

Community conveniences help attract new home owners

BY JOSH SKAPIN

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Deciding on a new condo or townhome goes beyond the floor plan and its specifications. These choices can also be about the community and conveniences nearby.



The swimming pool at the Remington YMCA in Quarry Park. SUPPLIED / CALGARY HERALD

Grocery stores, restaurants and shopping centres are important.

But then there are the uncommon draws. Features that bring people from across the city, but for residents at some developments, they're either walking distance or a quick drive away. Here are five new or under-development amenities that are drumming up interest at multi-family developments, writes Josh Skapin.

The Remington YMCA in Quarry Park

The 94,000-square-foot facility opened its doors for the first time July 1. Before and since then, it has been a popular topic at sales centres at multi-family developments within the southeast community.

“It used to be strictly Carburn park and all the nature reserves nearby,” says Remington’s residential sales manager Julie Seidel. “Now that we have the YMCA, it’s huge.”

Remington is selling two condo developments in Quarry Park. One is called Champagne and the other is The Gates. A sales centre for both developments is at 350 Quarry Park Blvd.

“They like the idea of having an all-purpose facility that they do not have to commute to,” Seidel says of the new facility. “A lot of the time when people are coming home from work, even out on the weekends, they don’t have to go very far to do what they want to do. The people who live in the community just love it.”

Among the facility’s amenities are a 25-metre, six-lane swimming pool, small leisure pool, hot tub, steam room, gym, fitness centre, walking and running track, multi-purpose rooms and a child development centre with 63 spaces. There’s also a 10,000-square-foot Calgary Public Library.

CrossIron Mills Mall and New Horizon Mall

Being only a few minutes behind the wheel to a substantial shopping and employment centre has been a boon for residents in the new communities covering northeast Calgary and south Airdrie.

At 1.4 million square feet, CrossIron Mills is the largest single-level mall in Alberta. That space includes more than 200 speciality stores and outlets.

A townhome development in the Airdrie community of Ravenswood has seen what a major mall can do for the area.

“We do have buyers who work at CrossIron Mills mall,” says Matthew Arena, marketing co-ordinator at Avalon Master Builder. The company has a townhome development in the community called Zen Ravenswood. Arena says buyers are turning to Zen for its blend of Airdrie’s “small-town life” while enjoying “all the amenities of the city.”

“CrossIron is literally a short five to 10 minute drive from our project and you get to skip all the big city traffic,” adds Arena.

Soon, CrossIron won’t be the only draw for in the area for shoppers. In June, shovels turned for construction on the New Horizon Mall, which will be next door. It will have 500 stores and a food court that accommodates 300 people. More than 1,000 jobs are expected to be created directly or indirectly through the construction of the mall. It’s expected to open in fall 2017.

Seton

It's been dubbed the downtown of Calgary's south. And like downtown, the convenient access to an assortment of major amenities has been a catalyst for housing demand. Seton sits within easy reach of a number of new master-planned communities in southeast Calgary, including Mahogany, Cranston and Auburn Bay.

Measuring 365 acres (141 hectares), Seton is one of the largest mixed-use sites in the city and also home to the South Health Campus. At build-out, it's expected to have 2,500 residents and about 12,000 jobs. The development will contain about 1,300 multi-family units, up to 1.5 million square feet of office space and 1 million square feet of retail space. It will also have a high school, recreation centre and assisted living/nursing home.

"Seton and its long list of amenities has been a major draw for our customers in both Auburn Walk and Cranston Ridge," says Brayden Logel, director of sales and marketing at Cardel Lifestyles. "We have sold a number of homes to various types of customers that are currently working at the hospital and liked the fact that they could walk to work."

Avi Urban has seen it, too. The reigning Multi-Family Builder of the Year has an apartment-style condo development called Canoe in Auburn Bay.

"Many of our purchasers in Canoe are evidence of a new trend in buyers we are seeing in our developments," says Charron Ungar, president of Avi Urban. "It used to be that proximity or integration of location of work with the place you called home were not as important a factor. The decision for a new home location was made on the quality of the neighbourhood and personal amenities. So as long as there was quick access to major roadways, then location of work was not a primary decision maker."

Now, Ungar says, the company is seeing the integration of all facets of life coming together.

"Neighbourhoods like Seton are not just employment centres, but the rich and diverse communities built around a philosophy that recognizes the increase in quality of life that comes from being able to work, live, play and learn in close association with one another," says Ungar. "It's a holistic approach to community planning. And that attraction to this concept sits prominently in the collective mind of those who purchased in Canoe."

The Simmons Building/National Music Centre/St. Patrick's Island

East Village continues its transformation to a burgeoning urban destination with a wave of new additions and more on the way. In summer 2015, work wrapped up on St. Patrick's Island, which is a 12-hectare master-planned recreation area with

a plaza and amphitheatre, places for children to play, restored river channels, and hiking and biking trails.

This was followed by the opening of the revamped Simmons Building. The historic structure is now home to Charbar, Sidewalk Citizen Bakery and Phil & Sebastian Coffee Roasters. Last summer, the National Music Centre joined the East Village skyline, opening its doors for the first time July 1.

The new Central Library, valued at \$245 million, is headed for East Village, as well, with an expected opening of 2018.

“Every time we make an announcement on the library or the National Music Centre, or anything towards advancing the vision of the community, we do see a bump in visitations to the (condo development sales centres),” says Susan Veres, senior vice-president of strategy and business development at Calgary Municipal Land Corp. Since 2007, CMLC has spearheaded the Rivers Revitalization Plan, which includes East Village.

Condo developers in East Village include Embassy Bosa, FRAM+Slokker, Knightsbridge Homes and Battistella Developments.

The Rotary/Mattamy Greenway

This history-making outdoor amenity developed by Parks Foundation Calgary is winning the hearts of residents citywide. When complete, the Rotary/Mattamy Greenway will connect 55 neighbourhoods in a 138-kilometre loop around the city, making it the largest urban system in the world. Along the way are family fitness parks, educational wetland interpretive areas, play structures and speciality off-leash dog parks.

One of the communities reaping the benefits of the greenway is Cityscape by Mattamy Homes in northeast Calgary. Cityscape offers a range of housing options including townhomes and single-family homes.

“Now that the community is starting to progress further along the greenway from the north down to south, a lot of our home owners are now backing onto it and using the pathway and boardwalk that is in place,” says Warren Saunders, vice-president of sales and marketing for Mattamy. “They’ve definitely commented on it. It’s something that’s there for them to enjoy and we’ve definitely had great feedback from our homeowners that they’re loving having in it there. And as it gets connected, it’s just going to be more beneficial.

“We’ve actually had people come from other areas to just walk on it and use it,” Saunders adds.