

Emerald Hills Urban Village

FOUNDATION RESEARCH BULLETIN

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ECONOMY

1.0 Why is economy a key theme?

Developing a strong local economy is an important component of a sustainable community. Such communities must support a diverse mix of local economic opportunities and growth appropriate to the local demographic and to anticipated future needs. It is also important that such communities actively promote those aspects of the local economy that support a long term sustainable vision. This requires that the definition of "economic success" include principles of social and environmental sustainability, in addition to economic sustainability. Examples of sustainable community economic development include the planning and development of affordable housing; the creation of downtown development authorities to fund core area revitalization; and the creation of eco-industrial parks, where industries are linked by integrating byproducts as inputs.¹

"The aim of sustainable community economic development is to promote economic development that provides opportunities for people of different incomes and skills, promotes a better quality of life, and protects the environment" (Roseland 1998, 160).

The local economy, in the form of employment-related land uses, provides the locational opportunities to businesses, institutions, organizations and service providers, who in turn provide employment opportunities to residents. Industrial, civic, and commercial entities provide a relatively diverse mix of job opportunities, while also providing goods and services to the residents of a community, thereby meeting residents' daily needs. For sustainable communities, achieving the right locations for (and amounts of) commercial, industrial, or civic land uses, achieving the right mix of commercial types within commercial land uses, and achieving the successful integration of multiple uses, are key.

2.0 Why is economy important to Emerald Hills Urban Village?

Commercial development in Strathcona County, as in much of North America, can be characterized by some recent trends. The occurrence of big box and large format retail chain stores have increased substantially. There are a number of concerns created by large format retail, including land use and servicing costs, environmental costs, and negative impacts on local economy and community character. Development patterns associated with large format retail strongly favour vehicle use, with commercial uses located at the periphery of communities. This makes it difficult for local residents to meet their daily needs through alternative transportation options, and removes the opportunity for commercial uses to contribute to the creation of a community "heart" or centre. Strathcona County intends for the creation of its "urban villages" to begin to address this issue. The County projects that as demographics change, communities continue to grow in size, and the cost of living increases, there will be the need to return to smaller scale,

¹ Roseland. 1998.

"A long-term, holistic perspective drives economic decision-making with decisions made through meaningful consultations with community stakeholders" (Douglas 1994, 26).

accessible commercial uses.²

Strathcona County's Strategic Plan contains a number of Community Goals, including the following for economic development: "Create a more diversified economy and increase employment opportunities by broadening the variety of industries and commercial businesses."³ In addition, Policy 6.19 of the Municipal Development Plan states that Strathcona County will "promote the development of urban villages to support accessibility to meet every day needs and to create vibrant and attractive multi functional community focal points."⁴ Emerald Hills Urban Village represents such a concept, and offers the opportunity to address these economic and employment issues.

3.0 How can EHUV impact on this theme?

The Emerald Hills Urban Village is intended to hold a mixed use development containing smaller scale commercial uses that contributes to the village heart. To address the economic issues mentioned above while working within the existing mix of land uses identified for this urban village, the Emerald Hills Urban Village development will need to employ a variety of strategies in the areas of commercial use mix, physical design of commercial and mixed use areas, the integration of social amenities within a mixed use heart, and the social and environmental practices and products of businesses.

3.1 What strategies are relevant for EHUV?



Fig. 1 Businesses benefit by being located in or near walkable places that attract a broad range of people.

Use Mix of the Village Heart

Businesses benefit from proximity to other uses that attract a customer base. A well integrated mix of complimentary uses provides destinations and gathering spaces attractive to a broad range of users, and creates a vibrant centre or heart that fosters social interaction as well as supporting business (Figure 1). Employees benefit by this mix when they have the opportunity to do errands on their lunch breaks in close proximity to their work places. Reduced commuting times for employees who live close to their work place is an additional benefit of mixed use developments generally, as is a more active lifestyle and fewer vehicle emissions.

Flexible Zoning

Zoning limits the types of land uses that are allowed within a particular area of the community. Often zoning results in the dramatic separation of uses within a community. This segregation prevents the possibility for a strong community fabric by limiting the ability to walk to meet daily needs, by limiting social interaction to one's immediate neighbours, and generally limiting the confluence of different people and activities in the same spaces. More flexible zoning intermixes residential, commercial and other uses, thus ensuring that jobs and services will be closer to the people who need them. As community economics and demographics change over time, flexible zoning allows the uses and their locations

² Strathcona County. 2006. p. 6.1.

³ Ibid., p 3.1.

⁴ Ibid., p 6.3.



Fig. 2: An example of a horizontal mixed use project.



Fig. 3: The Cornerstone at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver is an example of a vertical mixed use project.

within a community to best adapt to current conditions.⁵

Use Mix Distribution (Mixed Use)

The distribution of a mix of uses can occur both horizontally (side by side, on the same parcel or block), as well as vertically (within the same building.) Larger retail-commercial, institutional and industrial uses, particularly ones requiring units with multiple stories or high ceilings, may be most easily mixed in a horizontal distribution. Smaller residential, office and retail units lend themselves more easily to a vertical mixed use distribution due to their flexibility in orientation and stackability that their smaller size allows.

Design Measures

A horizontal mix of uses requires well articulated building facades, multiple entrances to larger units, and pedestrian scale presence at ground level (Figure 2). Structured or underground parking is desirable to reduce the distance between units or buildings typically produced by surface parking. A vertical mix of uses (within a building) may be organized in different ways. Commonly, buildings with four or more stories are organized with retail and service commercial at ground, office on the second storey, and residential above (Figure 3). Commercial and office spaces may be double loaded to face the back as well, if this is appropriate to the urban pattern. A vertical mix also benefits from structured or underground parking, serving residents as well as customers and clients, and maintaining a friendly, accessible and vibrant public space at street level.

Mix of Employment Opportunities

A diverse mix of commercial uses provides a range of employment opportunities for nearby residents, as well as draws others from surrounding communities. Professional practices in health, law, design and engineering, education and other fields can easily be accommodated alongside or above retail and service industries.

Size and Flexibility of Commercial Units

Smaller units for commercial uses offer opportunity to small, local, and new businesses to establish themselves in competitive markets. Smaller units also allow for a greater number of businesses to locate in a defined area, thereby diversifying the range of products and services being made available to the community, as well as diversifying the types of job opportunities.

Flexibility of physical spaces enables the size and organization of a unit to change in response to fluctuating conditions such as business growth or decline, or change in use or zoning. Businesses that establish themselves in one location but in time require more space would be able negotiate their expansion without moving to a new location, breaking their lease, or complicated construction. This minimizes any disruption to business operation.

⁵ The James Taylor Chair in Landscape & Liveable Environments. 2002. p. 99.



Fig. 4: The Waterfall Building in Vancouver is an example of a Live/Work building.

Design Measures

Examples of design elements for flexible spaces: standardization of building components, modular components, centralized systems, load bearing pillars and beams with partition walls, raised access flooring.

Live-work units

Combining working and living space can reduce costs for small businesses or self-employed individuals in artisan traditions or office work. Working at home eliminates the cost of renting additional space, while also allowing parents to supervise young children and minimize their child care costs. Live-work areas function as a transition between residential areas and higher density mixed use, commercial or industrial areas. See Figure 4.

Design Measures

Live-work areas should have a strong residential character combined with a continuous street frontage, direct pedestrian access, and on-street parking. Buildings containing live-work units should provide shared space opportunities for multiple units to access (e.g. meeting room, storage.)⁶

Shared space

Facilities are typically built, maintained, and managed to serve single uses or user groups, despite the proximity of other spaces and users who could potentially share these facilities. This results in underutilized space and facility redundancy, while the management and maintenance of separate spaces or buildings adds significant cost. Shared facilities decrease these costs as well as minimize energy and materials use. Sharing space also fosters social interaction between different age and interest groups, and has the potential to define and reinforce synergies between different enterprises. The use of shared facilities may be distributed spatially, or in time. For example, the parking needs of a pet store would likely be during the day, while the parking needs of a pub would likely be during the evening. Both businesses could share the parking spaces without undue conflict since their need for such spaces have little overlap in time. In a second example, a startup consulting firm that cannot afford rent for an office with additional rooms may share a meeting room with another office-type business on a limited time basis.

Sharing space can occur between two or more businesses, but also within a single business. It is estimated that about 50% of the space in a conventional office environment goes unused.⁷ Space can be conserved through shared working arrangements including the sharing of workstations.⁸

Design Measures

Reduce the spatial requirements of parking, meeting areas,

⁶ The James Taylor Chair in Landscape & Liveable Environments, 2002, p. 99.

⁷ Beatley, 2000, p. 388.

⁸ Employees are not tied to a specific station or office, but choose an available office each day. This is based on the average daily attendance, factoring in illness, travel, vacations, etc., to match the number of workstations or offices available.

equipment areas, storage, workstations, access corridors, loading areas and driveways by a minimum of 25%.

Synergistic uses and value-added enterprises

Traditional business models follow a supply chain that begins with the procurement of material resources, manipulates these resources into product, and then sells the product. Along the way, waste is generated - waste material from manufacturing, waste heat from cooling processes, waste from consumer packaging, etc. If a specific business's resource needs and waste byproducts can be identified, there is opportunity to coordinate with other businesses who could use this waste as their resource, or whose waste may supply resources. The synergistic character of eco-industrial enterprise can occur in a similar way in commercial enterprise, where energy, water, and material waste from one business is used as a resource by another. Additionally, where waste is generated but no business is in place to benefit from this possible resource, the opportunity created by the capture of such waste provides for new, value-added business to enter the marketplace. The cost savings to businesses utilizing so-called "waste" from other businesses can be substantial, and the marketability of such environmentally sustainable business practices offers significant competitive advantage.

Design Measures

Examples include: provide waste separating receptacles for sorting material waste; capture waste heat to supply other uses; locate synergistic uses in proximity.

4.0 What policies and/or programs will add value?

Fair Trade

Fair Trade policies or programs can enhance local economies by supporting enterprises that make positive impacts on social equity and the environment through their business practices - in areas of employment, manufacturing, resource harvesting, marketing, and profit distribution. The following are some specific examples of how fair trade concepts can be supported in Emerald Hills Urban Village, at various project phases:

Design and Build

- incorporate skills development activities
- voluntary sign-on to accepted "Code of Conduct" to ensure basic working and environmental standards are met for major suppliers (supplying design and build services and materials)

Occupancy

- encourage fair trade retailers to locate in the development
- voluntary sign-on to accepted "Code of Conduct" to ensure basic working and environmental standards are met for major suppliers (supplying commercial enterprises)
- use community intranet (or similar system) to provide information on local fair trade retailers, suppliers, organizations, and initiatives
- facilitate a "time bank" or barter system where people offer services or home-produced goods to each other in exchange for similar

Social Outreach

Programming public and private spaces adjacent to or within in the village centre

with social programming will attract a customer base to businesses, strengthen local identity, and create a vibrant heart for the community. Such programming may include craft markets or swaps, community garden events, play spaces for clients/customers of commercial tenants, and notice boards for local advertisements.

Time-share Requirements

Requiring the time-sharing of spaces reduces the total development footprint and also reduces costs to developers, businesses and residents. Bylaws and building codes can be amended to require the sharing of spaces such as parking stalls, facilities and amenities.

5.0 What other resources are available?

Foundation Research Bulletins:

#1 Land, for more information on less expensive patterns of development.

#7 Materials, for information on developing a market for local building materials.

#6 Food, for information on local food production.

The Canadian Eco-Industrial Network

A clearinghouse for information on Eco-Industrial Networks

www.cein.ca

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Figure 1: Bohl, Charles C. Place Making: Developing Town Centres, Main Streets, and Urban Villages. Urban Land Institute. 2002. p. 199.

Figure 2: Ibid., p. 270.

Figure 3: Design Centre for Sustainability

Figure 4: Ibid.

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