



Best Practices in Housing

Ground-Oriented, Medium Density Housing (GOMDH)

Greater Vancouver Regional District

Mole Hill Community Revitalization City of Vancouver



*Restoration of 26 Heritage Houses Creating 170
Non-market Housing Units and Community Facilities*

PROJECT TYPE

Ground oriented suites
Heritage preservation
Social community facilities
Non-market housing
Built project

SPECIAL FEATURES

This unique urban housing project in Vancouver's West End includes the restoration of 26 houses, creation of 170 units of affordable housing, a child-care precinct, community gardens and greenlinks, and a new supportive housing and day care program for persons living with HIV/AIDS. The project incorporates sustainable building practices and energy efficient features including an earth energy geothermal heating system. Named after two early residents of the area, Elizabeth and Henry Mole, the

Mole Hill project required considerable community effort and government coordination and funding.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

Mole Hill is located in Vancouver's high-density West End. It is Vancouver's only intact Victorian and Edwardian neighbourhood, with more than 30 houses built as early as 1888. The block had been under the threat of demolition for redevelopment since the early 1950s. As late as 1996, 26 City-owned heritage homes, many listed on the City of Vancouver Heritage Register, were slated for demolition to make way for either park use, playing fields for an adjacent park, or residential re-development.



Many of the units in phase I went to residents who had been living in the homes prior to their redevelopment

Objectives

After a five-year campaign to save the block, led by the community-based Mole Hill Living Heritage Society (sister society to the MHCHS) and city-wide supporters, Vancouver City Council decided not to demolish all of the houses and adopted policies to guide the future re-development of Mole Hill. These policies included:

- maintaining the City's lands in long term City ownership
- ensuring that existing tenants could be accommodated in the re-development
- giving priority to rental housing for low and modest income households
- preserving the heritage listed buildings and existing scale and
- allowing community uses to be included in the redevelopment

Following the adoption of these policies, an extensive community consultation process was undertaken to develop a concept plan that would achieve these policies in conjunction with the Society and its supporters, City staff, and Provincial government. In 1999, the City and Province announced a Non-Market Housing Partnership that would redevelop Mole Hill over three years.

The Results

The redevelopment plan for the Mole Hill Block includes:

- 170 units of non-market housing, with a mix of units to serve low-income singles, couples and low- and modest-income families
- preservation and restoration of all City- owned heritage homes on the block
- successful integration of environmental and energy efficient features in low-cost, non-market housing
- a greenway in the lane behind the houses,

- community gardens, and open space to complement a park to the north of the site
- a 25-space childcare centre that will be integrated into the block in one of the restored houses as well as two family day care units in adjacent homes
- a day centre and 24 units of supportive housing for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. This component is to be funded by the Ministry of Health and BC Housing, with services provided by the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board and the Dr. Peter Centre for persons living with HIV/AIDS
- four parking stalls reserved for the Co-operative Auto Network with whom the Mole Hill Community Housing Society has established a formal partnership to reduce the number of vehicles owned by Mole Hill residents and to promote the use of time-shared vehicles by residents in the area
- a reduced number of parking stalls in the lane from over 100 to 28
- storage for 168 bicycles

All of the units in Phase I have been rented. Many of the units in this phase of the project went to residents who had been living in the homes prior to their redevelopment. Phase II will house individuals on the Society's long waiting list.



Project includes a 25 space child care centre

Funding

The project's \$21 million cost was assisted by the Province to secure a loan from CMHC, to be paid back over 35 years. The City leased the land, worth approximately \$18 million, to the Society for 60 years at no cost. The City may then sell the unused density on the site, which could be worth between \$6-15 million.



Community gardens enhance the laneway

The Province subsidizes 60% of the suites, while the remaining 40% are rented at low end of market rates.

Partners

The project was a partnership between the Mole Hill Community Housing Society, the City of Vancouver and BC Housing. The Community Development Unit of the Provincial Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Foundation, the Vancouver Foundation, the Co-operators Community Economic Development Fund and the VanCity Community Fund were active participants in the efforts to organize and redevelop Mole Hill with a community-based perspective. The Dr. Peter Centre project is a partnership between the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, BC Ministry of Health, BC Housing and the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation.

Next Steps

Completion of the greening of the lane (the traditional heart of the Mole Hill Community) is the next step. The lane will become a pedestrian priority space to complement the variety of public amenities planned for the site. The traditional West End lane width has been reduced from 33 to 20 feet. The Society would also like to close the lane to through traffic but further discussion will be needed with the City's Engineering Services. The City has provided funding for re-surfacing the lane. The Society requires donations of money, materials and labour to finish landscaping and public amenities. Salvaged materials from the renovations on the site are being used to build the community gardens and the same approach will be required for a children's play area, public

green spaces and walkway, a day-lighted stream, a pond and other public amenities.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

Involvement of the neighbourhood is essential to the creation of plans that meet community expectations. Considerable energy was spent on the part of residents bringing all of the partners to the table. With Mole Hill, no one was fighting to maintain the status quo, but the community's vision for the block differed radically from the City's. These differences are illustrated in the following comments from the co-ordinator for the Society, Blair Petrie.

"The City of Vancouver went into the process with a set end result in mind and the Community had to fight battles at every stage right up to the start of construction to ensure our vision was the one implemented. We learned early on not to just oppose but to find solutions to the problems presented by our opponent and to offer a different vision one that would work within the parameters our opponent had to adhere to. This was something the City had not experienced before and it took them by surprise. However, the Society had to keep this up for seven years, at every stage, until the project was underway. Jane Jacobs summed it up for us in 1998 when she told us to "never give up"! We didn't! Mole Hill learned early on that partnerships work. The Mole Hill Living Heritage Society formed the 'Friends of Mole Hill', which was comprised of over 35 community, religious, AIDS, heritage, housing and other citywide and provincial organizations. Eventually, Mole Hill had over 10,000 supporters citywide from all walks of life, working to save the entire block. Years later we finally achieved one of our central goals: working in partnership with the City in a win-win solution."

The project also provides a re-development model with a unique leasing and partnership agreement with the City and the Province, which could be replicated by other organizations in the future.



All of the City-owned heritage homes on the block were preserved and restored

VITAL STATISTICS

Residential Project

Mole Hill

Year of Completion

Phase 1: 70 units total, completed 2002

Phase 2: 100 units total, completed 2003

Density

RM-5B zoning; 2.5 FSR permitted. Up to 1.2 approved

Dwelling Units

a range of studio, one, two and three-bedroom units

Community Facility

Dr. Peter Centre:

Sponsor

Dr. Peter Foundation

Total Units

22 units, plus 2 respite units

2-floor day program centre

Anticipated completion in 2003

Density

2.1 FSR

CONTACTS:

Housing Sponsor:

Mole Hill Community Housing Society

Co-ordinator Blair Petrie, Tel: 604-681-2096

Housing Officials:

Cameron Gray, Director of the Housing Centre, City of Vancouver, Tel: 604-873-7207

John Jessup, Senior Housing Planner (no longer with the City)

Development Planner: Scot Hein

Housing Consultants: Terra Housing

Architects: Sean McEwan, in conjunction with Hotson Bakker Architects - Residential Facility

Larry Adams, Neale Stanizkis Doll Adams, Architects - Community Facility