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Surrey goes global for makeover contest



TownShift organizer Trevor Boddy at the kick-off event Monday, with Mayor Dianne Watts.

Evan Seal photo

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The City of Surrey is offering up \$75,000 in prize money for ideas on how to redesign five of its six city centres, including Semiahmoo Town Centre.

And you don't even have to live here to take a crack at the cash.

In fact, organizers predict the TownShift: Suburb Into City competition will draw global interest from a range of interested parties and individuals, from architects, planners and entrepreneurs to average citizens.

“We really expect to get ideas from around the world and from people that wouldn't typically engage in a design-ideas

program,” Mayor Dianne Watts said Monday, during the competition’s launch at the Surrey Museum in Cloverdale.

Organizers have identified sites in each of five town centres – Cloverdale, Newton, Fleetwood, Guildford and Semiahmoo – and given each a theme.

For the Semiahmoo, the theme is “Up – Forming Plaza Through Residential Towers.” Entrants are asked to submit designs for a site on the southeast corner of 152 Street and 19 Avenue. Submissions must include a gathering place and consider the site’s proximity to houses, said Trevor Boddy, one of the competition organizers.

The site has room for one or two 18- to 20-storey towers, said architect Scott Kemp. It is the only highrise site amongst the five.

Cloverdale’s theme is “Round-Up – Building Affordability.” Submissions for that centre’s site, at the old Safeway or “dead mall” location, must incorporate affordable housing and seniors.

The simplest concept is for Fleetwood, where submissions are to focus on creating a marker for the area: “Shaping Gateway Identity.” Newton’s “New Town – Connecting Density to Transit” will be the toughest, said Kemp, citing the area’s size and diversity.

In Guildford, the theme is “Cornered – Place-Making at Mall’s Edge.”

All of the designs must consider livability, walkability, sustainability and connectivity.

The issues are not unique to Surrey, Boddy said, noting he was “swamped” with interest in the TownShift initiative during a recent presentation in Buenos Aires.

Watts said the competition is the largest of its kind ever carried out by a Canadian municipality.

It is important “we have a sense of place, a sense of uniqueness, that brings us all together,” she said.

The city budgeted about \$350,000 for the competition. Architect Allen Aubert, a South Surrey resident and co-ordinator for the organizing committee, noted commissioning five separate designs would have cost the city “in the millions.”

Aubert lauded the opportunity the competition offers for everyone who is interested to have a say.

“It is probably the most democratic way to have public consultation we have ever witnessed,” Aubert said.

The city is not bound by any of the submissions put forward, regardless of whether they are chosen as winners, noted Boddy. They are simply ideas to be put on the table, on Surrey’s terms, he said.

“This is not – not – a city planning competition,” he said.

“We’re not giving the City of Surrey on a platter and saying, monkey with it.”

Kemp said one value of the competition is the potential for ideas to be applicable to any of the sites. Another benefit is it gets people involved and provides a vehicle for dialogue.

At the same time, it puts everyone on a level playing field, said Aubert, “...looking at ideas and having dialogue without a fixed agenda.

“This opens up general dialogue about what the future could look like.”

The \$75,000 earmarked for prize money will be distributed amongst 11 winners: an overall winner, who will receive \$15,000, and two winners in each town centre (five \$10,000 prizes and five \$2,000 prizes). There will also be honourable mentions, and, a couple dozen designs will be chosen for exhibition during the Winter Olympics.

Those interested in submitting designs can do so online, said Kemp. Cost is \$50, whether one design is being entered or five.

Registration opened Monday. The website, www.townshift.ca, will go live Nov. 5. Registration closes Jan. 4; entries are due Jan. 6. Winners will be announced at the end of February.

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