

# Refuge from the road: Arrive at Allard development caters to RV owners



LAURA SEVERS

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More than 28,000 visitors passed through the turnstiles at the recent Edmonton RV Expo and Sale saw more than 28,000 visitors. Alberta leads the way in RV ownership, as approximately 21 per cent of Alberta households own an RV. *BRUCE EDWARDS / EDMONTON JOURNAL*

## Even Dolly Parton is a fan.

The RV lifestyle has long been a lure for those looking to hit the open road while bringing a bit of home with them, and Parton, who commented on her love for RVs on a Late Night with David Letterman episode, is just one of many who long to head out on the highway. In Edmonton, interest in that lifestyle, even in a slower economy, is still quite strong, according to the Recreational Vehicle Dealers Association of Alberta, with the recent Edmonton RV Expo and Sale show drawing around 28,000 people.



The recent Edmonton RV Expo and Sale was a hit. But realtor Steve Sedgwick admits it's challenging property in Edmonton with enough room to park an RV. *BRUCE EDWARDS / EDMON*



“About 21 per cent of households in Alberta own an RV, the highest proportion in Canada,” said Dan Merkowsky, executive vice president of the RVDA of Alberta.

But while buying an RV definitely has its pros, one con for those who want to pamper their new vehicle could be the question of where do you park it? If you’re an Edmonton homeowner you can only park your RV — if you’re parking on a city street between April 1 and October 31 — immediately beside your residence and for no more than 72 consecutive hours. Further, RVs cannot be stored on city streets between November 1 and March 31. If you actively use your RV between November 1 and March 31, the same 72-hour parking limit applies.

“I’ve worked with a couple of clients in recent years where it has been a bit of an issue when they have larger RVs,” said realtor Steve Sedgwick, with Royal LePage Noralta. “It’s challenging to find a property with room to park it within Edmonton’s city limits. Most of those people have been shopping for a property in the metro area, and what they find is there are a lot more acreage or rural options available, but they typically reject that option due to the maintenance obligations that come with a property of that style.”

That doesn’t mean you can’t find an Edmonton home that will work for RVs or have covered garages able to accommodate the larger vehicles, added Sedgwick, who was voted best realtor in Edmonton for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 in the Best of Edmonton Awards.

“Within the city there are still properties like this that come to market. They can be found sporadically throughout the city and with a wide range of price points, but it is quite uncommon to find covered RV parking,” said Sedgwick. “They don’t come up often in the resale market. Demand for that type of property feature is higher than the supply. There’s always a list of people waiting for that type of property, and if it’s priced appropriately it’s going to sell quickly.”

### **Arrive at Allard**

Susan Johnson calls it an untapped market.

“We feel that it is a market that is underserved,” said Johnson, area

manager for Bedrock Homes' new Arrive at Allard development, explaining the thinking behind the southwest Edmonton project that will allow RV owners to park their vehicles indoors. "This is a market where they're probably already in their dream home. The reason they're looking into this is because the RV has become part of their lifestyle and they want their protected (parking) space nearby to store it."

Arrive at Allard, which is still in its early stages, is a condominium bungalow project that is expected to be completed by late spring or early summer 2017. Eighteen duplexes and one single family unit will be built with RVers in mind. The condos, which range in price from \$575,000 to about \$800,000, all include two-car garages and an up-to-50-foot-long RV garage with 14-foot high garage doors. Depending on the model selected — there are four styles to choose from — square footage starts at 1,176 and goes to 1,292, with the possibility of adding 800-plus sq. ft. by having the basement finished.

The homes, said Johnson, are not too large, as Bedrock took into account that buyers are likely to be travelling for a good portion of the year. As they are condos, landscaping and snow removal is taken care of. As for the finishes, Johnson said, "just because this is all about RV parking, it doesn't mean you can't do your home up fancy." Expect higher-end finishes, 10-foot ceilings on the main floor, a backyard deck, and a choice of upgrades to take the home to an even higher level.

But it's the RV-related features that just might seal the deal. For the duplexes, the RV garages are located in the centre of each building unit, meaning that the actual duplex living space is twice as far apart than that of a typical new single-family home. There's also 30- and 50-amp panels you can connect your RV to, an automatic venting system, and sewer dump systems.

Don't have an RV but still tempted? Johnson said the bungalows are also ideal for other outdoor toys, such as boats, ATVs, or even smaller car collections. Arrive at Allard will also include oversized vehicle parking for owners' friends who visit with their RVs.

**From high to low**

If money isn't an option, a two-storey Sturgeon County home was recently listed for a shade under \$2 million. Not only did the house come with 6,000 square feet of living space, it also has an RV bay and more than 5,000 square feet of garage space that can fit at least 23 cars. At the other end of the spectrum, RV owners can just opt for outdoor parking in an RV park.

"There's a reason RV storage is so prolific around Edmonton," said Sedgwick. "It is because lot of RV owners don't have a property that's good for storage."

Merkowsky said RV storage lots tend to charge prices that range from \$40 to \$80 per month. "There are a lot around," added Merkowsky. "The trick is to find one close to your home."

But other possibilities do exist.

"The most attractive properties for consumers when it comes to that characteristic [RV parking] is to end up looking for established properties in older neighbourhoods," said Sedgwick, noting that buyers should not just look at adding RV parking but at finding a home they really like as well. "Some of the challenges then become do you have mature growth trees, and do you have to get it ready, as not a lot of people want to take out mature growth trees."

### **RV demographics**

While Bedrock's Johnson said that baby boomers and snowbirds have primarily expressed an interest in the Arrive at Allard development, the RVDA says RV demographics are shifting.

"What we've seen at our (consumer) shows over the last three years is that the demographic is getting younger," said Merkowsky.

Even though it's baby boomers who are buying the larger motorhomes — with prices ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000 — and it's buyers aged 40-55 who are opting for a fifth wheel (24-foot to 40-foot trailers that require a truck to pull them) there's also interest from a younger crowd.

"People in the late 20s and early 30s are buying starter RVs. These are 15-foot to 25-foot pull-type RVs — trailers that are more adaptable to

being pulled by an SUV,” said Merkowsky, noting that the RV industry outlook, while currently down, remains strong.

“We had seven years of growth to about 16,000 new units (sales) a year until the economy dipped in 2015,” said Merkowsky. “From an industry perspective we’re not concerned about a down year or two, and the industry is now showing signs of growth.”

If that’s the case, Arrive at Allard may have company in Edmonton’s new home market in the not-too-distant future. And, according to Johnson, Bedrock is already considering the possibility of additional developments similar to Arrive.