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COMMENT

Like it or not, Georgetown is changing

By David Churchill

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David Churchill

Georgetown isn't Mississauga or Brampton.

And for most of our community, that's a good thing. If we wanted to live in a larger city, we'd move there.

But like it or not, Georgetown is changing.

With three major housing projects planned for the downtown over the next five years, our little Main St. will look different and feel different. The question is no longer whether new development is coming, it's how do we make sure it gets done right.

The folks at the Downtown Business Improvement Area are prepared, but BIA boss Ted Flanagan isn't convinced everyone in Georgetown is ready.

"This town is on the edge of explosive growth," says Flanagan, who is also an investment advisor with Caldwell Securities. "Some people think it won't happen but that's wrong."

The biggest talking point is the planned redevelopment of the McGibbon Hotel at the corner of Main and Mill Sts. Georgetown's SilverCreek Commercial Builders has proposed an 11-floor, 125-unit condo project for the site.

That's big. As big as anything in Georgetown and bigger than the initial proposal that was before town council last year.

The McGibbon Hotel is also unique in Georgetown— an historic building which still looks pretty much the same today as it did when it was built in 1888. Comments on the Architecture Conservancy of Ontario, Halton Hills's page have ranged from "hideous" to a "new, positive direction for Georgetown."

But Flanagan says the building is no lon-

ger in sound shape and the logical way forward at this point is a condo project.

When you add in new seniors housing planned on the former site of Holy Cross Church and the latest plan for seniors homes and condos on the former Memorial Arena site on Mill St., there's a new buzz around the downtown.

"Over next four years our whole demographic is going to change," says Wendy Farrow-Reed, manager of the downtown BIA.

Farrow-Reed has heard the concerns from people who want to preserve the town's heritage but believes the McGibbon condos, which still have to be approved by town council, won't impact the feel of downtown for those who love the Farmers Market or a night out at one of the many restaurants on Main St.

"Visually you won't see that much of the glass from Main St.," she said.

For Flanagan, it's a question of moving ahead with caution.

"Our view is progress but let's remember our heritage," he says. "You can't stay in the past."

Perhaps the best spin on where Georgetown is headed comes from Sandy Mackenzie, a 79-year-old lifelong resident and chair of the downtown beautification committee. He was born on Main St. and knows every brick in every building downtown as well as anyone.

"Georgetown's a good place to live," he says. "That's never going to change."

David Churchill is a longtime journalist who writes about family, life in Georgetown and a love of travel. Follow him on Twitter @ChurchillDJ



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