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**BUILDING**

## Anti-sprawl development to the fore in Calgary

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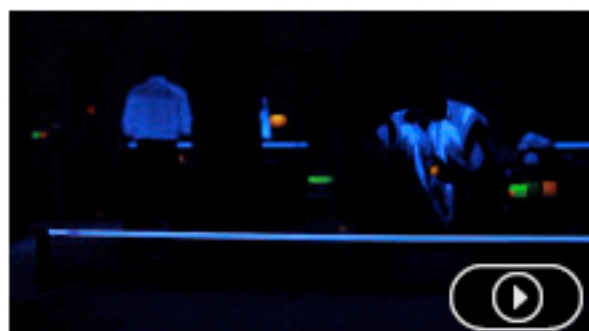
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Calgary is looking ahead. Over the next 60 years, it expects to welcome another 1.3 million citizens – and Plan It Calgary should ensure the city's growth is sustainable.

The new policy proposes a compact city that encourages walking, cycling and the use of public transit, and preserves open space, parks and other environmental amenities. Mayor Naheed Nenshi campaigned on an anti-sprawl platform in 2010, and is a proponent of Plan It's push for increased density as the city grows.

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A new housing development by Alberta developer Geo-Energy Enterprises is teeing up to provide just what Plan It proposes.

In 2009, Geo-Energy purchased Shawnee Slopes golf course in Calgary's southwest. Until the golf course closed recently, Shawnee



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Slopes had been a hackers' heaven for nearly 50 years. But tastes changed over the decades. The old course wasn't the draw it once was, and with newer, more exciting courses available, was going to require considerable updating to be competitive. Instead, the owners decided to sell the land to Geo-Energy.

The company has plans to turn the fairways into Shawnee Park, a community for about 3,500 people. Traditionally, housing development in Calgary has been "scrape and build" – developers would take bare prairie on the outskirts of town, build houses and plant trees. This was the way Calgary's sprawl was spread.

Geo-Energy's proposal to redevelop the 53-hectare course by integrating it into a residential area is "something quite unique" for Calgary, providing new homes in a mature community, according to Shawnee Park's senior planner, Les Humphrey.

The Shawnee Park design nests the proposed homes in the already mature landscape of the golf course's trees and grassy dales. "Eighty-five per cent of the trees will be retained," says Mr. Humphrey. The proposed development includes three key areas: Shawnee Village, Grand Promenade and Park's Edge – all within range of existing public transit.

Shawnee Village, near one of Calgary's LRT stations, will feature low-rise condos and apartments, along with the Village Square – a 50,000-square-foot retail area. The Grand Promenade is characterized by single family homes, clustered off principal arteries and paths in Shawnee Park. According to the developer's prospectus, the clusters will create "a kind of commons – open green space instead of individual yards – that is shared by neighbours." Park's Edge, bordering on Calgary's famed Fish Creek Provincial Park, will have estate-style homes.

Accounting for about two-thirds of the total development, the Grand Promenade and Park's Edge areas feature single-family homes. Earlier Geo-Energy projects include the multi-million dollar Estates of Elveden and Elmont Green project, which boasts the largest single-family lots available in Calgary.

In addition to the proposed housing, Geo-Energy says it will create a network of trails in Shawnee Park. "We have deliberately tried to retain the park-like character, which is the area's principal asset," says Mr. Humphrey. "As a golf course, this green space was closed and private. In the new community, it will be opened up for everyone to enjoy." About one-quarter of the site will be dedicated as accessible open space, according to the company.

Shawnee Park's integrated development concept is an idea that's getting attention in Alberta's boom town. Over the next six decades, Calgary must either continue to sprawl, or take a new course: intensify development, as proposed by the Plan It Calgary policy.

"This project is a poster-child for the new vision of Calgary," says Mr. Humphrey, "In terms of where the city wants to go, we are conforming to the city's desires in every way."

But not everyone agrees.

Neighbours of the golf course have protested the Shawnee Park plan, saying they don't want to see it developed for housing because of the increased traffic and congestion those new neighbours will bring.

Tsur Somerville, an associate professor at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Real Estate Economics, isn't surprised at the controversy – as he puts it, "golfers, no matter how loud their clothing, are still quieter than neighbours." The dispute, he says, is a classic urban development issue.

Former city councillor Ray Clark, responsible for stick-handling the approval process for Geo-Energy, says the company did attempt to work with the community, but found the response "disappointing." The local residents association has consistently opposed the development, insisting the space should remain a golf course.

It's easy to appreciate the neighbours' response to the idea of losing a calm and serene environment next door, says Mr. Somerville, "but the government is under no obligation once something is zoned as recreational to keep it that way forever.

"This proposal sounds like it's in keeping with the city's vision," he says, "the question will be, is the city going to practice what it preaches?"

Geo-Energy hopes to have the development in front of the city for approval early in the new year.