

'Greenies' get abundance of food for thought

Kim Davis *Vancouver Sun (West Coast Homes section)*
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The month of March has kicked off a busy season of sustainability events here in the Vancouver region.

Thirty days of Sustainability, next week's GLOBE 2006, and the much anticipated UN World Urban Forum in June is giving 'greenies' and the general public alike an abundance of food for thought.

Among the numerous events, there are at least two looking to demonstrate sustainability in a big way.

VISUALIZING 2050

It is 30 feet tall and 45 feet wide, and while it may not be the same as an IMAX experience, the GVRD Mosaic, created as part of the Sustainability by Design (SxD) project out of the UBC Design Centre for Sustainability, offers an impressive 'snapshot' of a potential future for our region.

It is hard for most of us to imagine what two million more people in our region could mean to the urban and suburban landscape. Dots on a population map and verbose planning policies give people little indication of what their neighbourhoods or city centres are going to look and feel like.

"Unless they can see how the neighbourhood is going to look, citizens cannot respond. This usually results in NIMBYism [not-in-my-back-yard]," says Patrick Condon, a UBC professor and chair of the James Taylor Chair of Landscape and Liveable Environments, one of the SxD project's supporting funders.

As part of the first phase of SxD, and in an effort to demonstrate what a region comprised of sustainable neighbourhoods would mean and look like, teams of UBC graduate students were given the task to design parts, and in some cases all, of individual municipalities.

The students were asked to create designs that conformed to key sustainability principles such as providing as many jobs close to houses as possible, ensuring a mix of housing types, protecting and/or restoring environmental systems, and making sure that everybody lives within a five-minute walk of transit systems.

"Previously we had been working in small scale areas in Surrey and Maple Ridge. We took this experience and blew it up to the whole region," says Condon.

In order to create their vision of a 2050 GVRD, students used orthophotos of the region (images generated from aerial photographs) and drew directly on them the additional sustainable neighbourhoods and infrastructure, or retrofitted existing neighbourhoods, to accommodate the forecasted population.

The result? "We can put almost all of the growth needed in our existing footprint," says Condon, "through the use of densification and some greenway development in Langley."

And how does it look? Surprisingly like some of Vancouver's most liveable neighbourhoods -- along Fourth Avenue and West Broadway, Commercial Drive, and more recently parts of Main Street. There are vibrant neighbourhoods of mixed-use development -- street-level shops and services, condos and apartments on upper floors, and single-family homes just around the block. Residents can find much of what they need, including convenient transit, within a few minutes walk.

The doubling of our population could translate to more complete communities. As Condon points out, "in the same way that most people think downtown Vancouver has become much better as its population has doubled from 40,000 to 80,000 in the last 10-12 years."

You can catch a glimpse of this vision for a sustainable future at GLOBE, March 29-31st, and at the World Urban Forum, June 19-23rd.

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In May of last year, 'Living Green' spoke with Nitya Harris, a founding member of the B.C. Sustainable Energy Association (BCSEA) about her goal to have 100,000 solar roofs in B.C. by 2025. Now, nearly a year later, that number not only seems reasonable, it could be a bit conservative judging by the rapid uptake of solar programs overseas and in the U.S.

In China, 300,000 solar systems are installed every year, and the city of Shanghai, alone, has a 100,000 solar roof program. As Scott Sinclair, a director with BCSEA notes, by not implementing solar, B.C. residents ultimately miss out on two opportunities:

1. Locally, by not saving the \$300-plus per year in energy savings, which will only increase as energy prices continue to rise and;
2. Internationally, by not taking advantage of the business opportunity as an exporter of solar technology.

As part of an effort to rally support for the BCSEA's solar plan, and to let professionals and the general public know about Canada's largest solar energy initiative, BCSEA will host several of the world's leading experts on solar energy at the BC Solar Summit in Vancouver and Victoria, March 31 to April 2.

Activities over the 3-day event will feature community group and plumbing inspectors training, presentations on solar water heating uptake in other regions, a policy makers' lunch, and homeowners' workshops and guided tours of existing solar hot water installations in both Vancouver and Victoria.

For people wanting more information about different systems and what incentives may be available to them, there will also be a free trade fair at the public lecture on March 31 from 7-10pm.

For more information go to:
www.globe2006.com,
www.landfood.ubc.ca/sxd
www.solarbc.org