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Avalon pilots better ways to protect homes from wind and hail

Pilot project is one of four across the country to test ways to improve homes' climate resilience from high wind, flooding and hail.

By **Andrea Cox**
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Chris Williams, president of Avalon Master Builder, stands outside the Zen Mahogany show home. The company is part of a national pilot project to test climate resilient exterior cladding -- on its new project Zen Belmont -- to better protect homes from weather and hail. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA RYAN /Calgary Herald

A new pilot project targeting climate resiliency takes shape in Calgary's Belmont community as part of an innovative four-way partnership between Avalon Master Builder, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Institute of Catastrophic Loss Reduction and insurer Aviva Canada.

"The purpose of the project is to test the practicality and constructability of resilience measures," says Dan Sandink, senior director, resilience programs at the ICLR. "We are working with builders on pilot projects to help 'demystify' the concept of resilience, which is a relatively new concept to many builders and renovators — and often gets conflated with greenhouse gas mitigation."

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The findings from the Zen Belmont pilot project will inform and refine national guidelines for homebuilders, insurers and homeowners.

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“Avalon’s leadership in the pilot project demonstrates how builders can be part of the solution to climate resilience,” says Kevin Lee, of the CHBA.

Zen Belmont will offer a combination of 120 net-zero ready and net-zero townhomes that are built with technology that mitigates hail and wind damage — two of the most costly and frequent causes of property losses in Alberta.

“Building homes that stand up to Canada’s changing climate is part of our commitment to long-term value and safety for our customers,” says Chris Williams, president of Avalon Master Builder, the builder behind Zen Belmont. “This project is about proving that resilience can be built in from the start, using practical, tested approaches that make sense for builders and homeowners alike.”

Known for its net-zero home designs, Avalon is already a leader in sustainable, energy-efficient home construction, building liveable, thoughtfully designed, high-performance and affordable homes. But Williams notes that the Zen Belmont project is the first of its kind.

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“There are no other market affordable townhome projects in Canada built to this level of energy efficiency or climate resilience,” he says.

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Zen Belmont builds on Avalon's successful Zen series net-zero ready townhome product, which is offered in several communities throughout Calgary and surrounding areas. Zen Belmont will offer 120 stacked townhomes (60 one-story and 60 two-storey homes) across eight buildings. Homes are configured with the one-bedroom, one-level homes on the lowerblevel and the two-bedroom, two-level homes stacked above. Two-storey homes include a fenced backyard and bike storage, while the one-bedroom, one-storey homes offer a private front patio, large windows and a glassed front door for maximum light exposure.

All Avalon homes are built with a net-zero ready building envelope and a heat pump, a process adhering to the CHBA net-zero labelling program, a protocol that Williams says is "stringent and backed by the EnerGuide performance testing and modelling system." Adding solar panels to the net-zero ready home, takes it that step further, making it both fully net zero and adding that first line of defence against weather. Avalon uses Skyfire Energy, which sources hail resistant panels.

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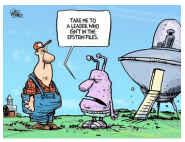

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As part of the pilot project, the Zen Belmont project then knocks it out of the park with a spate of extras designed to mitigate hail and wind like impact and wind-resistant Class 4 hail-rated shingles designed to withstand damage, LP Smart siding, triple-pane windows, hail-resistant roof vents, hail ties and extra fasteners to keep the roof securely attached to the walls during high winds, along with secondary ice and water barrier underlayment. Many of these extras are

already on the docket for Avalon builds. The bonus of the entire package starts with plenty of peace of mind, followed by reduced utility bills and significant savings on insurance premiums.

Megan Olson was one of the first buyers at Zen Belmont, purchasing a one-bedroom, one-storey home in the lower-level of the first building. She purchased the 594-square-foot Braeburn model, one of two one-storey floor plans offered — the other is the Munroe, a 747-sq.-ft., two-bedroom plan. Two-storey designs include the 1,177-sq.-ft., two-bedroom Ambrosia, and the three-bedroom, Empire at 1,611 sq. ft.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“Honestly, net zero wasn’t something that I knew much about, but when I learned about it and the hail and wind resistance, it just added to all of the good things about this project,” says Olson, who is 24 and a first-time buyer. She toured the Zen Mahogany

show home with her mom and fell in love with the open-concept design, all of the closet space and the fact that it was so light and bright inside.

Location was really important to Olson, who works two jobs, as a genetics assistant in the inner-city and also as a server in a restaurant in the south.

“It was important that I could get downtown easily,” she says. Being close to her family in Chaparral was also a definite must. They then checked out the neighbourhood of Belmont, which is situated adjacent to Spruce Meadows. Olson describes it as “quiet and really well-located.”

She’s really excited about moving in (possession is slated for August), and has already picked out her finishes — she’s a big fan of white and wood and has even been shopping for some furniture.

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“It’s just going to be so cosy,” she says. “I can’t wait to have all of my family over for dinner.”

Zen Belmont is one of four pilot projects in the works across the country. Others include a home in Hamilton, Ont., (Empire Communities) piloting high wind, basement flooding and hail risk reduction; a project in Fernie, B.C., (Big Block Construction) targeting measures for wildfire protection; a re-roofing pilot project in Durham, Ont.; and a wind and basement flood mitigation project in Toronto. A Habitat for Humanity pilot project, a partnership between Aviva and Habitat for Humanity, also targeting wind and hail resiliency, is also in the works in Chestermere.

THE DETAILS

PROJECT: Zen Belmont, a collection of 120 one-level and two-level net-zero townhomes that are part of a pilot project designed to mitigate hail and high-wind damage.

BUILDER: Avalon Master Builder.

PILOT PROJECT: An innovative four-way partnership between Avalon Master Builder, the Canadian Home Builders’ Association, the Institute of Catastrophic Loss Reduction and Aviva Canada, targeting climate resiliency.

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COMMUNITY: Belmont

PRICE: One-bedroom homes start in the $240,000s, including GST.

SALES CENTRE: The sales centre is located at 63 Belmont Passage S.W. It is open Monday through Thursday from 2 to 8 p.m. and Friday, weekends and holidays from noon to 5 p.m. Note that the show home is located at Zen Mahogany.

INFORMATION:avalonhomes.com

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