

TREB move to neighbourhood names draws flak

Toronto area house hunters conducting their search online can now search for neighbourhoods by name, as in Roncesvalles or Rosedale.

The names are catchier than their previous designations – W01 and C09 respectively – on the real estate map.

Toronto Real Estate Board president Richard Silver says the overhaul is aimed at making searches easier for members of the public, who often found the zones mystifying.

“It allows you or your agent to search by neighbourhood.”

The changes appear on the website realtor.ca, which displays the Canadian Real Estate Association’s multiple listings service for the public. Real estate boards from across the country contribute listings for realtor.ca.

The geographical areas covered by TREB expand beyond the Greater Toronto Area to include Orangeville to the north, Newcastle to the east and Burlington to the west.

The district names and boundaries coincide with those used by the city and provincial governments, says Mr. Silver.

The names coincide with those used on the city of Toronto website. The recently-launched Wellbeing Toronto hub lets users look for demographic information and services in the city’s 140 neighbourhoods.

The city’s interactive map lets users compare neighbourhoods with data on average family income, crime rates, the number of daycare centres and the location of bus stops, for example.

“It gives you much richer data,” Mr. Silver says. “It will be great for us in the future.”

But some real estate agents say the new method of searching is more confusing for the buyers and sellers they represent.

The long-established name Cabbagetown, for example, doesn’t appear on map to describe the area surrounding Carlton and Parliament. Some homeowners who previously thought their house was in South Riverdale will now find it in Blake-Jones.

Patrick Rocca, an agent with Bosley Real Estate Ltd., says he thinks the idea behind the facelift is very good but there have been glitches.

For example, Mr. Rocca has an automated e-mail sent out each morning to prospective buyers notifying them of the new listings that have come up in their chosen neighbourhoods.

Mr. Rocca received assurances from TREB that the search parameters would remain in place and that automatic emails would still be generated but that wasn't the case, he says. After the overhaul, the client names were still in place but he had to spend several hours going through his files and setting up the automated searches again.

He adds that some agents are complaining about a shift in boundaries along with the name changes. One loft located near Parliament Street is set in the trendy Distillery District, for example, but on the map it appears in the area called Moss Park, which has less cachet.

Nellie Czopyk, an agent with Royal LePage Supreme Realty says she is working with one buyer who is looking for houses near St. Clair and Dufferin. On the map, some properties appear to be in the area labelled Corso Italia, which sounds too bustling to the client who prefers a quiet setting such as Regal Heights or Hillcrest Village.

"For the consumer who really knows the marketplace, all of a sudden they are questioning me," she says.

Mr. Silver says TREB has been sending out information to agents for months but he acknowledges that some members have been taken aback.

But he says buyers can now make their search more specific and spend less time looking at superfluous properties. He says it makes sense to keep labels consistent with those assigned by City Hall.

"The one thing I know after 32 years in the business is no one likes change," says Mr. Silver.