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New Pathways to Better Communities

The time is now. We are at a watershed moment at the intersection of a climate emergency, a world-wide health crisis, and the re-emergence of racial inclusion and social equity. These are affecting each one of us personally. One or all of these are in our living rooms. They are not distant concepts but personal challenges.

I want to share with you seven real estate form-makers of the future, and then finish with two process essentials for business success that are necessary to build the next generation of great communities in the Fraser Valley.

Let's first look at seven emerging trends that are reshaping our communities:

1. Climate Emergency. Climate change is here to stay, moving us toward Net-Zero Buildings and Level 4 in Energy Step Code. Just weeks ago, I was on a net-zero city seminar, and it was estimated that a net-zero building cost 6 to 15 percent more than the standard. We must find ways to create incentives to reduce if not eliminate this barrier, otherwise it will be a dream for the rich not the common standard that brings increased comfort, health, and value to every home. Homeowners should then save up to 50 percent on energy the minute they step inside their new home.

2. Regulations Overhaul. We need an overhaul of development regulations including Official Community Plans and zoning bylaws to reshape cities and communities. There needs to be consistent standards between municipalities and more inclusive permissive mixed zones. I have already developed common zoning templates for four communities on Vancouver Island, so they share the basic zones and then customize to their individual needs. With recent cases in White Rock and elsewhere, there also needs to be more certainty in development regulations and permits to ensure that development rights are not removed too late in the process.

3. Parking No More. The City of Edmonton recently eliminated parking requirements in their downtown. Residual parking in existing structures (this is the trend) needs to be redesigned to have multiple uses. A good friend of mine, vice-president of a large development company, doesn't even own a car. Owners use their second car only 15 percent of the time when living in an apartment building. An apartment building in Ottawa recently was built with no parking at all. With increased density, decreased parking, and increased car-share, we can now design buildings for people, not cars.

4. Single-Family Homes No More. Townhomes are the new single-family home. Did you realize that 40–50 percent of your buyers are singles! Who wants to sit on a lawn mower cutting a lawn that you don't use? Even eight years ago, I asked a senior executive of a major development company for a single-family case study for our Urban Development Institute real estate development course, and he said "we don't do those anymore". One community that I helped master plan – Garrison Crossing in Chilliwack, reversed the trend from 25/75 to 75/25 (ratio of multi-family to single-family homes) back in 2002! That is now the trend reinforced by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) statistics. New Zealand has moved towards higher density requirements country-wide just a few months ago.



◆Townhomes are the new Single-Family Home



◆ Density done well is the way of the future

5. Compact Communities. Invisible density and density done well is the way to suburban regeneration. In 2005 my firm helped the Township of Langley complete the Willoughby Town Centre Plan in and helped the Township double the density in the area through a mix of housing as only 25 percent of the Township is developable. The City of Ottawa recently approved their new Official Plan that illustrates up to six units in a single-family looking home. Right now, Vancouver allows outright three units on a lot – three times the Density. Seattle has a use-friendly guide that enables ADUs (Auxiliary Dwelling Units) and allows up to two units on Single-Family lots depending on their size. <https://aduniverse-seattlecitygis.hub.arcgis.com/>

6. Affordability by Design. Diversity and choice of housing is part of housing affordability. We are moving towards a requirement of 15–30 percent non-market housing in each project of any magnitude. Replacement housing, missing middle housing, and seamless mixed-use are the ways of the future – building true "community", not just "commodity". Essential amenities are part of the development equation. Isolated towers or even three–six storey infill buildings must provide on-site or close amenities. They add value to the homes and the community.

7. First Nations First. First Nations are the largest landowners in British Columbia. First Nations come to the table with their own unique views in mind, which should be addressed separately from those of other communities. Care should be taken to actively consult with them and listen to their needs and concerns. Respect and acknowledgement, along with heartfelt sincerity and sharing, are at the core of building constructive understanding and relationships with First Nations.

GETTING TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF BETTER COMMUNITIES

So how do we get to that next generation of thinking and processes in business and real estate development in the Fraser Valley?

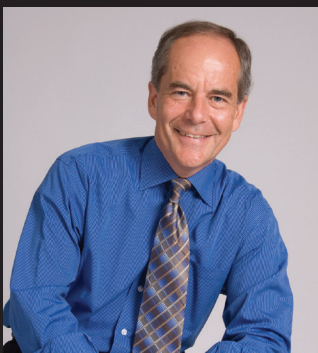
First: We need to build a common commitment: Building TRUST through engagement/building partnerships early, often, and differently from the beginning.

Second: We need to understand 9 distinct characteristics to transformative change in real estate development, not just incremental change that ends up in the same old place:

1. Combine three interacting elements: comprehensive due diligence, 3 engagement levels (#5 below), and efficient approvals
2. Consider a third alternative from the beginning (another option besides yours and theirs)
3. Create a dynamic interactive process that is driven by community support
4. Shape specific rules of engagement that guide effective process
5. Engage from the beginning with community, council, and staff
6. Develop proactive community benefits
7. Embrace agile thinking in this age of disruption

SHAPERS PYRAMID

People should be at the top of the pyramid, supported by policy and the economy in the approvals system.



Michael von Hausen has developed and facilitates the sought after School of Development for the Urban Development Institute. He is adjunct professor at Simon Fraser University and Vancouver Island University and President of MVH Urban Planning & Design Inc., a global consulting firm with roots in Western Canada. Michael is launching a digital-first urban design and development certification program in 2022. Visit courses.greatcommunitiesinstitute.com to learn more.

Michael's book [New Pathways to Approvals: Developing Better Communities Together](#) is available at Amazon.ca or his website at mvhinc.com.