



PROOF positive

CITY CENTRE'S EVOLVING AND AWE-INSPIRING SKYLINE PROVES JOINT EFFORTS BY ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE SURREY DOWNTOWN BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION HAS GREAT EFFECT

Above: Central City Tower and SFU-Surrey Campus. Below: The new City Hall, slated for completion in 2013, will have an adjoining plaza that will be able to host 5,000 people for public events.

MOTORISTS HEADING NORTH ON THE King George Boulevard in Surrey get the distinct impression they are entering a vibrant downtown core when they approach 100th Avenue. Immediately west, the staggered plaza of Holland Park welcomes guests to the neighbourhood. Nearby, the soaring Central City office tower is an icon, much the way the Empire State Building is an indelible symbol of New York City. The dramatic swath of the adjoining Simon Fraser University-Surrey Campus adds to the urban ambience.

The Skytrain, the new shops, the street signage and green accoutrements also contribute to a vibrancy that

until recently was only a dream. But arguably the most impressive part of Surrey's City Centre is the people: business men and women emerge in droves from the Skytrain station; students wander from one retail store to the next; young couples push baby strollers along crosswalks.

Thanks to a visionary mayor and city council, a host of neighbourhood improvement associations and forward-thinking investors, what once was a part of Surrey – Whalley – that was dismissed by many Metro-Vancouverites as a low-rent haven for drug addicts, street walkers and petty crime, is no longer the case.

However, the best aspect of Surrey's downtown core is that greater things are yet to come. "Major organizations such as the Fraser Health Authority and PricewaterhouseCoopers have either recently moved or will soon relocate here," says Elizabeth Model, >



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executive director of the Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association (DSBIA). "Upscale residential and commercial development is continuing at a rapid rate. A new library and hospital expansions are nearing completion, and perhaps most significant of all is the impending relocation of City Hall to our downtown core."

The library model refers to the \$36-million City Centre Library, a striking facility (it looks sculpted rather than constructed) that will open this fall. Further south on the King George Boulevard, ground has broken on the \$600-million Surrey Memorial Hospital Emergency Department and Critical Care Tower (the largest capital investment in the history of B.C. health care); the adjacent \$240-million Jim Pattison Surrey Outpatient Care and Surgery Centre opens in June; and the new \$90-million, 180,000-square-foot City Hall is scheduled to open in 2013 and will flank a massive new plaza.

Architect Bing Thom is frequently singled out for having a vision of Surrey's City Centre long before any substantial upgrading took place. Thom strongly believed that the initial development of the downtown core should consist of a 1.7-million-square-foot mixed-use development that would integrate an existing shopping mall with a new major university and office development. His firm, Bing Thom Architects, was responsible for brokering a deal between the city and provincial governments whereby in exchange for the City donating land in the designated downtown core, the province would agree to locate the new university there.

Thom designed the Central City tower, making it and its plaza a place where residents and visitors gather; SFU moved its Surrey campus into the building in 2004 (Thom was subsequently awarded the design contract for the new library). SFU's 450,000 square feet of space injected the burgeoning downtown core with 5,000 students and 2,500 employees, and a neighbourhood renaissance

was suddenly underway.

Today, according to Blackwood Partners/Central City vice-president and general manager Bill Rempel (who is also the current DSBIA president), Central City "is 100 per cent leased with prestigious clients such as Coast Capital Credit Union, McQuarrie Hunter, The Fraser Health Authority, 7-Eleven, TransLink, Vancity, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and many more."

Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts can take credit for creating a business climate that encouraged the propulsion of long-gestating urban planning. "A lot of City Centre's components were coming together, but Watts really kicked the process into high gear," says Charan Sethi, whose Tien Sher Group of Companies invested \$700 million in the development of Quattro, a

master-planned condominium community in Surrey. "She and her staff are first-class people to deal with. Instead of setting up roadblocks, they work with business people to get things done."

Under Watts' leadership, investors spending more than \$10 million on City Centre development enjoy a DCC (development cost charge) reduction of 30 per cent and deferred DCC payments, plus no property taxes for three years and building permit fees reduced by 50 per cent. Other incentives await developers with projects valued over \$25 million.

This combined with a business tax rate that is the second lowest in Metro Vancouver and the lowest residential taxes of all the Lower Mainland municipalities makes City Centre – and Surrey in general – an

Left: Holland Park, with Concord Pacific's Park Place in the background, where six highrises will be built. Right: The \$36-million City Centre Library, due to open in 2011, is designed by Bing Thom Architects.

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Partners with DSBIA in building a vibrant, safe and liveable downtown in Surrey City Centre



Clockwise:
 The 1,600-seat proposed Performing Arts Centre;
 The new RCMP Division E Headquarters for 3,000 employees is expected to open by early 2013;
 Surrey Memorial Hospital's New Critical Care Tower and Emergency Department.



enormously attractive place to do business. "We're able to offer the highrise experience for a far more attractive rate than anywhere else in Metro Vancouver," says Grant Murray, vice-president of sales for Concord Pacific.

Murray goes on to say that "for our concrete highrises we're able to offer a rate of only \$400 per square foot. Even in Burnaby, a comparable living space would go for at least \$600." Concord is investing \$1 billion in Surrey's Park Place development, which will ultimately see the creation of four towers for 2,500 residents in the space of five years.

Add to all this activity a carefully thought-out proposed cultural component in the form of a \$120-million Performing Arts Centre

that will contain a 1,600-seat theatre, and it seems that Surrey's City Centre will be fully developed. But that's hardly the case. "Our immediate area is crying out for a new hotel, which I hope will be the next development in our downtown," says Rempel. "There's also a large demand for triple AAA office space in downtown Surrey. Central GE Capital Real Estate has plans for additional office towers at Gateway Business Park on 134th Street and 108th Avenue, and there are discussions

of new commercial development on the Compass Point Hotel site."

Companies such as Rempel's Blackwood also have long-range plans (and hopes) for the region. "Our long-term goals are to continue to develop Central City as an 'urban' centre where you can work, learn and shop, all under one roof," says Rempel. "We will see thousands of new jobs and new residents moving to our immediate neighborhood over the next five years, so we have to ensure we have an offering to meet their needs. To that end, we're working with Bing Thom and his team along with other consultants to develop a short-term and long-term positioning strategy."

As for the DSBIA's goals, Rempel says, "Working with the business stakeholders and local community, we will continue to promote the economic development of downtown Surrey and strengthen government relations. A focus on special events is also key in creating a sense of community in the downtown core. We will also continue with our focus on safety and security to ensure our goals for a safe and liveable downtown core are met now rather than later."

Rempel echoes the sentiments of everyone involved in Surrey's downtown core development when he concludes, "The City of Surrey, and in particular downtown Surrey, have caught the attention of the entire Lower Mainland, and this evolution has garnered international attention. As part of a vibrant team, I'm so proud to be part of this exciting process. The future really does live here." ■

This promotional feature was prepared for the Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association by BCBusiness magazine's Special Advertising Features Dept. Writer: Robin Brunet. For information, contact VP of corporate features John Cochrane at 604-299-7311. Email: jcochrane@canadawide.com

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