

# TAKING COMFORT

## IN GREEN, SUSTAINABLE HOMES



**I**n May, I had the pleasure of attending a BILD highrise tour in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Malmo, Sweden. The Building Industry and Land Development Association strategically planned the tour to target specific locations in Denmark that were of interest to builders and industry professionals. The tour incorporated a study of the architecture, innovative building techniques, original marketing strategies, different market trends, and more.

This tour covered those areas, but what really stood out was the quality of life that the Danes enjoy. It seems their government has a mandate to take care of their citizens and ensure a healthy — and low-stress — lifestyle.

Evidence of this mandate was the hundreds of kilometres of bicycle paths that were wedged in between the roads and the sidewalks everywhere. The government plans to build even more paths and is able to offset building this infrastructure by completing cost-benefit analyses — for example, by calculating how many health-care dollars they will be saving with a healthier population. In this case, it's estimated that an astonishing \$36 million (CDN) will be saved in health costs.

Because of this, the government takes urban planning to a different level. It seems like they build from the outside in, unlike North Americans, who build from the inside out. Their communities are painstakingly planned to incorporate commons, green areas and water features, like ponds, rivers and fountains. I also witnessed an abundance of pedestrian-friendly areas and green features.

### APPLYING COPENHAGEN TO THE GTA

My visit got me thinking about how we can take these ideas and apply them to our lives here in the GTA. The simplest thing would be to look for quality-of-life initiatives when purchasing your new home. These can be planned communities with walking paths, neighbourhood parks and open green spaces.

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of having a  
sustainable household  
is the comfort and  
durability it provides.

Being able to walk the kids to the park, or cycle to pick up a bag of milk is not only healthy, but calming.

Quality of life is an intangible additive to the neighbourhood you purchase a home in — although difficult to measure when purchasing, it's priceless in the long run. Quality of life extends further than what is outside; it's within the home as well. While many people may think that "green" is just a trend, many studies are showing that more and more Canadians not only see the value in an environmentally-friendly home, but are putting it into practice.

Eco-friendly upgrades can be as easy as switching to energy-efficient light bulbs, replacing or upgrading windows and appliances, to installing solar panels.

These fabulous features aren't often part

of a new homebuyer's wish list because they're not big-ticket items, but are functional and often perceived as boring. However, these sustainable features will not only benefit you and the environment, but your monthly bills, too. While you may need to put in a bit of extra money at the start, the savings can be tremendous — much like Copenhagen's biking infrastructure plans.

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### BUILDING GREEN FROM THE GROUND UP

There are many programs that not only encourage people to "go green," but help you get started, as well. If you're building a new residential home or buying a pre-construction home, I would highly recommend looking into programs by BuiltGreen, the ENERGY STAR New Home initiative, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, and Solar Ready.

All of these programs and initiatives can help you build a sustainable home while providing you with added benefits such as tax savings, mortgage rebates and lowering the overall cost of running your home once it's built.

When it comes to the resale of your home, the renovations and sustainable options you have embraced will be appreciated by potential buyers because of the utility savings your home has to offer.

It is important to remember that while the initial cost may be overwhelming, the future savings and quality of life will outweigh those costs tremendously.

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