

Developing Lake Country's future
Lake Country Calendar
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Above: Sitara on the Pond is one of several major multi-family housing developments going on in Lake Country. Along with the LakeStone project, The Lakes represents a significant portion of the District of Lake Country's future community growth. Right: Ian Walker, one of the District's building inspectors, checks over the trusses of a single family home being built near Davidson Rd. School.

Development in the Okanagan Valley has been booming in recent years and the District of Lake Country has been no exception. Feeling the full brunt of developers wanting to build on Lake Country's prime real estate, the Development Services department has had the responsibility of meeting these increasing demands while trying to balance some semblance of sensible community growth.

Development Services oversees all of the community's planning, building and bylaw enforcement needs. To make sure development is carried out responsibly, they conduct all building inspections, approve business licenses and, with council approval, issue permits for various zoning and building applications.

"The public sees the effect of what we're doing and they're impacted by it," says Mike Reiley, the Development Services Director.

Reiley, who started working for the municipality in 1998, has watched the first two councils deal with development in two very different ways. From a relatively conservative stance under Mayor Bob McCoubrey to a more proactive approach under Rolli Hein, he has witnessed a significant increase in the pace of development in recent years. "It hasn't slowed down in five years," says Reiley.

The present day council is still dealing with the decisions set in motion by the previous one, but from what he's seen, Reiley suspects it will be more moderate in how it deals with future development projects.

Given that the municipality is well into its second consecutive year of double-digit community growth rate, council may not have a choice, but to pull up on the reins. The District started the year predicting an 11 per cent growth rate, a continuation from an equally busy 2006.

Reiley believes the pace of development will taper off eventually once the housing supply starts meeting demand. In the early years of incorporation, he explains there was a lack of land available for development, either because it hadn't been subdivided or because the infrastructure was lacking.

Now, with a thriving economy and real estate market, Reiley attributes the current rate of growth in Lake Country to large-scale resort-type projects – such as The Lakes and 20/20's LakeStone development – adopted by the previous council.

Whether it's a large scale resort developer looking to rezone a massive property or a single family looking to move into its new home before the school year starts, Reiley says Development Service's main goal is to meet people's expectations and keep the paperwork moving as best they can. "Dealing with growth itself is one aspect of it," says Reiley. "The trick is keeping everybody happy and understanding that you'll never do it."

Given the feverish pace of development and the rate at which the community is growing, Reiley says it is all too easy to lose sight of the long-term vision when dealing with the day-to-day demands of customers. "Nobody says, 'Oh my god, you haven't looked 15 years into the future,'" quips Reiley. "Politicians respond to urgency."

This is where the Official Community Plan comes into play. It is the document that provides the District with the community's long term vision. It is currently under review by council and staff, who will amend its vision based on input provided by Lake Country residents, stakeholders groups and other District appointed committees.

The zoning bylaw and servicing bylaws are the tools Development Services use for implementing the OCP and regulating community growth. The DCC's collected by the District provide it with the currency to ensure its roads, water and sewer can meet the demands of development.

"Everything we do with processing applications is based on the OCP's vision," says Reiley.

Moving forward, one of the things Reiley would like to see is for Lake Country to get a sense of itself. Is it still the agricultural centre it once was or has it evolved into more of a resort-recreation community? "What is our community all about?" he asks. "People come here for a variety of reasons and the needs of these people are vastly different. The idea is to not destroy what you have but to change it into what you want it to be."

Many Lake Country residents would probably like the community to remain the way it is and not get swallowed up by developers, but they are already here and the community is growing faster than it ever has. Using an adage, Reiley says, "The only constant thing about communities is that they're constantly changing."

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