

**IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

Pedestrian first, or friendly, initiatives in East Village:

- Street lights are closer to the sidewalk and shine on sidewalks as much as the road.
- Roads are as narrow as possible. This serves as a traffic calming tool.
- On-street parking is maximized to provide a buffer between pedestrians and traffic.

- Sidewalks are barrier-free for wheelchair and stroller access.
- Trees, bike racks and benches are positioned so pedestrians don't have to dodge in and out of them.
- The River Walk segment will provide a promenade experience for pedestrians.

— Source: *Calgary Municipal Land Corp. Master Plan*



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**The River Walk portion of East Village, seen in this artist's rendering, will aim to provide a promenade experience for pedestrians.**

# East Village progress to silence naysayers

**W**ho says history doesn't repeat itself? The current Calgary recession is looking more and more like that of the '80s when downtown office vacancy rates — Calgary's best economic benchmark — exceeded 15 per cent, as is currently the case.

The recent announcement that Vancouver company Embassy Development, along with parent company Bosa Developments, are going to be the first developers of the new East Village is also a bit of déjà vu.

In the late '90s, it was Bosa who pioneered the rejuvenation of Calgary's West End with the construction of Axxis, The Marquis and River West condos.

Hat's off to Vancouver's Nat Bosa, who saw the potential market for downtown living in Calgary when other developers believed suburban Calgarians would never give up their big, single-family homes to live in smaller urban condos.

Now it is Nat's son, Ryan, who will pioneer the development of East Village after more than 50 years of false starts.

For those who missed it, Calgary Municipal Land Corp. has sold a signature block to Bosa and Embassy,

During the next five to seven years, the companies plan to build three condo towers with some restaurant, retail and office space next to the LRT tracks on the western edge of East Village. This is exciting news and should silence the naysayers who have been predicting the East Village vision will never happen.

And this is just the beginning. The opening of the first phase of the River Walk promenade and the development of the National Music Centre by the



**RICHARD WHITE**

Cantos Music Foundation in East Village (which has just received \$55 million from government) are also expected shortly.

Temporary uses for the Billingsgate and Hiller Buildings — as well as the St. Louis Hotel — will also add animation to the area.

The renovated Bow Valley College building and the opening of the school's new South building in 2012 will further increase the diversity and density of activities in the area.

This is exactly what an urban village is supposed to look like — a mixture of old and new, big and small, as well as a mixture of students, seniors, artists, office workers, empty nesters and tourists. It is also interesting to note Grosvenor — an international developer whose North American head office is in Vancouver — recently announced it will be proceeding with Drake, a new condo development in the Beltline.

This has been on hold since the company received its development permit three years ago. This provides another big vote of confidence in the Calgary market given Grosvenor is an international developer with land holdings around the world — and this is its first new project in the world since the stock market crash in 2008.

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## 'FIRST' PRINCIPLES

With Vancouver-based developers creating re-development projects in inner-city Calgary, it may be of interest to note the "Living First" mantra of city planners in Vancouver. The principles include:

- Developing a comprehensive integrated strategy for downtown residential development.
- Pushing for housing intensity.
- Insisting on housing diversity.
- Creating coherent, identifiable and supportive

neighbourhoods.

- Fostering suitable domestic urban design and architecture.

Some of the initiatives include:

- Limit commuter access to downtown and let congestion be an ally in a household's decision to live downtown.
- Designing urban neighbourhoods with a high street with retail and other amenities necessary for

day-to-day living, as well as public gathering space.

- Insisting on rich mix of housing for people of all income levels including families.
- The sidewalks must become the effective living rooms of the neighbourhood.
- Cost for public utilities and facilities must be borne by the development.
- Discretionary regulatory framework emphasizing guidelines and incentives over hard regulations.

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If that wasn't enough, Qualex-Landmark Group of Companies (yet another Vancouver developer) announced just this past spring it was going forward with the construction of its third tower, Luna, along 12th Avenue at 11th Street S.W.

Clearly, Vancouver developers are high on the Calgary market. In each case, these companies bring an experienced development team and Vancouver architect to design and market these Calgary condos.

The same is true for Vancouver's Anthem Properties — the developer behind the ambitious Waterfront condo project next to Eau Claire Market.

I have heard from both the public and some planners that Calgary's city centre could begin to look more and more like "Vancouver East" as it evolves.

In addition, Calgary's Centre City Plan for the inner city is based on many of the "pedestrian first" policies and planning guidelines that have made Vancouver the poster child for urban living around the world.

Vancouver has fostered a culture of progressive and disciplined urban, mixed-use community design for its city centre that has created a community of architects and developers with tremendous experience.

Here's hoping that this experience can be adapted to create a Calgary aesthetic.

I am on record as saying Calgary and East Village need to make their own architectural statement — and not be a dog's breakfast of knock-off buildings from somewhere else.

We need innovation, not imitation.

A quick check of Bosa's website shows that it has engaged "starchitect" Foster and Partners — the same firm that designed The Bow — to design its Jameson House condos in Vancouver.

It would be great if East Village could attract an eclectic group of local, national and international architects who are given the latitude to create site-specific designs that reflect a distinct East Village aesthetic — something that captures and builds on the colour and character of the area, thereby creating a unique sense of place.

It should be something that reflects the shimmering reflections and changing colours of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, the pattern and tones of the wood of Fort Calgary's walls, or the brick of the historic Simmons Building and St. Louis Hotel in East Village.

It should be something that integrates the teepee shape from the homes of the indigenous people who have camped in the area for hundreds of years.

Hopefully, too, the designers will respond in some way to the existing architecture in the area — The Calgary Tower, The Bow, St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Saddledome — and maybe the area's new condos, such as Orange Lofts, Arriva or Nuera.

I think Calgarians are hoping and expecting something special — something new and something that links vision to economic reality.

To be an urban village, East Village must attract people of all ages and backgrounds.



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**Work on new infrastructure proceeds in East Village in 2009 to transform the area.**

This means condo projects need to be affordable to young professionals, small families and empty nesters of varying economic means, not a ghetto for the rich and famous.

I would like to welcome Bosa and Embassy to Calgary and East Village. They have committed to a very challenging task in a very challenging time.

They will be setting the new benchmark — not only for future East Village projects, but also for other future developments in Victoria Park, Beltline and The Bridges, as well as other LRT-based developments like Westbrook Station.

I wish them well.

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