

SUSTAINABLE FROM THE START

“Sustainability needs to guide our decisions when planning our communities. Being able to partner with others who are incorporating sustainability into their work gives our students the chance to apply their knowledge in a real-world setting.”

Bernard Momer is a big believer in putting theory into practice. So what's better for his Geography students than planning a sustainable community on a 125-acre property in Peachland.

“I asked students to come up with a community plan taking into consideration urban design, zoning and sustainability. It's a real-life project that allows students to bridge theory and practice, it's not totally academic,” explains Momer, Associate Professor of Geography.

The expansive New Monaco property is located on the eastern edge of Peachland near the junction of Highway 97C. The planning and design firm, HB Lanarc, describes the proposed project as “an integrated village that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.”

“What attracted me was that HB Lanarc is incorporating sustainability and I felt New Monaco was the right size, scope and vision for the students,” he adds.

Momer's students are excited to work on the unique project.

“It's a tough assignment but it's also a chance to be creative and design a community,” says Dana Barnes, a fourth-year Geography student. “It's great to be able to apply what we've learned.”

The students' presentations included plans that went beyond the norm in building a sustainable community such as solar panels, green spaces, higher densities and minimal construction footprints. Rather, they also looked at ways to encourage cultural sustainability by adding spaces where people can gather, such

as a farmers' market, rooftop gardens and street-side cafés.

“The physical part of planning a sustainable community is really important but what I find intriguing is what makes people want to be sustainable. You can build in all the gadgets you want but if people aren't willing to buy into it, then it's not going to go anywhere,” says Momer, whose own focus is social and cultural sustainability.

Transportation was also key to the students' plans for a sustainable community. Momer believes that creating walkable neighbourhoods where people are physically connected helps create a sense of identity which then encourages people to become more engaged and participate in their communities.

“That idea of creating a sense of identity by being a part of the neighbourhood and communicating with each other is more likely to help people to engage and adopt sustainable behaviours,” he adds.

All of the plans for sustainable development will go to HB Lanarc, who is keen to hear the students' ideas.

“We were honoured to meet with the Provost and Vice-Principal and key contacts at UBC's Okanagan campus and we value any opportunity to partner,” said Mark Holland, Principal, HB Lanarc.

Momer hopes the project will initiate more community partnerships with the university. And maybe one day, a student will see their ideas set in stone or in play at a sidewalk café. ●

