



Visions for Surrey Volume Five

Newton: New Town

Connecting Density to Transit



An Ideas Competition for Surrey's Town Centres

TOWNSHIFT

Suburb into City

Cloverdale | Fleetwood | Guildford | Semiahmoo | Newton

In early 2010, designers from around the world were asked to imagine futures for five of Surrey's key growth hubs, its 'town centres.' Different sets of rules were devised for each site, but in all cases designers were asked to imagine more walkable and livable town centres, with increased housing densities accompanied with public amenities. TownShift's goal is to generate visions of how architectural and urban design for new private and public development might "shift" Surrey from its suburban legacy towards a bolder, more inclusive, and more sustainable urban future.

As Whalley is the emerging downtown for all of Surrey, it was not included in this competition, but highly creative and innovative schemes were received for all five other town centres: Cloverdale, Fleetwood, Guildford, Newton and Semiahmoo. A distinguished international jury of architects, landscape architects, planners and developers met to select the winning schemes, and there were public exhibitions and discussions of suburban futures at SFU Surrey and Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

"TownShift: Suburb Into City" is the largest ideas competition ever mounted by a Canadian municipal government, attracting 137 different entries from more than twenty countries. Prizes totaling \$75,000 were distributed to winners for the five sites, and an overall best scheme was named. This is an ideas competition, where designers from all backgrounds (both amateur citizens and

professionals entered and won prizes) were given broad design freedom. While the City of Surrey is not committed to building any of these, it does own land and otherwise controls development for most sites. Some of TownShift's assumptions and results are already shaping building proposals. Cities are made from ideas as much as bricks and mortar, and TownShift is 'research and development for the next Surrey.'

This publication is one of five separate volumes that collect and interpret winning designs for each site. As competition organizers, we have chosen to also publish selected additional entries we think might shape Surrey for the better. The complete competition submission panels—with extra images for these and all other TownShift entries—can be found at www.townshift.ca.

We invite everyone to tell us what they think of TownShift's ideas in five public meetings in late fall of 2010, or via online comments. We will collect this feedback into a sixth and final volume of this publication in early 2011, with an eye to turning even more of our designer's ideas into built reality. Most urban design consultations are led by verbal evaluation and written check-lists/wish-lists, but this is a pioneering form of public engagement led by visual ideas—created by TownShift's talented and engaged entrants. Please enjoy the TownShift designs collected here, and do tell us what you think.

TownShift Ideas Competition Organizing Committee
Allen Aubert, Trevor Boddy, John Sprung, Scott Kemp, Sean Ruthen
info@townshift.ca
www.townshift.ca

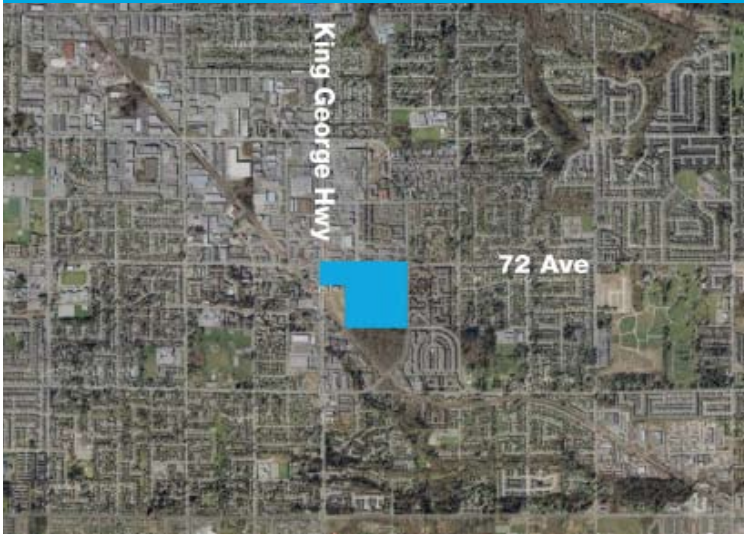
Visions for Surrey Volume Five

Newton: New Town

Connecting Density to Transit

The TownShift competition brief for Newton proposes boldly reshaping the entire southern sector of this Town Centre. This area is currently a confusing, almost random agglomeration of civic functions and retail, with very little housing, and ongoing issues regarding the perceived safety of its few public spaces. Crucial to TownShift's vision for Newton is a massive build-up in housing at this ideal location—close by the new transit hub proposed along King George Boulevard.

More residents will make streets safer, will take better advantage of existing civic infrastructure, and will provide the increased tax base necessary to fund needed improvements to the public realm. The urban design goal for "Newton: New Town's" designers is the creation of a walkable and sustainable community, attractive to visitors, with reasons to visit, shop, and most of all, live here, rather than just pass through. The most complex of the TownShift competition briefs and the largest in area, this combination of new housing with public spaces may point to a new kind of downtown for suburbia.



SITE LOCATION



Newton is a true 21st century suburb, a far cry from the supposed simplicity and conformity of the 1950s, and much more interesting because of it. Unfortunately, Newton has grown without the benefit of an overall plan that balances public and private realms, or even encourages housing in the central area. Newton has evolved into an almost random collection of facilities, and the neglect of the public realm has financial consequences in policing costs, and emotional ones in not providing a coherent civic heart where residents deserve and expect one. There is cause for optimism in re-shaping Newton's town centre because of the extensive holdings of land there by city and provincial agencies. Moreover, a trigger is imminent with Translink's plan to move the bus exchange on 72nd Avenue to a much larger inter-modal transit hub along King George Boulevard.

Newton has one of Surrey's highest ratios of recent immigrants and non-white residents. Both new arrivals and long established residents of South Asian origin enliven its public and commercial spaces, with restaurants and markets along its streets filled with the scents of the

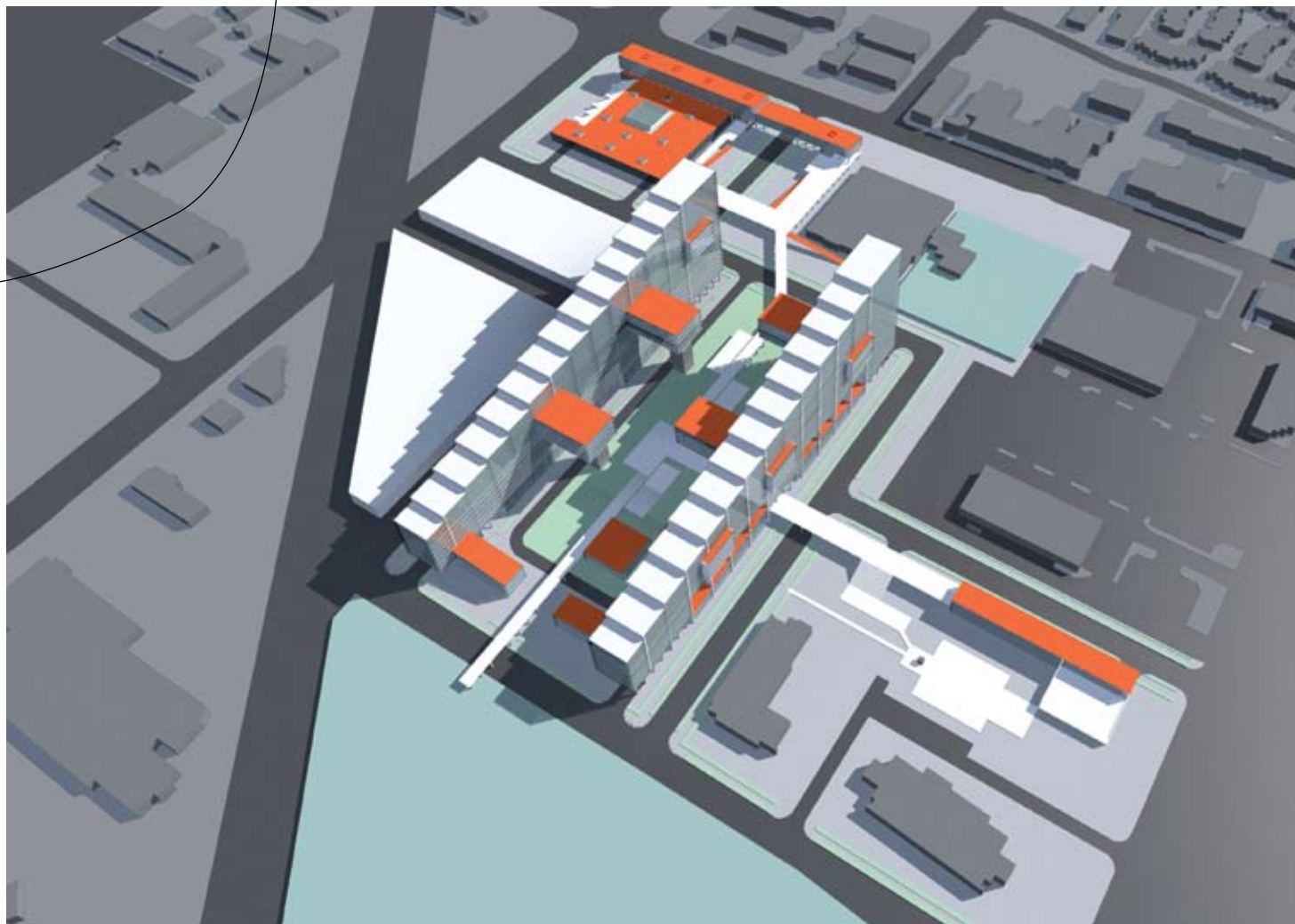
Punjab, saris and turbans marking these strip malls as unlike others in the Lower Mainland. Newton is as complex socially as it is ethnically, with pockets of disadvantaged citizens alternating with middle class and upper middle class enclaves.

This is one of Surrey's largest component 'towns,' but it is one that many find hard to locate, or more bluntly, a failed Town Centre that is thought unfocused and undesirable. Citizens know that Newton town centre sits somewhere near King George Boulevard and 72nd Avenue, but few have a clear vision of what it could be. This is where ideas from designers from all around the world may be catalytic in providing the urban vision Newton has so far lacked.

It provides some of the most difficult challenges of all five TownShift sites, but our design premise is straightforward – build a new town centre for **Newton with one thousand new housing units in a variety of configurations, and use them as connectives to integrate existing public institutions, while shaping a viable public realm around them.**

Idea Twin Peaks

Vladimir Belskiy / Moscow, Russia / Entry No. 17



“The development of a system of green spaces includes the existing park and grove connected to a rooftop square on the new arena, a community zone square and residential blocks courtyard. A pedestrian path system additional to the functional links is arranged to create a continuous recreational walkway through the green areas, with car movement outside the main pedestrian zones.”

— Vladimir Belskiy



This design was labeled as ‘Mountain House’ by its designer—the name is appropriate, given that twin mountains of housing are its key feature. The core key proposition here is two multi-block slab apartment towers, peaking at 24 storeys just south of the aquatic centre, then coming down in steps to 14 storeys at the south end. These two new buildings frame a new central pedestrian walkway and linear park. The new arena has a high profile location near the busy corner of 72nd Avenue and King George Boulevard, and is topped with a green roof that is open to the public.

By concentrating so much of the housing into these twin mega-structures, there is freedom elsewhere to shape generous civic plazas and green spaces. This scheme demonstrates the tension in large scale housing development between shaping a memorable form and image (which it does well) with creating a variety of living experiences and enriching streetscapes (which it does less well.)

In addition to the relocated arena and the new pedestrian mall, this entry proposes its new community centre north of the existing library and senior’s residence, creating a new compound where the cenotaph is relocated. The effect here is to replace the ill-defined and crime-troubled residual spaces behind the aquatic centre and the strip mall with better designed and monitored parks dominated by the new housing.

While this design rationalizes and simplifies land uses in Newton’s town centre, it does so by imposing an over-powering scale, which may overwhelm the daily life of the streets around it. The scheme turns its back on the proposed triangle-shaped transit hub along King George Boulevard, with a monolithic multi-block slab tower elevation set right at western boundary. The focus on the central spine has come at the expense of streetscapes on the outer sides of this enclave-like proposal.

Idea Parkside's Upside

Rick Hulbert / West Vancouver, Canada / Entry No. 30

NEWTON SECOND PLACE



“The concept for Newton's New Town Site is to establish a vibrant public realm that is then framed and reinforced by private development. The neighbourhood structure emerges from an urban grid, which is born out of the existing and historical development patterns in this area.”

— Rick Hulbert



Given the scale and complexity of Newton Town Centre's social and urban design challenges, designers had the option of phasing development for the build-up of the one thousand new housing units TownShift proposes here. This entry was one of the few to build phasing into its plans. This scheme is predicated on incremental roll-out for a variety of residential building types – single family homes, townhouses, and apartment towers. These are set in four highly differentiated quadrants, phases bearing different characters to better respond to changing housing market conditions and developer interest.

There would be a range of townhomes at heights of two and three storeys in the southeast quadrant, while the southwest would feature high rise towers on townhouse podia near and over the transit centre, and again at the intersection of 72nd and King George Boulevard. These densities on the western edges free up space for a large public realm at the site's centre for a public market, and its most striking feature, a multi-block string of market and resident garden plots running north and south right through the site. With its multi-block length and framing by buildings, this design feature recalls downtown Portland's traditional Park Blocks or Toronto's new Sherbourne Park, but neither of these cities grows salad greens within their park boundaries!

This idea is an intriguing inversion of Surrey's urban structure, where the perimeters, not the very hearts of town centres are defined by the fields and farms of the Agricultural

Land Reserve (ALR). Contrasting with the clusters of high rise nearby, this 'Mini-ALR' would implant urban agriculture as a focus for new residents. More than just community gardens, some of these plots could be intensely planted by commercial produce farmers, with the new adjacent public market providing a ready outlet. With its residential high densities alternating with local food production, this scheme neatly combines two key green strategies for the decade to come (see David Owen's book "Green Metropolis.")

This scheme also benefits from its formidable clarity of conception and its no-nonsense graphics, finding a few apt means to simplify and focus Newton's current confusion. Much of this clarity of conception arises from reinforcing, rather than replacing, the current system of streets. The most central of the linear strip of gardens is the new town's most important green space, a park which is also new home for the cenotaph. Further public open space is provided in the form of a usable green roof covering the relocated arena with community center, located to the north of the existing library.

The urban design here is well-balanced, clearly up to the task of re-branding the area, providing for a variety of housing types and tenures, and creating a competitive advantage with other Surrey developments through its synthesis of garden and agriculture with high rise blocks. By any analysis, this is one of Newton's most thoroughly imagined and buildable proposals.

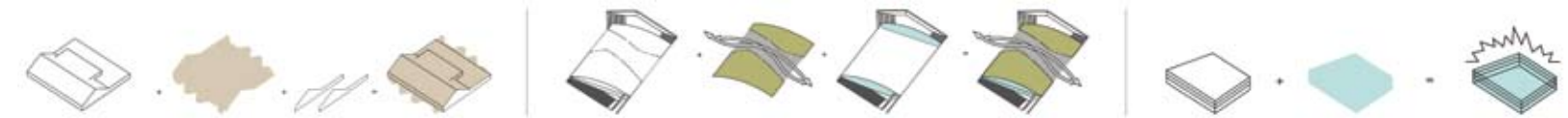
Idea Suburbia Re-Sequenced

Ivo Dieleman / Breda, Netherlands / Entry No. 35



“An urban design is seldom experienced from a bird’s eye view perspective. The every day experience is a sequence of revelations of contrast, mass and diversity from eye level. Therefore the public space and building massing is carefully designed to be a series of linked worlds, worlds that are based on small and large deviations and alignments which can produce a series of variations in the experienced world.”

— Ivo Dieleman



This scheme is a counterpoint to the over-standardized block and housing forms of suburbia. Most TownShift entries chose to extend the existing street grid to organize much-increased housing densities, but this design devises a looser, non-orthogonal framework. This layout is shaped with little reference to the existing street grid, but rather composed from varying angles and alignments that are driven by pedestrian paths, not the lockstep of north-south-east-west.

This generates odd shaped plazas and intersections, but these have the benefit of forming intriguing vistas of buildings, with no two alike. The effect is more like the organic forms of medieval towns than the packing of crescents or gridded streets in most suburban development. These blocks are fuller and higher around the intersection of 72nd Avenue and King George Boulevard, with more open space and lower heights to the east and south.

While the urban block forms here may be more organic or neo-medieval than those typically favoured by our planners and developers, there does exist an urban structure here, notably the main pedestrian path running from the denser northwest corner, through a series of interestingly shaped

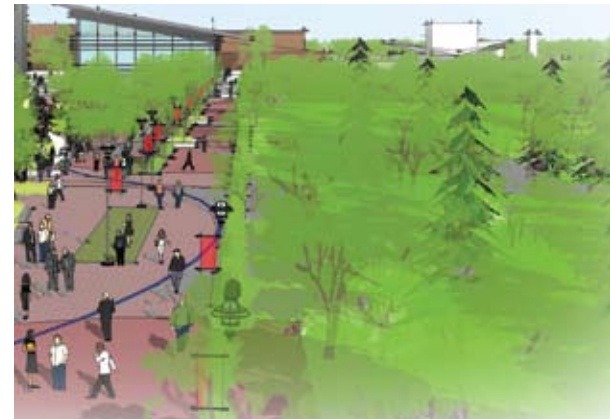


civic plazas, including a walkway over the green rooftop of a new arena, to finish at the library at the southeast corner. With a wide variety of housing types integrated into this framework, it would be visually engaging to stroll through so diverse a set of courtyards, buildings and the unique spaces between them.

This scheme’s in-filling many of Newton’s more problematic crime hot spots with well-meaning but non-descript housing blocks (such as those east of the grove of trees along 72nd Avenue) may be more wishful-thinking than considered urban design. This entry was entitled ‘Intensity’ by its designers, and its virtues are its rich spatial sequences and varied public spaces. These decisions, however, come at the price of an almost total non-standardization, with each nook, cranny and apartment block alike no other. There may well be a ready market for so powerful an antidote to the slow poison of suburban conformity.

Idea Nature Re-Rooted

Michael Johnson / Ann Arbor, U.S.A. / Entry No. 77



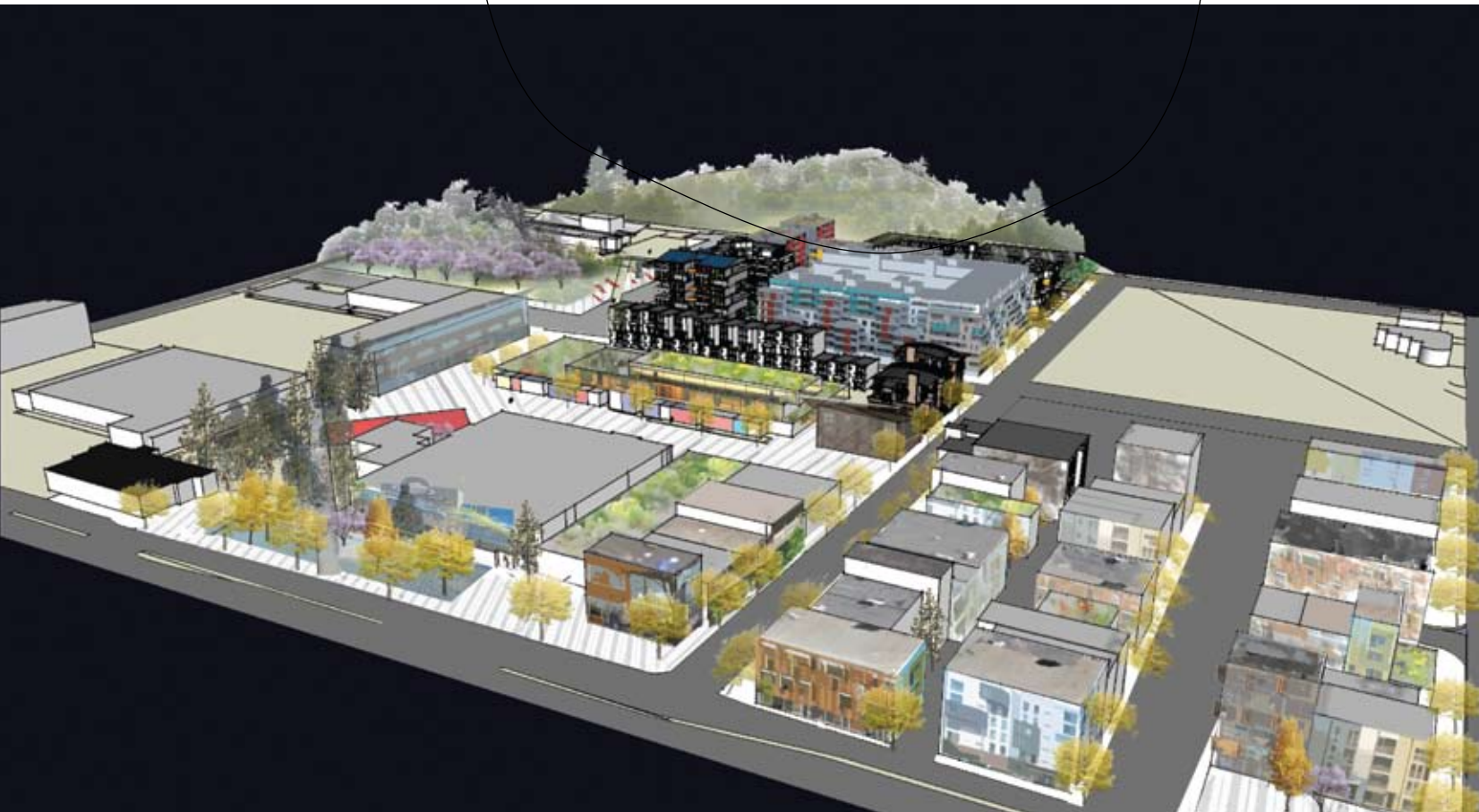
This entry proposes not just a new town centre, but an urban philosophy to go along with it, summed up by the entrants as “rooting nature’s return.” The idea is simple, as it proposes surmounting the usual city versus nature opposition by reclaiming natural sites within existing city boundaries. According to this view, where once there were houses and shops, there should be a re-introduction of forests, wetlands, and arable farmlands, aiming towards environmental sustainability, and improving food security. For Newton, this scheme proposes removing the current block of single family houses along 70th Avenue, then introducing local species into an expanded natural reserve.

With a series of mid-rise perimeter block apartments at the site’s northwest corner and centre, this scheme proposes far fewer than the 1000 housing units required by TownShift’s criteria. Instead, the most interesting element of this entry is the esplanade along the south boundary, an ‘arbour’s-edge’ public space. This entry expresses diagrammatic interest in linking Surrey’s town centres with each other and the ALR, but there are few details on how this will be done.

“Rooting nature’s return” would fundamentally alter sub-urban land use planning, encouraging the return of natural systems. But this position is born of a contradiction—more people housed here would save truly natural sites elsewhere (this is one of the lowest density schemes for Newton.) A re-forested acre here, or one acre of dense housing that saves ten acres of true wilderness, rather than suburban tracts? Which of these positions is green, and which is green-washing?

Idea Community Completed

Elizabeth Laing / Wells, Canada / Entry No. 110



““This design endeavours to encourage citizen participation, at multiple tiers, in the creation, occupation and perpetual manipulation of public space in Newton Town Centre, with the goal of shaping viable and inclusive public spaces that act as catalysts for community pride and empowerment.”

— Elizabeth Laing



This scheme's strength is its thorough commitment to building in a culturally sensitive way for a neighbourhood where residents are increasingly South Asian in origin. Restaurants, retail businesses, and the faces of people on Newton's streets demonstrate this reality, but few other TownShift schemes have attempted this accommodation to the emerging needs of the post modern suburb, where immigrants predominate, and change is constant.

This sensibility is most evident in a photo-montage of inter-relationships called "Process of Inhabitation" showing the overlap of daily needs, cultural identity and collective possibilities for its residents. This diagram is a lively way of showing how the individual's needs relate to collective ones, how recent Punjabi-speaking immigrants' desire for community converges with those of their longer-established neighbours. A key design component is for an outdoor stage suitable for ethno-cultural performance, a type of space much needed in this area. The scheme is rich in socially resonant details, such as proposing an "arts and trade school" for recent immigrants to upgrade their skills, and a "Safeway Feast Table" for sharing meals with the more unfortunate.

The design demonstrates that one thousand housing units can be accommodated in low and medium height continuous blocks. The layout relocates the arena to the north of the library, with a community centre taking its place, and a public square between there and the wave pool on what is now a parking lot. By building on the realities of local residents, the scheme's strengths are also in their restraint, demonstrated by a decision to leave the cenotaph in its current location, transforming the spaces around it instead of bumping it elsewhere. Impressive are some of the smallest of details—the retail zone near King George Boulevard and 72nd Avenue for example, consists of many, small buildings suitable for locally-generated businesses, rather than the large floor plate indoor and strip malls more suitable for national chains. There is little architectural expression in the scheme, but it is easy to imagine how unforgettable streetscapes would evolve out of so thoughtful and sensitive an urban design analysis.

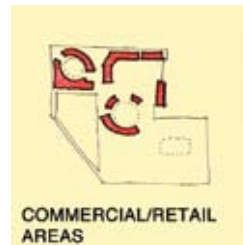
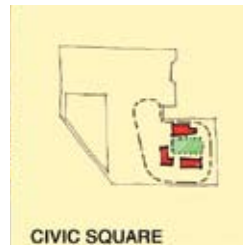
Idea Urban Realm

Alan James/ Vancouver, Canada / Entry No. 73

NEWTON SECOND PLACE

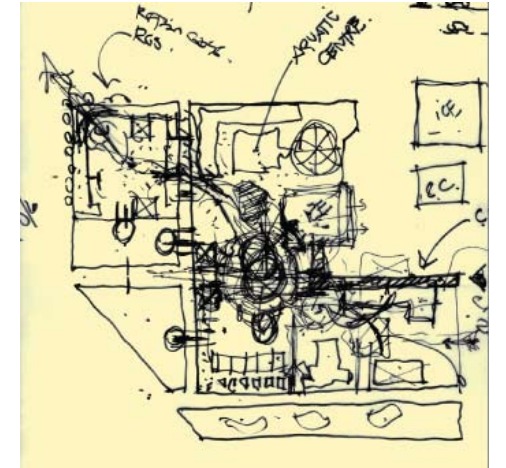
“This is a walkable urban village with a small ecological footprint. Its distinct areas are tied together by a pedestrian Greenway connecting a series of small colorful public squares lined with shops, cafes and public art, all flowing into the Main Square. The Greenway links components of the urban village starting with Gateway buildings at 72nd and King George Highway and proceeding toward the Civic Arts Square containing the iconic Newton Library and the New Community Centre.”

— Alan James



“This mix of housing types establishes a framework for a vibrant, aesthetically appealing community with a strong sense of place and direct access to a wide range of transportation choices including: public transit, cycling, walking and private vehicles. The housing is designed to be socially and economically diverse and provide affordable housing options including a component of dedicated rental suites. People live here, work here and enjoy the many amenities in the area. The design establishes a complete sustainable community set in a green environment that uses ground level retail with mixed use and housing above as a primary building type.”

— Alan James



This is one of the most fine-grained of all the schemes, which nonetheless features such ‘civic sensations’ as a Spanish Steps-like entry at the corner of the King George Boulevard and 72nd Avenue. There is an almost organic unity of the overall plan, with each housing node neighbourhood flowing into the next. There is an integration of the heterodox required features on the largest and most difficult of TownShift’s sites.

While each node has a secondary public space, there is a much grander space at centre, an all-Canadian ‘campo’ that orbits around the cenotaph retained on its current location. The ugly bulk of the aquatic centre is wrapped with single-loaded housing blocks and community/retail functions. Condo towers with townhouse podia are the strategy for King George Boulevard at 72nd, with the corner itself cut and set with a formal stair leading to the pedestrian path on to the cenotaph main square. Surprisingly, this was the only Newton entry proposing a podium-tower solution, the hallmark of much Lower Mainland housing at these densities.

The scale of buildings drops down to townhouses facing library and park reserve at the south end of the site, where street alignments are curved to better unify residential with natural zone. There is a new green-roofed arena and community centre, and this is one of the most effective re-integrations of the now-isolated Patkau Architects’ Newton Public Library and Senior’s Centre back into the daily life of its town centre.

This scheme is commendable for its variety of housing forms, and for their integration with well-shaped and located public spaces. There is no one easy idea here, but the combination of many into a kind of urban tapestry, patterns of activity set on the warp and woof of the street plan. The designer demonstrates real skill in sculpting urban plazas given identity and definition by surrounding housing. For example, raising the ground plane at the site’s northwest entry point sets up a powerful sequence of public spaces, putting this urban design quite apart from the commercial banality and un-focused civic investments currently parked here. This scheme would make a new town of Newton.

Idea Canal Zone

Kate Busby / Paris, France / Entry No.194



“Despite our hectic lifestyles, we still crave a relationship with our surroundings. This is hard to do in cities that disconnect us from our neighbours, our places of work and the shops and amenities we frequent. The neighbourhood as a concept is facing its demise and we need to breathe new life back into it. Bringing separate daily activities closer together in the centre of a primarily car-free pedestrian-only zone, the scheme favors alternative transportation and describes a healthier, more vibrant urban centre.”

— Kate Busby



This scheme is a literal ‘shift’ for Newton, as it proposes a street grid set at a diagonal to the city’s existing north-south orientation, similar to entry #177, with long ‘shards’ of four storey housing shearing to shape the flanking neighbourhoods. The long central canal is not just a storm-water basin, but also a multi-seasonal amenity – wetland in the summer, ice skating in the winter, with generous space along its edges for markets, crafts sales, concerts and cultural processions. This scheme would look its best when activities are concentrated as shown in the rendering—but how its long, straight and un-peopled streets might be perceived on a rainy November morning is another matter. While some will find the scale of these extra-long blocks intimidating, others will find an invigorating clarity.

The urban design strategy here demonstrates how it is possible to accommodate all one thousand units in housing that are no higher than four storeys. The means to this end is an extensive use of stacked townhouses, where two-storey units always have direct access to their own small garden, whether at grade or on-roof.

This scheme takes one of the most radical positions for TownShift entries in virtually banning automotive use of the ground plane—emergency vehicles and deliveries are possible along the linear park areas, but otherwise vehicles would be banished underground or off-site. In this plan, a new arena would be attached to the existing wave pool, making for a concentrated campus of community and recreational activities. In all, it has the air of a northern European new town.

Idea Connecting Axis

Sang Ok Kim / Shanghai, China / Entry No. 177

The strategy of this TownShift entry is to make a dense concentration of mid-rise residential towers along the site's western edge near the transit hub, then drop in scale along a project axis running diagonally from the corner of King George Boulevard and 72nd to the library. Rising up from this diagonal pedestrian spine are villa-like housing blocks set around courtyards. In combination, these yield a generous range of public open spaces, and a clear visual order that would give the project a unique identity in the humble jumble of Newton's town centre.

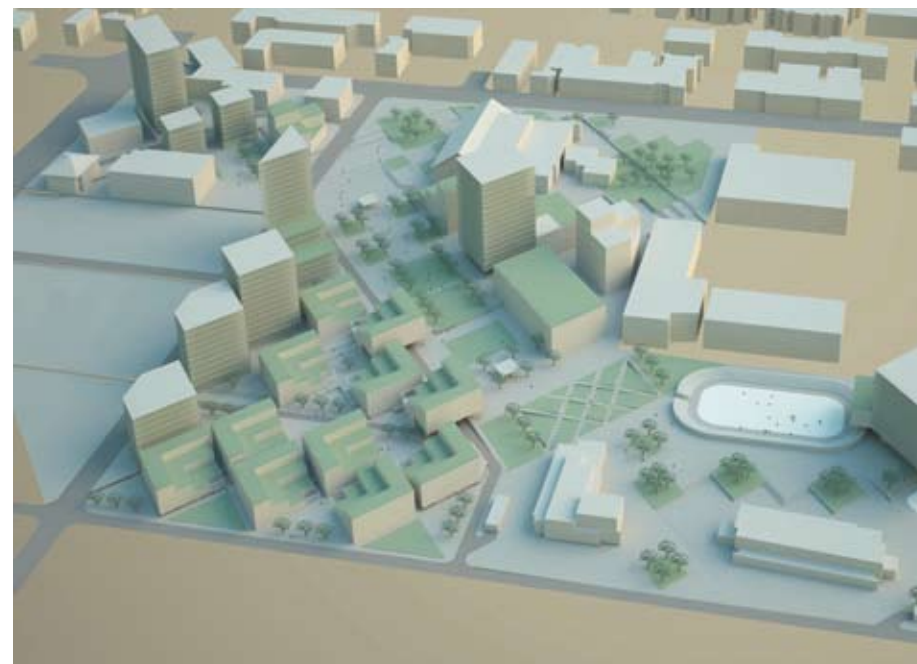
Along with the 1,000 units of housing, there is a double arena and community centre to the north of the library. Unique amongst Newton entries, there is a large commercial component here, in the form of a new office tower, and ample area for shops lining the pedestrian mall.

This scheme has civic centre ambitions, perhaps too much so, with its building scale and under-animated axis feeling more like a university campus than a new residential neighbourhood. Its strength is in the urban design basics—linking the elements of the town centre, locating density next to transit, creating generous spaces for pedestrians.



“The idea is to create an urban green network, which gives intensity to the layout, to bring the transit center into this urban network, and to regain the Newton Library and Senior’s Centre to the urban public space.”

— Sang Ok Kim



Idea Infrastructure Greened

Leif-Peter Fuchs / Halifax, Canada / Entry No. 189

“The pervasive issue of suburban development is the relationship between motorized traffic and all other uses. Habitual infrastructure and the constraints of property patterns and zoning lead to the isolated bus-stops, narrow sidewalks disconnected from buildings and ad-hoc commercial plazas disconnected from streets. Public and private building and infrastructure efforts can be aligned and the responsibilities pooled. Committed urban space and clarified orientations will generate built environments explicitly designed to predominantly serve either the cultivated or motorized zone. It will generate development of ‘infrastructure’, an architectural interface between the two.”

— Leif-Peter Fuchs

This entry re-organizes the layout of city blocks to create a more pedestrian friendly and less automobile oriented town centre. Its focus is a wide pedestrian mall running north and south, extending into an at-grade pedestrian bridge over 72nd Avenue that connects the new town centre with the large concentration of retail to the north. One of the boldest (and most expensive) infrastructure proposals in a Newton scheme is to run 72nd avenue in a below-ground location along these blocks. With this busy and noisy arterial out of sight, the aim is a union of civic and commercial functions, a complete town centre, not one split along private/retail and public/civic lines, as now.

The majority of the one thousand units of new housing are concentrated into three mid-rise U-shaped and south-facing perimeter blocks, defining the eastern edge of the central pedestrian axis. This pedestrian zone is to be covered with Parisian style gravel at its north end, grass to the south, with the cenotaph near the middle. To the west of this esplanade, the entry proposes the new arena/athletic centre hidden under a massive green roof. The virtue of this scheme is its clarity of conception and concentrations of uses into rationalized block forms, but these innovations would come at a substantial price in grand public infrastructure.



Idea **Gardened City**

Lillian Mah / Vancouver, Canada / Entry No. 195

Intensive urban agriculture integrated with fairly standardized block forms is at the heart of this entry. The scheme proposes a good mix of housing types - mid-rise apartment blocks, terraced townhouses, and one large tower on 72nd Avenue. At first glance the scheme appears rigid and camp-like in the disposition of its housing and conversion of nearly all public space into productive gardens.

The design cues are sparked by the ALR - internalizing the fields into the city, rather than the city into the fields, as has been the pattern for the past few decades. An irrigation canal runs centre site from north to south, with all parking put underground to maximize areas for agriculture. The scheme recalls the suburbs of Japanese cities where huge subsidies (prompted by memories of food shortages) maintain tiny plots for wet paddy rice production, closely surrounded by medium density new housing.

The large floor plate of the high rise residential tower frees up space for a large south facing plaza, to be used as both civic square and farmer's market for produce grown just down the street. This plan leaves the arena where it is but greens its roof, with a bermed terrace leaning up against one corner. With housing planted as neatly in rows as the corn and cabbage to come, this design shows how urban agriculture can be supported and located in a high density neighbourhood.



“The climate is changing. The debate over whether it is caused by activities of mankind or a natural occurrence is irrelevant. To survive on this earth, our built environment must be constructed in harmony with nature.”

“Two of the most under utilized natural resources are the sun and rain; resources that are not seen to be essential but optional. In the future, they will no longer be optional.

What sort of urban form would we have if south sun became a building code requirement for all living units?

This question drove the planning of this proposal.”

— Lillian Mah



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TownShift: Visions for Surrey
Publication Editor
Editorial Advisor, Content
Editorial Assistant
Publication Design + Production
Publication Designer

Sean Ruthen
Trevor Boddy
Allen Aubert
Cause + Affect Design
Nanda van der Meer

TownShift Project Team:

Allen Aubert MAIBC
Competition Co-organizer, Project Coordinator
allen@townshift.ca

Trevor Boddy MRAIC AIA hon
Competition Co-Organizer, Communications + Content
trevor@townshift.ca

John Sprung B. Sc.
Competition Documentation, Webmaster
john@townshift.ca

Scott Kemp MAIBC
Competition Professional Advisor
scott@townshift.ca

Sean Ruthen MAIBC
Competition Assistant, 3D Models
sean@townshift.ca

TownShift Ideas Competition Jury

David Miller Miller-Hull Partnership, Architecture Chair, U. Washington, Seattle
Steven Teeple Teeple Architects, Toronto
Jane Durante Durante-Kreuk Landscape Architects, Vancouver
Peter Webb Senior Vice President, Concord Pacific Developments, Vancouver
Mary Beth Rondeau Acting City Architect, City of Surrey

TownShift Project Support:

Jean Lamontagne
Competition Liaison with Planning
and Development Department
City of Surrey

Cause + Affect Design
Competition Brand,
Graphic + Web Design

Steven Cox
Project Design Leader

Chris Allen
Project Designer

For further information
info@townshift.ca
www.townshift.ca

TownShift is an initiative of
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TOWNSHIFT
Suburb into City

An Open Ideas Competition:

5 Different Surrey Sites
5 Different Urban Scales
5 Futures for Suburbia
137 Visionary Designs Received from
23 Different Countries

Cloverdale | **Fleetwood** | **Guildford** | **Semiahmoo** | **Newton**