

# Emerald Hills Urban Village

## FOUNDATION RESEARCH BULLETIN

Design Centre for  
Sustainability at UBC

No. 12  
December, 2006

### CULTURE

#### 1.0 Why is culture a key theme?

Culture and heritage can be defined by the character of a place. "Communities with a strong character and identity are more attractive as places for living, commerce and leisure, provide opportunities for a richer range of experiences, and generally offer a higher quality of life than other locales."<sup>1</sup> By avoiding suburban sprawl, big box stores, highway strip development and an overall "sameness" characteristic of many communities<sup>2</sup>, the character, culture, and heritage of a place has the opportunity to thrive, and this can in turn create a shared sense of pride, ownership and stewardship within community members.

In order to nourish and sustain the diversity of a community's culture and character, thoughtful choices about where and how change occurs need to be made. Furthermore, there needs to be an "understanding of the impacts of change on character which are key to sustaining these dimensions of community life"<sup>3</sup>.

This research bulletin will present design strategies and discuss ways in which Emerald Hills Urban Village can build and incorporate places and spaces of opportunity in its community plan which can then form foundations through which a diverse culture and safe, vibrant community can be created, celebrated, and sustained.

#### 2.0 Why is culture important to Emerald Hills Urban Village?

The land outside of Sherwood Park has historically been dominated by agriculture,<sup>4</sup> and it is beginning to change. Within Strathcona County, rural 'character', and thereby cultural heritage continues to change as well, as land is subdivided for acreages and other developments.<sup>5</sup> The context of any new development provides the backdrop against which the community grows. Acknowledging the diversity of this context throughout EHUV's design is important as it can instill a powerful sense of place in members of the community which then promotes social inclusiveness, awareness and stewardship to create a safe, vibrant, and unique place to live, work, play and visit.

<sup>1</sup> Cam Campbell.. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Brad Stelfox et al. n/d.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

### 3.0 How can EHUV impact on this theme?



Fig. 1 A welcoming space in a garden that is created by using and referencing local materials.

Emerald Hills Urban Village has an opportunity to create a community plan which will thoroughly integrate spaces and buildings within the community that can encourage the ongoing participation of community members. When identified spaces and opportunities are designed for cultural activities in the onset of community-building process, cultural expression and social inclusivity can be created and sustained. Contextual and integrated building and neighbourhood design can provide a foundation for public programming opportunities that engage residents and promote community cohesiveness and identity within Emerald Hills Urban Village.

### 3.1 What strategies are relevant for EHUV?

#### Placemaking

Placemaking involves neighbourhood and building designs which facilitates community identity and encourages participation. Placemaking design respects the varied cultural, historical, geographical, climatic, and ecological context, creating a memorable, inclusive community. To ensure the neighbourhood retains its “green” focus over the long term, the community should understand and embrace sustainable development. If EHUV is built with robust contextual references and if it provides diverse social places, this will encourage knowledge-sharing and mixed social & cultural interaction, which can create a safe, vibrant, sustainable and valued community.



Fig. 2 A place-specific paving pattern in Portland, Oregon.

#### Design Measures:

- Use and reference local materials, see Fig.1;
- Incorporate symbolic, cultural, ecologically relevant designs, see Fig. 2;
- Create a tree-lined Main Street or Node with small shops and services that is transit and pedestrian focused;
- Build appropriately scaled, and characteristically different, public spaces on, and around the Main Street and close to or within parks and natural areas, and provide public amenities therein, see Fig. 3;
- Provide diverse services and share resources as much as possible within one building footprint within a 5-minute walk of residential and social activity areas;
- Provide identifiable and strongly articulated building forms and spaces which invite interaction or meditation (ie. active or passive uses);
- Ensure all buildings are pedestrian-scaled and their design integrates with public areas around them (eg. reduced setbacks on sidewalks, adjoining garden with seating areas);



Fig. 3 A place for public gatherings and events in Revelstoke, B.C.



**Fig. 4** Water features often create a focal point for gatherings, and invite occasions for temporary or permanent artwork, exhibitions and events.



**Fig. 5** Treed paths with occasional seating creates a safe and pleasant pedestrian corridor between residences in Vancouver, B.C..



**Fig. 6** Bellingham, Washington. Successful public places include amenities and relate to buildings and spaces around them. Public spaces should be located in a sunny spot.

- Create designs which educate residents about sustainable development;
- Create accessible spaces for children and the elderly;
- Create sheltered spaces (from sun, snow, wind, rain).

### Spaces for Community Expression

Designing indoor and outdoor spaces and combining opportunities for community expression and interaction are tied to the placemaking strategy, and enable a variety of possibilities for community programming. The visual arts encourage meaningful discussion and celebration of culture, history, ecology and community, and require a variety of spaces for this purpose, as seen in Fig. 4.

#### Design Measures:

- Create a community hall for meetings, gatherings, exhibits;
- Create small, safe public 'pocket' spaces adjoining cafes or institutional or community services and buildings for small-scale events such as art, farmers', children, or crafts markets, stargazing;
- Design streets and other corridors to accommodate banners, parades, block parties.

### Connecting Spaces

Connecting social and cultural spaces and places to all residents within the community is integral to cultural development and sustainability, and provides residents with equal access for participation which fosters a sense of safety and inclusiveness.

#### Design Measures:

- Link public and cultural spaces and buildings to neighbourhoods with treed paths for walking and bicycling, see Fig. 5;
- Create fully accessible pathways, see Table 1<sup>6</sup>;
- Enhance connectivity between buildings as well as between buildings and their surrounding spaces, see Fig. 6;
- Locate residences and cultural places close to transit stops;
- Ensure connectivity between residents and cultural destinations outside of the community.

<sup>6</sup> Evergreen. 2001. p. 2.

<b>Table 1: Guidelines for accessible paths</b>	
Min. width (single)	110 cm(44 in.)
Min. width (double)	220 cm (88 in.)
Max. change in elevation	60 mm (1/4 in.)
Max. slope	5% (1:20)
Surfacing	Non-slip

#### **4.0 What policies and/or programs will add value?**

- Community residents’ and visitors’ manuals to provide significant and accessible information on local heritage, places to visit, etc.<sup>7</sup>
- Create policies that will ensure public art and participation is included in all public open-space planning and design.
- Create partnerships between the municipality, NGOs and First Nations, to ensure everyone has a voice in community planning.
- Create a policy to promote year-round events that celebrate context and community including ecology, history and diverse cultures.
- Create a “visual preference” survey, to preserve important views and places which people cherish.<sup>8</sup>
- Create “awareness days” around issues within the community and create educational events which can promote sustainable lifestyle choices (eg. a waste-to-art program for children).<sup>9</sup>
- Create volunteer programs and encourage participation through a variety of awareness strategies.
- Increase community knowledge of and participation in the region’s agricultural activities and heritage.
- Create inclusive, multi-stakeholder, informational and idea-building workshops, events and forums to plan suitable and relevant public spaces. Create workshops for children, teens, elderly and special needs residents.

#### **5.0 What other resources are available?**

WinterLights Celebration [http://www.communitiesinbloom.ca/\\_winterlights/index.php](http://www.communitiesinbloom.ca/_winterlights/index.php)  
 Communities in Bloom [http://www.communitiesinbloom.ca/welcome\\_page.php](http://www.communitiesinbloom.ca/welcome_page.php)

<sup>7</sup> One Planet Living. 2006. p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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