Fast Tracking a Sustainable Subdivision:
Iqaluit's "Green" Neighbourhood Springs Up In Record Time

Nunatsiaq News . November 25, 2005

In a dream world, the design, planning and construction of a new subdivision spans three years.

But the city of Iqaluit didn't have the luxury of time when council approved work on the new Plateau subdivision in the fall of 2004. Demand for housing continued to grow in Nunavut's capital, while no new residential lots had been created since the Lake subdivision was finished in 2003.

That meant a busy construction season this summer and fall. Roads were built, trenches were dug, water and sewage pipes were installed, and power lines were raised. And, because the Plateau has the highest elevation of any subdivision in Iqaluit, a water booster station was needed as well.

Now, $5.5 million in work on the first phase of the Plateau project is complete. Ten lot owners have applied for development permits, and five have already started construction.

Lumber and crates of supplies lie covered in snow, while the incomplete frames of homes overlook a freezing Frobisher Bay. Some could have the best views in the city.

"It was a very tight schedule, but we were able to make it," said Michele Bertol, the city's director of lands and planning. "We crammed it all into one year."

The subdivision holds 34 single family residential lots, nine multiplex lots, which are zoned for buildings holding four to six units, and three mixed-use lots, which will likely have businesses on their main floors and residential units above them.

There are also two community-use lots, including one that has been donated to the Iqaluit Greenhouse Society.

The lots went up for sale through a ballot draw in April.

"We sold out immediately," Bertol said. "They're all gone."

The average cost of a residential lot was $58,000. Most buyers chose 30-year leases with the city, Bertol said. Those lease payments will be used by the city to pay the cost of building the subdivision, so that it's "self-sustaining," she said.

Bertol says the Plateau is a "sustainable subdivision" in an ecological sense as well. All homes will be required to be fitted with low-flow toilets and faucets, as well as energy-efficient appliances, insulation and windows. That's the first time the city has introduced these new building standards.

And seven units are zoned as R2000 compliant, an even tougher standard for energy efficiency.

Plateau houses are zoned with a southern orientation to best take advantage of solar energy, while the roads are aligned northwest, in line with prevailing winds, to prevent snowdrifts from piling up on the streets.

To Bertol's knowledge, the Plateau was the first time the city conducted a snow study prior to developing the subdivision — something residents buried on the Road to Nowhere, who have had

decks collapsed and houses swallowed by snowdrifts, must wish had happened before their property was developed.

Besides buildings, the Plateau plan also includes space reserved for green space, including several berry picking areas.

This December city council will discuss whether to budget for phase two of construction. Without the need to build another water booster station, that phase should cost the city about $1.5 million less. Three more phases are also envisioned by city planners, with the neighbourhood stretching out across the tundra like a ribbon.

The Plateau's current location wasn't the city's first choice. During community consultations, they first presented a plan to build on the tundra beside Tundra Valley. But residents from that neighbourhood howled at public meetings, arguing the area should remain as green space.

"People totally rejected the idea," Bertol said.

One advantage of the existing location is its view, which will allow residents who hunt to follow the breaking and freezing of the ice in Frobisher Bay, Bertol said.

"These are very important things for them."