

# Empty nesters prefer to stay in Tsawwassen

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At the moment, though, there is little else but single-family homes

A couple of recent experiences caused me to start thinking about the type of housing we are building during this latest housing boom in metro Vancouver. Are we building the type of homes most of us will want to live in 25 or 30 years from now? Are we building enough of the right type of homes to accommodate a population that will double in 50 years?

I talked with a friend recently over lunch about the lack of growth in the suburban community in which he lives. He lives in a typical single-family-detached home on a relatively large lot, a park behind, in Tsawwassen. His kids are off to university. He commutes daily to downtown Vancouver to his office. He and his wife are in their early 50s.

My friend told me he liked the fact that there is relatively next to no growth in Tsawwassen. The peace and quiet in the "small town" setting provides for a tranquil lifestyle that he and his wife really enjoy.

Delta is one of the slowest growing municipalities in the greater Vancouver region. The Tsawwassen community is the slowest growing in Delta.

The community consists of predominantly single-family-detached homes built in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s. During this latest housing boom, Tsawwassen has seen a few apartments built in its town centre, but when measured against growth in other town centres, it has been minuscule. I can't remember the last townhouse built in Tsawwassen.

I asked my friend if he and his wife have thought about where they are going to live in 10 years, when their kids have completed their studies and started their own families. He told me that is a constant topic of conversation, not only with his wife, but among neighbours and friends who face the same situation.

They all love living in Tsawwassen. The lifestyle there is great. But they can't see living in their detached homes a decade



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from now, having to worry about caring for a large yard, maintaining a big home when they want the freedom that is supposed to accompany the "later years in life."

According to my friend, a popular topic of dinner party conversation in Tsawwassen is the fact that there are virtually no alternatives to a detached home for those who cherish the community and want to stay there but also want to downsize. Everyone talks about where they might have to move to find the housing they want.

My friend said he thinks some townhouses, designed for "empty nesters," could be built in Tsawwassen so that he and his generation would be able to remain in the community in a type of home they desire.

A recent news story about a Richmond family living in a condominium also got me thinking about the type of homes we are building to accommodate our population. The immigrant couple and their two young children have been forced to search for a new home because neighbours complained to their strata corporation about the noise the two children were causing in the condo when they were doing what children typically do — running around and yelling. The strata corporation fined the young couple for violating the building's noise bylaw.

A majority of the homes built in this region during the latest housing boom and the one before it in the mid 1990s are multi-fam-

ily homes. Most people are choosing to live in condominium homes, townhouses or other forms of strata-titled housing simply because price dictates choice. Land prices in the region have become so costly, higher density multi-family housing is the only choice.

But many people choosing to live in condominiums and other forms of multi-family housing are also empty nesters who have down-sized from their single family homes where they enjoyed the luxuries of space and privacy. When your kids have left home and you are looking for the peace and quiet of retirement living, a little noise from children playing next door can be a nuisance.

If Greater Vancouver's population continues to grow at the rate it has over the past 20 years, in 50 years the region's population will double to almost four million. With this population boom will come a demographic shift. The growth with the demographic shift will affect the demand for housing.

Although the effects of an aging population have emerged with more elders and fewer children, 50 years from now, more than one-third of the region's population will be made up of people 55 years of age and older. Those under 20 years of age will represent less than 20 per cent of the population.

A decrease in the number of people living per household will be one of the consequences of this demographic shift. Attitudes of residents will also change. Buying habits will change. Lifestyles will change.

Fifty years from now, will we have enough housing appropriate for smaller families without children? Where is this housing now? Where will we be building it in the future?

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