

Township of Langley, BC

an overview of development trends

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the suburbs project

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Introduction

In the context of the modern west coast metropolis of Vancouver, Langley Township may be seen as an outlying semi-rural community within the fringe of the metropolitan commuter shed.

The Township speaks of itself as a 'community of communities' due to the separation of distinct settlement areas by preserved agricultural land and historical settlement patterns. A smart growth philosophy clearly guides Township planning objectives as it rapidly urbanizes. A strong urban containment boundary provides an opportunity to focus growth in existing community nodes and corridors. Increasing land and development costs support policy directives to densify growth patterns with a variety of housing options.

One of the most rapidly growing municipalities in Metro Vancouver, Langley Township nevertheless faces challenges in translating preferred community planning principles into development practice.

The Suburbs Project explores the changing form of Canadian suburban communities. We investigate current development trends and planning contexts to learn how communities define and respond to the challenges of suburban growth.

During the summer of 2010 we conducted a second phase of research in Ontario, Alberta, and BC. We explored municipal policies, conducted visual surveys, and interviewed planners, developers, elected officials, and residents. For more information about the project and results visit:
<http://suburbs.planning.dal.ca>



The Township of Langley in the context of Metro Vancouver

(Google Earth composite)

Development History

The Township of Langley enjoys the significance of its historical identity as the 'birth place of British Columbia'. First settled by Europeans in 1827, Fort Langley was established as a major trading post along the Fraser River, providing enterprising pioneers a centre for the transportation of goods and as a rich source of agricultural products to sustain settlement activity west of the Rocky Mountains.

In 1858 British Columbia was proclaimed a Crown Colony at Fort Langley, and fifteen years later in 1873 Langley was incorporated as one of the first municipalities in the region. The discovery of gold and subsequent gold rush in the area during this time put pressure on Langley to take further advantage of its rich agricultural base to supply the influx of miners (Waite, 2000).

Langley maintained a mostly rural and agricultural character as Vancouver's inner suburbs urbanized first. Langley began to change in the mid twentieth century with major infrastructure changes that facilitated the independent movement of people. The Fraser Highway passes centrally through the Township and the City of Langley, which became a separate municipal entity in 1955 when commercial and industrial needs outpaced the agricultural land base and community. In 1964 the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway through the Township allowed rapid population growth as urbanites fled to the country for the large lots, spacious atmosphere, and commuting lifestyle.

Development pressure led to establish the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in the early 1970s to protect the area's agricultural resources in the region. Approximately 75% of the Township land base remains in the ALR, while the remaining quarter is designated to accommodate urban growth.

The Brookwood/Fernridge community in the south of the Township developed in the 1970s with split-level bungalows and rancher homes on quarter acre lots. Murrayville and Walnut Grove both experienced residential development in the 1980s and 1990s with cul de sac layouts and garage-filled street fronts. Gated developments are common in both communities as a niche trend of the same era.



Drug Store, c. 1910s, Fort Langley
(Photo: Langley Centennial Museum)



Haying, c. 1966
(Photo: Langley Centennial Museum)



Typical 1980s suburban street
(Photo: Daniel Scott)

New urbanist design influences are seen as well in these communities as late 20th century experiments in residential form. Neo-traditional architectural designs follow North American small town models by incorporating front porches, decorative trim and gables, and back lanes often with additional housing options. The gently curving streets of Murray's Corner in Murrayville offer an attractive pedestrian space with front gardens separating the houses from the street by only about 15 feet.

Although new urbanist design flourishes were reintroduced into the modern residential landscape as a late 20th century design trend, these elements are now irrevocably part of the design language of new development in Langley. Further discussion of current development trends follows below.



New urbanist designs in Murray's Corner. Compact lots and experiments with coach houses on back lanes. (Photos: Daniel Scott)

Census Snapshot

Langley Township is one of the fastest growing municipalities in the Metro Vancouver region. Compared with the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) the Township growth rate between the census years 2001-2006 was 1.5% higher. With a population of 93,726 in 2006, the 2010 population is estimated at approximately 104,000 people (Township of Langley, 2010). This change represents a growth of about 11% since the last census year, which is consistent with the 3% annual growth rate that the Official Community Plan (OCP) calls for to effectively manage growth.

Several respondents characterized the Township as a family friendly community. Of the total number of private households, 77% are composed of one family unit, while 21% are non-family unit households. In the Vancouver CMA the split is notably less, with 64% one family households and 33% non-family households. The Township has slightly fewer single parent families at 12.5% compared with 15% in the Vancouver CMA. A median income of \$76,574 in 2005 for all census families was higher in the Township compared with \$64,332 in the Vancouver CMA (Statistics Canada, 2006).

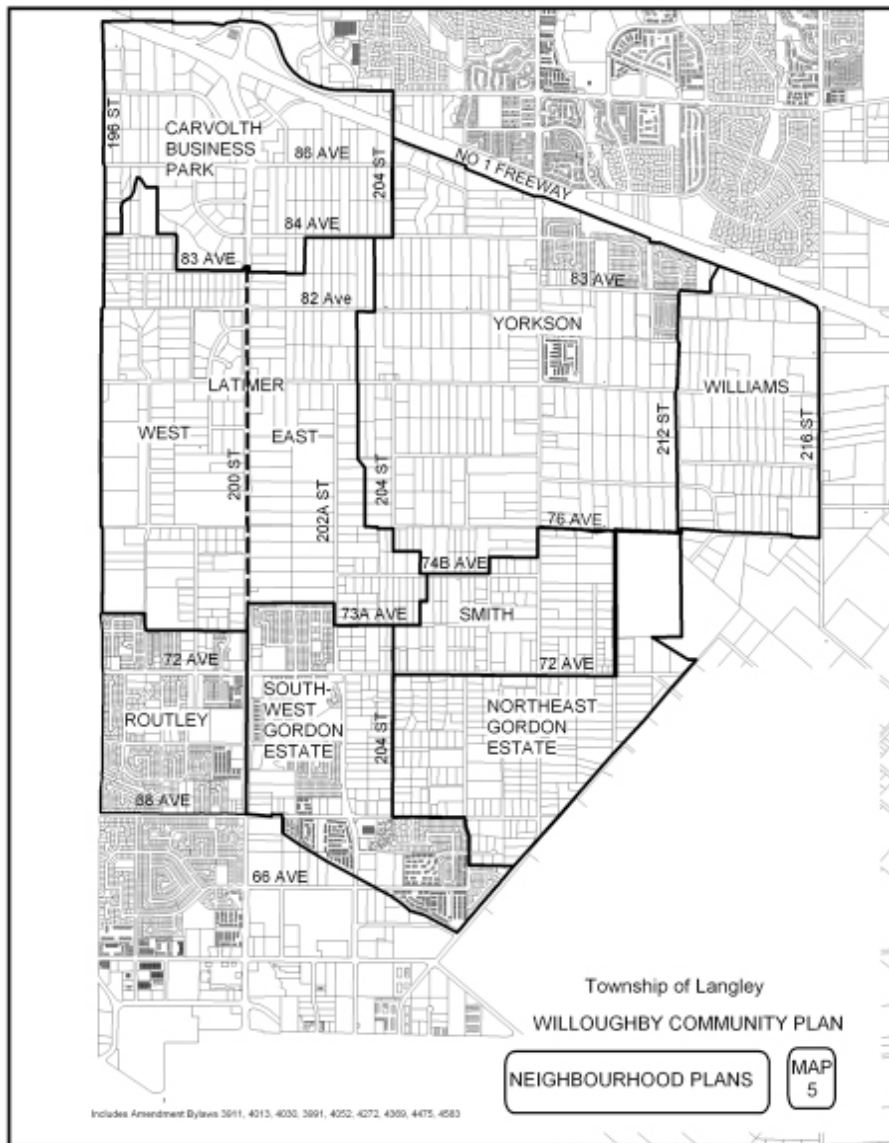
Like many suburban communities, many people in the Township commute to other municipalities for employment. The 2006 census shows that of the total employed labour force 44% worked in a different municipality within Metro Vancouver. As much as 92% of the Township workforce drove to work, compared with about 75% from the Vancouver CMA generally (Statistics Canada, 2006). The greater percentage of commuters by automobile reflects in part the difficulty of accessing the Sky Train light rail system that so far only reaches to the western part of neighboring Surrey. People also commute to other municipalities for employment that are not on the Sky Train route.

The lower mainland in general is seen as an area of rapid growth. Although precise comparisons were difficult to make, respondents characterized Langley as one of four high growth municipalities in the lower mainland, along with Surrey, Coquitlam, and Abbotsford. Surrey was regarded as experiencing more steady and rapid growth over the years, but that may be changing with the relative availability of designated urban land. As Surrey's

In the region, we are one of the fastest growing. Us, Abbotsford, Coquitlam and Surrey. Although we are nowhere near Surrey's rate. Our growth is between 2 and 3% a year. It's been steady for many years.

Councillor

land base fills up, Langley is becoming a hot spot for residential development. By opening up new land for development in the Willoughby community, the pace and character of development are changing drastically in the Township. The growth strategy calls for implementing smart growth principles in the form of compact, mixed use, and walkable communities. A backbone of this strategy is the substantial increase in residential density targets and ensuring a mix of housing types characterizes new development patterns.



Willoughby is divided into several neighbourhoods with significant development potential. (Township of Langley, 1998)

Well, right now, because of where I live, it's absolutely booming. I'm not aware of to the east, but I am fairly aware of what happens in Surrey and what happens in closer to Vancouver. And I can tell you that right now it appears to me that especially in the area where I live it is, if not number one, it's right up there in terms of a housing boom and a residential shift.

Resident

Planning Structure and Development Environment

The broad aims of the Township's planning goals conform to the regional umbrella planning strategy known as the Livable Region Strategic Plan. As a member Metro Vancouver the Township must follow the framework regional strategy, which applies four principles: protect the Green Zone, build complete communities, achieve a compact metropolitan area, and increase transportation choice. These basic tenets reflect core planning principles promoted by Smart Growth BC, a non-governmental partner in land use planning and development.

A hierarchy of plans guide land use planning in the Township. The Official Community Plan (OCP), adopted in 1979, provides a framework of broad planning goals and objectives. Community Plans developed from and amended the OCP to provide focused planning objectives for particular areas of the Township. The Willoughby Community Plan provides detailed policy direction for a large part of the remaining land designated for urban growth. Updating the OCP in 1998, this plan includes principles of smart growth by providing for high density mixed-use nodes connected to a variety of housing types, parks, and community amenities by a network of pedestrian greenways. Neighbourhood plans focus policy directives and design guidelines regarding the form and function of designated neighbourhood areas.

The Yorkson neighbourhood is expected to accommodate a significant proportion of the Township's population growth. Yorkson is being planned and developed as a model smart growth neighbourhood with a major town centre to serve as the heart of the Willoughby community. Development in Yorkson,



We've had a lot of pressure from different groups like Smart Growth BC. We've got environmental groups out here that have brought to our attention the need to look at smart growth planning, which is why we're looking at trying to densify.

Councillor

I can tell you that Langley was very slow compared with Surrey, which is next door, for a long period of time. Until they came up with the Yorkson neighbourhood plan and opened up the whole of Yorkson.

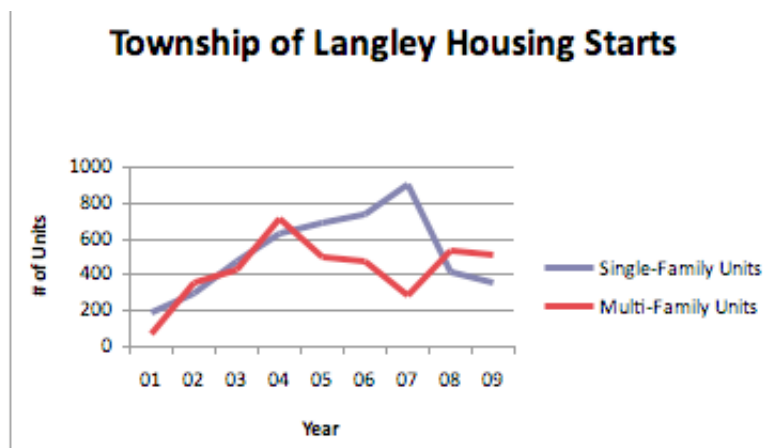
Developer

Typical large lot home that is facing development pressure. Compact rowhomes at the street front now face this lot. (Photo: Daniel Scott)

as with much of the Township, is on greenfield sites or by conversion of hobby farms and rural homes on acreage.

Development is rapidly changing Yorkson's rural community identity. Residential density is shifting from a spacious rural form to compact subdivisions of detached homes and townhouse complexes. Apartment units are planned for the town centre core area at an allowable density of 80 units per acre. Multi-unit residential development is currently outpacing that of single-family homes. The Urban Development Institute (2009) notes a recent dramatic reversal by pointing out a 54% decline in single-family permits and 88% increase in multi-family permits over the 2006-2007 year. The multi-unit trend continues in the Yorkson neighbourhood with a 16 building, 1,472 unit apartment and 140 unit townhouse development in the development application stream. The project is seen as a keystone in establishing the population density to support a pedestrian-oriented town centre.

Planning staff work closely with the development industry through monthly meetings with members of the Urban Development Institute as a forum to exchange perspectives on policy development and market trends. In this way policies developed to implement new planning objectives are discussed and negotiated with developers. This relationship reflects a process of push and pull on the development market to ensure planning policies and regulations reach for desired outcomes without becoming unpalatable to the housing market.



Township of Langley, 2010

I think the biggest challenge with respect to implementing the smart growth is although there has been a downturn in the economy, I think a lot of the developers started to understand the need and the opportunities with the higher density.

There is still that notion that we live out in the Fraser Valley and it's a car-oriented environment. And that model has been very difficult to change. So that is an ongoing struggle with the development industry, of trying to get away from that and try to educate them and teach them and encourage them with the higher density, more mixed use, more walkable type of community...

And I think the economics of it are starting to work for them. Which of course helps tremendously. Whereas previously, higher density did not mean more lucrative development. Now, I think the land economics have demonstrated that, especially over the last 2 or 3 years.

Planner

Results of Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in the Township of Langley during the summer of 2010. The following summary of notable trends in planning and development comes from interviews conducted with planners, developers, councillors, and residents. Official plans, planning reports, site plans, marketing materials, and visual surveys were collected during the field visit.

Planning and Development Trends

The Township's commitment to smart growth principles is evident in the updated planning objectives, which are beginning to affect development on the ground. The recently amended Yorkson neighbourhood plan is expected to exemplify the benefits of a compact, high density, mixed use, walkable urban form in the suburbs when it is built out. Yorkson, as the first area to be opened up to extensive development since Walnut Grove, is currently experiencing the gravity of the higher density development trend. Plans for other parts of the Township are being revised to match a smart growth framework.

Even for a traditional small town downtown core, we tried to basically encourage mixed use instead of typically suburban mall, strip mall, and hollowed out downtown at night. We are saying that mixed use is the way to go for the next 30-40 years. And what we mean by that is pure smart growth principles.

Planner

Town Centre and Neighbourhood Nodes

The elements of a model town centre are yet to be demonstrated on the ground. The principles, however, are certainly in the plans. As an organizing principle, policy objectives call for each community to have a central commercial node accessible by a pedestrian pathway network. In newly developing Willoughby, a major town centre is planned near the corner of 208th St. and 80th Ave. The town centre concept envisions a community destination with educational, commercial, high-density residential, institutional, and recreational elements. A vertical mixed use form with ground floor retail along a 'high street' will create the town centre core. It is intended not only to serve the commercial needs of residents, but to act as a destination and place of social interaction. The overarching objective in developing these large and small-scale nodes is to

ensure that every residential unit is within a 5 minute walking radius of commercial services. The interchange of 200th St. and Highway #1 developed with mixed use principles in mind with condominium projects and apartments above retail commercial. Although one official referenced this area as an example of the desired 'urban village' concept, it appears as car dominated with ample street front parking neighbouring a major highway.

The sequence of residential and commercial development can impact the success or failure of the town centre model. The Jericho sub-neighbourhood plan for an area of Willoughby intends to create a mixed use centre. Several officials feared that a preemptive big box retail outfit in this location – along the 200th St. corridor – would compromise the possibility of implementing desired smart growth designs. Working with the development community to balance residential and commercial development is therefore a priority for planners.

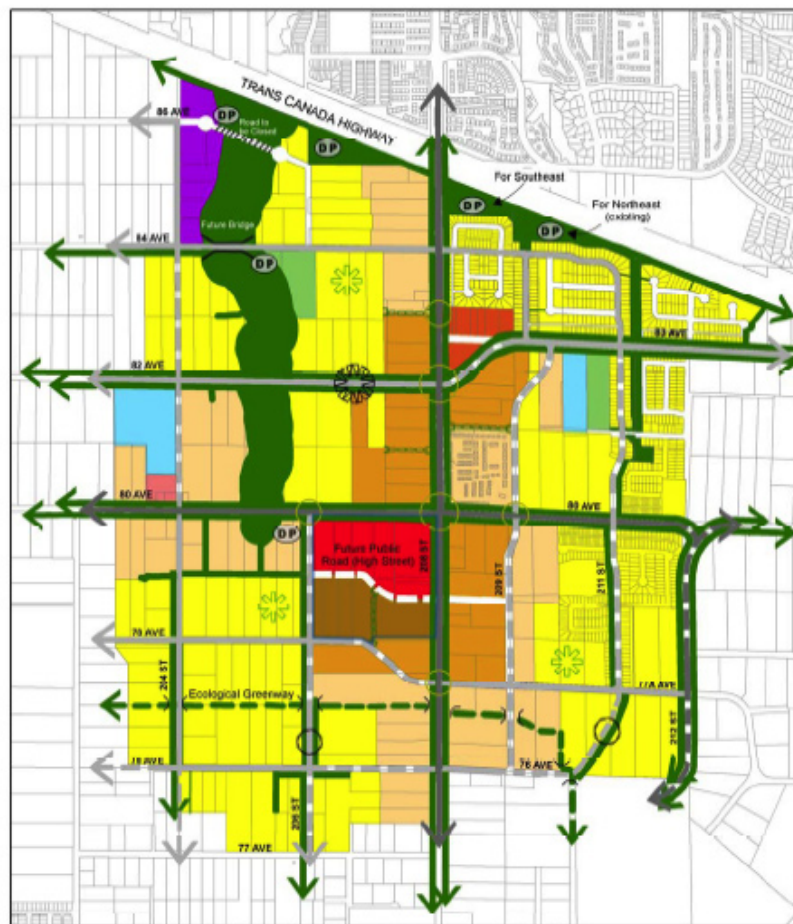


Existing mixed use development in Walnut Grove.
(Photo: Daniel Scott)

We should be doing more mixed use for sure. We have a re-zoning in front of us. There is a new sub-neighbourhood, the Jericho sub-neighbourhood that is based quite extensively on mixed use.

The developer came in and said they want to build the commercial first. And we gave into it. You know what is going to happen. On 200th Street, major corridor, arterial road, they are going to try to put in a big box. And if they get one in then they'll come back and say, "Oh, there's no market for mixed use there. We need to have more big box." And this council tends to cave to developers in my opinion.

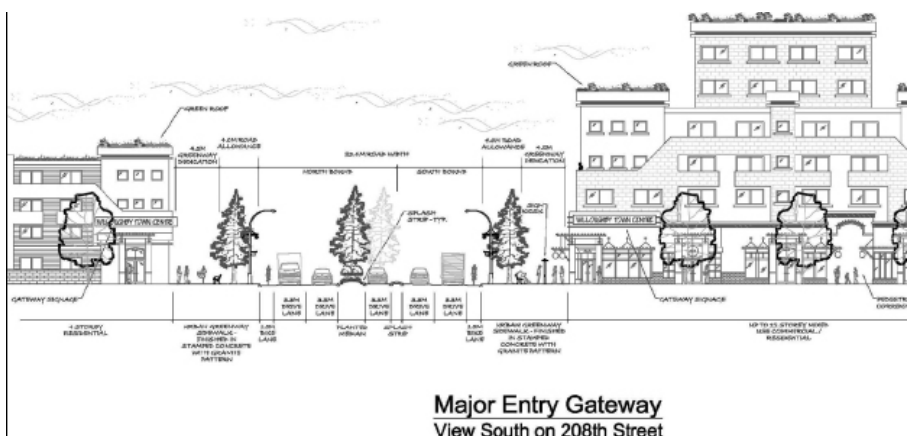
Councillor



We have embraced smart growth and are trying to skip one entire phase of development.... We're aiming very carefully at not creating suburbs. We're going straight to urban walkable centres.

Planner

The Yorkson neighborhood plan demonstrates the smart growth intentions in current Township planning. (Township of Langley, 2001)



Details of the proposed Yorkson town centre concept
(Township of Langley, 2001)

Residential Density and Mixing Housing Types

Previous to the community plan revisions, policies in Willoughby limited residential density to about 6 - 10 units per acre. To support the town centre model the Township is now designating a density range as high as 80 units per acre in the closest ring of housing to the town centre, and gradually leveling out to a typical suburban single-family density pattern. Needless to say this scale of densification will bring about a dramatic transformation of community form. Several neighbourhood or community plans are being revised to consider higher density development, including North East Gordon and Aldergrove, reflecting a commitment among staff and council to a smart growth agenda.

In Willoughby, plans now require a fine grain mix of housing types in new developments. When asked about the required mix, planners, developers, and councillors agreed that it helps prevent a monotonous residential form and provides several price points for homebuyers. Several respondents spoke to the neighbourhood level social mix expected from mixing housing types in close proximity. Two developments nearing build out – Milner Heights and Bedford Landing – demonstrate what a housing mix can look like. Each project integrates at least five general housing types. Both include a mix of single-family lot sizes, townhouse strata housing, and freehold rowhousing. Bedford Landing has a luxury 4 story condominium project, while Milner Heights includes 4 unit ‘manor homes’, each under its own strata title.

Single-family homes generally appear on two lot sizes. Lots as small as 3000 square feet can accommodate a compact detached home with garage access on a rear lane. Larger lot sizes of 4500-6000 square feet can accommodate a detached home with a front loaded two-car garage. Townhouses are the most common housing type currently that achieves increased density. Townhouse developments are arranged with an internal network of private, strata managed roads with narrower dimensions than municipal road standards allow. They usually have one entry point marked with a community branding feature. Most do not have shared private community facilities. Developers consider rowhomes an innovative trend. An attached townhouse form,

So there's essentially a requirement that certain percentages have to be allocated to those different housing forms. And it's up to the developer to try to fit that puzzle together and see where he can put his townhouses, where he can put his row houses, where he can put the single family. And on the bigger applications, they try to block those off into the different quadrants. But the intent of it, and what we try to do, is try to integrate those and mix them as much as possible.

Planner

rowhomes are in freehold ownership fronting a public road with garage access on a rear lane.

Apartment units are new to Willoughby, and are present but uncommon in other parts of the Township. With the recent density updates in Willoughby, however, this housing type will make its mark in the community. A major condominium apartment project of over 1, 400 units at 80th Ave and 208th St. will leverage the possibility of creating a community town centre in Willoughby through substantial density gains.



Manor home in Milner Heights



21st century back lane in Milner Heights



'Large lot' single family homes are redefined in smart growth terms. Although lots are up to 6,000 square feet, they are tightly packed together.



Rowhomes neighbour an apartment complex in Bedford Landing
(Photos: Daniel Scott)

Land Assembly

Land assembly ranked high as a challenge faced by the development industry. The increasing demands from municipalities that developers must provide, including the required mix of housing types and green space dedications, means that working with fewer than about 10 acres is becoming untenable from a developer's perspective. It can be a challenge for developers to acquire enough contiguous parcels of 1 and 2 acre estate lots to form a land base large enough to make a mixed housing development possible. Property owners with acreage sometimes hold out on releasing their land to development pressure and may prevent or impede a site plan from moving forward as a comprehensive development. A housing mix requirement also means developers need builders able to efficiently produce single and multi-unit product.

Project financing has become more challenging as banks are offering less favorable lending policies. One developer pointed out that this in effect works to squeeze out smaller developers. Between the financing climate and increasing municipal demands for parkland dedications and a fine grain mix of housing, there is a trend away from piecemeal development and toward fewer, larger developers working to assemble large parcels to make projects workable.



A property owner held out on releasing land to the wave of development. Townhouses and single family subdivisions surround this property. (Photo: Daniel Scott)

Here you are dealing with small parcels of land. You can't go and buy 100 acres like you could in Ontario or Alberta. So you're dealing with 5-10 acre parcels. And to get that [housing] variety in a small parcel of land is very, very difficult.

Developer

Two years ago, we could find financing for projects at 85% of cost. Now they think they are doing us a huge favour at 75%. And really, they want to go 65%. Although it sounds counter-intuitive, you would think therefore you would go with smaller projects. It's actually the opposite. What it does is it squeezes out the smaller developers, and the bigger guys can live with that.

Developer

Transit and Traffic

Everyone in Langley recognizes it as an auto-dependent culture. Smart growth principles have turned the focus toward creating more compact, higher density nodes and corridors of development understood by planners as transit supportive. Although the regional transit authority, TransLink, is investing in a transit hub at 200th St and Highway 1 to connect people by bus to the Sky Train in Surrey, this may only be a preliminary effort with a negligible impact. Development is advancing around a grid of arterials that are essentially two-lane country roads. Achieving a transit-oriented growth pattern is seen as a high priority but also viewed with great uncertainty until densities increase. Several respondents reiterated the culture obstacle of car dependency even as the Township builds out at a higher density.

Traffic is increasingly problematic along main arterials, and the limited bus service within the Township ends up in the same traffic streams passing big box or strip mall shopping areas with abundant street front parking. Within residential subdivisions, traffic flows and parking congestion escalate from limited through access, an often one side only parking arrangement on narrower road standards, and higher density living. Many detached homes have either legal or unauthorized basement suites to help homeowners afford their mortgages. Several residents referred to the common reality of 5 car households. With a culture of multi-car households, compact subdivisions, and rental occupants, traffic and parking congestion is a regular concern.



A one-side of the street parking arrangement is a sore spot in new subdivisions. (Photo: Daniel Scott)

We're on the poor end of TransLink, if you would... The rapid transit, if it comes, will probably come out along the Fraser Highway. But we are talking about trying to build transit corridors going up into the high density areas here. Now, when should that happen? It should be happening now. When will it happen? Probably 40 years from now.

Councillor

One thing we're trying to do, and it's tough because of our geographical location, is do less stuff with the car. That is probably the most significant challenge. We had a public hearing for an apartment building, 1.6 parking spots per unit for 1 and 2 bedroom units.

The neighbours all came out and demanded more parking. And you say to them, "Well, you know, actually the rest of the world is going to less parking in apartment buildings." Like this is probably .3 or .4 more than Vancouver is doing, for example. And they all laugh at you. There's an actual audible laughter in the room at that statement from our planning department.

Councillor

Greenway System

A high-density living environment compromises the space typically expected in suburban communities. In response, the Township is compensating for the gap between ‘sustainability and livability’ through high standards for street front landscaping, park land dedications, and an extensive pedestrian greenway system to connect residents to amenities, services, and neighbourhood pocket parks. Greenways being planned and gradually implemented will provide the opportunity for pedestrian linkages with key destinations. They are also expected to bring social activity to the street fronts and public spaces, whereas traditionally a sense of space in the suburbs may be accommodated in large private back yards.

The logistics of implementing the greenway system comprehensively has been a learn-as-we-go experience. When development occurs in a piecemeal fashion and neighbourhood services and amenities do not keep pace with residential growth, the greenway system lacks destination and falls short of its goal. Through a revised amenity zoning policy the Township now requires development contributions to a greenway amenity fund to spread the financial burden among developers and to plan comprehensively for amenity development. In contrast to other municipalities, the greenway fund requires contributions on a per acre basis rather than a per unit basis. As one planner explained, this approach encourages higher density, whereas the cost per unit approach punishes density.



This greenway provides for a pleasant stroll but lacks connection with key neighbourhood destinations.
(Photo: Daniel Scott)

[Routley] was sort of a test pilot on trying to increase density and see what works with respect to zoning by-law, what setbacks, coverage, lot sizes should be, and get a feel for how much space is too much space or if it's too compact. And I think we sort of missed the boat or missed the opportunity with respect to the amenity space and open space. There are some elements of greenways which look nice and are quite well received and well used....

But Routley doesn't really have a strong commercial centre, a neighbourhood commercial centre to serve the residents. We do have a school park site secured but there is no school park constructed yet in Routley. So there really is no place of destination in Routley. And I think we recognize that.

Planner

Private Communities: Re-imagined

Several gated communities exist in the Township. A trend in the 1980s and 1990s, they were developed in Walnut Grove along 88th Ave and 96th Ave, and in Murrayville along 48^h Ave. When asked about the municipal stance on approval of gated communities now, respondents reiterated a negative attitude towards gates, referring to them as a thing of the past. Municipal opinions about gated communities portrayed them as insular and offering a false sense of security. Although developers do not propose them in designing and marketing their projects in Langley, several suggested the market for gated product is still strong in other parts of the region. One developer sympathized with the municipal position on gating, but felt the objection may be unwarranted when projects are not centrally located within a community.

Although questions about private streets generally elicited responses to gated developments, other forms of private communities are prevalent. Townhouse strata developments are quite extensive. Perimeter units contribute to an active public street front, but resident activity appears internally focused on narrow private streets, playgrounds, and clubhouses. Generally, respondents did not conceptualize townhouse stratas as private communities. They are regarded as a matter-of-fact form of townhouse development and are seen as beneficial to the municipality and developers alike. Municipal infrastructure costs are reduced, developers' costs are reduced, greater residential densities are achieved, and they offer another housing type and price point. Single-family detached strata developments on private roads are infrequent and small in size when approved.

Planners try to maintain public connections and pedestrian routes through strata developments. Public easements established on title can ensure public access. Planners otherwise try to make public access inevitable asking that strata pathways link with the Township greenway system. One developer commented that this results in an unfair burden for strata owners who bear the cost and liability of maintaining pathways that are publicly used. Unless a right-of-way is protected, a strata council has the option to restrict public access upon taking ownership of the development.

The whole thing just sort of turned around...Both municipal planners and developers found out [gating] is something that is a no-no.

Planner



Semi-private play area in a townhouse development. (Photos: Daniel Scott)



Narrow strata road as a private residential space



Pathway leading into a townhouse development maintains a public face.

Architecture and Design

Housing and neighbourhood design have experienced a clear transformation over the decades in the Township. The influence of new urbanist ideas is evident in the architectural design of housing developments as early as the mid 1990s. Murray's Corner is an approximately 100-unit development branded as new urbanist style. With only single detached homes, the architecture conjures up traditional, often Arts and Crafts styles with a mix of building materials, decorative trim, and front porches. Offering back lane access for most units, street front setbacks are as little as 10 feet and an unbroken sidewalk remains a pedestrian dedication.

Craftsman style architecture and front porches are widely incorporated in both detached and attached housing currently in the Township. Compact lots have been reduced from 5000 square feet, as they were in experiments like Murray's Corner, to as little as 3000 square feet. In such cases back lanes are included in site designs since lot frontages are too narrow to accommodate garages. Lanes also occur on units that front onto arterial roads where direct unit access by car is prohibited. Both of these conditions suggest lanes are incidental to other factors. The trend of new urbanist aesthetics has been more or less normalized and elements are encouraged in planning policies at the neighbourhood level. Despite this prevalence, people do not speak in terms of promoting or working with new urbanist principles as much as they do smart growth and sustainability. New urbanism as a branded philosophy is not explicit in the way planners and developers talk about design, yet the principles are clearly present.

I think what was initially perceived as new urbanist back in the late '90s, early 2000s has sort of evolved into just what people perceive as a very conventional neighbourhood now. Especially with respect to bringing the homes closer to the street to try to get the vehicles into the rear yard, into the lanes, and try to bring more pedestrian activity to the street front. In the late '90s it was quite unique. But now I think it's just been accepted as the norm.

Planner



Sustainability and Education

The Long Range Planning department recently published a Sustainability Charter. The Charter takes a long-term vision about balancing the three aspects of sustainability – social, environmental, economic – and working in partnership with neighbouring high growth municipalities. In general, sustainability initiatives are perceived to relate closely to smart growth objectives of compact communities, transit supportive densities, walkability, efficient use of existing infrastructure, and diversifying land uses. Planners see the long term challenges to achieving these goals and regard themselves as educators on these issues. The Charter reflects an ongoing campaign of public and private education, in which residents, politicians, and developers are schooled in a culture of long-term thinking.

Developers emphasized that market conditions determine housing trends more than anything else. Although some developers are crunching numbers for features like geothermal heating, energy efficient home features face a test in the market where the homebuyer is the final judge on the value of such initiatives. The ability of bigger developers to work with large land parcels may assist planning efforts to implement a rigorous smart growth strategy. One developer suggested that to implement sustainable plans, the municipality should develop policy to assist developers in land assembly. Balancing market demands and political will is an ongoing challenge.

We have been hammering them over the head with sustainability for a few years now. And they've gone through a massive process of embracing sustainability. And our communication with council is if you really want to live by that sword, you are going to have to die by that sword.

Planner

Sustainability is a new buzz word. Nobody knows how to define it, but they all know how to put it into their laws and regulations.

Developer

We probably have the ability to work on larger pieces, and I think some sustainability mechanisms are going to require larger area assemblies in order to achieve them. Sustainability is not a site by site proposition.

Developer

Conclusion

The Township of Langley's rapid growth in the regional context of Metro Vancouver makes it ripe for applying prevailing planning principles related to smart growth. Plans are being revisited to reflect smart growth values and to introduce policy instruments to implement of smart growth objectives. The Township's rural character is changing dramatically as compact, mixed housing developments are becoming increasingly common. The success of the town centre model is yet to be seen, but planners are confident that coordinating commercial and high density residential growth will lead to its success.

Car culture is not going to disappear any time soon in Langley, and with compact development patterns only beginning to surface along the narrow country roads, traffic congestion is already a growing complaint. There was a general sentiment among respondents that this is a necessary growing pain in working toward smart growth.

Developers pointed out several major challenges they face in working with the planning policies and development environment. First, developers considered land 'over valued' in the lower mainland, making development costs high compared with other places. Although the suburbs are known to make fulfillment of the desire to own a detached single-family home an affordable reality, even in Langley this proposition is questionable with new detached homes rarely selling for less than \$500,000.

Due to high land values and development costs, affordability will be an ongoing struggle. Langley is perceived as a place where people go to advance their housing career and seek the space of a rural atmosphere. Several respondents spoke to an irony in this desire. Although new residents may be attracted to Langley for the space, long time Township residents often regard the new housing trends as undesirably cramped. As plans and land values continue to force densities up, planners acknowledge that strategies to provide sufficient amenities will be the greatest challenge.

We will have more public space, greenways, small parkettes, squares and things like that. So that is the other side of balancing the equation. We have to up the urban amenities.

So who is going to pay for them? The developers. But eventually who is going to pay for them? The buyers. And in this region here we are struggling with the concept of affordability. We are jamming more people here and they will be paying for all these amenities, but can they afford it?

Planner

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All interviews were conducted between June 14-25, 2010. They were recorded and transcribed with participant consent.