

WEEKEND EXTRA



Rendering of the new open-air luxury outlet centre planned for Vancouver airport.

The mall moves outdoors

Traditional shopping centres are being reinvented by developers as open-air emporiums

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Hear the term High Street and you'll likely envision the main business street of a city, teeming with shoppers scurrying from store to store in a bustling, open-air, pedestrian-friendly environment.

The tree-lined street has restaurants, cafes, bars and probably a public plaza where people can socialize and take a break from their busy day.

It's an outdoor image through and through.

Today, indoor shopping centres have embraced the High Street concept en masse to inject life into malls searching for an effective new way to entice consumers.

Metro Vancouver malls such as Oakridge, Park Royal, Brentwood, Lougheed and others have ambitious plans to create more outdoor streetfront retailing options for shoppers who used to prefer the cosy confines of enclosed shopping centres.

"People like the feel of a busy street with shops and activity flowing onto the street — there's comfort in that," said Shape Properties executive vice-president Darren Kwiatkowski. "Indoor malls have been around a long time and they can be very inward-looking and single-purpose. It's time for a fresh look."

Shape has huge redevelopment plans for Brentwood, the central Burnaby mall that has had several facelifts since opening in 1961.

The latest upgrade — to cost up to \$1 billion when fully completed — will amount to a total body makeover and open-air retailing plays a significant role in the new look.

Surface parking will shift underground so people arriving by SkyTrain can walk straight into a one-acre public plaza filled with trees, lined with shops and flanked by two high-rise residential towers.

Total retail space in the shopping centre will climb from 550,000 square feet to one million square feet when Phase 1 of the project is finished by late 2017. Longer-term plans call for 1.3 million square feet of retail space, 11 residential towers and two office towers.

Kwiatkowski said the project reflects the growing trend to urbanization — with transit access, a mixture of indoor and outdoor retailing and high-density housing creating a more sustainable town centre.

"Brentwood isn't downtown Vancouver but it's very central to the region," he said.

SFU Community Trust president Gordon Harris, an urban planner overseeing the development of the UniverCity community on Burnaby Mountain, said new outdoor retailing projects can fit in well with high-density, mixed-use developments.

"Many of these sites are located next door to spectacular urban transit so the idea is to put in a mix of uses — particularly residential — in high-transit service corridors," he said. "We're building town centres on what used to be auto-oriented shopping centre sites."

Vancouver retail consultant David Ian Gray feels developers and city planners are driving the open-air retailing trend more than consumers and retailers.

"When it's done right, it's set up for a shopper who wants a more leisurely experiential shopping trip but not everybody wants that," said the DIG360 founder. "Streetfront retail has always been popular. This is just more manufactured — a little



Rendering of the new open-air shopping centre planned for Brentwood, a mall in central Burnaby undergoing a major transformation.

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SHAPE PROPERTIES EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

more Disneyesque.”

But Gray agrees many shoppers want a change as they find enclosed malls to be “mind-numbing.”

“They can make them a little more interesting by adding fountains and other features but it's still stale air and artificial lighting,” he said.

New residential towers often complement new open-air retailing projects and Form Retail Advisors principal Derick Fluker feels those towers are the real driver behind the High Street retailing trend.

“A lot of retail development is driven by the condos above and they don't know what else to do with the main floor,” he said. “Ninety-nine times out of 100, developers are wondering how to

create the nicest retail experience to help sell the condos. In some ways, there's more retail being built than the market is actually demanding.”

Fluker said fashion retailers typically do best in an enclosed-mall environment, noting one of Lululemon's most successful stores is in West Edmonton Mall. But Lululemon and Aritzia — another successful Vancouver-based fashion chain — both operate outdoor streetfront stores in Park Royal.

Lululemon likes the “creative leeway” outdoor locations often provide when it comes to designing storefront exteriors and providing extra amenities.

“Our storefront exterior designs often reflect the community we are joining and become the subject of curiosity, which in turn, leads to future shoppers of our brand,” Lululemon vice-president of store development Wynn Spencer said in an email response to questions.

He noted its Burlington, Vt., location used two gondolas to create an eye-catching and locally-relevant storefront in a strong ski community, while its Tulsa, Okla., store offers outdoor community yoga classes on a rooftop patio.

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The mall moves outdoors

Spencer said it makes sense to have an indoor mall location in Edmonton because of the city's cold winters. But stores in enclosed malls can sometimes be restricted to traditional mall hours, which can work against Lululemon's free run groups and in-store yoga classes.

A new open-air designer outlet mall will open near Vancouver International Airport next year on a 12-hectare site next to a Canada Line station. U.K.-based developer McArthurGlen Group promises luxury piazzas, pedestrian-friendly walkways and tree-lined streets in a shopping centre that will likely feature high-end brand names such as Prada, Armani and Burberry.

McArthurGlen operates 20 outlet centres throughout Europe and 17 of them are open-air malls.

"We think open-air shopping is more pleasant and relaxing than being in an enclosed mall," McArthurGlen North American development director Joan Jove said in an interview. "We want outlet shopping to be different than conventional shopping, to be more of an experience and a day out."

The new outlet centre will also feature a large fountain and a covered, open-air children's playground. Jove knows it rains a lot in Vancouver but noted his company operates successful outdoor retail centres in northern Europe, where it is also very rainy.

"Even when it rains, many people still come to the open-air centre because they have umbrellas, there are awnings and there's protection inside the stores," he said.

Jove said it costs less to build and operate an open-air shopping centre because less enclosed space leads to lower heating and air conditioning



Renderings of the new open-air luxury outlet centre planned for YVR. Bottom left: Rendering of the new open-air shopping planned for Brentwood in Burnaby. Bottom right: Rendering of the new open-air shopping planned for Park Royal.

costs throughout the year.

Park Royal Shopping Centre vice-president Rick Amantea agrees costs are lower with outdoor centres but feels the

savings are not as substantial as one might think, because it can be expensive to provide the right outdoor amenities — such as lighting, public art,

quality landscaping and water features.

Park Royal opened Canada's first open-air "lifestyle centre" — Village at Park Royal

— nearly 10 years ago.

"We don't walk into these things because they offer huge money savings," Amantea said. "What you don't spend to roof

and enclose and provide heating and lighting, you spend on outdoor improvements if you do it properly."

The original Village at Park Royal had 250,000 square feet of retail space but a recent expansion has added about 150,000 square feet of space, including Aritzia's new 7,000-square-foot store.

Like many other malls, Park Royal wants to add more residential development over time, including two new towers — 24 storeys and 19 storeys — it hopes to build over the next two to three years.

"Having more residential on site drives the opportunity for us to become less of a regional shopping centre and more of a neighbourhood centre," Amantea said.

The open-air retailing, public-plaza concept plays a major role in the proposed redevelopment of Oakridge, which envisions a doubling of retail space and 13 residential towers to accommodate about 4,500 new residents.

Stantec Architecture senior principal Darren Burns, who helped design the ambitious project, said a renewed focus on outdoor retailing and outdoor public spaces should provide new opportunities for Oakridge tenants.

"From a retailing perspective, you're looking at the possibility of extending your hours and having restaurants and entertainment activities that otherwise wouldn't occur in a solely interior environment," he said.

Amantea said the open-air retailing trend has forced Park Royal to change its thinking about how it provides a more "customer-centric experiential environment."

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