

DEVELOPMENTS TRY TO MAKE PEACE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, The
Vancouver Sun, September 27,2000.

The plans for Surrey's East Clayton don't look anything like the future cities of popular imagination or Popular Science.

It's not built in concentric circles around an airport. It doesn't have glittering, silvery, round towers connected by high-speed trains. It's not underground or built on stilts or invisible.

But East Clayton, along with two other developments currently being planned in Vancouver region - Southeast False Creek and the new village at Simon Fraser University - represents this model of the future city for many. It will have lanes and garages at the back of the yard. It has some big suburban-style houses, but many smaller rowhouses. It has a traditional street system, small square streets as opposed to the curves and cul-de-sac so characteristic of the suburbs. It has places for small shops and restaurants right in the development, meant to house 13,000 people in over 200 hectares, not at a strip mall a few kilometres away.

Less noticeable but just as significant, it has far less pavement than any other suburb in the region. The stormwater, instead of being taken away through an expensive system of drains and sewers, will be handled through natural filtration into the soil, which gradually feeds streams from subsurface flow. That will help preserve the salmon bearing streams inside and outside the development.

The result of all this: Cheaper houses, a neighbourhood where people can walk to the store or school rather than getting into the car for everything, and a suburb that works with its environment rather than eradicating it. The development is the result of a unique collaboration between a team for the University of B.C., under the direction of landscape architecture professor Patrick Condon, and the City of Surrey, with the support of key politicians like Councillor Judy Villeneuve and Mayor Doug McCallum.

Condon sees developments like this as key to Vancouver's future. "Our whole approach is based on the concept that the site is to the region as the cell is the human body," he said, "If this cell and enough others are healthy, then the region will be healthier.

Two other "cells" planned for the region will take a slightly different approach, since they're going into areas that already have a lot of development. SFU geography professor Mark Roseland has been involved in both. He provided the original spark for what has been a City of Vancouver commitment to a model sustainable urban neighbourhood" in Southeast False Creek, the last big chunk of central city land.

That development, which will house up to 9,000 people on the city and private land, will have "green buildings" that reduce energy consumption, incorporate roof gardens, and, where possible, use recycled materials. It will create streams, foster recycling of all kinds, including water recycling, and connect residents to the city's bike paths, pedestrian routes and transit. Southeast False Creek is getting international attention from city planners and the sustainable-development communities.

Many of those ideas, and more will be incorporated into the new development now being planned for Burnaby Mountain, something that Roseland, as a board member of the Burnaby Mountain Community Corporation, will be even more involved with. Still, he admits that these cells are a long way from taking over cities. "Most development that's going on these days in North America is business as usual."

But change is also happening, albeit slowly and incremental.