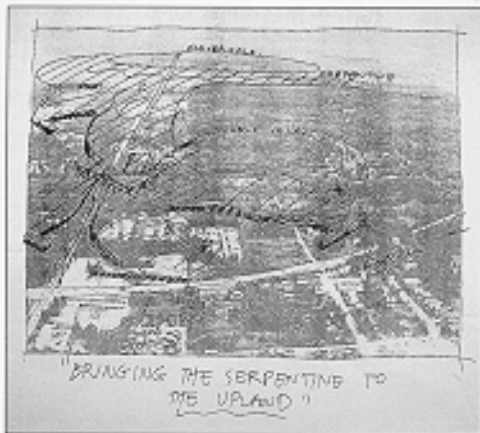


Below:
Quick concept sketches
that express the team's
preliminary vision for
the charrette site and
for the larger context.
This vision includes
ecological, visual,
functional, and cultural
dimensions. It is a
vision of an integrated,
not a mitigated, nature.



TEAM FOUR

Catherine Brown
Patrick Condon
Roger Hughes
William Morrish
Don Vehige

THE VALLEY OF TWO WATERS

There are two ways to approach the question of urban landscape sustainability. You can use the design language of “mitigation” and create some sort of benevolent buffer between nature and the city; or you can use the design language of “integration” and try to fuse nature and the city. We chose to use the latter. When you make this particular choice, everybody has to pay attention and work together at a maximum level of creativity. This is not the way it has been done in the past, but we, as a culture, are beginning to discover that integrated urban landscape design approaches to development are essential to achieving urban sustainability. In the past, we have treated nature as that thing that sits out there in the landscape that we put things on. More recently, we are starting to see that nature is not just “that thing out there,” but that it is actually something that pushes back when pushed. Recognizing nature’s capacity to push back when insulted is important if one is concerned with protecting a region’s social and economic vitality. It is good to see this recognition reflected in the urban development policies that are emerging from the regional, provincial, and federal authorities.

In keeping with this principle, in our design we let nature make the first push. Rather than taking the lines of the urban grid and placing them down on the site, hoping they will fit (and if they don’t just bulldozing the site or doing whatever it takes), we tried to let the land “push up and out.” We wanted to see what would happen if we shaped the zoning principles for the site by responding to the natural features of the land. We started by studying the natural features of the whole city of Surrey. We did this so that we could better understand our own 400-acre site. The first thing that we realized was that the urbanized city covered less than two thirds of the total land area of Surrey; the rest was unbuildable

development by being located within the boundaries of the Agricultural Land Reserve. Only three areas of land are left for urban development, and all of these are on hills surrounded by rivers and farmlands. The second thing we realized was that for Surrey to become a city in its own right, more than just a bedroom community, it couldn’t continue to add houses to its highlands indefinitely. The city had to rebuild as it urbanized.

The View Out to the Valley

But how should the city rebuild? During, the first part of Surrey’s development, the focus was on the headwaters lands, the highest and driest parts of the city. The forest was cleared a little bit at a time and the suburb grew. But now that the suburb is becoming a city and stretching out to the edges of the highlands, this focus towards the high points becomes less important, while the view out - to the river valley - becomes more important. Yet, as far as we could make out, the importance of this river valley had not yet been recognized, at least not from an urban planning or design perspective. In most of the planning documents that we reviewed, the river valley area appeared as an empty white hole, which, in effect, said, “No planning needed here!” All of the planning documents seem to concentrate their attention on the headwaters communities rather than on the river valley itself. Yet the valley is so strong! Strong enough to unify this spread out and almost placeless city.

There is little doubt that, as the city grows, the many edges of the valley will become important communities. When this happens, the orientation of the community will inevitably change from being inward-focused (to the highlands) to being outward-focused (to the lowlands). With this in mind, thinking about how to make that important new connection from the highland to the lowland becomes very important. The city of Surrey’s emerging lowland front yard can be treated either pragmatically or with due deference. There are many important points where this connection occurs and could be improved. Sixty-Fourth Avenue, which traverses the northern boundary of our site, is one of the most important of these community connections.

From the Upland to the Lowland

With the contrast between the inward view and the outward view in mind, we asked ourselves the question: Where does our site fit in between the headwaters and the valley? We discovered that our site is a turning

Left:

Team 4: (back row) Russel Taylor, Catherine Brown, William Morrish, Roger Hughes, David French, Paul Kearns, Derek Breen; (front row) Don Vehige, Patrick Condon, Penny Vanderwekken, Grace Fan, Corrine Guillot; (not shown) Kojia Koszinowski