

And They're Off

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Cochrane to grow in wake of annexation

Sunset Ridge is something of a new dawn for one of Canada's fastest growing communities. It's one of the first new subdivisions to proceed in Cochrane following the town's recent annexation of 1,335 hectares of land from the surrounding rural Municipal District of Rocky View. "The town is almost out of developable land and there's a pent-up demand for new housing," says Greg Brown of Brown and Associates Planning Group.

The company is working with developer Tirion Properties Ltd. to create Sunset Ridge.

"Our project will be one of the first out of the chutes, and we're targeting March for the public hearing at council, with grading of the land over the summer and the initial show homes started by this fall," says Brown.

Located just west of Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway, Cochrane was proclaimed in 2002 to be the fastest growing municipality in Canada of more 5,000 people.

Its population grew to 11,798 in 2001, up 57 per cent from 7,424 in 1996. As of last year, the total had risen to 12,418.

Sunset Ridge will be located just north of Cochrane's new town hall - the former Western Heritage Centre on the town's northwestern edge just east of Highway 22 and north of Cochrane Ranche.

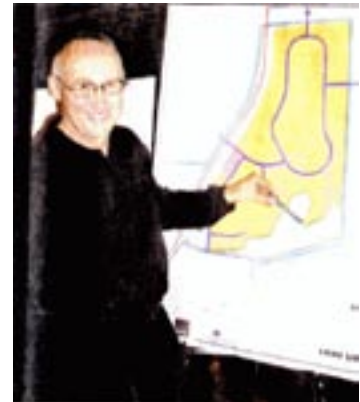
The project contains 240 hectares, of which 188 hectares are developable. The remainder is a large escarpment area on the southern edge of the land, which gently slopes down towards the town.

Big Hill Creek winds through the base of the escarpment 240 meters below the highest point of the land. Of the total development, Tirion owns about 142 developable hectares.

The land is spectacular, says Brown. "The piece of land is a 10," he says. "With the southwest sloping topography looking toward the mountains, it's got it all."

The community will include two man-made stormwater retention ponds of 1.6 to 2.4 hectares, one of which is just south of the first phase of development, with some homes backing on to the area.

Another school site will also be in the development, along with the recently opened St. Timothy junior/senior high school in the project's southwest corner.



One of the main reasons for providing more land for development centres around the need for more diverse housing in Cochrane, says its mayor.

“We definitely need sustainable development,” says Ken Bech.

But supply and demand took over as the amount of land dwindled waiting for annexation to occur, he says.

“It’s a strong factor when there is a limited supply of land... and we lost an important component of housing, such as the starter market, duplexes, R-4 lots,” says Bech. “As a community, we need all types of housing.”

With the new land incorporated into the town’s limits, “we will strongly encourage varied styles and mixes of housing from now on,” he says.

Sunset Ridge will have traditional and narrow lot single-family homes, as well as two-family homes in either duplexes or semi-detached, says Brown. It will also offer homes with secondary suites, along with a variety of multi-family housing, he says.

It will be similar to The Hamptons, Tirion’s flagship development and its first in Calgary, “but without a golf course and with a broader range of housing types to fit into the current market conditions,” he says.

Located in the city’s northwest, The Hamptons is close to build out, says Brown, adding nearly 2,600 homes will be in the neighbourhood once its completed.

CalBridge Fine Homes currently has a show home remaining in the area just south of the large estate clubhouse. The builder is also selling homes in the most exclusive area of The Hamptons, a small, gated community virtually surrounded by a golf course.

Tirion’s second development is the EverGlades in Calgary’s southwest, where development is nearly 85 per cent complete.

Architectural controls in Sunset Ridge will be similar to that of The Hamptons, says Brown, adding they will be designed to fit with Cochrane’s unique character.



“The exact theme has not been selected as yet, but it will complement the town,” he says.

The first phase is in the southwest corner of the development — “the steepest land with some of the best views and linear open space because of the topography,” says Brown.

One hundred and fifty to 200 lots will be available, with the builders to include CalBridge, Janssen and Jayman Master Builder, he says. “We’ll be biting one or two Cochrane builders to join the group.”

Prices for this phase are expected to be in the range of \$250,000 to \$400,000 for home and lot.

The developer has purposefully gone a different route to get the project approved than is traditional in the town, says Brown. “We’ve come to the public before developers would ordinarily do in Cochrane.”

The developer has already held two open houses before approaching the council for approvals, rather than going through council before seeking public input.

“It’s the first time that’s ever been done here, but it was to make people aware of what’s coming, and to receive input that we do have a good plan and have addressed all needs before asking for first reading at council.”

The furthest northern sector of the land is held by Larry Koper, whose family owned much of the area for more than three decades.

He’s not sure what he will do with the remaining land, but he says he’s not a developer.

Philosophical about the need for the town to grow, Koper says: “If my land has to go, I’m glad it’s going to look very good.”

If all of his land is included in the development, the area could eventually be home to as many as 10,000 people, depending on market conditions and the amount and density of the projects. About 3,200 units will be built.

A neighbourhood convenience centre of three to four hectares is also part of the overall plans.

The annexation was approved in late fall of 2004, retroactive to July. Several other developers have areas that will come on stream shortly.

