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## A Community Comes to a University

By LINDA BAKER

Burnaby, British Columbia

WHEN Mike Hart, a 43-year-old professor of biological sciences, took a job at Simon Fraser University a couple of years ago, his first priority was finding a place to live within walking distance of the campus, which is about 15 miles from downtown Vancouver. So in October 2004, he bought a two-bedroom, 850-square-foot condominium in UniverCity, a new pedestrian-oriented community springing up next to Simon Fraser.

Mr. Hart said he first heard about UniverCity on "The Nature of Things," a television show whose host is the Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki. "The topic was sustainable communities, and there was about five minutes on UniverCity," said Mr. Hart, whose condo is a 10-minute walk from his office and the child care center that his son, Henry, attends.

Mr. Hart said he liked UniverCity's landscaping, which uses native plants, and its comprehensive effort to manage storm-water pollution, as well as its network of biking and walking paths. "The major advantage is not having to get in the car every day," he said.

Located atop Burnaby Mountain, a forest conservation area, Simon Fraser has hovered like an ivory tower above Burnaby, a Vancouver suburb, since it was founded in 1965. Forty years later, the community is coming to the university.

The Simon Fraser University Community Trust, a university subsidiary, is building UniverCity, a residential community for 10,000 people on 200 acres of densely forested land. About 800 residents live in its first neighborhood, and another 1,000 people are expected to move in this summer.

What distinguishes UniverCity from other high-density developments in the United States and Canada is its link with a major university and a slate of policies not typically associated with a suburban development.

UniverCity prohibits national and international chain stores in the town center, incorporates mechanisms to provide lower-cost housing and provides a subsidized transit pass, at one quarter the regular cost, to all residents. None of the 4,500 residences will be detached single-family homes.

"It's an urban style development in a suburban development," said Norm Hotson, UniverCity's lead architect. "Every good project has to have a really big idea behind it. To decide to build a whole new

community on top of a mountain, next to a university, that's an innovation."

Last February, UniverCity won a 2005 Canadian Home Builders Association award for best new planned community. It has attracted a variety of buyers, including academics, young professionals with children and retirees. Because of the outlying location, UniverCity's prices are about \$30,000 below comparable condos and town houses in Burnaby, said Frank Pupo, a local real estate agent.

The community includes a mixed-use building, the Cornerstone, with stores, restaurants, offices and rental apartments. It is surrounded by a nature preserve that Simon Fraser transferred to the city of Burnaby in exchange for development rights to the rest of the area.

"This is a clean, safe, relaxed place to raise a family," said Andrew Fowler, 30, a business development manager for Cruiseship Centers, a tourism company. About a year and half ago, Mr. Fowler, who has a 1-year-old son, bought a two-bedroom condo in a four-story UniverCity complex for \$277,000.

"I love the transit pass," said Mr. Fowler, who commutes by Skylink, Vancouver's light-rail system, to his office in downtown Vancouver. His wife uses a community card, which is available to all residents, to get access to Simon Fraser University's facilities, like the pool and library.

Michael Geller, the president and chief executive of Simon Fraser University Community Trust, said the development was intended to create an endowment fund for the university. The focus on sustainability, he said, began as a tactical approach to address the concerns of people opposed to the project, which has so far razed 20 acres of cedar and spruce forest.

Having faculty members, staff members and students on a community advisory committee helped keep the process open, said Mark Roseland, a Simon Fraser University geography professor, who is the chairman of the committee.

To meet the demand for student rental housing and to help homeowners pay their mortgages, UniverCity allows up to half the units in each complex to include secondary suites: apartments with separate entrances that can be rented. The Verdant building, which is now under construction, provides another kind of affordable housing. Faculty and staff members can buy two- and three-bedroom town houses at 20 percent below market rate, with the stipulation they resell the units at a similar discount from market value.

Mr. Hart, who has had a second child since moving to UniverCity, recently bought a two-floor, three-bedroom Verdant unit for \$370,000. The price-reduction plan made "a huge difference," Mr. Hart said, adding, "We couldn't have bought without it."

Universities have more opportunity to innovate, said Robert Renger, the senior city planner for the city of Burnaby, which amended its zoning code to enable the secondary suites. "Now we have an example to show other developers," he said.

Despite the presence of high-profile gimmicks, like Canada's first solar-powered trash compactor, UniverCity occasionally falls short of basic expectations, residents and planners said. Few of the buildings include common environmental fixtures like water-saving faucets. The Verdant and the Cornerstone are the only two structures equipped with advanced technology like waterless urinals and geothermal energy sources. "We could have gone a lot further with green initiatives," Mr. Hotson said.

Another concern is the lack of progress on the first elementary school, which was supposed to open last fall and will serve as a laboratory for the university's education students. Although Simon Fraser has donated a building for the school, the provincial government has yet to commit funds to renovate the building.

Residents said they are willing to be patient. About a year ago, Gabor Vasarhelyi, a 62-year-old civil engineer, moved from a waterfront condo in downtown Vancouver to a three-bedroom condo in UniverCity. Mr. Vasarhelyi expressed enthusiasm for UniverCity's prohibition on chain stores. "No Starbucks signs is an attractive idea," he said.

UniverCity is in an early phase of development, said Mr. Vasarhelyi, who did complain about overcrowded Simon Fraser University tennis courts. "But the overall concept is good, for university business and the community."

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