

'It started out as utopia, and became real'

SUBURBS

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Although lots in East Clayton are smaller than those in most suburbs, which helps cut housing costs in this booming market, many homes face tastefully landscaped green spaces where children can kick a ball.

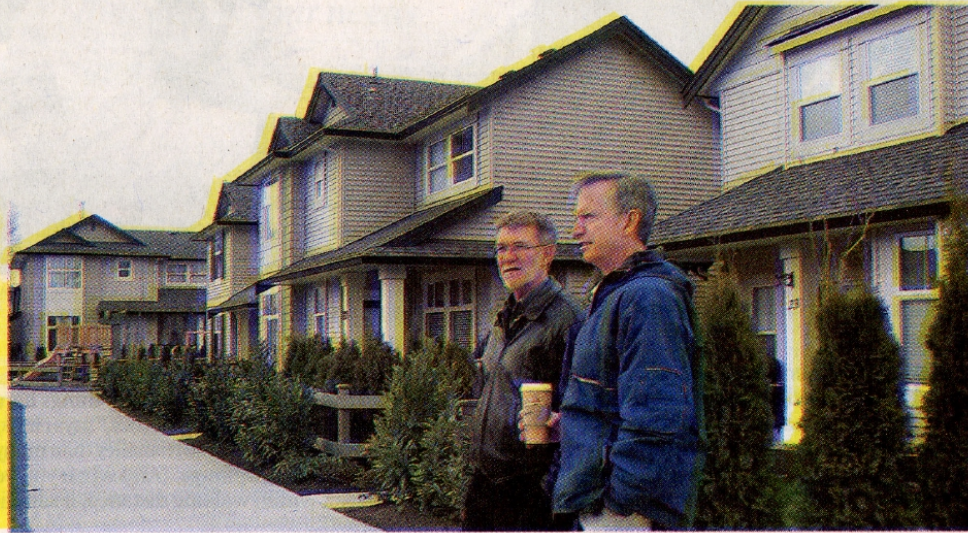
Back alleys are another feature of East Clayton that Turner initially opposed. They cost more and use land that could go towards a bigger house or yard, he thought. But now he sees that the back alleys get unattractive, front-loading garages and lines of parked cars off the streets.

Still, East Clayton does have some homes with front garages, because some homebuyers want them. That kind of compromise was a hallmark of East Clayton's design.

Home builder John Titus recalls an early suggestion by an ardent environmentalist that the roofs of East Clayton be made of sod. That notion got shot down quickly. But all ideas had an audience, and often changes were made in response.

Local police weren't keen on back alleys because they could be a haven for burglars. Designers agreed to put larger windows in the back of the homes to allow more "eyes on the street," says Whelen. But these extra features come at a price. Turner says the alleys and the eco-friendly drainage system cost an extra \$10,000 per lot.

"We weren't sure we could command a higher



LIANE FAULDER, THE JOURNAL

Developer John Turner, left, and UBC professor Patrick Condon take stock of East Clayton.

(house) price to get our money back," he says. "But we have."

It's too early, however, to call East Clayton an unqualified success. Key to new urbanism is the creation of densely populated, mixed-use communities, in which people are able to play, work, shop and eat out within a five-to-10-minute walk of

home. Smaller lots and townhomes, condos and single-family homes with rental suites over the garages increase East Clayton's population density somewhat over many suburban communities. But it will be some time before there are enough people to attract a coffee shop or corner store in East Clayton. Or before public transit officials

can justify putting a rapid bus route in place.

Right now, homeowners like Simmi Dhillon and Eric Melim still have to drive 20 minutes from East Clayton to the Sky Train. Then, it's a 45-minute commute into Vancouver, where she is a legal assistant and he's a police officer.

"It seems like a long trip," says Dhillon, "but we love our home and we love our neighbourhood, and for this price, we wouldn't have had anything like it downtown."

The couple, who have a two-year-old son, paid \$343,000 for their two-storey home in February 2004. Though they were familiar with the sustainability sales pitch of the development, that's not what attracted them to East Clayton. What they value are the community's safety features, including large, above-ground basement windows. They also like the alleys, which keep cars from backing out over sidewalks, a risk for kids playing in front of their homes.

"It's a good place to raise a family," says Dhillon.

For Turner, East Clayton has been successful enough to prompt using the sustainable principles in other developments he has underway in the Lower Mainland.

"What I'm happiest about is that we were able to compromise those issues and get a project built which is making money and people are moving in," says Condon. "It started out as utopia, and became real."

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