

# Embracing green building technology

Acceptance of global warming is changing the way we do things, including planning and developing



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Vancouver's new director of planning called it "the perfect storm of awareness." Brent Toderian was talking to developers gathered at the Urban Development Institute, referring to the almost-overnight emergence of the urban environmental issue at the top of virtually every public opinion poll and every political agenda throughout North America.

The acceptance of global warming as a measurable reality rather than a theory and the realization that climate change may be more than an odd shift in local seasonal weather patterns has come upon us like a storm.

This storm of public awareness may have been predictable, especially the moment it was clear that former U.S. vice-president Al Gore was successful

in merging entertainment and political advocacy. But the rapid response by governments everywhere has taken most by surprise.

Vancouver's developers were probably as surprised as anyone with how quickly this shift in public opinion has impacted thinking among those who regulate and set standards for new development. Toderian has only been on the job in Vancouver for six months, yet he was explicit with developers when he indicated that it is no longer business as usual at city hall.

Toderian, who was known as a new urbanist planner when he arrived from Calgary, signalled clearly to developers that the city will no longer be measuring success in urban development by looking at livability as the first measure. Instead, he has elevated ecological sustainability to the top of the list of measurement indicators.

City planners in Vancouver are shifting their focus to the "ecological footprint" — a metaphor Mayor Sam Sullivan used in first announcing his Eco-Density initiative. The ecological footprint depicts the amount of land and water area a human population hypothetically needs to provide the resources required to support itself and to absorb its wastes.

Developers now know they will need to embrace green building technology,

ecological conservation planning and energy conservation measures when they are designing new projects in Vancouver.

While many developers will tell you that these concepts are far beyond the sophistication of homebuyers today, who are looking for little more than durable construction, contemporary designs and affordable prices, the fact remains that this perfect storm of environmental awareness is shaping public policy today and with every incremental shift in public policy like this one comes a permanent reorientation of the way we do things.

Standing by at the forefront of what will certainly be a new wave of consumer demand that follows from this is Vancouver's first building supply store focusing on ecologically friendly and healthy building products.

Green Works Building Supply quietly opened their doors on Eighth Avenue a few weeks ago to fill an obvious void in a city that is big in talking the talk about green building but still slow in walking the walk.

Since graduating from SFU's School of Resource and Environmental Management a decade ago, former schoolmates Pete McGee and Alastair Moore had talked off and on about getting into the green building supply business.

McGee dabbled in rehabilitating old

buildings and using reclaimed wood while Moore worked in England encouraging local governments to adopt sustainability principles to minimize their ecological footprint. They finally got together a year ago and started planning Green Works.

The first-of-its-kind store locally is focusing on three main product areas to begin with: paints and finishes, countertops and flooring materials simply because sourcing other materials and landing them in Canada at competitive prices is no easy task.

As more consumers make smart lifestyle choices and become concerned with their ecological footprint, developers will be clamouring to incorporate these kinds of products into their projects. That's when additional products will become more easily available.

Public concern with ecological sustainability may simply be one of those quickly emerging and instantly fading trends. Regardless, we now know that we can build homes and other buildings that have less impact on ecosystems, are better for our personal health and reduce waste by cleverly re-using materials.

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