

Sustainable suburbs goal of developer

Calgary firms part of growing trend

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FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Will suburbs become the next ghettos because no one can afford to live in or heat houses that are too large?

While Jonathan Westeinde, managing partner of Windmill Development Group, says we're headed in that direction, he doesn't agree with author James Kunstler, who predicted a suburban decline in his book, *The Long Emergency*.

Seeing the future through green-tinted glasses, Westeinde — developer of the sustainable Acqua and Vento projects in Calgary — is optimistic that we'll wake up and start to build a more sustainable world.

"I don't think we'll ever get that far," he says about Kunstler's predictions. "Hopefully, they'll realize that before it's too late."

Among the green initiatives launched by Calgary-area builders is the Drake Landing project of 52 homes in Okotoks — the first such community of its kind in North America. Solar panels mounted on the rooftops of things like garages collect energy from sunlight.

The United Communities development has Sterling Homes as its exclusive builder. Drake Landing was named the winner last year of an Alberta Emerald Foundation award in the climate change category.

Another green initiative is the Calgary-based Built-Green Society of Canada, which allows both homebuyers and builders to select their own level of environmentally-friendly and sustainable housing.

Four Alberta companies, including one from Calgary, also make up one third of 12 teams of housing firms across Canada recently chosen as part of a national competition to create sustainable homes.

The teams were selected under the EQuilibrium initiative of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

Houses were designed to produce as much energy as they consume on an annual basis.

The Calgary company chosen by the competition was Echo-Logic Land Corp., which is the developer and builder of Echo Haven, an enclave of 25 homes in the northwest community of Rocky Ridge. The project incorporates energy-saving, healthy construction concepts in the development of a green community.

Besides constructing the 25 residences, Echo Haven will also include features such as a greenhouse, as well as a community building with guest accommodation and work-at-home offices. The design of the homes will demonstrate healthy and durable materials, rainwater harvesting, composting or low-flush toilets, and site-sensitive orientation to maximize both solar

exposure and integration with the surrounding nature.

Avalon Master Builder was also among the winners for its Discovery III home in Red Deer. The company is active in multi-family construction in Calgary with its Bordeaux project in Cranston.

Windmill, formed in October 2003, is unique because it constructs only sustainable buildings that are LEED Gold standard or higher.

LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a rating system for commercial and multi-residential buildings, much like the new Energy Star system rates energy efficiency for homes.

A LEED rating for homes is being piloted in the United States.

Buildings are rated from one to 60 points. Anything 32 points or more is LEED certified, with silver, gold or platinum status for the best buildings.

Windmill's three major projects are receiving accolades hand over fist: the Acqua and the Vento in Calgary, the Currents in Ottawa, and Victoria's Docks Green — North America's first LEED Platinum planned urban community.

Westeinde recently spoke to builders, developers, architects and designers at the Ottawa-Carleton Home Builders' Association monthly meeting, attempting to convince them that change to their business is inevitable.

Suburban housing developments depend on car use — but gas prices are 30 to 50 per cent higher than five to seven years ago, he says.

Houses are 30-per-cent bigger, but energy efficiency is only 25-per-cent better and there are fewer occupants per house, so we're using up much more space per capita.

"We, as a human species, are consuming more than we can replenish," he warned delegates at the meeting.

Building green is one step toward a sustainable future and he assured them green homes don't have to be outlandish or goofy. "It's a myth that green buildings all stick photovoltaic cells on the roof," he says.

Green buildings are highly energy efficient, water efficient, have good air quality, and use healthy materials that are sustainable.

In Ottawa, the Currents is being built on a former brownfield site (meaning it was contaminated) where a gas station, drycleaner and car wash once stood.

The 43-apartment luxury condominium, which will house the new Great Canadian Theatre Co., is 95 per cent sold and the first occupants arrive this spring.

Windmill asked the



Calgary Herald Archive

Solar panels under construction last year on the garages at the back of the homes in Drake Landing.

City of Ottawa for support to become a LEED Gold building, proposing to double the density, but halve the impact on infrastructure such as water and sewer pipes and electrical lines. City councillors agreed.

Windmill also owns a sustainable development consulting company, Buildgreen Consulting, which is examining projects that include venues for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games, and a complete sustainable resort village in Loreto Bay, Mexico.

The Acqua and Vento project in Calgary will definitely be LEED Gold and possibly platinum.

Again, a partnership with the city helped make a success of the town-house project with retail space and 10-per-cent affordable housing.

The interior U-shaped open area allows natural light into all units with their bamboo floors, wool carpets, wheatboard cabinets, and radiant floor heating. Rainwater is harvested for toilet flushing.

Docks Green, a finalist in CMHC's competition, was a contaminated site on Victoria's harbourfront for 37 years because no one knew what to do with it.

Windmill promised it would be LEED Platinum or it would pay the city \$1 million, says Westeinde. The community includes a mix of lofts and townhome condominiums.

An on-site sewage treatment plant will scrub wastewater until it's clean enough to discharge into the ocean.

Most, however, will be reused for landscaping and toilet flushing. The city is examining Windmill's sewage treatment as a model for its own system. A biomass plant uses waste wood from construction sites and pulp and paper to create heat.

less, not only in energy savings, but also in reduced absenteeism and higher productivity of the people who live and work there.

Even U.S. companies, such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot, are paying attention to green building because it saves them money in the long run. "That is going to come downstream and affect how we do business," says Westeinde, adding that change is happening and quickly. "No one had heard of Energy Star when we formed Windmill three years ago."

Builders are getting on board with things like Energy Star, which is a good first step, but they're still building the huge suburban homes that could one day be unaffordable to operate. "The discussion is happening, which is great, but the action is slow in coming," says Westeinde.

— with files from the Herald



Jonathan Westeinde



Mikael Kjellstrom, Calgary Herald

The Vento project in The Bridges in Calgary aims to be sustainable.

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