

# VALLEY AS A LIVING LAB



*UBC draws together highly engaged partners to co-define and tackle sustainability challenges relevant to the region. The New Monaco and Okanagan Aesthetic projects demonstrate how collaboration between researchers, community, and business results in research that will address important issues as the valley continues to evolve.*

## New growth, new vision, New Monaco

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A steep, rocky hillside sloping towards Okanagan Lake may not seem like a typical university lab. But for researchers at UBC's Okanagan campus, it's the perfect Petri dish.

UBC is home to the Okanagan Sustainability Institute (OSI), where faculty and student researchers view the entire valley as a living lab. And Mark Holland, project manager of the New Monaco development—a proposed 125-acre community to be built at the northern end of Peachland—thought of UBC and the OSI when he began drawing up plans for the multi-year development proposal.

"I wanted to draw UBC and its researchers out of the Okanagan campus and into the valley and I thought the OSI was the right avenue to achieve this," says Holland, a UBC alumnus.

The MOU allows for a number of different research projects, following the theme of a sustainable community, to be explored as New Monaco is developed. Waste water management, cumulative development effects on birds of prey, and building energy efficiency are among possibilities.

New Monaco, adopted into Peachland's official community plan in 2011, will be a sustainable community with mixed housing and retail and commercial zoning. The ultimate projection is that New Monaco will one day be home to 5,000 people, doubling the population of Peachland.

District of Peachland Mayor Keith Fielding says the collaborative approach developed between the district and New Monaco provides a great example of how communities can be engaged in planning future growth.

"The relationship exemplifies best practices with respect to community consultation and the quest to ensure healthy and sustainable outcomes," says Fielding. "The developers and district staff have a very effective working relationship and we

look forward to an exciting and exceptionally well-planned new neighbourhood in our community."

For UBC researchers, the development project is a blank canvas and OSI Director Keith Culver says several faculty and post-doctoral students have identified specific research ideas. The OSI is an interdisciplinary, inter-faculty institute that focuses on research, scholarship, and creative work relevant to issues of long-term sustainability.

"We want to engage the public when it comes to development in the valley," Culver says. "We want a broad dialogue about development, but we don't just want to ask 'what do you want in the valley?' We want to go further. We want to work with communities to develop a deeper vision of the Okanagan and what it can be at a time of rapid change."

Culver says New Monaco is a unique collaboration that engages faculty, students, area municipalities, and even engineering firms, developers, and utility providers such as FortisBC.

"The easy answer is to do what you've always done," says Culver. "But is that the right thing? We have to ask, if the New Monaco development will double the size of Peachland's population, what effect will this have on the environment? How is water to be delivered to the site? Does the site really need beautifully manicured green lawns? How do these people get to work, to the store, or to recreation? These are some of the questions we need to answer."

While much of New Monaco's future is still on paper, and Holland doesn't expect shovels to get into the ground much before 2015, the research done now will help ensure that New Monaco is developed in such a way that the impact on the semi-arid environment is minimal. ●