

Rural roundup

Ottawa builders continue to flock to the countryside as buyers are drawn to lower prices, more space and the small-town feel

BY PATRICK LANGSTON, OTTAWA CITIZEN AUGUST 22, 2013



Urbandale recently released the adult-lifestyle project Country Walk in Kemptville and is seeing interest from Ottawa retirees looking for a quiet spot close to the city.

Photograph by: Rendering, Urbandale Homes

OTTAWA — Small-town Ontario holds a special place in our collective heart. At least, that seems to be the case, judging from the way new housing projects are springing up left, right and centre outside the City of Ottawa.

From Arnprior to Rockland, developers — many of them Ottawa-based — are snapping up land at less than what it costs in the big city and sprinkling it with everything from townhomes to condos to luxury two-storey singles.

And with small towns offering big-city amenities like modern shopping and new sports arenas as well as housing at less than what you'd pay in Ottawa, buyers are taking advantage of the mini-boom in development.

Here's a sampling of what's happening beyond the fringe.

Arnprior

The 'Prior is clearly the place to be these days.

The last few years have seen population growth "way ahead" of official plan forecasts, according to Arnprior's chief administrative officer, Michael Wildman.

"I have no scientific proof, but I think federal downsizing bodes well for small towns," he says, pointing to the lower price for out-of-town homes. "You may not be interested in jumping into a big mortgage in the city but you might be willing to take on a mid-sized mortgage in a small town."

Sweetening the buyer pot: the recently widened Highway 417 to Arnprior and lower property taxes.

Ottawa developers, meanwhile, are attracted by lower development and land costs in places like Arnprior, says Rahul Kochar, vice-president of Ottawa-based Phoenix Homes.

For Phoenix, building further afield was also sparked by a paucity of raw land inside Ottawa city limits.

The company, which has already built in Almonte, recently launched Westhaven Gate in Arnprior with downsizing retirees firmly in its marketing sights. The project is a mix of semis and singles, including bungalows. Prices start at \$229,900.

"Requests for the bungalows have been overwhelming," Kochar says.

"We try to do some of our dramatic elements like great rooms and higher roofs in these products. We try to keep the same elements that people like in their big suburban homes but wrap them into 1,500 or 1,600 square feet."

Lower costs in Arnprior mean homes are priced at \$30,000 to \$50,000 less than comparable ones would be in Ottawa, says Kochar.

Other Ottawa builders in Arnprior include Olympia Homes, whose Village Creek project will eventually consist of 300 towns and singles, including bungalows. The company says its towns, starting at \$199,000, are its big seller.

Campanale Homes, which already had a toehold in the Arnprior market with its Riverwood Estates development, has now launched Callahan Estates. It's a mix of singles, including bungalows, semis and towns starting at \$199,900 and will eventually consist of some 324 homes.

Asked about reportedly slow sales in Arnprior, vice-president Vince Campanale echoes Kochar when he says, "The whole market is slow. (Arnprior) isn't a boom-type environment, but buyers get prices they couldn't touch in Ottawa."

Elsewhere in Arnprior, homegrown McEwan Homes continues to build out Campbellbrook Village, which will eventually see 350 singles, including bungalows, semis and towns.

With Ottawa builders making serious inroads, "The competition is fierce right now," says the company's plucky owner, Scott McEwan.

Sales offices