

## CREATING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

What does it mean to live in community? In our current cities, too often it means defining a boundary with positive relationships inside and uncertain interactions beyond.

The SEFC sustainability mandate encompassed not only environmental performance, but social sustainability as well. A harder concept to make tangible, it nevertheless played a major role in determining design. A sustainable community, after all, is one where resilience is high – where people support each other, share resources, enjoy communal experiences and develop trust. The built environment can significantly help – or hinder – these things.

The Olympic Village project creates more points of interaction between people than is typical in tower and podium development. Glassed stairwells, inviting lobbies, open-air corridors, pedestrian pathways and building courtyards offer serendipitous experiences where people will bump into neighbours, stop to chat, or just be visually aware of others going about their day. Stand in the middle of Parcel 10 on a typical morning: the kids are out on the balconies, students are going off to school and somebody's pulling their blinds. The distances, while comfortable, are intimate: you see a friend across the courtyard and call out an invitation – shall we go down and have a coffee? In the mix of shared sights and experiences, people will less often be socially sidelined, or completely alone.

Repeated interaction over time builds relationships, and relationships are the essence of community. Supported by inviting communal spaces, daylit common areas and an interactive environment, it is hoped that people will come to know each other here. Socio-economic differences are downplayed as market and non-market housing intermingle; the wealth of common amenities is shared. It is a markedly different idea of a good life from that expressed by the suburbs, with their fenced distances between homes and common areas primarily relegated to cars.

As the limits of global resources become clear, it is obvious that humanity must cluster around resources to use them in a more efficient and effective way. The question is how to enhance livability so that this environmentally efficient model is also desirable (or it will not be adopted).

The challenge, in part, lies within us. How will we perform in this more intimate environment? Who will we become? What do we value most – the private lawn or the proximity of rich relationships? We do not have the answers to these questions yet – but the design of the Olympic Village offers the chance to see them emerge over time.

With the SEFC vision grounded in its official development plan, the public spaces designed and moving into construction, and the 2010 Olympic Games coming to town, the push to build the Millennium Water Olympic Village was underway.

The architects selected to design buildings entered an integrated design process with other building professionals to achieve multiple design targets: prescribed environmental performance, including minimum LEED Gold eligibility; appropriate density and marketability; a high degree of social sustainability features; a mix of market, rental, non-market, commercial and community uses; and successful integration of individual buildings into the narrow streetscape and public areas. These were to culminate in an enduring example of state-of-the-art sustainable community design to showcase to the world during the Olympic Games and beyond.

The designers started with passive design principles to maximize energy efficiency and moved into the task of defining the exterior and interior spaces that would provide texture and dimension to the village's built environment. This chapter explores the basics of passive design and highlights aspects of architectural design across each parcel. It includes stories of the architects' experiences as they worked to meet the complex program within the Olympic time frame. The chapter concludes with an examination of the building envelope systems used in the village to ensure the buildings will provide high quality living experiences with low maintenance and extended durability.

Throughout these stories weaves a larger theme, of a concerted, collaborative effort to break through past conceptions of architecture to bring a new urban experience to life. In so doing, the community of designers and builders in BC enriched their own experience, deepening their shared understanding of sustainability and enhancing a commitment to permanently shift the parameters of urban design for the better.