



HUGH HERON
ON-SITE INSIGHT

A developing story

Government, industry and people must come together

We are inundated with people predicting the future, and as much as we like to think we know what's coming, life has a way of taking its own course. Remember 10 years ago, when we were sitting by our television sets wondering if Y2K would bring the world to an end? People were in panic mode, yet somehow we survived. And people who are in their twenties today probably don't even know what Y2K was.

When problems do crop up, resourceful people take action. They may be part of industry or the government or the general population. We can all do our part to help.

Take global warming, for example — today's Y2K. Scientists are currently working on determining the causes and effects — and, yes, there is still a lot of disagreement about it.

I'm not sure what's happening with the changes in weather, but one good thing that has come out of the global warming "scare" is the current trend toward green practices. The Ontario Building Code has been changed to include energy-efficient features as standard in new homes, and builders are going to great lengths to minimize waste on job sites.

People complain about the government and industry lacking leadership in this area, but sometimes what we need is more "followership." Our surroundings affect us, and as individuals, we can all work toward a better environment.

There's so much more awareness nowadays regarding unnecessary waste of energy. People are switching off lights when they leave a

room, recycling, taking lunch to work in reusable containers rather than plastic bags, using public transportation when they can, etc. As a result of the recent recession, people are doing with less and are finding they can still live comfortably. These individual efforts add up to huge results when it comes to saving on the wear and tear on our planet.

The point is, life evolves. The only certainties are death and taxes — and the fact that the value of homes will increase over time ... which brings me to an aspect of the green concept that may be counter-productive.

In the Greater Toronto Area, we have a challenge going forward with something called allocation. Some municipalities, such as the Town of Markham, are pushing to stop development from expanding any farther by limiting new projects to designated boundaries — an increase in intensification.

There is a lot of criticism about external growth, but if people had used that argument 100 years ago, Toronto would still be clustered around Front Street. Looking ahead, we have between 100,000 and 150,000 newcomers to Toronto every year. In 2008, the population of Ontario was 13 million. It is predicted to jump to 21.2 million by 2051. The population of the Golden Horseshoe will expand from 8.4 million to 15.5 million during that same time. It's easy to criticize expansion, but where will all of these people live? Will developers have to leapfrog over the 905 municipalities?

And while we're looking ahead, how will that many more people get



around? Our transportation will need a major overhaul and expansion — and that will work only if we do away with parochialism and work as a team.

Major change takes time. Our cities are growing, and recognizing the need for infrastructure change is a big step in handling growth ef-

fectively. Industry must work with municipalities, regions and provinces to find a solution. With cooperation and teamwork, we can overcome this challenge, just as we have overcome so much in the past. We can make predictions all we want, but in fact, we make the future. Let's make it a good one!

Hugh Heron is president of Heathwood Homes, as well as a former member of the board of directors of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and a past president of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.