Surrey and UBC cooperate on creation of sustainable urban community
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East Clayton, also known as the Headwaters project, will incorporate nonpolluting concepts

While construction has not yet begun, some Lower Mainland communities are planning neighbourhoods with a more sustainable future in mind.

The city of surrey, along with the help of the University of B.C.'s James Taylor Chair, in Landscapes and Liveable Environments (www.agsci.ubc.ca/jamestaylorchair), is planning the sustainable urban community of East Clayton, also known as the headwaters project.

In December 1998, Surrey city planners began investigating sustainable development based on principles of sustainable development.

City council, which will vote on servicing and financing concepts in June, wants a compact design with increased density to allow for residents to walk to services including schools, parks and shops. Amenities would be within a five-minute walk to eliminate the need for cars.

The city also wants to develop a mixture of housing types, from single homes to apartment buildings, on the eastern edge of the municipality.

East Clayton's garages would be located in lanes at the rear of dwellings, and an interconnected street network would be designed in a grid to cut down on traffic congestion.

The neighborhood's narrow streets would be shaded be rows of trees to provide a greener, more friendly environment.

One of the unique aspects of this development is a natural drainage system that holds water on the surface and slowly allows it to seep into the ground and into narrow ditches along roadsides.

The proposed development has the support of an advisory committee made up of representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Ministry of Environment Lands and arks, Environment Canada, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp., BC Hydro and other.

The main focus of planning for sustainable development is to protect the environment and water quality for fish, according to Patrick Condon, a UBC associate professor and the head of the James Taylor Chair in Landscapes and Livable Environments. Condon said the East Clayton design would cut down vehicle use and air pollution by about 40 per cent in that neighbourhood.

Condon said the proposed water infiltration system, as opposed to commonly used storm drainage systems, would allow streams to fill normally and would protect fish habitat. He said infiltration can cost less then conventional drainage and no extra land is required for water retention ponds. Infiltration of surface water would nearly eliminate water pollution and stream disturbances.

"We can't completely mimic nature," said Condon. "It's the only way to urbanize and have no impact on streams."

Condon said that as the Lower Mainland's population continues to grow, now is the time to adopt sustainable development practices.

"We only have five to 10 years to change our patterns to avoid what our children are going to truly regret," he said.

While some communities such as Surrey are considering alternative developments, most are slow to catch on. Federal and provincial governments should share the responsibility and political risks for these new projects, according to Condon.

"No one wants to take risk, and when politicians do, there are very little rewards to trying alternative," he explained.

Eric Emery, municipal drainage planning manager for Surrey, said the city is still reviewing potential developers for the project.

"The proof will be when a developer comes in and builds it," said Emery, who predicts construction will start in 2001.

In Port Moody, plans are in works to develop the Suter Brook community, also based on sustainable principles. The development would include about 1,000 residential units in a mixture of low-rise and high-rise buildings. About 55 per cent of the 22-acre site in the Town Center would be preserved as green space. The Suter Brook habitat area would be dedicated as a greenway including salmon spawning channels and rearing ponds.

The development includes a stormwater management plan that separates the clean and dirty water, and an environmental construction-monitoring plan. The proposal includes a stream stewardship plan to educate residents about protecting Suter Brook, a salmon stream which runs through the middle of the development. A fund that the builders pay into would be set up for long-term maintenance of Suter Brook.

Development is proposed for on the former site of a steel foundry where soil contains small amounts of zinc. The ministry of Environmental, Lands and Parks has approved a clean-up plan, which would include removing the contaminated soil.

While Suter Brook development has received all government agency approvals, including council's nod, the development was put on hold last spring due to poor marketing conditions.

Bob Heaslip, planning director for Vancouver-based Pottinger Gaherty Environmental Consultants Ltd., was the development manager for the Suter Brook project for developer Concert Properties, formerly called Greystone Properties Ltd. Concert is in a joint partnership with the Inuvialuit Development Corp. to develop the property.

"This approach starts with the environment first and looks at how we con enhance it.