carolina Moretti, councillor of Ward 4.

"This will have a huge impact. In order for a street to be alive, you need people," Moretti says. "This will be a destination where people live, work, and shop."

Priced from the mid \$200,000s to \$1 million, 68 Main Street will offer residents a concierge, a parking spot,

gym, rooftop terrace with a garden and barbecues, and four car shares on the property.

Kansun says that the fourth and fifth floors will have the largest suites with high-end finishings and appliances, fireplaces and gas barbecues.

Suite sizes will range from 600 to 1,700 square feet and there are 32 different layouts to choose from. Five Signature Series appliances will be included, as well as the choice of marble or granite counters, hardwood floors, security systems and upgraded kitchens.

"There will be a central piazza in the courtyard where residents and guests can drive up to the concierge," says Kansun, "and there will be a walkway to Main St. The retail shops will compliment the building with a café, bakery and upscale restaurant."

Diane Kobelansky owns the Tangerine Gecko Art Gallery on Main Street, and has been the chair of the Business Improvement Area for the last year and a half. She says 68 Main will be "quite a bonus" and that "it will encourage new businesses which is better for us.

"The people who will live at 68 Main Street won't have to drive to big box stores or malls," she says. "Stores on Main St. include three women's dress shops, a shoe store where the owner makes the shoes himself, a great gift shop, a fantastic furniture store where the furniture is made to order, eyeglass stores, the best restaurants, lawyers, dentists and hair salons."

The revitalization of Main St. actually began about five years ago when the Town of Markham assumed control of the road, which was previously a provincial road. The town immediately banned trucks to cut traffic and, after a lengthy environmental assessment, is planning to decrease the lanes from four to two so that the street becomes more pedestrian-friendly.

"There will be one lane north and one south, and benches, park amenities and interlocking brick," says Webster. "The hydro lines have already been buried."

The budget for the design of the road is expected in the spring, with construction anticipated to begin in 2012, Webster says, adding that road construction will likely be phased and will take seven to eight years.

The re-development is actually taking Main St. back to the way it was when his grandfather owned a butcher shop on the street, he says, adding his mother used to look out her window, above the butcher shop, and watch people walk by.

When people start moving into 68 Main Street at the end of 2012, they'll be able to shop without getting in their cars and look out their windows at the street life below, just like Webster's mother so many years ago.

"This is what urban renewal is all about," says Kansun. "It's about creating living space in a human scale. It's about connection on an urban street. People don't want thirty storeys. Shadows kill the street. It's important to achieve a scale where people want to walk places."

The grand opening for 68 Main Street will take place in the fall when the 3,000-square-foot presentation centre opens. Kansun encourages people to pre-register to take advantage of a special discount. For more information or to register, visit www.68mainstreet.com or phone 905-305-0822.