

SFU's UniverCity embraces sustainability in a real way

It's a walkable community that fits into its natural landscape



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SPECIAL TO WESTCOAST HOMES

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Atop Burnaby Mountain, where the Simon Fraser University campus once sat isolated from the rest of the world, one of North America's most sustainable new communities has taken shape as a perfect model for what a complete community should be.

UniverCity is a compact, walkable community, sensitively set within the moun-

tain's natural landscape. The community is not, by any means, an eco-village featuring demonstration green building experiments or a place that tries to appeal to the small group of eco-pioneers in search of off-the-grid living on top of a mountain.

Instead, it is a place that embraces the concept of sustainability in a real way, where incremental improvements are achieved in ecological performance and healthy living through thoughtful planning and proven new green technology.

Walking around the community, one can see how the community's infrastructure, including the drainage systems, landscaping and pathways, has been designed to respect the natural environment. Green-building tech-

nology has been incorporated, perhaps not explicitly in the design of buildings, but more where it makes sense functionally.

UniverCity has begun to accomplish two goals for SFU.

First, a new complete community with a broad range of housing choices, shops, services and amenities, has quickly unfolded adjacent to SFU's once-isolated academic campus, benefiting students, faculty and everyone else who treks up to the mountaintop daily. In fact, some of those who trek up the mountain now stay there.

About 30 per cent of the approximate 2,200 residents who now live at UniverCity have an association with SFU, either as students, faculty or campus staff.

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SFU developments include multi-use buildings

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From K2

The commercial services and community amenities that are already open, or soon to be in place, ensure that the new community's residents and campus visitors don't have to leave the mountaintop to meet their daily needs.

A 23,000-square-foot grocery store, operated by Nesters Market, will open about a year from now in Liberty Homes' "Hub" development. The Hub is a mixed-use building with 144 condominium homes on UniverCity's High Street, just east of the Cornerstone retail complex that has acted as a true cornerstone for UniverCity.

The province recently announced funding for an elementary school to start classes in September 2010 in a former academic building in the heart of the community. SFU Community Trust has purchased the building from the university and will upgrade and donate it to the Burnaby School District.

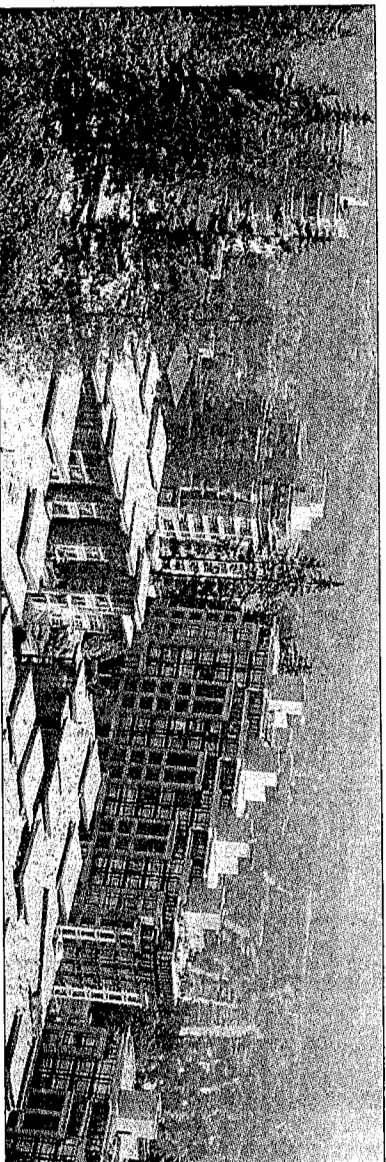
The trust is also paying for a 50-space child-care centre to be built adjacent to the new school in a community park. This will supplement the 12-space toddler centre in the Verdant development.

The Verdant is another model achievement. It is an affordable price-restricted townhouse project developed as a partnership by SFU Community Trust and Vancity Enterprises, the credit union's socially-driven market development arm, to ensure that the community has a mix of housing types that appeal to a range of income levels.

For those who do need to leave the mountain, public transit use has never been easier. All SFU students have a U-Pass, which provides unlimited, all-zone access to public transit in Metro Vancouver at approximately one-third the cost of a regular monthly transit pass.

Residents at UniverCity also have a first-of-a-kind transit pass. Thanks to a program co-sponsored by Vancity and SFU Community Trust, the Vancity Community Transit Pass allows residents unlimited access to Metro Vancouver transit for just under \$30 per month. Bus service to the mountaintop is pretty good at shuttling riders to the SkyTrain station at the base of the mountain.

A survey has shown that 30 to 40 per cent of UniverCity's residents use public transit to commute to work. About 10 per cent of the new commu-



UniverCity, nestled in the stunning natural surroundings of Burnaby Mountain, is a model of sustainability. The

walkable community offers a broad range of services and amenities, and incorporates green-building technology.

nity's residents don't even own a car. For those who occasionally need a car, the Co-op Auto Network is now atop the mountain with the trust funding the purchase of one of the two cars available to Co-op members.

All of these innovations, none of them earth-shattering, have been applied in such a way that each is important and each incrementally contributes to the

development of a truly sustainable new community — a community that has unfolded amazingly in less than five years as a testament to its popularity with homebuyers.

It almost goes unnoticed that there is also an extra benefit being generated by this special community-building effort. With SFU getting into the land development business through its SFU Commu-

nity Trust, the profits from the development are creating an endowment fund that will support a variety of university needs over time.

What could be a more convincing model for a sustainable complete community?

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