

NEWHOMES

Giving plastic and polyester a second life



MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S
NOTE

It was just a little more than a year ago that IKEA Canada announced it would phase out all single-use plastic straws in Canada, nine months ahead of its global commitment to eliminate all single-use plastics from its product range and restaurants by January 1, 2020.

It should not be surprising that this announcement got a lot of play — people really do care about this topic — but at the same time, only a small gesture in terms of what else can be done.

My time spent at the IKEA Democratic Days in Sweden earlier this month was a real eye-opener and did have me thinking about recycling and reusability in broader terms.

First things first, there is nothing wrong with plastic or polyester, both are essential raw materials in furniture and in more common everyday products than you could ever possibly imagine.

But it's not what they get used for that should bother us, it's what happens after it gets disposed of and where it ends up.

Today, too much plastic and textiles end up in oceans and landfills. An oft-quoted fact, is that by 2050, there will be more pieces of plastic than actual fish in our oceans. I am not sure of the validity of that claim — it was also used at an opening day video — but it did have the effect of making us all sit up and take notice.

To IKEA's credit, these materials are not waste but valuable resources that can be used again and again in literally all of its products.

First of all, let's dispel a couple of myths. *No. 1. Sustainable products are boring and look ugly.*



Products made from recycled materials need not be brown and boring, says IKEA's Lena Pripp-Kovac in showing a multi-coloured rug made from re-used plastic.

Recycling products don't have to be brown and difficult (to make), it can be multi-coloured and easy, says IKEA's Lena Pripp-Kovac.

In a session called "Better living through sustainable consumption, Pripp-Kovac spent a lot of time talking about emotional connection we have with things, and on display, were several IKEA products all made from recycled materials including rugs, cushions and pillows.

As for the other myth: *No. 2. There is a premium to be paid for sustainable products.*

"Absolutely not," says Evamaria Ronnergard, an executive with IKEA of Sweden. Ronnergard says when you're are working with new techniques or new materials, "it can be more expensive initially, but in the long-term, IKEA has found this not to be true."

At other sessions throughout the event, I learn from IKEA executives that the corporation is taking bold

steps to building a "circular business" meaning that one day (2030 is the target) all its products will be made out of re-cycled and reusable materials.

Not a simple task as it means transforming its current business and designing products with re-use, repair, repurposing and recycling in mind from the beginning, using only renewable, recycled and recyclable materials.

Already today IKEA uses the equivalent of 5 billion collected and recycled "PET" bottles in its textile product range. In doing so, it contributes to lowering greenhouse gas emissions, saves energy, decreases pollution of landfills and oceans and uses fewer resources by turning waste into products.

Through its sheer size and business set-up, it's hoped IKEA can influence a positive change in the world and also inspire other corporations to follow.

Let's hope they do, for the sake of all people and the planet.

Changing parking standards can impact housing affordability, report says



RICHARD LYALL
RESCON

The City of Toronto's parking standards haven't meaningfully changed since 1986, and that's crazy when you consider how your everyday life has evolved and they haven't.

For Toronto condo buyers for starters, with the City stating a preference for the construction of below-grade parking in its Tall Buildings Design Guidelines, the city is adding \$80,000 to \$100,000 per condo unit.

That isn't chump change for a condo buyer (or a builder, for that matter). And remember, you have to pay interest on that added cost through your mortgage, so it's costing you even more.

In fairness, the City has made exceptions for certain projects near subway stations. But there remains a strict adherence to minimum parking requirements which impact development costs and hits the pocketbooks of millennials and young families as they already struggle to afford new homes.

This is just one of several reasons to reconsider how we plan, design and construct parking for high-rise buildings in Toronto and the GTA.

"Toronto's parking standards haven't been revised in three decades, and that's a problem considering that affordability, stormwater capacity and travel behaviour are factors that need to be considered," says Prof. Murtaza Haider of the Ryerson Urban Analytics Institute. He is the co-author of "How Parking Regulations Need to Evolve for High-Rise Buildings."

The report is the 50th commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), an infrastructure advocate that



Yorkville lot (Cumberland) (Courtesy of RCCAO). Toronto's parking standards haven't been revised in three decades, and that's a problem.

has informed governments at all levels of the merits of investing in roads, transit, sewer and watermain systems, and bridges for 14 years.

In reference to stormwater, the report includes a recommendation for more above-ground parking to avoid high water tables and/or aging pipes to alleviate pressure from the presence of groundwater, exacerbated by heavy rainfall.

As for travel behaviour, how many people do you know in Toronto condo suites that would rather travel by bicycle, transit, ride-sharing service (like Uber or Lyft) or foot to their downtown destinations? Driving within Toronto has lost its appeal; lose the car, save some cash.

And as this trend grows and demand for parking declines, it's important to think of the afterlife of these unused parking spaces. The report cites several case studies from the U.S. and the U.K. which show how old parking garages have been transformed into wonderful new work and social event spaces. A major advantage of building above-ground is that the space can more easily be repurposed in the future.

The report makes three recommendations to the City of Toronto:

1. Undertake a review and overhaul minimum parking standards to reflect the sig-

nificant changes over the last three decades in travel behaviour, technology and services.

2. Examine and encourage innovative above-ground parking options so that these structures can be repurposed for other potential uses in the future such as retail and residential.

3. Consider implementing more flexible parking standards that assess local land uses, accessibility to public transit and travel behaviour, allowing for a nimble approach to emerging technologies and demographic patterns.

"We have to be forward-thinking in the way we plan new parking in urban centres in Toronto and across Canada," says Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO. "The consequences of building too much underground parking are multifold: unnecessarily increasing construction costs, overloading our stormwater and sewer systems, and generating vast quantities of soil that must be transported and disposed of."

Contact me if you also think the City of Toronto's parking standards should evolve. (I do.)

— Richard Lyall, president of RESCON, has represented the building industry in Ontario since 1991. Reach him at media@rescon.com or [@RESCONprez](https://www.instagram.com/RESCONprez).