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An exciting explosion of new homes; 'One of the fastest-growing communities'

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A short commute from downtown Toronto, Markham certainly has location on its side.

The municipality north of the city has long made the suburban short list --based on proximity alone--for families looking for a place to settle in the greater Toronto area. These days, though, the property range in Markham is growing, as developers work with city staff to create a variety of offerings for homebuyers. Whether they're looking for a condominium suite with a selection of amenities close at hand, a townhouse with a pedestrian-friendly new urbanist approach or an executive-style house overlooking the ninth hole, purchasers are finding that Markham's new-home market offers more than cookie-cutter suburban sprawl.

That combined with Markham's existing amenities and long-term plans, and the town appeals to purchasers across the board.

"I've been there a long time, and I think it's a great area," says developer Rudolph Bratty, president and chairman of the Remington Group. "People want to live here and it has a lot of amenities."

After developing residential and industrial sites through Markham since the 1970s, the Remington Group is now the developer behind one of the town's most high-profile projects -- Downtown Markham. The mixed-use master-planned site combines smart growth and New Urbanist principles with energy-efficient building techniques, for a new pedestrian-friendly downtown core at Warden Avenue and Highway 407. The 243-acre site

will eventually accommodate 4,000 condominium and townhouse units, integrating retail and office elements as well. Suites in the project have been selling quickly, with construction underway and a few remaining units at the Benchmark Town Manors available; these range from 2,360 to 3,105 square feet and are priced from the low \$600,000s. The developer has also recently released the Verdale condominium building, where suites range from 480 to 1,100 sq. ft. and are priced from \$170,000s. "It's been a great success," Mr. Bratty says. "I always expected it to be a success, but not to this degree."

Also proving successful in the Markham landscape is Mattamy Homes's ongoing new urbanist designed project, Cornell, now in its third phase. The project was introduced to the Markham market in 1998, and its second phase won the 2006 Design Excellence Award of Merit by the Town of Markham for its live/work townhouse designs. The third phase has recently been released at 16th Avenue east of 9th Line, with freehold townhouses and live/work units available. Suites range from \$269,900 to the \$400,000s and are sized from 1,200 to 2,455 sq. ft.

The developer also has ongoing projects in Whitchurch-Stouffville, where a similar group of buyers are going to Wheler's Mill and Wheler's on Main, both along the 9th Line as well. New phases are scheduled to be released at both sites late this year, including both freehold townhouse designs and detached properties on 36-, 45- and 50-foot lots.

Markham itself, says Dave Mc-Lean, president of Mattamy Homes east GTA division, has a reputation of actively promoting innovative designs within its boundaries, encouraging smart growth and the pedestrian-friendly New Urbanist principles found at places like Cornell and Downtown Markham.

"Markham, a while back, was one of the first suburban communities that had the vision to create something that hadn't previously been done in most suburban tracts around Toronto," Mr. McLean says.

All this combines with the town's infrastructure of shopping, employment lands and major highways to create a community that buyers want to -- and will continue to want to -- live in, Mr. McLean adds. "It's a very, very well-planned community."

Which means that there's a little something for everyone, with a range of buyers moving in, from young first-time purchasers to growing families and executives looking for high-end homes. They're also coming to Markham from across the GTA, adds Patrick O'Hanlon, president of Kylemore Communities. "Markham is one of the fastest-growing municipalities," he says.

Kylemore is currently underway with two projects in Markham: New Yorkton and West Village. The developer has a history in the town that goes back a decade to the popular East Village community on the Angus Glen Golf Course in Unionville. Now Kylemore has 1,000 homes planned for West Village -- another golf course community on Angus Glen -- and 70 at New Yorkton; both sites are located in Unionville. The executive-style homes at West Village range in size from 2,075 to more than 6,000 sq. ft. and in price from \$400,000 to \$2.6-million. At New Yorktown, townhouses and detached homes are sized from 1,875 to 3,550 sq. ft. and are priced from the mid-\$400,000s.

Many of the people buying into Kylemore's projects have lived in the area all their lives and want to continue to stay there, Mr. O'Hanlon adds. "There is a real sense of community."

Meena Sharma, sales and marketing manager for RegalCraft Homes, agrees. RegalCraft has also been in Markham a while and is currently getting underway with its third phase at the Manors of Wismer Common. The new enclave of homes, located at Markham Road and Bur Oak Drive, features 29 lots and a selection of detached and semi-detached properties ranging in size from about 2,000 to 3,000 sq. ft., with prices starting at \$457,900.

RegalCraft has been building in Markham since 2000, and Ms. Sharma has only high praise for the community.

"We have a soft spot for Markham," she says.