

Mole Hill Community Housing Society: A Green and Sustainable Community

By Robi Smith, BCNPHA

Mole Hill Community Housing Society is a model of green practices, from embracing geothermal heating to widespread gardening.

The gardeners—a mix of staff, tenants and neighbours living in the surrounding West End community—have created a green oasis of fruit and vegetable gardens, flowers and treed walkways. The spring air is filled with the scent of blossoms and the sounds of birds.

The Mole Hill laneway is home to 76 community garden plots, as well as native plants (low water, low maintenance), edible berries, herbs and flowering fruit and espalier trees. Gardeners use rain barrels for watering during periods of drought and rely on mason bees for cross-pollinating flowers and plants. The lush thicket-like landscaping and natural pond and stream provide for increased bird and insect life.

The community housing project includes 27 Victorian and Edwardian era houses, built between 1888 and 1908. The houses contain 170 units of social housing and have



been designated municipal heritage sites by the City of Vancouver.

When the original buildings were renovated by the Society between 1999 and 2003, large amounts of material were diverted from the landfill. Buildings were upgraded with state-of-the-art geothermal heating systems, low energy lighting and water saving devices. Parking spaces were reduced by over 80 per cent with four stalls reserved for a car co-operative. The lane was narrowed for traffic calming and public benefits. Units in the buildings were kept modest in size so the grounds could be retained. Mature trees were preserved for storm-water management and public green space.

Mole Hill Community Housing Society is founded on the principles of affordable housing, environmental sustainability and heritage preservation.

Just when you think the Society has done everything it possibly can to be green and sustainable, there's more. Margot Beauchamp, the Society's Executive Director, notes that there's a new "Green Committee" at Mole Hill with lots of plans. "We've applied for funding to increase the number of rain barrels by four, build a prototype of a square foot garden, provide a workshop on permaculture for the community and build a shed for electric bicycles and motorcycles."

You can learn more about Mole Hill at www.mole-hill.ca.



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