

# Low DOWN on Real Estate

## Douglas Cardinal homes aim to connect people

By Ben Bulmer

The opportunity to live in a house designed by a famous, award-winning architect is possibly coming to Wakefield. A decade-in-the-making development, Ferme Minnes Farm, has Order of Canada recipient and multi-award winning architect Douglas Cardinal designing houses for the site.

*"I feel it's important to cluster groups of people together so they can connect with each other."*

- Douglas Cardinal



DOUGLAS CARDINAL ARCHITECT

Wakefield could soon have a residential development unique in Canada and built by award winning architect Douglas Cardinal. His clustered housing approach (above) will have a lesser footprint on the earth as well as bringing people together. If permits are approved the first model home could be on the site by September this year.

How does a sleepy village snag the man who designed the Canadian Museum of History for a humble housing development? It's just a simple phone call, says Christopher Minnes, owner of the site for the prospective project. Minnes had a conversation with friend and Hills resident Gerry Morgan about the housing project for his land and, from that, a seed was planted. "He said, 'there's only

one person who can do this,'" said Minnes. "You have to talk to Douglas Cardinal."

"[Morgan] persistently reached out to Douglas," said Minnes, and the rest is history.

The proposed project, which still needs to be ratified by the Municipality of La Pêche, sits on a 161-acre site and will have up to 120 units of mixed-use buildings, including residential

and commercial. Cardinal has designed properties for the first phase of the project. Minnes says the development will roll out in phases, and of the 120 units, he estimates around 100 will be residential and 20 commercial. Just shy of 19 acres adjacent to Hwy 105 will be a 'multifunctional' zone that will be used for light- to medium-commercial purposes. The site

also encompasses 13 acres of park and trails, and 41 acres will be used for Eco Echo, the environmental campus Minnes co-founded in 2008. Minnes sees the completion of the 120 units as taking about 15 to 20 years.

Cardinal has drawn several master plans similar to his vision for Ferme Minnes Farm for aboriginal communities in northern Canada, but this is

the first non-aboriginal project he's worked on in Canada in this style. The architect, whose father was Anishinaabe, has been working with aboriginal communities for over 50 years and takes a lot of his inspiration for his designs from aboriginal culture.

The project aims to be a break from conventional housing developments, said Cardinal. "I don't see any value in doing same old, same old because I don't think it works for anybody," he said. He makes no apologies when he describes the current model of housing developments as being "designed around the anus of the community." Cardinal says modern housing is always designed around sewage systems with "no respect for the land or the beauty of the area."

The 83-year-old architect is blunt in his disdain for modern residential development and its general one-house-per-acre footprint. "You're disconnecting people when you do that," he said. "I feel it's important to cluster groups of people together so they can connect with each other."

Cardinal's design clusters eight houses around a common green space. It's a design that

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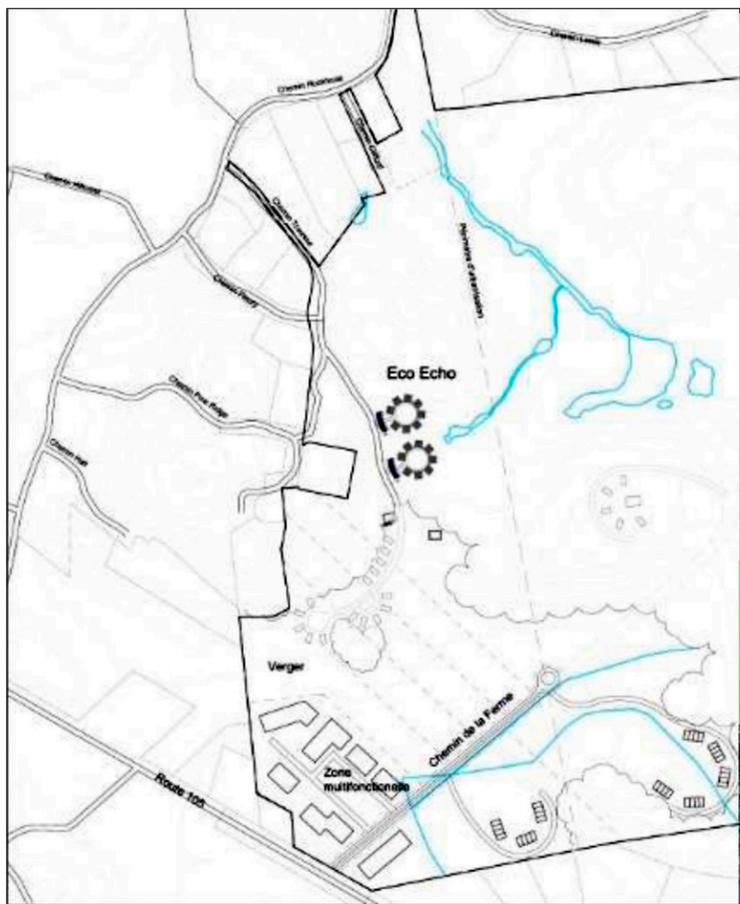
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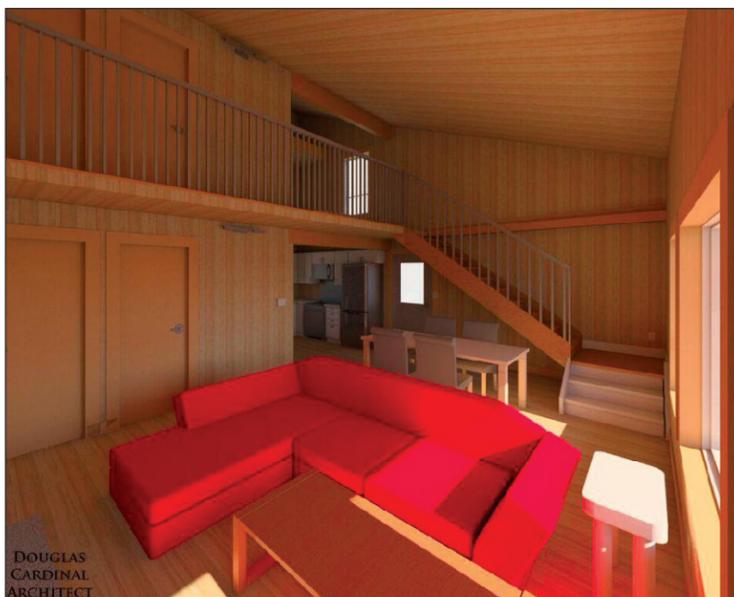
# Clustered for a smaller footprint and greater connection



draws inspiration from traditional village squares, which were once part of communities all over the world. By clustering properties, the footprint of the development becomes much smaller, leaving far more natural green space and having a lighter impact on the environment, says Cardinal. The properties' garages are located at a central point away from the buildings themselves, which means fewer roads are needed

and the footprint is smaller and therefore less destructive to nature. The houses sit roughly 10 feet from each other and have approximately 1,200 square feet of living space. They're built using cross-laminated timber. This construction method, Cardinal says, is more sustainable, much more energy efficient, and less costly than conventional building.

To produce cross-laminated timber, wood is dried in a kiln



Top left: The proposed site for the development in La Pêche. Above top: Rendering of a 1200 square foot, three bedroom property. The houses will be constructed from cross laminated timber. Above: The inner circle of the clustered housing project  
Images courtesy Christopher Minnes

and then glued to another piece of wood. The process is repeated numerous times to create a thick plank. Cardinal says the product is so strong it can replace concrete in construction and can be used for high-rise buildings. The roofs of the houses will be made with cross-laminated timber so won't need traditional trusses.

"There's something special when you walk into an all wood house," said Cardinal. "You smell the wood, you feel the wood. Psychologically, it feels good."

The houses are prefabricated and produced in a factory in Stratford, Ontario. This method greatly reduces costs and ensures quality control is maintained. Cardinal is taking the technology used in modern highway construction to build the foundations of the houses. A base of 12-inch thick Styrofoam is braced with cross-laminated timber covered in fibreglass. This makes for excellent foundations, says the architect, and is less "invasive to the land." It's the first time the method is be-

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*- Douglas Cardinal*

ing used in Canada, he says.

"We're looking at alternative solar power, we're looking at an alternative sewage system," said Cardinal. The idea behind clustered housing means that only one well should be needed for water per cluster. Cardinal says new septic technology may mean only one tank will be needed per cluster.

"All the principles that I used with the National Research Council when I designed the [Canadian] museum [of History], I applied to the houses," said Cardinal.

Minnes says properties will be built to order: the original design can be tweaked and customized. Once phase one is complete, Minnes says the site could be open to other developers and builders, providing their approach fits into the philosophy of the master plan.

"We're hoping to attract like-minded people to do similar buildings," said Minnes, who confirms two or three firms are interested in the proposal for the future.

Minnes hopes that, if all goes to plan, and the municipality rezones the site and issues building permits, the first couple of show homes could be up by September. He said it's too early to give an idea of prices, as final costs have not yet been calculated.

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