

April Real Estate Update

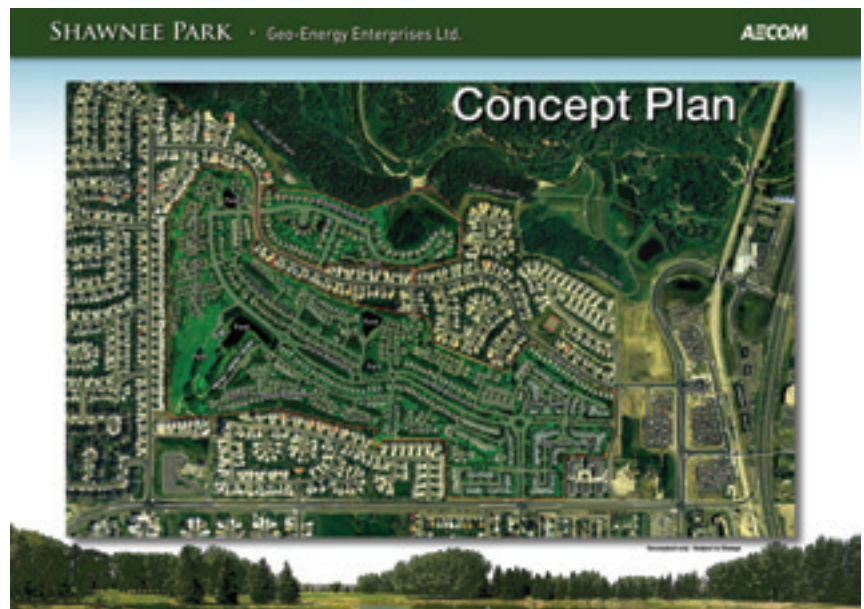
BY DEVON BABIN

Calgary is a city that is known for a lot of things, and one of the more unfortunate terms synonymous with Calgary is “urban sprawl.” Since the economic boom just a few short years ago, just how far Calgary can grow out and the costs involved in an ever-expanding city are issues that must be faced.

Recently, a report was released by Toronto-based Corporate Knights magazine that looks at the sustainability of municipalities across the country. In the category of ‘infrastructure and built environment,’ Calgary came in third out of a possible five positions when looking at density. Based on a scale of 10, in the ‘big city’ category, Ottawa (0.6) and Edmonton (2.1) were the only cities to receive lower scores than Calgary, which came in at 2.7. In comparison, and on the other end of the spectrum, Montreal had a density rating of 8.9 while Toronto had a rating of 7.9. While few want Calgary to grow to the size of Montreal or Toronto, there is clearly room for improvement when it comes to balancing the density of our population with urban sprawl.

In order to combat the issue of sprawl, creative and efficient solutions are being sought, and one of the more unique projects is the Shawnee Park

In order to combat the issue of sprawl, creative and efficient solutions are being sought, and one of the more unique projects is the Shawnee Park redevelopment.



Shawnee Park redevelopment - Concept Plan. Photo courtesy of Shawnee Park/Geo-Energy Enterprises.



Grand Boulevard before (above) and future rendering concept (below). Photos, this page, courtesy of Shawnee Park/Geo-Energy Enterprises.



South edge before (above) and future rendering concept (below)



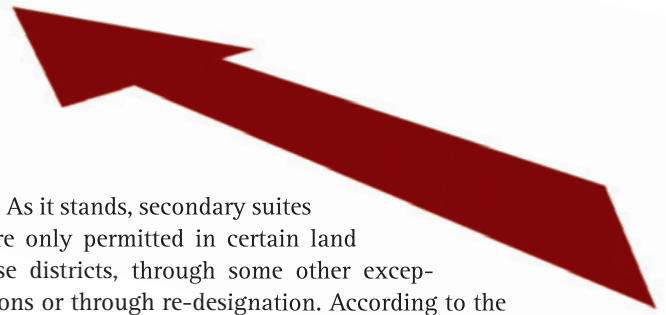
redevelopment. The 131-acre parcel of land is located in southwest Calgary and is part of the original homestead of William Shaw, an Alberta pioneer, and currently the location of Shaw-Neer Slopes Golf Course.

The land, now home to Shawnee Park, became a golf course in the 1960s. The course downsized in 1977 to accommodate more than 80 acres of new residential development. The remaining golf course was intended to be a temporary use of the land before future development would complete the story of Shaw-Neer Slopes. According to Geo-Energy: "A covenant on all residential lots and properties provided a moratorium on further building until 1992, just 10 years, before the landscape could evolve further. This restrictive covenant still remains on most titles even though it expired almost 20 years ago. Over time, the golf course has become no longer viable, and the course was sold to Geo-Energy in 2009 with the intent of development."

The development of this land into more than simply a golf course has been planned for more than three decades. Geo-Energy, the company behind the redevelopment, describes the future community in an original way.

"Shawnee Park is not a community built in the traditional way on earth scraped bare, and in this sense, it is a very different kind of development for Calgary. It is 'integration development' introduced into and engaged with a mature landscape and a surrounding community with thoughtfulness and respect," company documents say.

On top of being a plus for the environment, these modular homes cut construction time significantly and help with the issues of constructing a secondary suite to specific standards.



Assuming this redevelopment opportunity is successful, this type of redevelopment may be seen a lot more, if the right locations are available. Shawnee Park provides great access to transit and amenities that few suburban communities would have readily accessible, and a close proximity to the heart of the city.

“It’s a unique project for Calgary,” says Ray Clark, consultant and spokesperson for GEO-Energy. “We’re proud to be part of this opportunity. We’re thrilled it aligns itself with the planning department and the City of Calgary’s [goals].”

Finding a mature parcel of land like that of Shawnee Park then getting to work on planning and implementing a whole new community is no easy task and the opportunities for such a project don’t come along often. But, now that projects like Shawnee Park are going forward, there is a lot of potential.

“It is a trend? We hope so, for Geo-Energy,” says Clark.

Once complete, Shawnee Park will consist of 1,400 to 1,600 units, with approximately 800 single-family units and 600 to 700 multi-family units. The design of the community provides a great amount of open space, all designed around a central village square.

Bringing Calgarians further into the city is dependent on affordable accommodations. To help individuals move closer to the city, the topic of secondary suites and where they are permitted has been a hot topic since before the new year began.

“Housing availability and choice will be big contributors to Calgarians’ quality of life in the years to come and secondary suites will have a role to play in this,” says Calgary Real Estate Board president Sano Stante. “During the boom we were not able to offer enough affordable rental units, particularly for people looking to relocate to Calgary. The City of Calgary and our current city council has the opportunity to cost effectively provide more affordable rental housing by allowing secondary suites in all residential neighbourhoods.”

As it stands, secondary suites are only permitted in certain land use districts, through some other exceptions or through re-designation. According to the CREB there are estimated to be thousands of secondary suites in non-compliance.

“There is not enough incentive for homeowners to take on the re-designation process. We agree that safety and code issues are critical when it comes to secondary suites, but we need to streamline the process and relax non-essential requirements that make compliance too onerous,” says Stante.

Recognizing the difficulties and frustrations that come with secondary suites, a local company has taken a step in the right direction. Karoleena Custom Homes has embraced modular home building, and they see it as a huge opportunity for Calgarians. On top of being a plus for the environment, these modular homes cut construction time significantly and help with the issues of constructing a secondary suite to specific standards.

The newest product available, which the company feels will be perfect for Calgary, is the Karo Cabin. The multi-use design has many benefits, including some that could help those looking to explore building a secondary suite.

“Having seen a significant rise in the demand for environmentally-friendly building techniques, quicker build times and a higher quality of finished product, as well as a solution for the growing need for secondary suites, modular additions, backyard studio spaces and affordable recreational property, Karoleena announces an exciting addition to its current line of homes—the Karo Cabin,” reads a media release.

The future of the city’s urban sprawl is very much up in the air. As the city and private companies work toward innovative solutions, there will be plenty of options on how to sustainably grow the city. Picking the right options will be the difficult part. **BIC**