



NEWS RELEASE

July 26, 2009

For Immediate Release

Newburg: Urban Development for 21st-Century Survival

Urban development at the fringes of cities can be both high density and very family-friendly, according to a highly-illustrated document released today by the Sustainable Urban Development Association (SUDA). "*Newburg: Embracing High Density at the Urban Fringe*", presents an innovative urban development style that addresses both the need to develop pleasant urban environments and squarely address a number of critical issues of the 21st century.

"With Newburg, we hope to raise awareness and acceptance of the need for significant improvements in the shape and form of new communities being planned in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)," said John Banka, SUDA's President. "Environmental damage, very high energy costs and unstable economic conditions will mark the next 25 years. We cannot afford to expand out cities without addressing these issues more effectively."

As populations grow rapidly in the GTHA, the key measures of success for new urban areas (also known as greenfield development) will be a high level of land efficiency, dramatic reductions in fossil fuel consumption, significant and lasting modal shifts in transportation away from the use of automobiles, and the development of pleasant and vibrant communities, says SUDA. What this means is communities where densities and the mix of uses is such that virtually anyone living in them can conveniently access all of their daily destinations – including their jobs – by means other than personal automobile.

The Newburg document shows how this can be done, through a family-friendly example that achieves an urban density of up to 13,400 residents and jobs over a hypothetical one square kilometre site – a density much higher than the legislated minimum of 5,000 residents and jobs per square kilometre that municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) are struggling to achieve. "Unfortunately, new communities being planned or built outside of Toronto will consume far more rural land than necessary and be very car-dependent," says Banka. "The bottom line is that, in the '905' area around Toronto, sustainability will exist only on paper."

Sustainable high density also means relying heavily on a variety of attractive energy-efficient attached housing (rowhouses) and apartment living options. "The Newburg style offers a much-needed rebalancing of today's suburban housing mix, which is overwhelmingly marked by single detached housing, when the actual needs of residents are much broader," said Banka. "Unfortunately, in most of today's suburbs, when the kids grow up and leave home or the house becomes too big for mom and dad, the only choice is to move far away from friends or family because nearby housing choices are so limited. The Newburg mix enables people to remain in their immediate neighbourhoods as their circumstances change. Families and friends can keep in much closer touch with each other," said Banka.

Moreover, well-designed high density communities, with a mix of homes, shops and jobs, neighbourhood parkettes, and walkable, car-free environments, bring people together in ways that suburbs can't. "What Newburg aims to achieve is a kind of old European town ambience where people live in communities of neighbours they actually know," said Banka. "There is much less sense of community where we're all encapsulated in our cars, speeding to and from the mall. We can't even look sideways at the people in other cars, much less strike up a conversation."

In another study SUDA completed in 2008, the *Housing Alternatives Acceptability Study*, the majority of respondents favoured more compact communities where employment opportunities are within easy walking distance or easy access to public transit. The Newburg example shows how this can be done, by demonstrating that up to 12,000 jobs can be accessible within a one kilometre radius of almost any home.

"This is an amazing result, and a huge advantage over current planning, where it is assumed that office buildings, retailers and other small businesses must be separated into 'employment zones' where residences are not allowed; this unnecessary separation is what creates so much of our traffic congestion and air pollution," said Banka.

A unique feature of the Newburg example is its network of pedestrian- and bicycle-only 'pedways' that replace roads in front of homes that have garages facing a rear laneway. These pedways, wide enough for emergency vehicles, create safe, car-free environments for adults and children alike. Also, major roads in Newburg include wide sidewalks and bicycle lanes that are well-protected from moving motor vehicle traffic.

"We hope that *"Newburg: Embracing High Density at the Urban Fringe"* provides information that will move minds towards more aggressive and positive decisions in support of sustainable urban development," said Banka. "In an uncertain future, the appropriate 21st-century risk management strategy is to build our cities and towns in ways that are highly affordable and efficient in both land and energy, and in ways that are both attractive and profitable."

SUDA warns that if city-building decisions made today do not adequately reflect future conditions, negative side effects for people may arise that are permanent and difficult to correct.

The Newburg document was authored by John Stillich, SUDA's General Manager, who first envisaged the concept some years ago. Funding was generously provided by the Fund for the Environment and Urban Life, a private foundation based in the U.S.A.

Electronic copies of the report can be downloaded at www.suda.ca. Paper copies of the report are also available for purchase from SUDA.

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For more information, you are encouraged to contact SUDA at mail@suda.ca, or call 416-400-0553.

The Sustainable Urban Development Association is a registered charitable corporation whose mission is to foster a healthy natural environment by providing information about sustainable city-building in the Greater Toronto Area. It is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors.