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REAL ESTATE

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Urban Living: Condominiums like these, built by Bernie Glieberman in Royal Oak, present an attractive lifestyle alternative for folks who don't want a big house, big yard or long commute.

Uptown living returns

BY DOUG FUNKE
STAFF WRITER

Merchants once lived above the shops they owned on major commercial thoroughfares. Extended families lived in houses on small lots close to the street in the big city.

Then came freeways and the suburbanization of America – large families, larger houses, much larger yards far away from urban roots.

But in recent years, developers/builders Bryan Timlin, Bernie Glieberman and others have brought an urban lifestyle to suburbs with well-defined downtowns like Birmingham and Royal Oak.

And even back to Detroit, in Glieberman's case.

The pair have found that not everyone covets a huge house and a long commute. Some folks willingly pay more for less living space and neighbors on the doorstep.

"I call it a pedestrian lifestyle ... mixed use with retail, entertainment, restaurants, commercial, office," Timlin said. "You need a true downtown to make it happen, large enough to offer all amenities."

Glieberman sold out more than 200 new-from-the-ground-up condominiums at Main Street Square and Maryland Club in Royal Oak during the mid 1990s much quicker than he expected.

"The demand was there," he said. "I didn't create demand. Planners created demand by making downtowns viable."

Prices started at $79,900 and $89,900, respectively, for 1,000 square feet including two bedrooms and bath-and-a-half.

"They're doing incredibly on resale," said Joanne Williams, Glieberman sales rep.

She recalled that one original purchaser at Main Street who put $5,000 to $10,000 of upgrades in a $79,900 condo recently sold for $137,000.

Condos, townhouses and lofts in an urban setting are easy sells, said Mary Savoie-Huff, a Realtor with Snyder, Kinney, Bennett and Keating, who also represents some of Timlin's builds.

"They move very quickly," Savoie-Huff said. "It's amazing. I wouldn't have believed it. But what can you buy in downtown Birmingham?"

K.C. Mueller, a Realtor with Remerica Hometown, recently sold the last two available units at the Meadows, attached condominiums in downtown Plymouth.

"They were full-price offers and people were lined up in case they didn't go through," Mueller said.

"There's a segment of the population now that really wants an urban lifestyle," Glieberman said. "It's basically young people and empty nesters, not people with kids."

STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLYNSKY

City lights: *Bryan Timlin, a Birmingham developer/builder, is a big proponent of downtown living.*

Younger people may have been put on to the excitement of urban living by visiting friends in San Francisco, New York City and Chicago, Glieberman speculated.

Others, may have tuned in to reminiscences from their parents or grandparents' experiences, Timlin said. And maybe it's just cyclical.

"History repeats itself," he said. "Martinis and cigars are coming back."

Timlin has specialized in new condominiums and apartment-to-condo conversions in Birmingham ranging in price from $129,000 to more than $1 million.

His buyers reflect Glieberman's.

"It's both male and female, people 21 to 85. It's single people and married people," Timlin said.

John and Cheryl Davison, soon-to-be empty nesters, are moving from a condo in Royal Oak to a condo in Birmingham built by Timlin.

"We purchased this home to be close to town, close to work, actually so we could walk to places," John said. "It's close to restaurants, close to shopping for the wife.

"We don't want the big, major upkeep of a house, either," John Davison said. "If I'm going out of town, I don't want it to be totally vacant. People are living around it."

Timlin suspects that urban, condo living will expand in suburban communities like Rochester and Plymouth as the population shifts and more-traveled roads touch those downtowns – if land is available.

Mueller, who also serves as a Plymouth Township Trustee, concurs.

"From the desire of developing a site, I think it's a very realistic possibility," she said.

"Will it be approved by politicians, the zoning? There probably will be a little reluctance, but they will eventually give in. They resist change, resist high rises, resist what they didn't have before," Mueller said.

Timlin, who's building 19 condos and four lofts in Birmingham at 662 Purdy, thoroughly enjoys his niche. "Everywhere there's an urban market, there's an opportunity," he said.

Population growth 5-year change

Las Vegas	+31%
Boise, Idaho	+21%
Phoenix	+17%
Atlanta	+16%
Denver	+12%
Portland, Oregon	+11%
Salt Lake City	+11%
Charlotte, NC	+11%
Dallas-Ft. Worth	+10%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	+7%
Indianapolis	+6%
Grand Rapids-Muskegon	+6%
Kansas City	+5%
Chicago	+4%
San Francisco Bay	+3%
Detroit	+2%
Boston	+2%
Milwaukee	+2%
St. Louis	+2%

Source: U.S. Housing Markets

HELEN FURCEAN / STAFF ARTIST

Consumer's guide to mortgage lock-ins

MORTGAGE SHOPPING

DAVID C. MULLY

When you're looking for a mortgage, you're likely to shop among lenders for the combination of many of important features in a mortgage lender that will best meet your needs: favorable interest rate, the lowest points and other up-front charges, someone who can communicate with you and answer all your questions, etc. When you find the most favorable terms and the lender that you want, you'll apply to that lender.

But when you get to settlement, will you actually receive the terms you applied or bargained for? Lock-ins on rates and points might offer you a way to ensure that what you shop for is what you get.

In most cases, the terms you are quoted when you shop among lenders only represent the terms available to borrowers settling their loan agreement at the time of the quote. The quoted terms may not be the terms available to you at settlement weeks or even months later. Therefore, you should not rely on the terms quoted to you when shopping for a loan unless a lender is willing to offer a lock-in.

What is a lock-in? A lock-in, also called a rate-lock or rate commitment, is a lender's promise to hold a certain interest rate and a certain number of points for you, usually for a specified period of time, while your loan application is processed. Depending on the lender, you may be able to lock in the interest rate and number of points that you will be charged when you file your application during processing of the loan, when the loan is approved, or later.

A lock-in that is given when you apply for a loan may be useful because it's likely to take your lender several weeks or longer to prepare, document, and evaluate your loan application. During that time, the cost of mortgages may change. But if your interest rate and points are locked in, you would be protected against increases while your application is processed. This protection could affect whether you can afford the mortgage. However, a locked-in rate could also prevent you from taking advantage of price decreases, unless your lender is willing to lock in a lower rate that becomes available during this period.

What is a commitment? It is important to recognize that a lock-in is not the same as a loan commitment, although some loan commitments may contain a lock-in. A loan commitment is the lender's promise to make you a loan in a specific amount at some future time. Generally, you will receive the lender's commitment only after your loan application has been approved. This commitment usually will state the loan terms that have

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Title firm can help find mortgagees

REAL ESTATE QUERIES

ROBERT M. MEISNER

Q. We have just approved our condominium documents. What should we do to find out who the mortgagees are and how long should it take?

A. With the help of your attorney, you should obtain a list of the mortgagees. However, many times the co-owners do not provide this information or the information provided is not current. You will need to obtain a list of the mortgagees, which is sometimes expensive, since it requires a title search.

Often times, our firm has worked out an arrangement with a title company to assist the association in obtaining a list of mortgagees at a reasonable cost.

Once the list is obtained, the association's attorney should notify the mortgagees of the approved amendment and request their approval. Generally, mortgagees are cooperative. However, I have experienced a few instances where the mortgagee has been both dilatory and unwilling to cooperate with the association requiring, in one instance, the attorney for the association had to "redline the changes" for the mortgagee since the mortgage company did not want to have to spend the time to review the documents.

The mortgage company, in my view, should, as a cost of doing business, be prepared to assist its mortgagors and the association in approving these documents without additional cost to the association. When mortgagees become uncooperative, notify the mortgagor as well as the chief executive officer of the mortgage company regarding any unreasonable lack of cooperation.

Robert M. Meisner is an Oakland County area attorney concentrating his practice in the areas of condominiums, real estate, corporate law and litigation. You are invited to submit topics that you would like to see discussed in this column, including questions about condominiums, by writing Robert M. Meisner, 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 467, Bingham Farms MI 48025. His email address is Misner@mich.com and his web site is http://www.meisner-law.com

Home Buyers Fair planned Saturday

A lot of questions can cloud the process of buying a house.

Answers will be available during a free, no-obligation Detroit Metro Home Buyers Fair 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the University of Detroit Mercy, McNichols (Six Mile) at Livernois.

Upwards of 60 exhibitors, mostly financial institutions, have signed on to participate in the fourth annual fair sponsored by the Michigan Mortgage Bankers Association.

Additionally, hour-long classes will be presented throughout the day on a variety of real estate topics.

"The purpose is to provide a forum for people in the metro area to gather information on how to purchase a home, qualify for a mortgage," said David A. Trott, a Bingham Farms lawyer and president of the Michigan Mortgage Bankers Association.

"There's so many mortgage products out there now," Trott said. "Someone who's renting for $300 to $400 per month and has $3,000 to $5,000 for a down payment probably can get a mortgage. Even if they have marginal credit, they can probably get a mortgage."

Information can make the home-buying process less intimidating.

"It can be a great experience or, if you get involved with the wrong people, can be a disaster," Trott said.

Exhibitors include Standard Federal Bank, First Federal of Michigan, Comerica Mortgage, Republic Bancorp Mortgage, Flagstar Bank, Sterling Bank & Trust and Fannie Mae.

Also, Real Estate One, Gannon Real Estate, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Allstate Insurance, Professional Real Estate Appraisals, Detroit Board of Realtors and Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

Dozens of others have registered.

Five classes – Your Credit and You, Preparing and Qualifying for a Mortgage, Fair Housing and Fair Lending, Affordable Home Mortgages and What to Look for When Buying a Home – will run concurrently at 9:45 a.m., 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 1:45 p.m.

Free hot dogs and soft drinks will be served 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

"The fair will bring on and promote home ownership," said Sam Kreis, construction loan manager with Sterling Bank. "If you can afford to rent, you can afford to buy. That's the key."