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EDITOR: MIKE.DEREZYCKY@METRONEWS.CA

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Comment

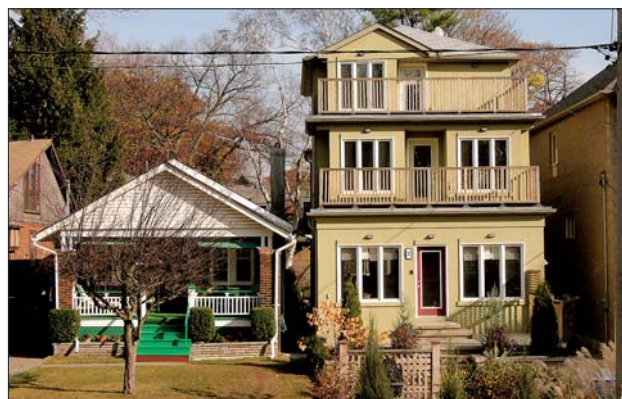
Monster home horrors

Council to decide on new zoning bylaws in new year

UrbanCompass



John Sewell
metronews.ca/sewell



City planners have recommended zoning changes that will make monster homes much more frequent.

The march of the monster homes, like a bad horror movie, seems to be on city council's agenda.

Monster homes are places that are too big, that don't fit in a neighbourhood, that loom over surrounding houses. They get built because someone has found a way to sneak them through a loophole in the zoning bylaw.

But city planners have recommended zoning changes that will make monster homes much more frequent. The planners are rationalizing the mess of zoning bylaws from

the six municipalities amalgamated into the megacity in 1998 and they want new rules to replace the bylaws that have shaped the ways neighbourhoods feel and look. They are repeating the common mistake of the megacity that one size fits all.

One current rule for older neighbourhoods is that the maximum allowable height of a house is meas-

ured halfway up a peaked roof. This encourages roofs to be sloped, which, studies show, makes houses feel more friendly. The new rule proposed is a height limit of either 10 or 11 metres (33 or 37 feet) taking no account of sloping roofs.

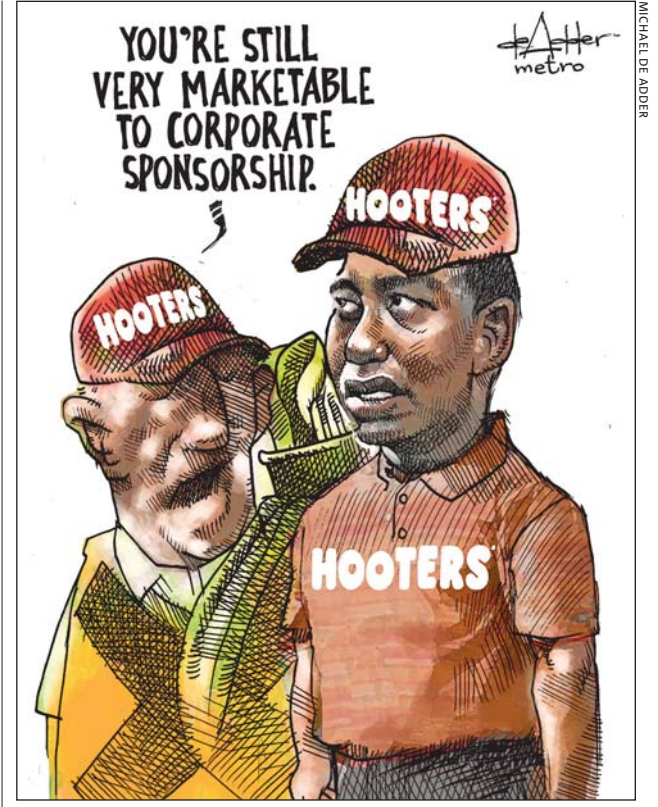
The result of measuring things this way is that houses will have flat roofs, and will be three or four storeys high. They will be monsters

to surrounding houses. Another current rule in many neighbourhoods is that the total number of square feet of floor space in a house must be less than two-thirds of the number of square feet in the plot of land. (This is known as "density," expressed as a density of 0.6.) At two-and-a-half storeys, a house would occupy 25 per cent of the lot.

What's proposed is that new houses occupy one-third of the plot of land, and if they have three or four full storeys, that makes a density of either 0.9 or 1.2, which is 50 per cent or 100 per cent greater than presently allowed. It's like a gift to developers.

City council will decide in the new year on these new rules. Surely we don't need more monsters among us.

John Sewell is a former mayor of Toronto; torontoletters@metronews.ca.



Worth mentioning

Guidelines unveiled for Spanish grammar

Can a Barcelona truck driver be expected to speak like a Buenos Aires banker? Can rules be imposed on a language spoken by 400 million people stretching from Madrid to Manila?

It was produced by the Spanish Royal Academy and 21 sister organizations in Latin America and other countries where Spanish is spoken and has taken them 11 years to compile.

20 The book is billed as a sort of linguistic

map that painstakingly documents today's Spanish in all its richness — there are nearly 20 ways to say ballpoint pen, for instance — and how it varies from country to country, or within one, or from one social class to another.

The academic overseers of the language of Cervantes have taken an ambitious stab at it, unveiling their first Spanish grammar guidelines in nearly 80 years.

The task undertaken by the academics was so gargantuan that the final product not only is spread into three volumes, but also comes in two smaller sizes: A 750-page manual geared toward students and teachers of Spanish, and a simplified 250-page version aimed at the general public.

The fruit of their toil is a nearly 4,000-page tome in two volumes presented Thursday, with yet another to come out next year.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Views

Not such a rosy picture for Aboriginals



Bernd Christmas

the Canadian infant mortality rate. An Aboriginal man will die 7.4 years earlier than a non-Aboriginal Canadian. An Aboriginal woman will die 5.2 years earlier than her non-Aboriginal counterpart.

Unbelievably, 70 per cent of Aboriginal students on-reserve will never complete high school. Graduation rates for the on-reserve population range from 28.9 to 32.1 per cent annually. About 27 per cent of the Aboriginal population between 15 and 44 years of age hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, compared with 46 per cent of the Canadian population with in the same age group

apply to First Nations, thereby greatly hindering any advancement toward gender parity.

On economic terms, unemployment rates for all Aboriginal groups continue to be at least double the rate of the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal persons living in a family setting are about three times more likely to have incomes below the poverty level than is the case for other Canadians. An Aboriginal person earns, on average, an income of \$20,940 versus that of a non-Aboriginal of \$35,872 — the median income is \$14,477 versus \$25,955 respectively. Or in other words, 80 per cent have incomes below \$30,000 per year.

Aboriginal Peoples is grim. The suicide rate is more than twice the Canadian rate. Suicide is now among the leading causes of death among Aboriginal youth between the ages of 10 and 24, with the rate estimated to be five to six times higher than that of non-Aboriginal youth. Diabetes is at least three times the national average. Tuberculosis rates are eight to 10 times higher than those for the Canadian population.

It is wonderful that Canada is held in such high regard by others, but once you start to peel back the layers, an uglier picture emerges ... Aboriginal Peoples' poverty.

Bernd Christmas is a Mi'kmaq lawyer practising aboriginal and corporate law. www.berndchristmaslawgroup.com

Statistics on the health of

We Know What You're Thinking

31% The number of Canadians who believe in Santa Claus.

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