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## Builder goes the bear-friendly route

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SQUAMISH, B.C.

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When developer Doug Day started selling lots for the University Heights subdivision in Squamish, B.C., he knew his new 200-home development was smack in the middle of bear country, and he knew the difficulties that came with it.

Because many local black bears have become accustomed to picking easy meals out of the town's garbage bins, dozens of the animals, and the occasional grizzly, are killed in the region every year by conservation officers.

Mr. Day didn't like that option.

"I'm a big bear fan - I absolutely love them," he said. "Shooting them is ridiculous, almost criminal. They were there first and it's up to us to keep the garbage away from them."

University Heights is a 50-acre mountain-top project of high-end "Whistler-style" duplexes and single-family houses with a sweeping panorama of the town, Howe Sound and the surrounding Coastal mountain range. About 15 lots remain unsold and prices start at \$350,000.

The development is next to the campus of Quest University Canada, a non-profit private university that opened its doors to students in September. Both were carved out of the forests adjacent to the Garibaldi Highlands area of Squamish.

"If you're developing in a place like Squamish, then it's really quite special," said Mr. Day. "Part of that are bears and cougars and whatever the hell is also wandering around out there. We've got to co-habit."

It takes just two weeks, experts say, for bears that had previously eaten only foraged berries, plants and carrion to get hooked on human refuse, with the chance of confrontation increased. Fall is an especially dangerous time, with black bears needing to consume 20,000 calories a day prior to winter hibernation time.

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design details, Mr. Day jumped at the opportunity.

"Squamish bills itself as the Outdoor Recreational Capital of Canada, which is true, but we've got to walk the walk," he said. "We heard about Bear Smart and it sounded like a good idea."

Bear Smart guidelines were created by the provincial government three years ago to encourage communities to protect the animals.

As a result, University Heights will be one of the few new developments in the province to incorporate Bear Smart principles.

Mr. Day has agreed to retrofit each home's garbage tote with a lock, practice Bear Smart landscaping by using plant species that won't attract bears, and ensure that each resident gets an information package on living in bear country. As well, all parks and green spaces will have bear-proof garbage receptacles installed.

Having University Heights built along these lines is "incredibly significant", said Ms. Toom.

"Doug is very gung-ho. He is setting a huge precedent for the rest of the community and for future developers," she said. "I think this is an attractive thing for people who want to buy at University Heights. So many of them like the outdoorsy lifestyle of Squamish and they see this as a big plus."

And with the town set to double in population in the next 15 to 20 years from 16,000 to around 35,000, said Ms. Toom, the potential for bear-human conflict is unlikely to lessen without such deliberate action.

"I think it is absolutely essential that we get to developers early on. A lot of people come from Vancouver and don't realize they are living in bear country. Just letting them know and telling them what they need to do is pretty straight-forward stuff," she said.

"The entire Garibaldi bench land is always going to have bears going through, because of the creek bed that runs through there."

Ms. Toom would eventually like to see a local developer take on the idea of centralized refuse drop-offs similar to those in use in Canmore, Alta. There, a large animal-proof dumpster takes all the garbage in every 25-home area, and removes the temptation by using a receptacle that can't be broken into.

"It took Canmore a while to get into it, but more and more residents there love it and want it in their own neighbourhoods," Ms. Toom said. "It costs more,

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Ms. Toom said she is working to establish an accreditation program for developers who want to practice Bear Smart principles.

"Let's give them something they could put on their brochures or on their websites that could say they are building on bear-friendly lines. It would certainly add to the attraction," she said.

Mr. Day said University Heights has already been built to Green B.C. Gold standards, with the highest-rated energy efficient windows, appliances, lighting and insulation. As well, each property will use geothermal technology for heating and cooling systems, and use the most up-to-date storm water management systems to prevent pollutants being washed into nearby creeks.

Managing wildlife, he said, is one more way to create a green community.

"At the end of the day, Bear Smart will help save many animals," he said. "We just need to keep them in the forest so there is no reason for them to come into our back yards."

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