

These new maps highlight population density, with green indicating the most heavily populated areas. Nearly two-thirds of Greater Vancouver residents live in 'compact' communities compared with only one in four residents in metropolitan Seattle.

Vancouver 'growing smart,' report suggests

Almost two-thirds live in 'compact' communities near a green zone

By FRANCES BULA

Suburban housing developments would blanket almost every piece of land in the Greater Vancouver regional district if the city had followed the growth pattern than Seattle has in the last 15 years.

Instead, even though Vancouver has grown at the same rate or faster than developing-world megacities such as Cairo, Jakarta and Rio de Janeiro, it has controlled its growth far better than its neighbour to the south.

Almost two-thirds of Vancouverites live in "compact" communities, compared with only a quarter who do so in Seattle, according to a report being issued today by two groups focused on urban development. That has meant Greater Vancouver residents have an extra 650 square kilometres of house-free land — almost the size of Burnaby — around them.

The lesson? "Vancouver's growing smart and Seattle's growing dumb," says Alan Durning, executive director of the group Northwest Environment Watch, which issued the report along with the Vancouver-based group Smart Growth B.C.

The study, *Sprawl and Smart Growth in Greater Vancouver*, looked at how many people live in "car-oriented" communities,

defined as 12 people or fewer per acre, how many live in transit-oriented communities (12-40 people per acre, the point at which transit becomes cost-effective), and how many live in pedestrian-oriented communities (more than 40 people per acre). The suburban developments in Langley are an example of the first, most of Vancouver's residential neighbourhoods are an example of the second and the West End and parts of New Westminister are examples of the third.

Census statistics show 62 per cent of people in metro Vancouver lived in either transit- or pedestrian-oriented communities, called compact, by 2001, an increase from 46 per cent in 1986. About 11 per cent of all residents lived in the very compact, pedestrian-oriented

communities.

In contrast, only 25 per cent of Seattle residents lived in both kinds of compact communities by 2001.

Durning and Smart Growth's executive director Cheeving Ho said that very different development pattern is due to two main causes.

First, Vancouver is held in by the province's Agricultural Land Reserve, which has preserved farm land much better than the Seattle system, where local governments control agricultural-land use.

"The ALR is one of the most important reasons Vancouver has grown smart. Decentralized control of agricultural land in Seattle has led to unfettered growth," says

Lack of freeway system through city helped keep sprawl orderly, author says

From B1

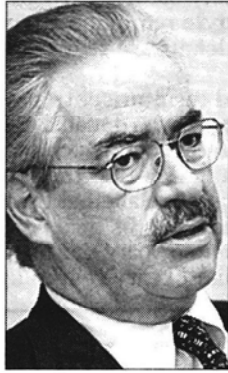
Durning, because local governments just don't have the backbone to resist developers.

Second, Vancouver, thanks to protest in the 1960s, never developed a through-city freeway system that would allow people easy access to the suburbs.

The report doesn't credit local planning policies with any effects, but Ken Cameron, the district's manager of policy and planning, said the results are a clear indication that it makes a difference when a region develops a clear vision of what it wants and then sticks to it over the years.

"It shows that if there is a sustained commitment to planning policies, we will get to a different place ultimately."

More than 15 years ago, the district developed a "livable region strategy" and, as a result of that, established a vision of a "series of cities in a green zone." That green zone of forests, farmland, and watersheds now extends to 50 per cent of developable land in the dis-



Ken Cameron

Burnaby follow at around 70-80 per cent.

At the bottom of the list are Langley district, West Vancouver and Port Moody, which look more like Seattle, with only 22-26 per cent of their residents living in compact communities.

If there's a down note that the report strikes, it's a warning that the Vancouver region can't just sit back and

assume that all will be fine.

Not all municipalities have been equally successful at forming compact communities, the report notes.

Vancouver is the highest, at 90 per cent, while North Vancouver city, New Westminster,

White Rock, Richmond and

assume that all will be fine.

Durning and Ho say the B.C. government's decision to give more control of agricultural land to local government is dangerous.

Cameron says he is less worried about that, saying he has confidence in local governments' ability to protect the green zone.

He did say the war is never won.

"We shouldn't be smug when we read these reports. It's a constant struggle."

Durning and Ho said many people become scared when they hear the word "density" when it comes to the future of their cities, because they think it means everyone will be forced to live in Hong Kong-like cities.

However, they said Vancouver could easily take another million people without a huge difference in most neighbourhoods, if only five per cent of the development were very compact such as the West End and the other 95 per cent were achieved through sprinkling townhouses, extra suites, and infill housing throughout neighbourhoods.