

Eco-friendly resort planned near Bellingham
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Image courtesy of Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects - The Horizon at Semiahmoo resort, and everything within its 200 acres, will be built using low-impact development techniques.

By 2010, a new resort called Horizon at Semiahmoo is expected to be completed, bringing a sustainably designed housing community of 650 units and a 100,000-square-foot commercial center to the greater Bellingham area. The resort, and everything within its 200 acres, will be built using low-impact development techniques.

Developer Fred Bovenkamp of FW Bovenkamp Ventures, said a commitment to eco-friendly “integrity” drove the project, which is located about five minutes away from Semiahmoo Golf and Country Club and has no relationship with that property. Pursuing green began with low impact design three years ago but since then, “It morphed a lot. This whole thing has evolved into something much greater.”

Bovenkamp's commitment to sustainability attracted Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects to the project, who ended up designing the entire multi-home resort community.

Scott Allen of OSKA said the project was a first-time opportunity for the firm to explore how people can live sustainably on a large scale. “(It was) an opportunity to create a community that has a well thought through design aesthetic and really be able to think about the various ways people live on the land and do it in a more cohesive way than a lot of developments.”

It was also an opportunity to save the resort from a common problem of mis-matched architecture patterns. “(Many resorts) start with good intentions but when you see it, it's so much more varied in architectural style to the detriment of the project,” Allen said.

The resort is being constructed in four or five phases. The first phase of preparing the land for 74 single family lots over 80 acres is complete. When construction is done by 2010, the resort should have 500 multi-family and 150 single family home sites; about 40 acres of parks, open space, trails and wetlands; and a 17,000-square-foot club house with a 20-person theater, library, fitness center, business center, catering area and guest suites.

A publicly accessible 100,000-square-foot retail and commercial space will also be on 10 acres of the property. It will house about 35 shops including an organic grocer, restaurants, bank, flower shop, bakery and an art studio.

Bovenkamp said he is targeting the same kind of audience that responded to the Suncadia Resort in Roslyn. "It's an affluent Seattle or Vancouver buyer who's looking for a second home (or) for possibly a transitional piece of recreational real estate that allows them to get out of the city and still work from their remote (location)."

"(It's) people who are really looking for lifestyle changes... and want to live in a lifestyle that's a little bit more relaxed."

Lots cost between \$288,000 and \$530,000 for the property and licensing fees. Then, buyers choose one of nine house plans, designed by Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen that range between 1,700 to 3,300 square feet. Buyers can further customize a plan by contracting with OSKA.

Buyers will then pay for the house to be built, using a member of the development's preferred builder list. Bovenkamp said builders had not yet been chosen, but will be selected based on green experience.

Residences at Semiahmoo will include single family, condos, townhouses and zero-lot lined homes. But all houses must be sustainably designed and encourage green practices. Bovenkamp said, "We don't want to encourage mega-house construction. We believe one element of sustainability is efficiency and a smaller footprint."

When designing the entire resort, the project team focused on using low impact design techniques in water and energy use.

Raingardens, green roofs and narrow streets to decrease impervious surfaces will help the site have a minimal impact on water and stormwater runoff. Allen said, "The idea is to not let any rainfall water leave the site. We're trying to capture as much of it as possible on the lot and use it for irrigation."

Optimizing natural light is another focus area, especially because the resort is on a hill that slopes to the south. Houses are designed to use as much natural light as possible. Use of artificial light in surrounding pathways between residences was also cut so "the viewscape wasn't dominated by streetlights," according to Bovenkamp.

The resort is geared towards pedestrian activity and encourages use of trails, which are interconnected with other houses and with the commercial center. The gated community will keep unknown cars outside, but Bovenkamp said pedestrians will be welcome to enter and walk the grounds.

It is unsure whether individual buildings or the whole project will be LEED or Built Green certified. But both Bovenkamp and Allen said each building would be constructed to similar green standards, and in some cases, would exceed them.

Bovenkamp said another goal of the project is to create a resort where buildings are ageless so people will want them in 100 years, instead of tearing them down.

“Sustainability is more than just making sure you use good materials,” he said. “Architecture itself is a sustainable element.”

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