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Can it be fall already? How did we get here? Where are we going? - by David O'Sullivan

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How did we get to October? It has been a long road adapting to the pandemic, changing our lives, and altering our work habits like never before. The good thing from all this is that we are learning to be resilient and adaptable.

As we move into fall, the cities and towns are holding public meetings online and residents and presenters are learning how to be heard. It was good that prior to this shift to virtual meetings, most approval meetings had moved from bulky display boards to power point. This made moving them to the online virtual format fairly smooth. This has helped to keep the design and construction get back to the business of providing new homes and apartments. Most in the design and development are continuing with projects and adapting to rules for the changed world. We see good things to continue as everyone adapts.

So where do we go from here? What is the future of housing and what will change as we live through these times and hopefully move beyond. The various trade organizations, American Institute of Architects, the National Association of Homebuilders and the Realtors Association have been devoting much discussion to emerging trends on this subject. We are all hoping to capture the sentiment of the home buying public and focus our business to provide for the latest needs.

The pandemic is making us refocus our approach to design. We are looking at cities and their density to determine if this is the right approach. Are there safety and sanitation issues which building codes should be addressing and are not? Do our zoning laws fit with how places could be developed? Will there truly be a flight to the suburbs or areas beyond suburbs? How is the home/work environment evolving and will there be a permanent shift to remote work?

I believe the effects of this pandemic will be long lasting and impactful. Some aspects will still be

desirable but the need for safe outdoor spaces is one that everyone seems to agree is important. The reaction to cities and towns opening outdoor dining areas from former parking areas and underutilized spaces has been positive. We need to find creative ways to make them work for extended seasons and not be an eyesore when empty.

When we look at housing there are many questions we are asking. Should front yards become places where we can entertain and interact with friends while maintaining distances? Do we need more bulk storage in our homes to stock essential items to weather market shortages? Do we need secure separate delivery areas in our home which would allow items to be dropped off by delivery people and we can retrieve when desired? Do homes need multiple small areas where there can be privacy to conduct online meetings and calls? Do we need work areas for children to learn and be online? These are all aspects of daily living that affect our homes and will be factors as people look for new homes or to renovate their existing homes.

What about on a larger scale, what types of communities do we want to live in? What aspects of their present location still are important and function during the pandemic? How can we feel safe in our neighborhood? Do we want to change our neighborhood? The way land is developed and the uses of our buildings will change from this pandemic. Many do not want to return to the busy life of cities and have embraced the simpler life in more rural areas. Whether they will feel safe as things progress and we can find a way to control the virus remains to be seen. Some will think this happened once and could happen again with a new virus so will want to return to their old ways.

As we look forward to this fall, it seems there are far more questions than there are answers.

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