

Langley's grand vision inspired by Paris

Greater Vancouver will double over 50 years

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Hundreds of planners brainstormed about how Greater Vancouver can live with a doubled population of four million. For 200th Street in Langley, they suggest transforming it into a multi-purpose boulevard with car lanes and transit lanes separated by rows of trees - like the Champs Elysees in Paris.

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The Kingsway corridor in Burnaby can accommodate another 40,000 residents and 200th Street in Langley can be turned into something like the Champs Elysees in Paris as Greater Vancouver doubles its population over the next 50 years.

Those are among the ideas put forward by hundreds of planners, architects and others who have been brainstorming on how the region can stay livable while accommodating another two million people.

"We're looking at a choice between Geneva and Atlanta," University of B.C. landscape architect Patrick Condon said Wednesday.

"I think we're kind of struggling at the half-way point between those two futures."

Geneva is ranked as one of the world's most livable cities while Atlanta is seen as an example of a city that has let urban sprawl get out of hand and suffers from extreme traffic congestion.

The brainstorming sessions were organized by UBC's Design Centre for Sustainability, the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the Fraser Basin Council.

They focused on Kingsway, 200th Street and the interface between residential developments and farmland in Delta. Condon said the lessons learned can be applied in comparable areas throughout the region.

Kingsway could be flanked by four to eight-storey buildings used for housing, commercial and office space, Condon said. The effect would be to "humanize a very long stretch of what is often an unappealing landscape."

It would help accommodate "the coming demographic tidal wave as we become a region of largely middle-aged and old people."

Dense development along Kingsway and similar corridors would provide down-sized housing "in extremely convenient places close to transit and commercial services."

"The transit is already there, along with some commercial services," Condon said. "By bringing in the housing, more commercial services and some office space along those corridors, you take advantage of the infrastructure investment that's already there, and obviate the need to build new infrastructure in other parts of the region."

In Langley, 200th Street will become an increasingly busy transportation corridor between the new Golden Ears Bridge and the U.S. border.

Condon said the choice is between "turning your back on that corridor" by building gated communities along it, "or facing the corridor and trying to make it a better place."

That could be done with a multi-lane boulevard with high and low-speed traffic lanes and dedicated transit lanes, broken up with rows of trees and flanked by "urban nodes" of residential and commercial development.

It wouldn't turn 200th Street into an international tourist attraction like the Champs Elysees, but it could mean the difference between a noisy, smelly highway and a broad, attractive boulevard.

The most difficult scenario was provided by the edge between urban development and agricultural land in east Ladner, Condon said.

Now, single-family homes' back yards often face on semi-industrial agriculture with the noise, smells and health risks of farm equipment, fertilizers and pesticides.

Condon said a buffer zone of "small-scale community agriculture" such as vegetable plots could prevent conflict between residential and agricultural uses while presenting residents with "brilliant views across intensely cultivated fields."

The sustainability project, which will continue at least through 2010, will summarize its findings so far at a session tonight, starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Marriott Pinnacle Hotel, 1128 West Hastings in Vancouver.

More information on the project can be found on the Internet at <http://www.landfood.ubc.ca/sxd/overview.htm>.

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