

# Planners wonder: What if two million people moved in?

## Competition paints picture of Lower Mainland in 2056

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More than 200 architects, planners and landscape architects had six hours Saturday to figure out how to squeeze another two million people into Greater Vancouver without encroaching on farm and industrial land.

On your mark, get set, go.

The massive imaginary planning exercise was held on the weekend in conjunction with the United Nations World Urban

Forum to help envision a future in which four million people — double the current number — live in the Lower Mainland by the year 2056.

Like a non-computerized version of SimCity, played by highly trained and normally well-paid professionals, the day saw about 30 teams each take charge of one five-kilometre-by-five-kilometre square in the targeted growth areas of the Greater Vancouver Regional District and incorporate the new people, jobs, schools, roads, SkyTrain lines, and parks needed.

In six hours, they drew in new housing on aerial maps, coloured in green spaces, and drew new transportation routes.

The “SuperSaturday” exercise, designed by University of B.C. professor Patrick Condon, is a teaching and design tool to get people thinking about planning according to sustainability rules — like creating a linked system of green spaces and ensuring no resident has to walk more than five minutes to commercial services. It also, he said, forces people to think about the big picture and discover simple ways to incorporate dense housing.

The exercise also provided a glimpse of the possible future for Vancouver residents, whose mayor said Friday he wants the city to develop an “ecodensity”

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See **TEAMS STRUGGLE** A2



# Teams struggle to fit thousands

From A1

policy and take on even more people than the 700,000 the city's current plans allow for.

Condon's projections envisioned another 650,000 people for Vancouver on top of the 570,000 now living in the city. Burnaby, New Westminster and Surrey were also targeted to become high-density areas where most of the growth would go.

"Part of what is disrupting our region now is people leaving Vancouver because they can't find an affordable house that allows them to stay," said Condon.

The exercise certainly highlighted the challenges and pitfalls future planners and municipal politicians will face.

Several teams were daunted by the sheer numbers they were supposed to add. With a few exceptions, most of the new, denser housing was planned along main roads, leaving single-family housing untouched in the quiet interiors.

Many people were so preoccupied with housing numbers that they had little time or energy to think about planning for jobs. Teams struggled with how much industrial land to preserve. Almost no one talked about the regional plans for trying to concentrate jobs in town centres.

"By putting all the density on the arterials, you don't get the housing choice," said Chris de Marco, a regional district planner working on a piece of Maple Ridge along with Maple Ridge's head of planning. "And people who choose denser housing get penalized by getting a poorer living environment. It's not the whole answer."

She was also frustrated by the way jobs were distributed to squares simply on the basis of population. (A formula of about one job per new household was part of the rules.)

Using those rules, central Vancouver didn't have to create any new jobs because it already has a lot.

But de Marco said it's better to plan for most jobs to be concentrated in town centres and Vancouver's downtown, which



STUART DAVIS/VANCOUVER SUN

**Fiona Crofton, Chris Lindberg and Graham McGarva discuss how to add another 100,000 people to central Surrey as part of an exercise held in conjunction with the World Urban Forum.**

are well-served by transit, with neighbourhood jobs largely focused in local services.

She wasn't the only one who struggled with the task. As the day began, there were small murmurs of concern at many tables.

One group even staged a small rebellion and temporarily refused to put in the 52,277 homes targeted for the square that covered southeast Vancouver from about Boundary to Fraser and 33rd to the Fraser River.

"Why should we have to double the population here?" asked Calgary landscape architect Brian Baker, who was working with architect Rajarshi Sahai and Vancouver landscape architect Heather Braun.

Eventually, Condon convinced them their work would save farmland in the valley, so they went back to their table, but still metaphorically wringing their hands about how to incorporate not just the people, but 27 schools and 75,000 new jobs as well.

Nearby, the team working on central Surrey had an even bigger challenge: triple the existing population.

One of the region's most experienced architects and master planners, Graham McGarva of VIA Architecture, worked on the numbers for an hour, covering a page with cal-

culations for how to fit 50,073 new homes into an area that now only has 26,029.

The plan for his team, which included planner Fiona Charlton and Chris Lindberg, the director of Simon Fraser University's Sustainability Building Centre, saw the area absorb almost all the new housing in a third of the available area, around the existing SkyTrain line and a new one that the team planned to cross Surrey from east to west.

The team doing northeast Vancouver (53,722 homes; 53,901 jobs needed) did a lot of planning for jobs. Gloria Venczel, an urban designer from the City of North Vancouver, packed the area around Grandview Highway with live/work studios and industrial land, as well as turning part of Hastings Park into an education precinct focused on urban agriculture.

But like so many other teams, they packed all the multi-family housing along the main streets.

One team that took the bold step of going into single-family land was the group doing central Vancouver.

Architect Rob Grant packed the neighbourhoods around Queen Elizabeth Park with townhouses, low-rise apartments and even a few towers along the south-side ridge

where residents would be able to look out over the city.

"It can be like the West End, next to Stanley Park," said Grant, pointing out it's a logical place for density because it will be on the Richmond rapid-transit line and close to the Oakridge shopping centre.

Of all the things that had to be worked into each area, probably the one teams took the most pleasure in was the green space.

Landscape architect Bruce Hemstock, doing north Surrey with chunks of Annacis Island, Queensborough and New Westminster, created park spaces all along the waterfronts and built greenways to buffer Surrey's housing from the "employment land" down by the river.

He and his teammate, landscape architect Edward Stillinger of San Francisco, had rivers of green running through the heavily industrial area, places that would look out over the activity on the river.

"This could end up being a wildly interesting area for some people to live in," said Stillinger.

The project results are being mounted for the week in the World Urban Forum's exhibition site at the Convention and Exhibition Centre, which is only open to the forum's 8,000 registered delegates.

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