

PUSHING



BY PETER MITHAM

Bold standards establishing green baselines for new real estate have been common among private enterprises for years. Property managers, tenants and others have specified strict criteria for the kind of real estate they're willing to own or lease.

Yet when governments follow suit, effectively asking private companies to meet similar criteria, a cry often goes up that they're using their coercive power to impose green standards on everyone.

"There's certainly the political will to do it," says James Furlong, speaking of Calgary where he's principal of PCPL Buildings Engineering, a subsidiary of Stantec Consulting Ltd. What stymies such will is the concern that it could limit how private companies operate.

"There's a lot of backlash against more administrative paperwork, more overhead, more hurdles. That's how it's perceived by the development community."

Furlong had a different experience in Vancouver, whose charter allows it to develop its own building code and gives it greater legislative control over what is built. More broadly, developers in B.C. generally have an economic incentive to make the best and densest possible use of land as ocean and mountains place natural limits on expansion, whereas in Calgary, there's

the east, which is wide open with flat land ready for development."

Says Furlong: "Calgary has green communities – Garrison Green is a good example of that – but we don't have Dockside Greens," referring to Victoria's landmark redevelopment. "It's simply, in my opinion, because we have ample space, ample real estate; there's not that cost pressure to do

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– Jaspal Marwah, planner, TaigaNova Management Team

always more outlying space available. As Mayor Dave Bronckhorst told home builders in 2004 as he discussed plans to annex land on the city's fringes, "[These 83 square kilometres are] a 30-year supply of land, but we need to look further – 40, 50, even 100 years down the road. We must move to

[green projects]."

Brent Toderian, who worked in Calgary before becoming Vancouver's director of planning, says that while Calgary noted what was going on in Vancouver and other cities, reservations from the private sector ultimately prompted the city to

the building envelope

Should cities mandate green standards or lead by example?



Unlike other office buildings, the Calgary Water Centre has windows that open, letting in fresh air. It has taught a lot about the importance of good envelope design

Beltline neighbourhoods in exchange for incorporating storm-water retention systems and green roofs into projects. Approximately six applications have been received to date.

The private sector should be willing to buy in, if the example of Fort McMurray's TaigaNova Eco-Industrial Park, is indicative. TaigaNova seeks to reduce the environmental impacts of businesses through compact developments with smaller environmental footprints.

Tracy Casavant, president of Vancouver consulting Eco-Industrial Solutions Ltd., says interest in creating an eco-industrial park came first, the municipality responded with design guidelines, and users embraced the final result. The park is now 80 per cent sold, with users ranging from commercial laundromats to trucking companies.

Similar patterns characterize plans for the Innovista Eco-Industrial Park in Hinton and an MK Delta Lands Group land in Delta, B.C.

Whatever the differences between Alberta and B.C., Casavant says consultation and a willingness to listen were key. Many developers are familiar with and even leading in the adoption of environment-friendly construction, she says, and municipalities have to avoid ignoring existing practices.

"Before the guidelines and the zoning bylaws were created, there were some consultation sessions," explains Jaspal Marwah, a planner from Eco-Industrial Solutions working in Fort McMurray as part of the TaigaNova management team. "The idea was to bring [developers] up to speed with what was envisioned for the park, and also to find out what was acceptable and also what might cause concern."

Marwah says the biggest lessons were learned by the municipality in bringing the project to market. The development guidelines, by contrast, stirred little controversy.

"We haven't really heard anybody having any issues with meeting those guidelines or anything like that," Marwah says. "If anything, there was just a bit of a learning curve for the municipality to put a process into place so they could work with businesses and let them know exactly what was expected." ■

lead by example, becoming Canada's first municipality to mandate LEED silver for all new civic buildings.

"But they don't have requirements for the private sector," Toderian observes. "The hope is that you'll inspire the private sector, but the primary tool that municipalities have is regulation. Our main power is not inspiration; our main power is regulation."

Cities can, in fact, achieve buy-in. The challenges of getting communities on board are part of what makes successful examples in Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary and Fort McMurray remarkable. The options include legislation, incentives and plain grassroots collaboration.

Vancouver's model of urban development, focusing on collaboration and negotiation with developers, has worked to create a livable downtown, but Toderian doesn't shy from urging legislation as a foundation for real change in how developers do things. Calgary, he says, has "no policy for greener buildings for the private

sector. There's not a consistent approach, because there's a feeling [that] the city can't or shouldn't regulate a higher standard for private-sector buildings. I think that's a mistake. I think cities have to do that if they want to achieve real gains."

Calgary has also focused on incentives, but Furlong says the emphasis is on encouraging best practices rather than requiring them. To do so, it will decrease approval and permitting times projects demonstrating green ambitions experience. Many solar installations now bypass the city's development permit process. A rebate of certain municipal fees is available for projects that achieve a set number of LEED points.

Justin Pockar, energy and environment co-ordinator for Calgary, says several area redevelopment plans make provision for storm-water retention and renewable energy systems to give developers choice. In addition, bonus density is available to developers in downtown's Central City and