



A look at Georgian Square

Lana Sostar, B.A.



Georgian Square Condominiums—also known as WSCC#344 is a beautiful townhouse complex overlooking the Armoury in downtown Galt; a section of Cambridge. Though commonplace now, it was Cambridge’s first brownfield housing development project and is a testament to urban renewal as the site passes its first decade.

Fully completed in 2003, Georgian Square was previously the derelict site of a foundry. Reborn as a community of brick townhomes with Georgian style architecture surrounding a central park, the complex enters its next decade re-christened, as “Georgian Square”. The name change was an owner’s initiative to differentiate this unique community from the condominium complex next door,

also called “Wellington Square” (WSCC#439). New signage now identifies the community as Georgian Square; a process that included owner input and culminated in a vote for the best of three at the last AGM.

Bounded by Harris Street, Bruce Street, Wellington Street and Commonwealth Lane the community consists of 82 townhouse units occupied by a balanced mix of young fami-

lies, students and retirees. Georgian Square’s proximity to public transit, schools, local theatre, the Grand River walking trails, outlet shopping and the Cambridge Farmers Market offers something for everyone. Easy accessibility to downtown allows for a car-free lifestyle. Though there are challenges associated with proximity to core areas, WSCC #344 illustrates what can be achieved when derelict properties in prime locations are converted into residential communities. Georgian Square and other local projects have contributed their vitality to the downtown, not only by invigorating retail business, but by providing a community presence, re-defining the traditional downtown demographic.

Georgian Square was designed to be sympathetic to the heritage district it borders. The ample use of stone finishes recalls the many stone buildings in Cambridge’s Heritage Inventory. Each unit has three stories plus a loft and is provided with single or double garage. As there is no additional guest parking in the complex, it is convenient that a municipal parking lot is located across the street on Wellington. Each unit has an exclusive use front yard which is owner maintained. Participation in patio garden contests is encouraged. Prizes are awarded

after the annual owners' meeting for different categories. The community itself sits on approximately 5 acres which includes a common elements parkette. The park is currently undergoing rejuvenation with input from the volunteer gardening club. An Armourstone border has been added to the main bed, overgrown plantings have been replaced and re-sited, the patio area has been graced by the addition of a seasonal planter, and spring bulbs have been included.

A recurring issue addressed by boards past and present concerns the community's desire to integrate into the existing neighbourhood without losing the 'integrity' of the complex. Privately owned, the internal roads are maintained by the Corporation, but are subject to use by surrounding neighbours as short cuts, or low volume alternatives. Creative solutions which don't alienate the neighbours include posted reduced speed signs and traffic calming bumps which serve to make the private roads less attractive as an alternate route. On the same theme, a large green space, complete with pathways often invites those from surrounding areas, sometimes with furry friends to use the parkette with impunity, flouting the city's leash and scoop by-laws. This same space by night, with easy proximity to the core and effectively screened from public view by the units themselves becomes an inviting haven for clandestine use. Again, strategically placed gates and fences with a low profile, and private

property signage provide the amount of deterrence needed. These initiatives reduce non-resident use and keep maintenance and replacement costs to a minimum.

Many people find condominium developments an attractive investment option. As Georgian Square is in close proximity to a local university, the complex has its share of student rental units. How do these rental units, most with offsite owners, impact a community like Georgian Square? Some of the problems encountered have to do with the nature of the student lifestyle. Common features of student life which impact Georgian Square are late or unusual hours, bicycle and car storage, ignorance as to the condo's rules, and most troublesome, house parties. These rental units can quickly become eyesores.

REBORN AS A COMMUNITY OF BRICK TOWNHOMES WITH GEORGIAN STYLE ARCHITECTURE SURROUNDING A CENTRAL PARK, THE COMPLEX ENTERS ITS NEXT DECADE RE-CHRISTENED, AS "GEORGIAN SQUARE".

Abandoned recycling boxes and garbage cans can block the common roadways. Bikes conveniently askew in entrance areas or chained inappropriately to common element fences, rather than placed in the garages are minor infractions compared to potential property damage caused by revelers. The offsite owner is usually unaware of the behaviors of their

student tenants. Rectifying these situations with an offsite owner can be a drawn out process. As the student resident doesn't have the same priorities as a homeowner, acknowledging and welcoming students into the neighbourhood can be an effective deterrent to these negative behaviors. Fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect with our student community makes unpleasant encounters a rarity.

Currently, more pressing issues present themselves as the units begin to age. Though classed as lot-line condominiums, with each owner financially responsible for the exteriors of the unit, the townhouse design utilizes linked roofs. When replacing the roof becomes a necessity, how will the repairs commence? How will the roof boundaries be addressed? How to ensure the adjoining roofs aren't com-

promised during repair? The question arises, should all owners concerned in an affected section be enjoined to repair all at once? Since there are no provisions in the Declaration relating specifically to roof repairs, the board is entering uncharted territory. Currently, the board can dictate only colour and style to preserve a uniform appearance.

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A dialogue at recent AGM's has begun among owners and the board to field ideas about how and when owners should budget for such expenditure. Reminder's for such repairs as roofs and exterior painting are commonly communicated only by newsletter as many owners don't attend annual meetings and are unfamiliar with the condo's governing documents. In some cases, owners are unaware that roof replacement is their responsibility. With a mind to offer some direction to owners, the board has begun to source out qualified contractors, determine a material standard, and possibly secure group discount rates. In this way, the board hopes to propose an equitable solution to all owners, possibly establishing procedures for these repairs now and twenty or so years from now.

Rising maintenance costs at condominium complexes are another challenge. Private contractors for snow plowing and increasing trucking/tipping charges for snow removal are a growing concern. At WSCC# 344, separate driveways, and narrow internal roadways make snow removal challenging at best. Georgian Square is fortunate that some areas of the common element parkette can be used for snow storage to save on these fees. Municipal taxation is a growing issue as more condominiums are registered. The Condominium Corporation is financially responsible for street lamps and their repair, sewers and fire hydrant maintenance on its private property. As owners also pay for these services in their property taxes, an on-going dialogue with the City regarding services is paramount. Owners are encouraged to join the Fair Tax Campaign.

WSCC #344 is facing its second decade. Fair tax issues, rising utility costs, aging unit exteriors, and transient resident populations are issues which will continue to demand attention. On a high note, with many of the units aligned to face the common element park, there are ample opportunities to socialize. Many owners stroll with their pets, and resident children and grandchildren enjoy the green space. There are now many condominium corporations in Cambridge. With its high profile location in Cambridge's downtown, it's still one of the best. Under the stewardship of its board of directors, and advised by its management company, Georgian Square will continue to be an enviable place to live. ■

Lana Sostar is an administrative assistant at M.F. Property Management Ltd. She joined the M.F. team in 2010. Lana is the proud co-owner of a townhouse unit at Georgian Square.



Judy Dawe, C.I.P.
Commercial Account Executive

519-650-6363 ext. 41213

Fax: 519-650-6366

Toll Free: 1-877-578-6030

judy.dawe@cowangroup.ca

705 Fountain Street North, PO Box 1510
Cambridge, ON N1R 5T2
www.cowangroup.ca



556 Edward Avenue, Unit 71
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