

Monster home phobia growing

There is a phobia making inroads among suburbanites these days, and it's claiming an ever growing number of victims.

And while this anxiety-causing affliction still lacks an official name, it concerns monster homes and the fear that one will be built next door.

Being a relatively new phenomenon, some towns lack the proper bylaws to restrict such oversized dwellings being built beside normal sized homes.

A Markham woman I spoke to recently reported that her family had sold their house and moved a few blocks over when the large lot next to them changed hands. Her fears that the new owner would erect a monster home turned out to be unfounded, but she wasn't ready to take any chances.

In Stouffville, the town council's recent claim that monster homes were not a problem in that town's built up area came as a surprise to Nancy Constable of Main St. East. Constable, whose modest bungalow once sat between two century homes of normal size, suddenly found her brand new private backyard patio laying at the base of an enormous new dwelling back in 1989.

The neighbour who built the house had told her he planned to tear down the original house some day. But what Constable didn't know, was that he intended to replace it with an edifice that was not only three times the size of the former house, but which would be set much further back on the lot.

Consequently, Constable has lost much of the advantage of living on a property with a deep lot. Where she could once look out from her patio at several weeping willow trees to the east, she is now confronted with a massive brick wall.

Her small bungalow, though well maintained, looks like little more than a garage beside this gigantic structure. Her property value has most definitely been affected.

Just across the street from Constable, Gary and Mary Anne Watson have encountered a somewhat similar situation. They are owners of a century home with an easement which has always allowed their roof line on the east side of the house to extend beyond the standard four foot lot line restriction. They could only sit back and watch as a new house was built which they can almost reach out and touch from their window.

As with the house built next to Constable's, this house has also been set back so as to partly obscure what was formerly a pleasant view from the Watson's backyard. While both Constable and the Watsons realize their neighbors have done nothing illegal, they think the town should be showing the same kind of interests in maintaining the uniformity of estab-



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

lished neighborhoods as it does for new subdivisions.

Neither Constable nor the Watsons were consulted by the town before these replacement buildings were put up. As the existing regulations now stand, the town wasn't required to alert them as to the coming major changes next door, as would have been the case in many renovation situations involving

adjoining properties. Constable insists she has no complaint with her neighbor, who, she said, has always been up front with her. But she wonders about the lack of vision of Stouffville's building department for not realizing the effect such a deviation from the norm would have on the overall streetscape.

It's too late to do anything to restore Constable's picturesque backyard view, or her property value. And the Watsons also realize their days of open space are gone for good.

But they all hope the lesson doesn't go unlearned for municipal building officials and planners in Stouffville, or in any other towns with established neighborhoods.



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