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How Does A Saskatoon Neighbourhood Come To Be?

PRIVATE, PUBLIC, PARTNERSHIP – A CONCEPT UNIQUE TO SASKATOON

It's a bright summer morning as I make my way east on Taylor Street towards the neighbourhood of Rosewood. As I get closer to my destination, the first thing I notice is the amount of lush green space on both sides of the road. When I turn into this new development, there are children playing in the baseball diamond to my left. Winding trails, native plants and wetlands lay just beyond the ball field.

There's a lot of planning that goes into new Saskatoon neighbourhoods like Rosewood. Well before homeowners select their cabinetry and countertops, the City of Saskatoon is collaborating with private developers behind the scenes to create communities that aim to serve our booming population well.

Saskatoon is Unique

Looking across the country Saskatoon is truly distinct, being

one of the very few cities with a land branch that develops residential neighbourhoods. What this means to the city is a hybrid of public, private partnership developments.

"This is unique in Canada and it has served the citizens of Saskatoon well – receiving dividends from the development of neighbourhoods in the hundreds of millions of dollars. That money is being reinvested in roads and infrastructure," says Saskatoon Mayor Don Atchison. He adds that the City's profits are also reinvested in attainable housing. In the past five years the City has built 2,534 attainable homes with the proceeds of the residential development.

For the private developers involved, it means the City is both a regulator and competitor. Arbutus Properties is currently developing The Meadows, a community that makes up 45 per cent of Rosewood (roughly 2,000 of the 4,200 units). Two

other private companies (Boychuk and Jastek) and the City are developing the rest of the neighbourhood.

"When you're competing with your best ally and governing body, it adds a level of complexity that's not common practice we've seen in other cities where we've worked," says Jeff Drexel, President of Arbutus. Despite the complexity, Drexel sees the relationship as mutually beneficial. "We try to work with the City to bring affordable, quality development that can hopefully meet the City's goals for expansion and meet our goals of delivering a high quality product." He adds that the City's involvement in developing Rosewood pushed the project forward very quickly.

Effective collaboration with the other players is key when it comes to consistency. "We have a good relationship with Boychuk, and with the City, and we meet regularly to discuss

how we can keep the area's infrastructure and overall landscape consistent because that's the biggest advantage – you want to have a consistent approach," says Drexel.

When it comes to building residential infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, sewer, water and gas lines) the City approaches the private sector to obtain bids. The price they pay the winning bidder is later factored into the cost of the land.

Pros and Cons

The City of Regina isn't currently involved in residential development, but smaller cities like Weyburn, Yorkton and Prince Albert are to various degrees. Martino Verhaeghe, the City of Weyburn's director of planning and development, says there are advantages and disadvantages to public involvement.

"The pros for city-led development are many, but the greatest is that it allows

decisions to be based on the strategic long-term direction of the city, not simply on profit models. It ensures the city is gaining what it wants from its new communities, not simply what can sell. The primary con is that taxpayers are left solely responsible with the risks associated with growth. This commonly places a city in the situation where it is asked to provide land at or below cost, which means taxpayers are left with outstanding debts and capital costs, effectively subsidizing private development."

As a homeowner there can also be an argument over the visual impacts of publicly developed areas which typically have loose to minimal guidelines over the look of a specific home in a

particular area.

If you take Willowgrove for instance, you could have an entire street of homes all built by different builders with no consistency in the look, flow, architecture or landscaping. The pro stance on this is an eclectic beauty that is seen in many early Saskatoon neighbourhoods, and non-cookie-cutter appeal.

For those in privately developed neighbourhoods, such as The Meadows, the developer sets architectural controls obliging the builder and homeowner to stay within these guidelines (such as minimum square feet of stone work, window types, etc).

The pro stance of the private approach is that it creates neighbourhood cohesion, positive esthetic, which leads to properties that potentially

hold their property value better.

Arbutus for instance has a set of architectural guidelines for builders to follow.


Drexel notes, "A lot of time and expense went into our planning process. We noticed that a lot of new homes in the area were dominated visually by their garages, and it created a sense of isolation. We make sure that every home built at The Meadows has a generous and welcoming front porch with a down played garage where neighbours will interact and create a sense of community."

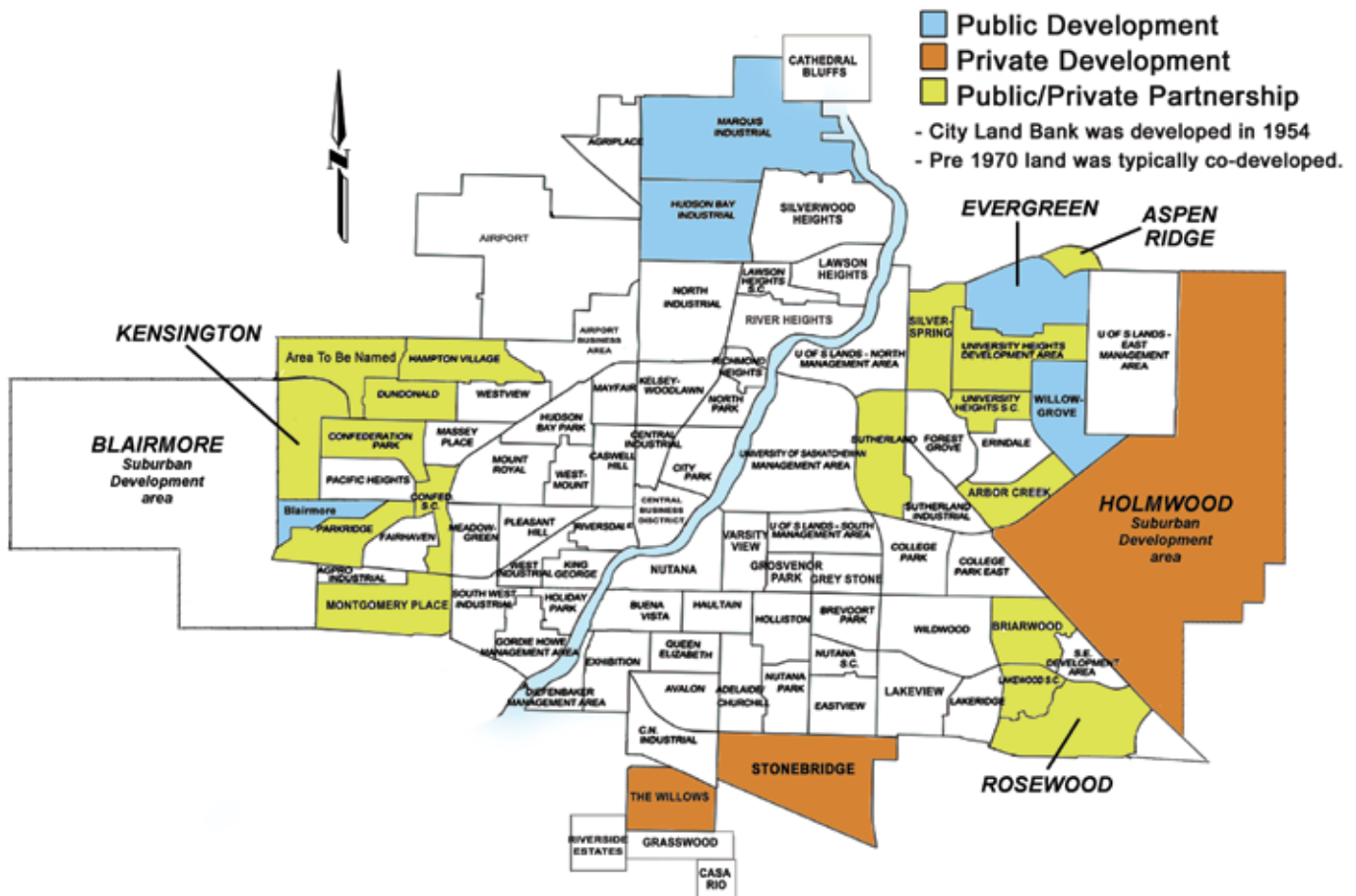
An in-house architect at Arbutus reviews each house plan prior to building to ensure that the guidelines set out are being met for the betterment of the neighbourhood at completion. For instance, Arbutus' guidelines for The

Meadows even state that homes may only repeat in style and colour every fifth house, to re-create the charm of an older neighborhood.

Smart Growth

The ability to meet long-term, strategic goals is one of the main reasons Mayor Atchison does not expect the City to step back from residential development anytime soon.

"In Saskatoon, all our neighbourhoods have low income, middle income and upper income homes. We have rental properties. We have high densities. The reason is because we want to make sure our communities are well balanced all the way through." He adds, "In some cities, they segregate you by economics. 





They have high-income people living in one area, middle in another and low-income people in another area. And I can tell you quite frankly – that serves no one well.”

Atchison says it also gives the City the ability to create mixed-use developments.

“It’s allowed us to sell some of our lands in the concept of work-live. For example, we build offices on the main floor and then have living space above them.” Every new neighbourhood will have some opportunities to incorporate the work-live concept.

Keeping Saskatoon compact and increasing density are strong focuses explains Atchison.

“The City is very shrewd in the way it develops lands. We always develop the next most expensive piece of land as opposed to other communities that may even leap frog a mile of land to develop someone else’s land. In Saskatoon, we always do the next piece of land abutting the last residential area.” Existing storm water lines, arterial roads, collector roads, and services such as policing and fire protection mean that it’s simply more efficient to keep the city as compact as possible.

“The downtown area will always remain the centre of our city,” Atchison adds. “If you

have a city that’s more round – keeping the downtown in the middle – travel times are reduced significantly.”

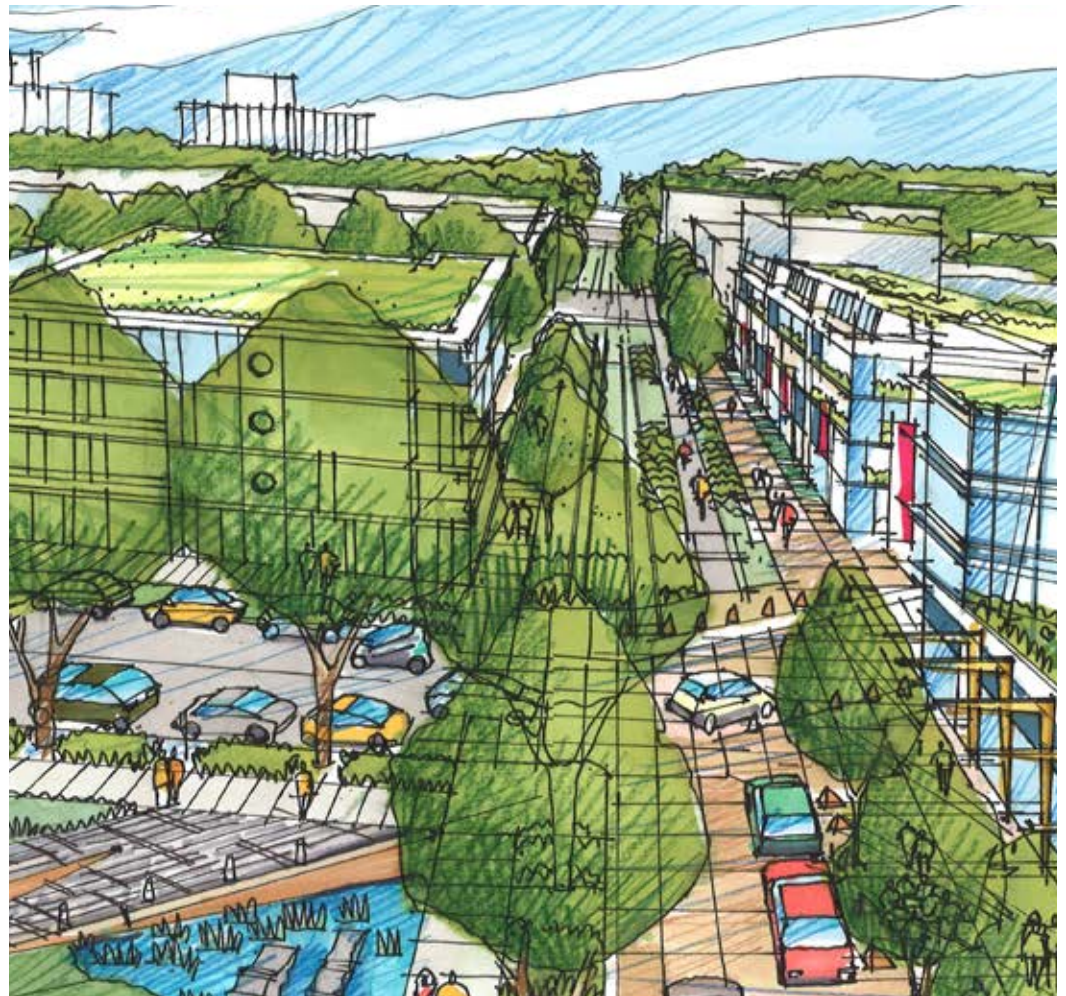
Looking Ahead

Since 2006 more than 70,000 people have moved to Saskatoon and more people

are arriving every day. Some of them will want a downtown dwelling and others will desire that nearby baseball diamond and park.

Our growing population and the housing decisions we make will ultimately determine what gets built, says Atchison.

“Politicians can say whatever they want to, but it’s the people who actually have to put their pen on the paper and write that cheque – they’ll tell you what they’re going to buy.”



Building Opportunities for Small Contractors and Individuals

City-led development means that smaller contractors can get their foot in the door more easily than they could otherwise. Saskatoon has many small homebuilders who construct only a handful of homes each year. These opportunities simply don't exist in other large centres where private development reigns. As a result, Saskatoon has twice the number of homebuilders who are registered members of the local Canadian Home Builders' Association than Regina.

Addressing the downfalls of public development, Atchison says, "I think you'll always find people who would suggest that we need to sell more to individuals. But we're one of the few cities anywhere that allows individuals to build homes."

Lots are allocated for people

who wish to build their own home and they are distributed through organized lot draws. In most other large cities, infill is the only option for doing a private build. (H)

Julie Barnes

WATCH FOR IT

In the Winter 2013 issue of Saskatoon HOME we will speak to the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association and look at the effect of having a proportionately large number of home builders operating in Saskatoon, when compared to the other major cities in Western Canada.

CANADIAN HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION HOMEBUILDER MEMBERS*

Central Vancouver Island: 45
Greater Vancouver: 430
South Okanagan: 16
Calgary Region: 209
Edmonton Region: 134
Lethbridge: 32
Central Alberta Region (Red Deer and surrounding areas): 43
Saskatoon Region: 93
Regina Region: 46
Manitoba: 62

*Numbers reflect builders who have taken membership with the Home Builders' Association in their region at the time of publishing. It is important to note that it is not legislated that a home builder become a member and therefore these numbers are not totally inclusive. Membership requirements vary among regions and numbers are subject to change.



Kensington

Modern living, traditional style

Much more than a collection of homes, Saskatoon's newest neighbourhood will be a vibrant community to call home. With an inviting village square, picturesque ponds, parks and space for local shops, this is a neighbourhood where people can live, play and work. Designed to connect seamlessly to nearby communities, this urban village will enrich the lives of its new residents.

Kensington is located in the Northwest within the Blairmore sector. You'll always be able to call Kensington home, even when your housing requirements change. There will be condominiums, townhouses, and single-family homes located on cul-de-sacs and traditional lots with rear lanes. The Village Square will feature mixed-use development with main floor commercial and residential above for those desiring a more lively urban setting.



LOTS of information. JUST ASK!

For details on lot availability in Kensington or other land developments including Evergreen or Rosewood, contact the City of Saskatoon Land Branch at 306-975-3278, visit www.saskatoon.ca/go/kensington or contact your homebuilder.

**NEXT LOT DRAW
FALL 2013.**


**City of
Saskatoon**
Land Branch