## THE 'LITTLE CARTS'

**Charrette is French for "little cart." In 19th-century Paris, professors at the Ecole de Beaux Arts were known to push students beyond their normal limits by assigning them huge projects with impossibly short deadlines.**

**They would send little horse-drawn carts — charrettes — to collect the final drawings, finished or not, from the students' homes or drafting stations. Students would leap on the charrette as it was wheeled away to keep working on their sketches until the very last second.**

**Today, marathon weekend or week-long brainstorming sessions by architects and landscape designers are known as charrettes. They are used to generate bursts of creativity and produce concepts or plans that would normally take much longer.**


BILL KEAY / VANCOUVER SUN

### Fewer animals, more people

East Clayton wasn't much good for serious farming — not enough top soil, too much clay — and after the war the large lots, up to five acres at first, were groomed as bucolic retreats from the city, some of them hobby farms with a few chickens, ducks, geese and cows, others with horse stables.

Where fir and cedar used to stand, fast-growing alder and cottonwood grew to dominate a new suburban forest. There are oaks and maples, and evergreens have been returning as the deciduous forest matures.

Big rainforest animals — bears, wolves, Roosevelt elk — disappeared along with the big trees. Forest biologist Norman Alexander, who settled in East Clayton in 1969, saw the animal ecology continue to change around him over the next three decades.

There were plenty of deer in the early days, Alexander recalls; not many now. Coyotes adapted to the urban outskirts, their population exploded and that spelled the end for ground-nesting birds like pheasants. The number of raccoons gradually dwindled, but opossums migrated north from Washington State and continue to survive.

There are still red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, starlings and myriad crows and seagulls which, like the coyotes, find the city to their liking and are driving out other species, including tree-dwelling birds whose eggs they eat.

Small pets became endangered species in East Clayton as the coyote population grew.

"I looked out of my porch one day and a cat went across my backyard," Alexander remembers. "It belonged to my neighbours. It dashed off into [another neighbour] Ed's yard and I kid you not, I could see five coyotes in Ed's yard at the same time, within 25 yards of his back porch."

When Mike McLennan moved into East Clayton in 1983, the place was still "pretty tranquil."

"There would be deer in the front yard sometimes in the morning when I got up, and there were coyotes around. It was a lot quieter. You rarely saw cars going up and down 192nd Street."

There are still hawks and bald eagles in the area, McLennan reports, and the wild rabbits they feed on.

"My dog killed a wild rabbit one time and brought it up by the back window. We were eating breakfast. She was sort of sitting there displaying how proud she was of it, and this eagle came down and basically stole it from her. That was only three or four years ago. And I see owls quite a bit."

### Oversized nest eggs

There was no organized subdividing in the post-war decades, but many lots were gradually carved into smaller pieces that were sold to newcomers. Some of the early East Clayton land owners held five acres or more. Alexander had more than two acres. McLennan has one acre and a bit.

"But age creeps up on people, eh?" observes Alexander, who is retired from a teaching career at the B.C. Institute of Technology. "Most of the people were getting too old to maintain these properties."

Many East Clayton residents began to see their oversized lots as retirement nest eggs, and subdivision as the key to cashing in. Alexander, McLennan and others approached Surrey city hall, which was just then moving from designing an over-all Official Community Plan to individual Neighbourhood Concept Plans for areas that were to be opened to development.

Never mind that the Greater Vancouver Regional District had a "livable region strategy" that designated certain town centres as the growth areas, and that Whalley, in north Surrey, was designated as Surrey's one growth centre.

Surrey bought into the strategy in principle, Mayor Doug McCallum says. But, he adds: "It's no good making all these plans if the reality is that people don't want to live there or you can't sell anything there, or developers can't build there because they can't get a return."

So, Surrey decided to open up as many as a dozen areas for development. East Clayton was one of them.

The land owners, following city hall's advice that they would need a neighbourhood association to take part in the planning process, put together the East Clayton Property Owners' Society. Alexander and McLennan were among the founders; they canvassed the neighbourhood and found "an overwhelming percentage of the land owners in the area were interested" in subdividing.

"Our idea of subdivision was more on the three, four living units per acre basis, a fairly upscale development of the area," Alexander recalls.

In a sense, the land owners wanted to have their cake and eat it, too. They thought the semi-rural character of the neighbourhood could be maintained. They would stay in their homes on a manageable piece of land, sell the rest of the property to newcomers, and continue to live in that green and comfortable place.

### Encouraging change

Patrick Condon was looking at the GVRD's Livable Region Strategic Plan, the provincial government's Growth Strategies Management Act, and other laws and policies.

They said "very good things, like all citizens should have affordable housing, all development should be done in such a way that it doesn't kill the fish, there should be recreational and nature access for everybody, transit should be provided for everybody, all of these nice things."

At all levels of government, laws and policies were being adopted in the early 1990s that encouraged sustainable development. On paper.

"But when you went out there and looked into the suburban developing landscape, you couldn't really find a single place that conformed to those laws," Condon says.

The James Taylor Chair raised money from the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. and others, and put together the Surrey Design Charrette (see story at top of page). In the fall of 1995, it brought together teams of building and landscape designers from across North America in what Condon calls "an entirely hypothetical project" to design a sustainable community "in conformance with emerging national, regional and local policies promoting sustainable development."

"Our idea was that if we don't have a sustainable community that we can actually go out there and look at, why don't we at least draw a picture of what it would look like if we did have one," he explains.

In a single week, participants produced a book of drawings and design concepts for a complete but imaginary subdivision. Next, Condon and his colleagues went knocking on city-hall doors on the fast-growing eastern edges of Greater Vancouver, looking for a municipality willing to turn it into reality.

"It was Surrey and their planning department who at that time came forward and very aggressively asked for us to choose Surrey as the host community for this," Condon recalls.

### Drainage and lawsuits

Take a rolling landscape, a few meandering rivers, mixed stretches of thin-soiled uplands, rich farming country and flood-prone lowlands, a maze of highways following the routes of 19th-century trading trails, a crazy-quilt of century-and-a-half-old towns, horsey estates and 20th-century suburbs, a history of quick-draw development, and a weakness for stretches of strip development where tattoo parlours are the anchor tenants. Mix thoroughly, and you get Surrey — not the easiest setting for orderly planning.

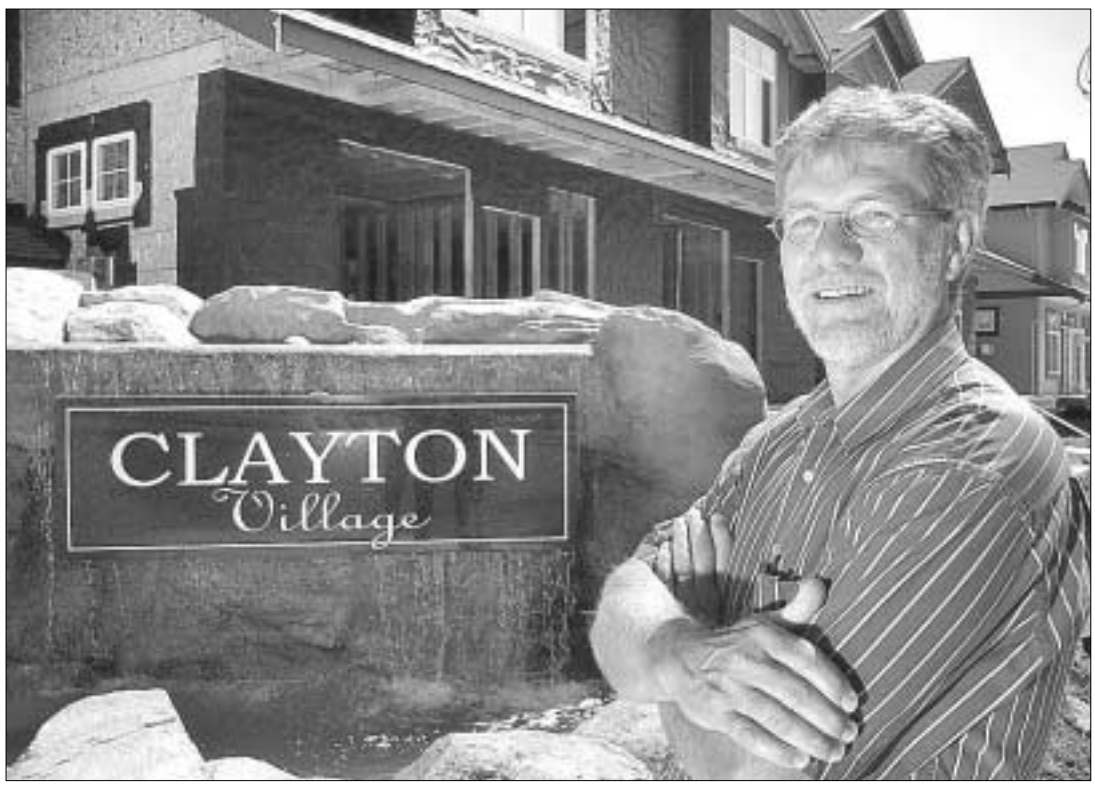
Doug McCallum, first elected to Surrey council in 1993 and mayor since 1996, acknowledges that 15 to 20 years ago, Surrey had earned its reputation for poor urban planning.

By the early 1990s, says Murray Dinwoodie, Surrey's general manager of planning and development, "the city felt that the approach taken to development in Surrey wasn't necessarily efficient, and that a different system needed to be put into place to provide for orderliness and growth."

Drainage was a particular problem. Low-lying parts of Surrey had been flooding more often since the old forests were cut down, and the more land was paved, the worse the flooding became.

In the early 1990s, home owners near Chantrell Creek fought a losing campaign against two proposed upstream subdivisions, complaining they would cause flooding. The new suburbs were built over their protests, their drainage systems promptly failed and by 1995, flooded-out downstream home owners were filing suits against city hall.

**Continued on C4**

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**From top: NORMAN ALEXANDER, JOHN TURNER, PATRICK CONDON, MIKE McLENNAN.**

**Long-time owners with acreage — Alexander, McLennan and others — first approached Surrey council in 1990 with a proposal to develop East Clayton into an upscale subdivision. 'Many of us proposed to stay on a portion of our property,' Alexander recalls. Nothing happened for several years until Condon's UBC group came up with the sustainable subdivision concept. Everyone tried working together, but a clash of visions put the land owners at odds with the academics, developer Turner and Surrey planners.**

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