

property tax revenues can increase significantly. If one of the two kitchens is fully decommissioned, an owner may apply to have utilities reduced from two separate fees to a single family charge. When developers twin several condos in a major building renovation, they are normally granted a reduction of utilities matching the reduced number of units.

- ▶ In most jurisdictions, trying to create a single legal title for the two former properties is not advisable. There is no downside for the municipality or the owner to keep the units under two strata title registrations, as it provides more flexibility for future owners.

Twindo building permits call for flexibility and, in most municipalities, new rules. Staff are well equipped to meet the needs of single-family homeowners who frequently apply for major renovations and secondary suites. It is time for condo owners to get some attention from municipal officials.

For residents who stay the course and navigate through the required approvals, a twindo is well worth the effort. The result of merging two condos is a unique urban dwelling with breathing room. And, when they expand their own condo, the taxpayers' new home remains close to the public library, recreation centre, and neighbourhood they already love.

Twindo owners are young families with a second child needing a family room and extra bedroom. They are mature couples who downsized beyond their comfort level and decide to

acquire the bachelor unit next door as a guest suite for kids and grandkids, a bright artist studio, or a sewing room. They are young entrepreneurs needing office space for a home-based business.

Twindo Trends

Why is this happening now? Several trends appear to be converging at the same time as wildly different housing options (think conversion of containers into housing) are featured in the media.

1. Average condo is getting smaller.

New strata developments consist of smaller units. The average size of condo apartments and townhouses has been decreasing since 2008. This trend leaves growing families with fewer options.

2. Young families like the urban lifestyle.

Young families are increasingly willing to stay in downtown apartments, even with children. For many people, suburbia and manicured lawns evoke negative images of commuting and urban sprawl. Moreover, the reality of reduced job security and lower median income makes single-family home ownership far less attainable.

3. Aging stock of condo buildings.

A large number of condos are reaching the age when a major mid-life rehabilitation is required. Renovating a small condo may be a questionable investment; but, renovating two units into a larger twindo often proves to be

a better investment. The cost of joining two units is minuscule when it is undertaken as part of a major renovation.

4. Demand for larger condos.

A larger unit is a common wish for families. Access to extra bedrooms and work/storage space is why most people consider purchasing the unit next door and creating a twindo in the first place. These are the features that will keep the unit marketable later on.

5. Reluctance to move.

For families who love their neighbourhood and local parks, for people who shop where the boutique owners know their name, the option to grow their space rather than move is extremely appealing.

The growing appeal of twinned condos is not about gentrification. Towers already offer luxurious penthouse apartments. However, larger units that are affordable are still extremely rare. In many markets, the only alternative to a condo is to purchase a single-family house – an option that has become out of reach for young families.

Beyond using the guidelines in this article to facilitate the merging of condos, municipal officials should give this housing choice more visibility. For instance, consider working with first adopters in your municipality to share their successful twindo conversion story with the local media. For residents aspiring to a more sustainable downtown apartment lifestyle, two condos merged into one can be the affordable answer to a question they didn't know to ask. **MW**

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