

Housing the New Family: Reinventing Housing For Families

Introduction

In recent decades, the traditional Canadian family — wage-earner father, homemaker mother and children — has been replaced by the dual-earner family as the most common family form. Families led by a single parent, usually a mother, have also become more common over the same period.

The changing structure and role of the Canadian family have implications for housing and communities.

This Research and Development highlight presents the results of a survey on the housing needs and preferences of young families. The survey indicates that young families remain strongly attracted to detached single-family homes located in suburbs. However, it also reveals that many young families are interested in communities that combine higher density housing with a variety of family-oriented services and amenities.

Methodology

The survey, conducted in 1993, randomly sampled 450 young families in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. (A young family was defined as including one or more children aged twelve or under living at home.) One hundred and fifty respondents were interviewed from each metropolitan area, and responses were weighted according to population.

The survey collected information on the housing status of respondents, their area of residence, socio-demographic background, distance and mode of travel to work, and the pressures related to work and family responsibilities. It asked respondents to indicate their preferences on a variety of issues related to housing, neighbourhoods, density and amenities, and asked about the appeal of a new housing model.

Housing And

Community

Design Can

Help Households

Balance Family

Responsibilities

Table 1
Current and Preferred Housing Form

	Total %	Toronto %	Vancouver %	Montreal %
Detached House				
Currently Live In	48	44	72	40
Would Prefer To Live In	80	83	89	71
Semi-Detached House				
Currently Live In	12	16	5	10
Would Prefer To Live In	4	3	3	6
Town House / Row House / Duplex / Triplex				
Currently Live In	19	14	16	25
Would Prefer To Live In	10	7	7	15
Apartment				
Currently Live In	22	25	7	25
Would Prefer To Live In	5	5	1	8

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre *Loger la famille nouvelle : Réinventer le logement des familles.*

**8 Of 10
Respondents
Aspire To
Own A
Detached
Single
Family Home**

Findings

Continuation of the Canadian Dream

According to Table 1, families continue to aspire to own a detached single family home. Eight of every ten respondents chose this housing form over all others when asked what type of dwelling unit they would like to move to in the next three to five years. This exceeds the percentage of respondents (48%) living in this dwelling type at the time of survey. Eight of every ten respondents also expressed a desire to own their own dwelling unit. However, as Table 2 shows, fewer respondents expected to own such a house in Montréal (77%) than in Toronto (84%) or Vancouver (85%).

Respondents were less enthusiastic about apartment housing. Whereas approximately one fifth of respondents were living in apartments, only one in twenty preferred this housing form. As with home ownership, housing preference varied by metropolitan area. Residents of Montréal were least likely to prefer the detached home, while Vancouver residents were most likely to prefer it.

A Suburban Lifestyle

When presented with the option of staying in their current area of residence or moving, almost three quarters of respondents would remain where they currently lived (see Table 3). One quarter of young families responded that they would move to another part of the city. Responses differed for various regions of the city: the proportion of families who would stay in the downtown centre, near downtown, or not too far from downtown was lower than the proportion of young families currently residing in these areas. In contrast, more families would choose to live in the suburbs (39%) than were residing there at the time of the survey (33%). The survey found these responses consistently in Toronto and Montréal; in Vancouver, no change in the percentage of families was recorded for the downtown area and the established residential areas near downtown.

With regard to neighborhood features, young families rank privacy as more important than family-oriented or community amenities (see Figure 1). When asked which neighbourhood features were important, more than 60 percent of respondents identified safety in the dwelling unit and area, privacy and sufficient indoor space and outdoor space; 40 to 60 percent listed parking, sound insulation and outdoor play areas for children. Fewer than four in ten respondents identified shops and services in close proximity, the existence of a strong neighborhood feeling and opportunities for volunteer or community activities.

**Table 2
Comparison of Current and Anticipated Tenure**

	Total %	Toronto %	Vancouver %	Montreal %
Ownership				
Current	58	57	65	57
Anticipated	82	84	85	77
Rental				
Current	41	43	34	44
Anticipated	15	12	14	19

**Table 3
Current and Preferred Area of Residence**

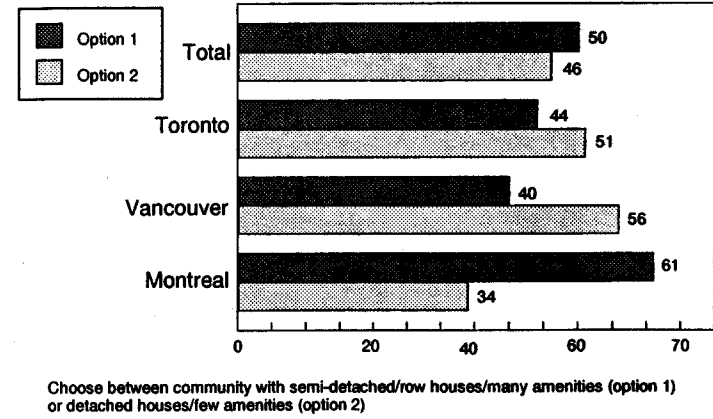
Type of Area Respondents would select if moving in next 3 - 5 years

	Total %	Toronto %	Vancouver %	Montreal %
Same Type	72	69	81	71
New Type	25	29	16	26
Type of Area				
Downtown Centre				
Future	3	5	1	3
Current	5	7	1	5
Established Residential Area near Downtown				
Future	20	20	23	19
Current	27	29	23	27
Older Suburb not too Far from Downtown				
Future	26	26	35	23
Current	32	28	47	30
Newer Suburb near Metro Area Limits				
Future	39	38	27	46
Current	33	33	23	38

Housing Density and Community Amenities

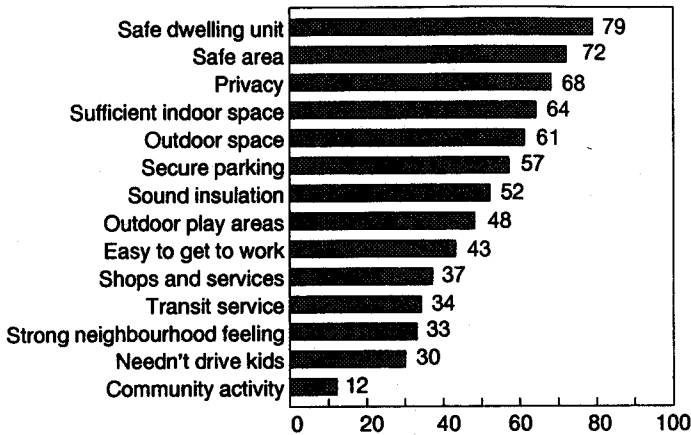
Despite these initial results, many respondents favoured housing that combines increased density with more family-oriented amenities and services. (Family amenities included child care, enclosed safe park space, and easy access to children's activities.) Assuming no price difference, half of the respondents preferred a community of semi-detached and row housing with many family amenities (Option 1) to one with detached houses and few family amenities (Option 2).

Figure 2
The Density/Amenity Trade off: Preferences



Community Spirit And Play Areas Are Important Neighbourhood Features

Figure 1
Importance of Selected Characteristics: Neighborhood, Activity and Housing



Among families who selected Option 1 (communities with higher residential densities and a variety of family amenities and services), the major factors were social, such as community spirit and play areas for children. In contrast, the major factors influencing the decision of families attracted to Option 2 were privacy and independence, the quantity of indoor and outdoor space, and the sense of peace and quiet.

According to Figure 2, Montréal respondents were more likely to choose Option 1. In Vancouver, where seven in ten families lived in detached dwellings, just under 60 percent preferred Option 2. In Toronto, forty-four percent of respondents selected higher density housing with many services and amenities, while 51 percent of respondents chose detached dwellings in communities offering few services and amenities.

Family Characteristics

Families choosing Option 1 share common characteristics in household income, current housing situation and family structure. According to Figure 3, a majority of households earning less than \$40,000 (more than eight of every ten) found Option 1 (higher density housing in communities with a variety of family amenities) very or fairly appealing. In contrast, more than half the households earning more than \$70,000 did not find this housing form appealing. Fewer than two of every ten chose Option 1.

The appeal of higher density housing in communities with a variety of family amenities also varied with the current dwelling type of respondents. According to Figure 4, families living in detached dwellings were least likely to be interested in this housing form. In contrast, eight out of ten families living in apartments or condominiums found Option 1 very or fairly appealing. Only 21 percent of respondents living in apartments or condominiums were not attracted to this housing form.

Figure 3
Appeal of Option 1 by Household Income

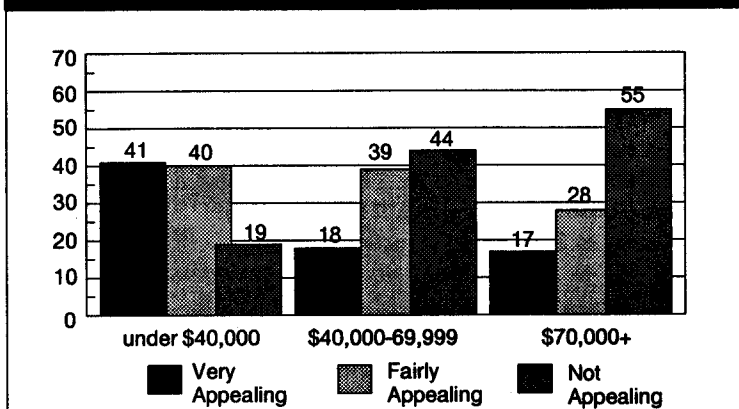


Figure 4
Appeal of Option 1 by Current Dwelling Type

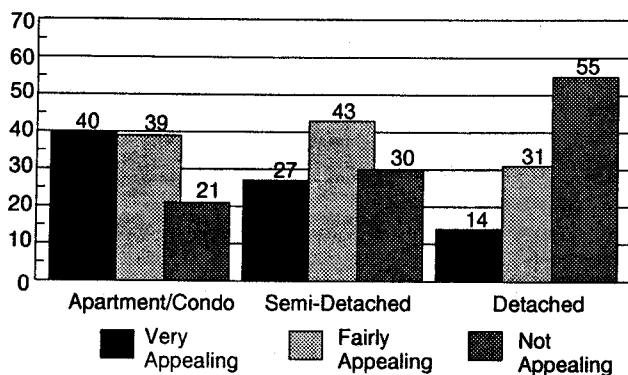
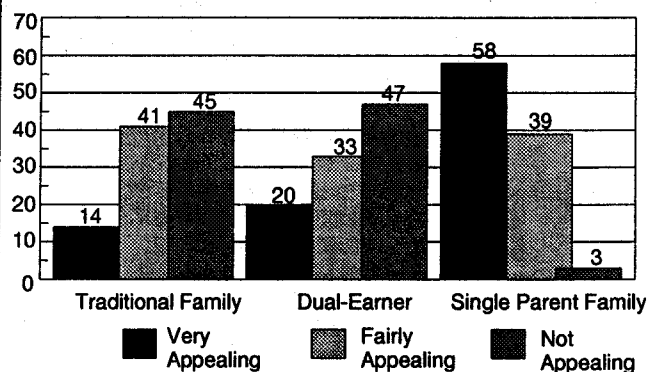


Figure 5
Appeal of Option 1 by Family Structure



Family structure was another characteristic that influenced the appeal of this housing form. Figure 5 illustrates that among the three family types, higher density housing in communities with a variety of family amenities and services received the lowest support from traditional families. Almost five in ten traditional families said this housing form was not appealing. In contrast, single-parent families (mainly led by mothers) exhibited the strongest support for Option 1. Only 3 percent of single parent families responded that this housing form held no appeal to them.

Conclusion

The housing stock must keep pace with changes to family structure and role. The so-called "traditional family" is now less prevalent than it was in previous decades. Today, dual-earner and single-parent families make up a significant proportion of Canadian households. Young families are willing to accept higher density housing if it comes with more family amenities. The challenge for the housing industry and community planning is to integrate family-oriented amenities and services into residential environments. The full report for this study presents case studies of eleven Canadian and European housing projects which have successfully combined higher density housing with a variety of family amenities and services.

This research highlight summarizes some of the findings in *Housing the New Family: Reinventing Housing for Families*. To obtain a copy of the summary or full report, call the Canadian Housing Information Centre, (613) 748-2367. For further information, contact Mr. Denys Chamberland, Manager, Centre for Future Studies, CMHC, (613) 748-2812.

CMHC carries out and finances a broad range of research on the social, economic and technical aspects of housing. This CMHC Research and Development Highlights issue is one of a series intended to inform you briefly of the nature and scope of these activities.

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