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Keep an eye on him: Ambitious Brad Lamb has splashy plans aplenty for this city



Lamb

Cathie Coward, The Hamilton Spectator

Brad Lamb, the Toronto developer of a proposed new condo development on the old CHCH site.

Hamilton Spectator
By Andrew Dreschel

Toronto-based condo developer Brad Lamb is a big man with a big bald head and an open and easy if sometimes showy manner.

That makes him easily recognizable, which is good because Hamiltonians would be wise to keep an eye on him.

Lamb arguably is the flashy forerunner of a looming development boom driven by outside investors who're eying Hamilton as fertile ground for new projects and profits.

The ambitious 55-year-old condo king — he's spearheading 25 projects across the country worth billions of dollars — has splashy plans aplenty for this city.

As reported in Saturday's Spectator, Lamb wants to build a 40- and [30-storey twin tower condo dubbed "Television City" on the old CHCH TV site at Jackson Street West.](#)

He not only expects those soaring glass towers to make a "big noise" architecturally, he maintains they'll be "signature" buildings whose modern exteriors will be complemented by snazzy loft-style units seldom seen in highrises.

"We want this to be the best residential building in the city, ever," Lamb told the Spec's editorial board.

It's far too early to say if the project, worth about \$360 million, will be approved in its current configuration by the city. What is known, however, is it's just one of several Lamb is planning for Hamilton.

Prior to purchasing the Television City site with local partner Aaron Collina of Movengo Developments, Lamb acquired property on Main West for a 400-unit condo and another on Queen North. He's also looking at an undisclosed fourth "large scale" project with a fifth hovering in the wings.

It's no secret why Hamilton is so appealing. Just as astronomical housing prices in teeming Toronto are driving would-be homebuyers down the road, insane land prices and development fees in that city are motivating developers to look this way too.

Enter Lamb, harbinger of things to come and focal point for the debate over whether Hamilton is fated to become a bedroom community of Toronto.

Lamb knows Hamilton. Back in the 1980s he worked here for a company that supplied welding equipment and electric motors to Stelco and Dofasco. In more recent times, he's been dropping in once a year to scout the real estate market.

He obviously likes what he sees. From Lamb's 40-storey perspective, Hamilton is a turnaround city that's "currently pro-development" and positioned to give him exactly what he wants.

"What I'm looking for is economic viability. That means new bodies, growth and the ability to sell our product and make a profit."

He expects those "new bodies" to come from empty nesters, millennials, investors who'll buy condo units to rent, and, of course, Toronto commuters who want to live in an urban environment but can't afford Toronto prices.

Lamb, who took part in the recent "Hamilton Consulate" in Toronto, put on by this city's economic development department, got himself in a bind for suggesting to a Toronto magazine that Hamilton is, in fact, destined to become a suburb of Toronto.

He claims he was taken out of context, but be that as it may Lamb clearly believes all communities that surround Toronto have "bedroom attributes," including Hamilton.

"People are pushing the boundaries of commuting, trying to keep their job but finding an affordable place to raise a family. And Hamilton is the only 'city' outside of Toronto, or anywhere close to Toronto," he said.

"So people that were city dwellers and wanted a sense of a 'city' would want to live here. And we're seeing more and more of our clients buying houses here and setting up life in Hamilton."

To be fair, Lamb says a lot of transplanted Torontonians will end up finding or creating jobs locally to avoid the

the amazing businesses that are here now and the new ones that will come."

That last thought may comfort some. But given the huge influx of Toronto homebuyers and the growing interest of developers like Lamb, does anyone truly believe that in the coming years this city can escape being at least partially subsumed and reshaped by the great devouring sprawl Toronto has become?

Andrew Dreschel's commentary appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. adreschel@thespec.com 905-526-3495 @AndrewDreschel