

UPPER LANDS STUDY REVIEW
working group **draft** report
PART I: RECOMMENDATIONS

March 10, 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION - OUR WORKING GROUP REVIEW

The Upper Lands are a part of our community's identity, lifestyle and heritage. These lands harbour significant environmental and ecological features and systems, and offer a seemingly endless range of recreational opportunities. A portion of the Upper Lands will also become future neighbourhoods that West Vancouver residents will call home.

Decisions about this area impact the wider community. Existing policy is 10-15 years old and, in conjunction with new environmental knowledge and renewed community engagement, a citizen-led review of existing policy took place 2012-2015 to ensure a community-based vision and sound principles are in place to guide the future of this area. This review was conducted by our Working Group of Council-appointed citizens.

Part One of this Final Report outlines the findings of our review and presents our recommendations. An accompanying Part Two: Background provides more extensive context, with a detailed account of our community and stakeholder engagement process, our analysis of the existing policy and regulatory frameworks, and our assessment of the lands themselves.



A view of the Upper Lands, looking eastward from the western edge



Our Working Group was comprised of nine citizen volunteers:

- Ashley Willard Bauman and Andy Krawczyk (co-chairs)
- Alan Bardsley, Rebecca Buchanan, Saba Farmand, Mike Phillipoff, Heather Johnston, Graham Nicholls and Brian Walker (members)

Councillors Craig Cameron and Trish Panz served as Council Liaisons, and David Hawkins was the primary Staff Liaison.

The District's intent in reviewing Upper Lands policies was to help identify which lands should be preserved, which lands could be developed, the kinds of development that would make sense, and the types of public uses that should be maintained.

In conducting this review, our Working Group has sought to do the following:

- To provide greater certainty and clarity regarding the future of the Upper Lands for the next 50 years, and potentially beyond
- To engage the community of West Vancouver in developing a high-level vision for the Upper Lands
- To provide a platform for a subsequent review of the District's Official Community Plan (OCP) regarding the Upper Lands
- To respect the interests of stewardship groups, landowners, and other stakeholders in proposing strategies for managing the Upper Lands
- To reaffirm how unique and valuable the Upper Lands are within the broader municipal and regional contexts.



The Study Area is shown below. It comprises approximately 6000 acres of undeveloped public and private lands, representing around 28% of West Vancouver's total land area.



Upper Lands study area

The accompanying Part Two: Background provides a comprehensive analysis of the features, regulations, ownership, environmental values, and recreational uses of these lands. Some key characteristics of this area are as follows:

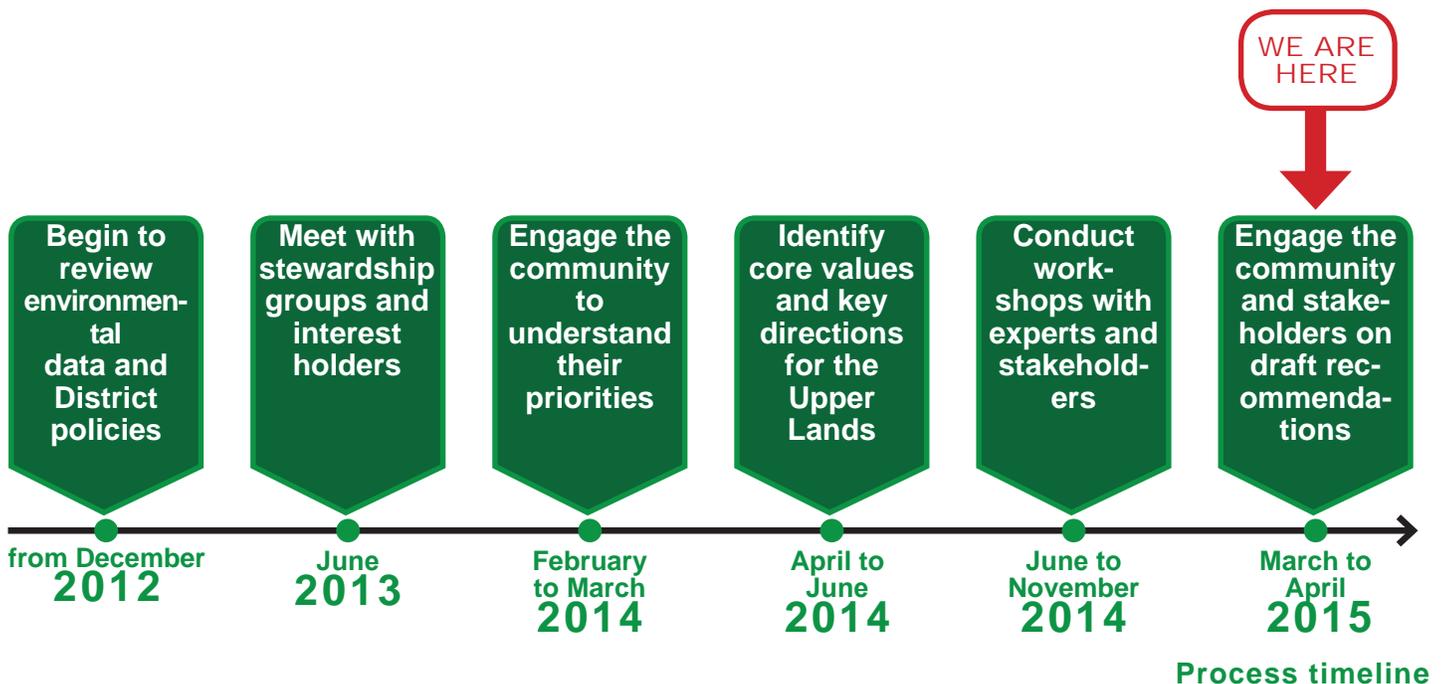
- Lands below 1200 feet in elevation are zoned for residential uses and designated “Future Neighbourhoods” in the current OCP, while lands above 1200 feet are zoned for community use and designated “Limited Use and Recreation”.
- British Pacific Properties are the majority landowner below 1200 feet, but also have significant holdings above and immediately contiguous to the 1200 foot contour (generally up to the Trans Canada trail).
- West Vancouver municipality is the majority landowner above 1200 feet, but also has significant holdings below 1200 feet, notably around Whyte Lake and around the first switchback (the works yard site).
- Recreational trails run across the Upper Lands, with a concentration in the central and eastern portions. Many trails – including some highly valued mountain bike trails – exist as unsanctioned uses on privately owned land.
- Other recreational features include the historic Hollyburn Cabins area (northeast of the fourth switchback) of public land that has accommodated rustic cabins for nearly a century. There are currently around 100 cabins.
- There are a range of ecosystems in the Upper Lands with varying degrees of environmental sensitivity and value. In general most of the environmentally sensitive areas are above 1200 feet on public land (where forests can be protected). However, there are important environmental features and systems on public and private land below 1200 feet.



2. RESPONDING TO THE COMMUNITY: A VALUES-BASED APPROACH

Our Working Group typically met twice monthly, allowing for ongoing dialogue with the community through public comments and written correspondence. In addition to these regular meetings, formal community engagement to date has included three public open houses, two input forums with stewardship groups and interest holders, four workshop sessions with local experts and stakeholders, and a community questionnaire that received almost 200 responses. Full summaries of these consultations are appended to Part Two: Background of our Final Report.

Our process is currently entering its final stage, with the draft recommendations proposed in this report the subject of community and stakeholder consultation. These draft recommendations will then be reviewed and revised as appropriate, before submitting **our final recommendations to Council in June 2015**.



The diverse meetings of the last 30 months provided opportunities for mutual learning, as individuals and groups shared their own knowledge and perspectives on the Upper Lands and how they use this area. A deep attachment and passion for the Upper Lands was evident throughout these exchanges, with the following three core values identified (in order of importance) as those that reflect the community's priorities for the management of these lands:

- the **environmental features and systems** of the Upper Lands, and their immense, contiguous, natural beauty
- the **outstanding recreation opportunities** of the Upper Lands, and the lifestyle and heritage associated with 'outdoor living'
- a **certain kind of neighbourhood model** (one that 'works' with nature, and is desirable, vibrant, inclusive, compact, and sustainable)

The draft recommendations provided in the next section respect and respond to these core community values. Using the "environment", "recreation", and "future neighbourhoods" as values-based organizing principles, our recommendations reflect the range of community interests we heard during our review process and seek to balance them appropriately, understanding that different interests are not mutually exclusive, and are in fact often synergistic.



A creek running through the forest in the Upper Lands



3. GUIDING THE UPPER LANDS: WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The draft recommendations presented for community consultation in this section are organized into the three guiding community value areas of Environment, Recreation, and Future Neighbourhoods.

While presented as sub-sections, it is important to understand the overlap between these three community values and our strategic approach to them. For example: one of the reasons people value recreation in the Upper Lands so highly is because of the pristine natural environment they enjoy there; at the same time, all forms of recreation impact the land and therefore need to be managed. Again, for example: the community is cautious about new development's environmental impact; yet clustering development into smaller, but higher density areas is a means of permanently protecting larger, more environmentally important areas from being developed at all.

In this way, the recommendations under each sub-section are intended to work together. Given the size of the study area (some 6000 acres), our recommendations are necessarily strategic and high-level in nature. Implementation-level decisions will be made by Council as they arise, with further planning and public input at that time. Each sub-section begins with a brief discussion of the issues our recommendations are seeking to address. More extensive context (analysis of the lands, existing policies and regulations, community interests) can be found in the accompanying Part Two: Background.



A wayfinding sign on a trail



3.1 Environment

The Upper Lands are a regionally significant repository of environmental features and systems, including old growth forests, steep terrains, creeks and wetlands, and a range of habitat types. The special characteristics of these lands are highly valued by the community and the many dedicated local stewardship groups such as the Old Growth Conservancy Society, Friends of Cypress Provincial Park, and West Vancouver Stream-keeper Society who are active in the area.

Protecting the “environmental features and systems of the Upper Lands, and their immense, contiguous, natural beauty” was identified as the community’s most important value for the Upper Lands.



The Upper Lands include a range of vegetation and watercourses



3.1.1 Environment Recommendations for Lands above 1200 Feet

Discussion

The 1200-foot contour line is currently used in the OCP to establish the limits of residential development, with lands below 1200 feet designated for “Future Neighbourhoods” and lands above designated for “Limited Use and Recreation”. The OCP also provides for the consideration of potentially allowing residential development above 1200 feet.

Our review process identified a clear community concern with the possibility of varying the 1200 foot development restriction; and a recent ecosystem inventory indicates that the majority of more environmentally sensitive lands are above 1200 feet. Conversely, lands at lower elevations are more likely to have been previously disturbed and are closer to existing infrastructure.

Maximizing environmental protection of lands above 1200 feet is a community priority. To this end, we are recommending restricting residential development in this area (i.e. maintaining the “Limited Use and Recreation” land use designation); permanently protecting municipally owned lands as dedicated parkland; and seeking to acquire isolated private lots so a contiguous forest system can be maintained. For the historic Hollyburn Cabins area, where recreational cabins have existed for almost 100 years, environmental best practices should inform the stewardship of this area.



Forest preservation is a community priority



To protect environmental values above 1200 feet, our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.1.1.1** The current restriction preventing residential development above the 1200-foot contour line be maintained without further consideration of a 1200-foot contour variation.
- 3.1.1.2** Municipally owned lands above 1200 feet be permanently protected as dedicated parkland.
- 3.1.1.3** West Vancouver seek municipal ownership of private lands that are surrounded by municipal lands above 1200 feet, including District Lots 1123, 1133 and 806, with a priority placed on lands with intact forests.
- 3.1.1.4** A long term strategy for the management of the Hollyburn Cabins area be formulated on completion of an environmental assessment of this area; and
- 3.1.1.5** In the interim, the District of West Vancouver Parks Department continue its joint stewardship with the Hollyburn Ridge Association to follow environmental best practices in the ongoing management of the Hollyburn Cabins area.



3.1.2 Environment Recommendations for Lands below 1200 Feet

Discussion

While the majority of more sensitive lands are located above 1200 feet in elevation, there are also environmentally sensitive areas and significant natural features below 1200 feet – such as the Eagleridge Bluffs and the area around Whyte Lake – and existing forest systems that sequester carbon and provide habitat.

A major outcome of our review is to recommend that the developable area (below 1200 feet) be further limited by using Eagle Creek as the general westernmost limit for future residential development, with the exact boundary of residential development to be determined after detailed environmental analysis of the lands in this area. This would reduce the lands designated for “Future Neighbourhoods” from 1400 acres down to around 500 acres, which represents well below 10% of the Upper Lands.

Increasing density in the limited areas where development may occur will significantly reduce the overall development footprint. Our recommendations seek to guide development in this reduced area by undertaking detailed “sieve analyses” to identify environmental values by type (e.g. slope, vegetation, watercourse), and then protect high value areas by transferring their development potential to other less sensitive areas.



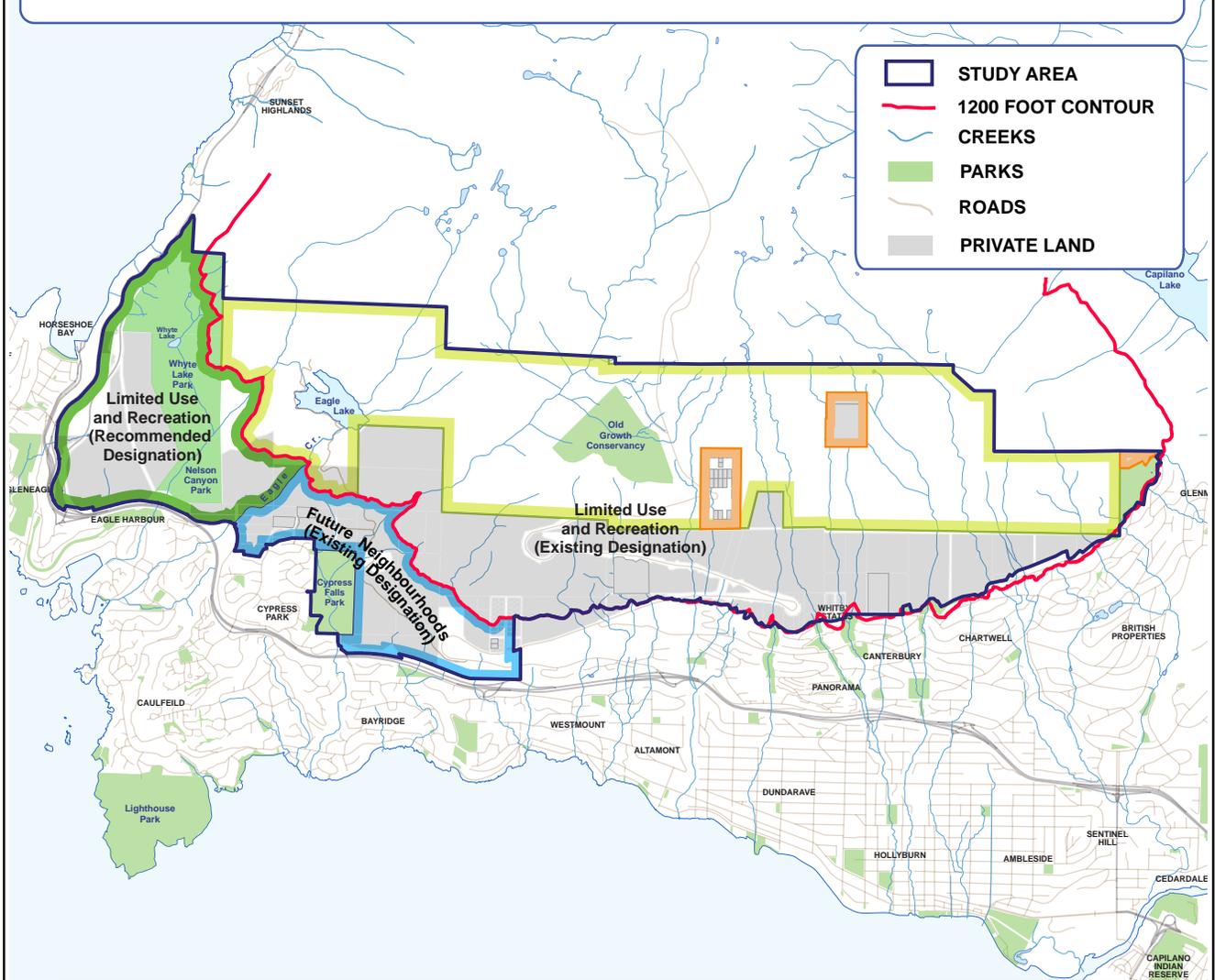
A tree near Whyte Lake Park, now protected as parkland

To protect environmental values below 1200 feet, our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.1.2.1** The residential development potential of lands west of Eagle Creek be transferred to lands east of Eagle Creek and:
- a) the area west of Eagle Creek re-designated for “Limited Use and Recreation; and
 - b) public lands west of Eagle Creek protected as dedicated parkland.
- 3.1.2.2** A comprehensive environmental sieve analysis of lands east of Eagle Creek be undertaken during the preparation of Area Development Plan(s) to identify environmentally sensitive areas and features of local ecological importance.
- 3.1.2.3** In accordance with the findings of the environmental sieve analysis, density variations and development transfers be used to:
- a) protect environmentally sensitive areas and features of local ecological importance;
 - b) maximize contiguous areas to be protected from development;
 - c) protect a range of habitat types and ecosystems (e.g. wetlands, creek corridors, rocky bluffs, different forest types, meadows, etc.);
 - d) provide functioning wildlife corridors and connections;
 - e) establish a ‘soft edge’ of development and appropriate urban-forest interface;
 - f) achieve the development of sustainable and compact communities described in the Future Neighbourhoods section.
- 3.1.2.4** The long-term use of lands west of Eagle Creek be informed by an understanding of the environmental value and local ecological importance of these lands.



Illustrative Map: Environment



Key Components of our Working Group's Draft Recommendations:

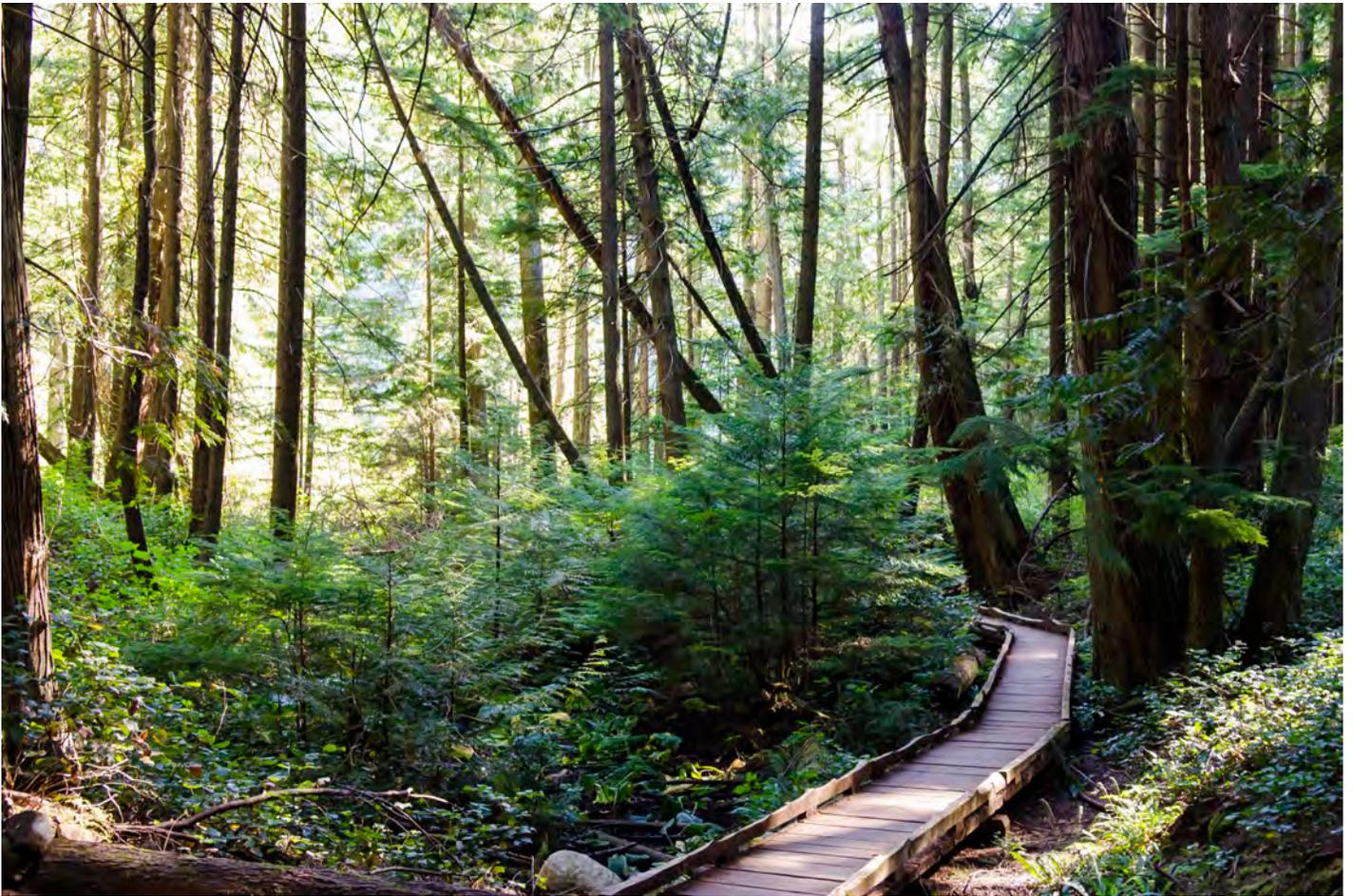
-  Municipally owned lands above 1200 feet would be permanently protected as dedicated parkland
-  Municipal ownership would be sought for private lands that are surrounded by municipal lands above 1200 feet, with a priority placed on lands with intact forests
-  Residential development potential from lands below 1200 feet west of Eagle Creek would be transferred to lands east of Eagle Creek below 1200 feet:
 - lands west of Eagle Creek re-designated for "Limited Use and Recreation"
 - public lands west of Eagle Creek protected as dedicated parkland
-  Environmental analysis of lands east of Eagle Creek below 1200 feet would identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas and ecologically important features during neighbourhood planning for this area



3.2 Recreation

Recreation in the Upper Lands has a history that spans from early twentieth century skiing, hiking and cabin-building right up to the 2010 Winter Olympics and the technical mountain bike trails of today. With its range of active and passive activities, mountain recreation in the Upper Lands is a key component of our community's lifestyle and identity and a regional asset.

Enhancing the “outstanding recreation opportunities of the Upper Lands, and the lifestyle and heritage associated with outdoor living” was identified as the community's second most important value for the Upper Lands.



There is a long history of recreation in the Upper Lands



3.2.1 Recreation Recommendations for Trails in the Upper Lands

Discussion

An extensive range of recreational activities take place in the Upper Lands, with most relying on the formal and informal trail network. Many trails are regionally significant and the use of this trail network can be anticipated to increase. Our recommendations seek to advance implementation of the recent 2012 Parks Master Plan, specifically in its directions to manage and enhance the overall trail system.

Different groups and individuals have different recreational needs and use trails in different ways. Our Working Group's recommendations envision the preparation of a Trails Plan as a forum for bringing diverse groups together, and then as a tool for balancing the needs of different users and aligning them with the community's objectives for environmental protection.

While many recreational activities are permitted uses on public lands, unsanctioned trails exist on private lands, presenting potential liability issues for the landowner and an absence of long-term stability for the recreational users. In these instances there is a specific need to work with landowners to respect their rights, while seeking to maintain the overall recreational experiences of the Upper Lands.



Photo: Clayton Racicot Photography

Mountain biking has become an increasingly popular recreational activity in the Upper Lands

To enhance the trail system and manage trail use above and below 1200 feet, our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.2.1.1** A Trails Plan be prepared in consultation with private landowners and stewardship and stakeholder groups that respects the needs of landowners and different users, and balances recreational uses with the community's environmental and cultural values.
- 3.2.1.2** The Trails Plan be used to advance policy directions of the Parks Master Plan relating to:
 - a) diversity and quality of trail experiences;
 - b) trail network and connectivity;
 - c) environmental management and protection;
 - d) orientation and signage;
 - e) involvement of stewardship and stakeholder groups in Plan implementation;
 - f) parking and infrastructure;
 - g) access, accessibility and safety;
 - h) potential revenue generation.
- 3.2.1.3** Consideration be given in the preparation of the Trails Plan to the merits of a trail network that comprises both joint-use trails (for various trail users) and single-use trails (e.g. downhill mountain bike trails).
- 3.2.1.4** Consideration also be given in the preparation of the Trails Plan to other, non-trails based recreational activities.
- 3.2.1.5** West Vancouver continue to work with private landowners and seek public ownership of private lands with high potential to be used for recreation.



3.2.2 Recreation Recommendations for Planning New Neighbourhoods

Discussion

The 2004 OCP requires mapping of environmental values to guide development below 1200 feet, and provides for the use of density variations and development transfers to protect environmentally sensitive lands. However, there is no existing policy requirement to take recreational assets into consideration when planning new neighbourhoods.

Our recommendations seek to supplement the existing area development planning process to identify recreational assets such as trails, enable their management, and respond to them in the design of new neighbourhoods and location of new buildings.

Many trails, including highly valued mountain bike trails, exist within and around the anticipated location of the future Cypress Village. There is an opportunity to embed recreational uses into the planning and design of this village as a component of its sense of place, with the possibility of acquiring private land with high recreational value as an amenity for the future village.



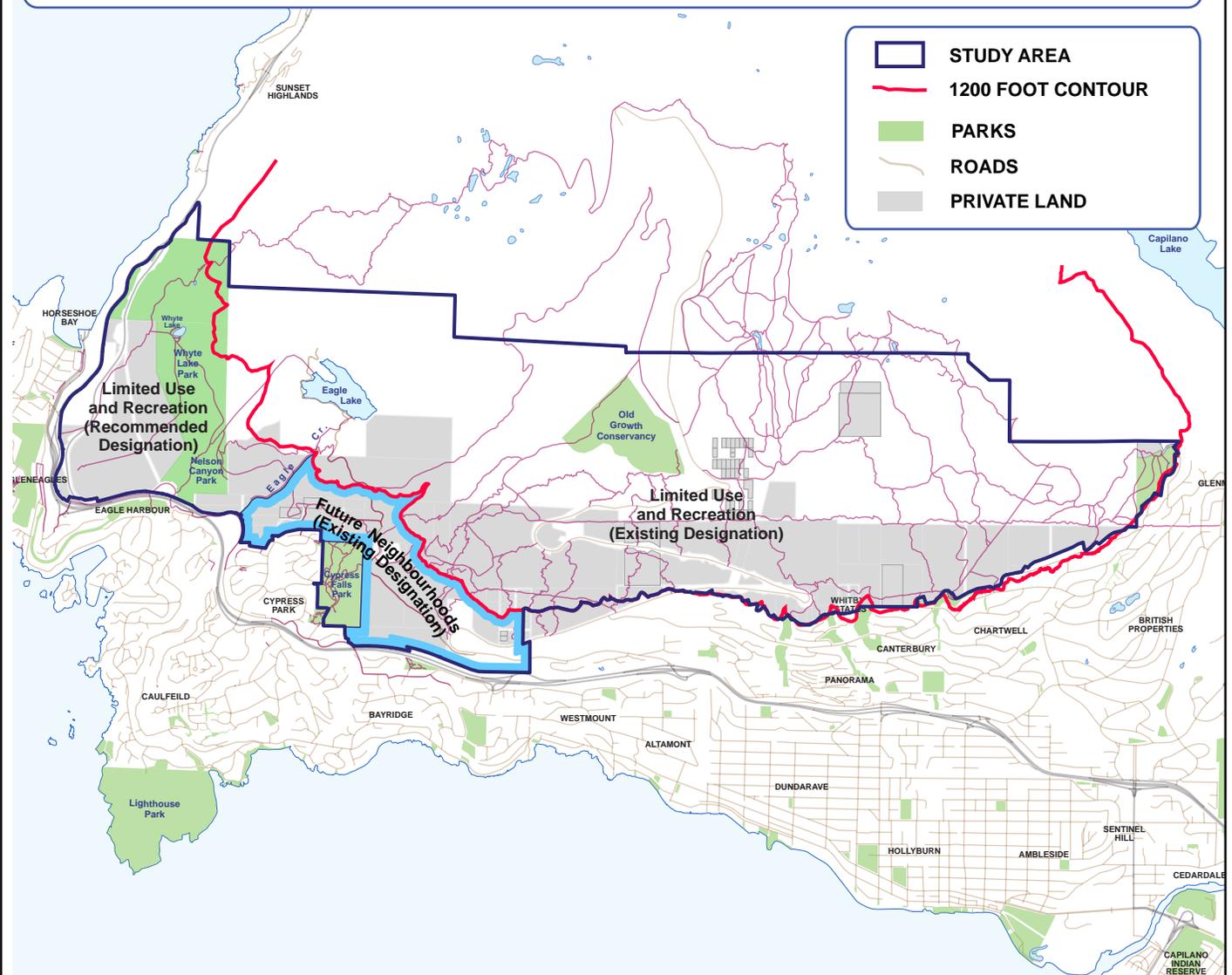
A trail in Cypress Falls, a dedicated park in proximity to the future Cypress Village

To incorporate recreation into the planning process for new neighbourhoods below 1200 feet, our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.2.2.1** A review of recreational features be incorporated into the sieve analysis process to guide the development of Future Neighbourhoods below 1200 feet east of Eagle Creek.
- 3.2.2.2** Preferred trail corridors and a sanctioned trail maintenance strategy be identified and implemented early in the Area Development Plan process for Cypress Village.
- 3.2.2.3** Planning for Cypress Village include consideration of recreational uses in the adjacent area above 1200 feet to provide for trail connectivity and potential recreational amenities.



Illustrative Map: Recreation



Key Components of our Working Group's Draft Recommendations:



Trails Plan would be prepared to respect the needs of different users and balance recreational uses with the community's environmental and cultural values:

- address trail network connectivity, environmental management, orientation and signage, and other priorities
- seek public ownership of private lands with high recreation potential (all trails shown on privately-owned lands are unauthorized except for the Trans Canada Trail)



Recreational features would be reviewed during planning of Future Neighbourhoods below 1200 feet east of Eagle Creek:

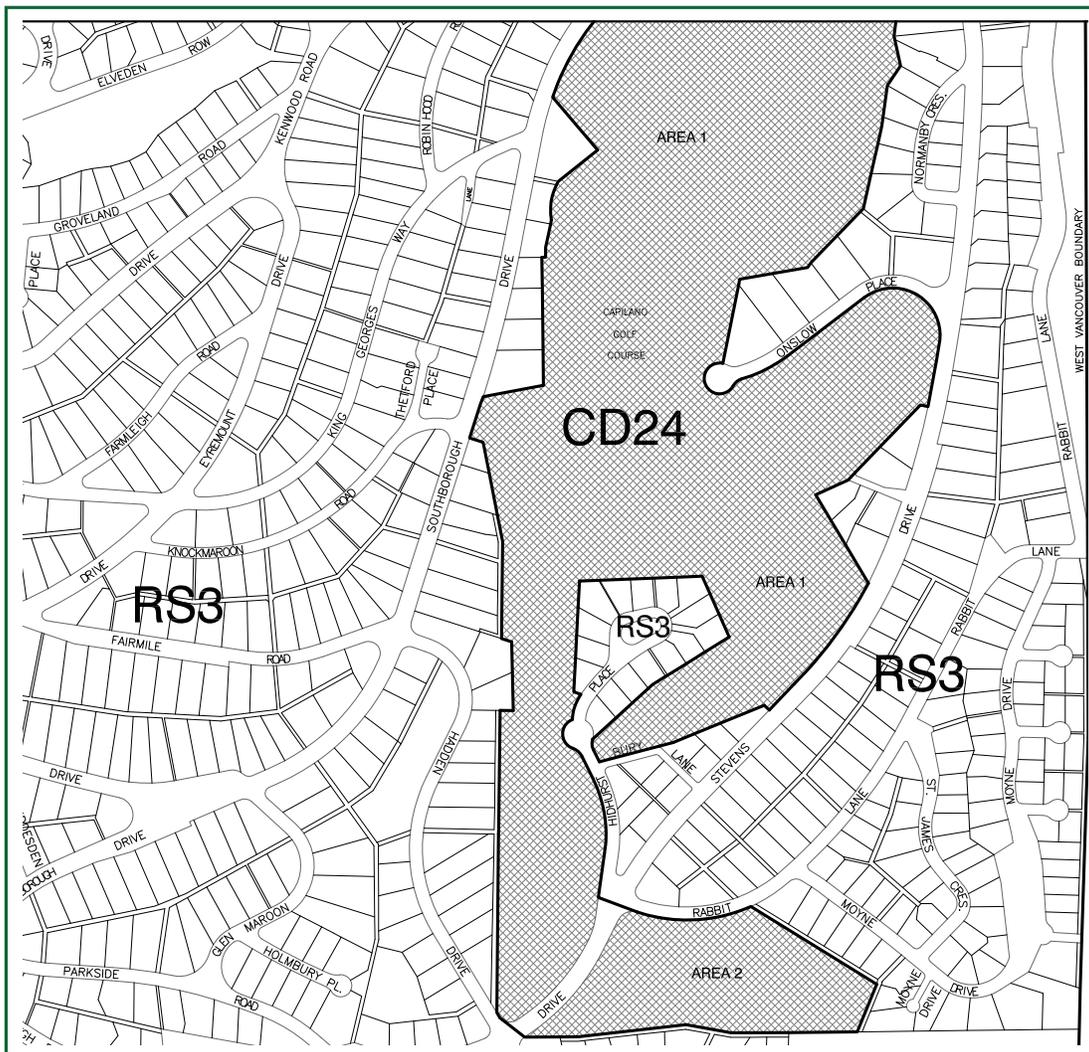
- Cypress Village planning identifies preferred trail corridors and maintenance strategy
- Cypress Village planning considers recreational uses in adjacent area above 1200 feet to provide trail connectivity and recreational amenities



3.3 Future Neighbourhoods

Historically, residential development above the Highway has consisted predominantly of detached housing, often on large estate-sized lots. Environmental features and lands with high recreational potential have typically remained under private ownership. Beginning at the eastern boundary of West Vancouver, planning has occurred incrementally over the last 80 years, moving westwards, looking at one neighbourhood at a time. There are limited commercial services above the Highway, necessitating travel by car for residents to meet their daily needs.

Planning for “a certain kind of neighbourhood model (one that ‘works’ with nature, and is desirable, vibrant, inclusive, compact, and sustainable)” was identified as the community’s third most important value for the Upper Lands.



Example of a historical subdivision plan from an established neighbourhood above the highway, with large single family lots (zoned RS3) surrounding a private recreation facility (Capilano Golf Club, zoned CD24)



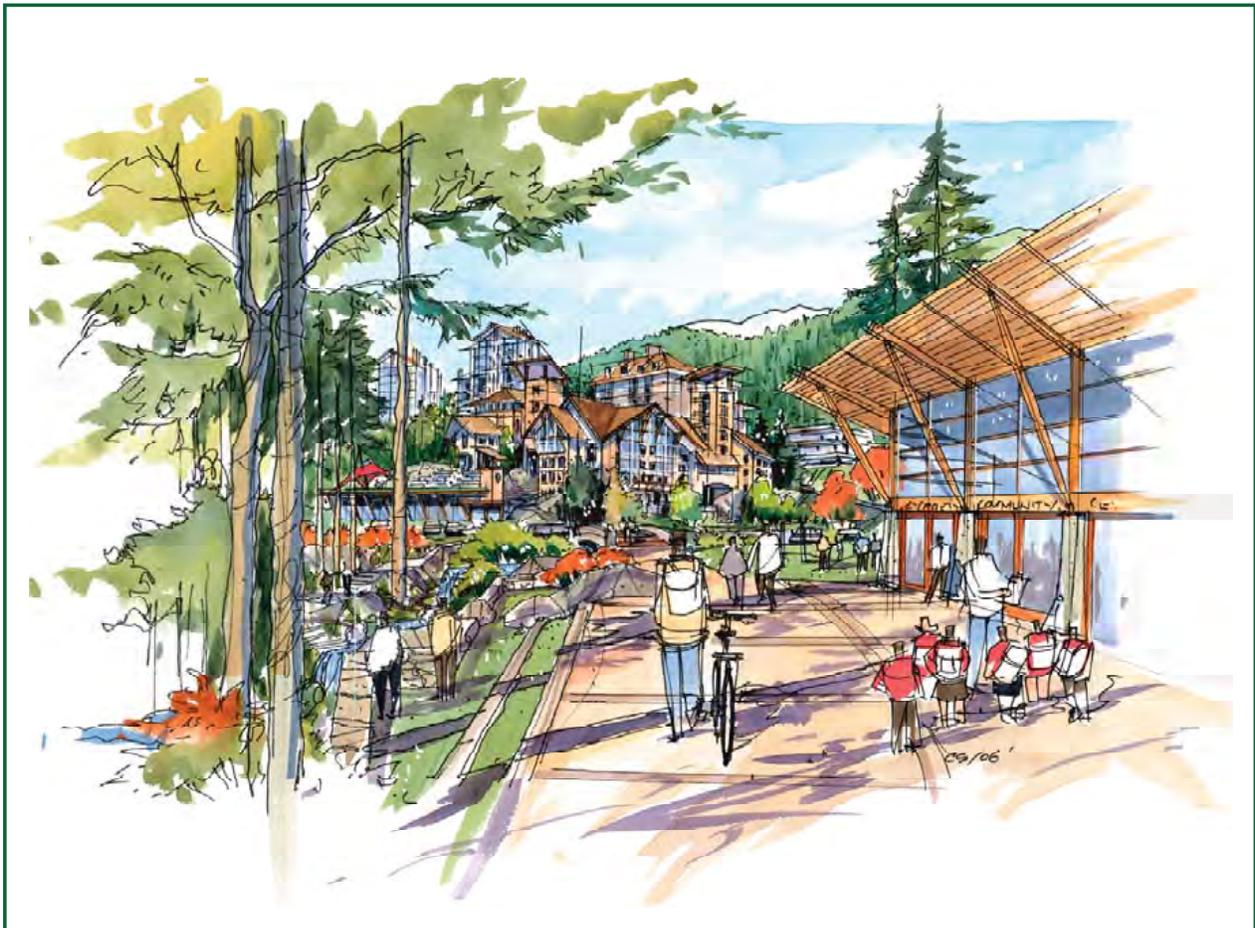
3.3.1 Future Neighbourhoods Recommendations for Lands below 1200 Feet

Discussion

Building on our previous recommendations to limit residential development to lands below 1200 feet and east of Eagle Creek, our fundamental direction is to make Cypress Village (generally located between Cave and Cypress Creeks) the focus of future neighbourhood development, with Cypress West (generally located between Cypress and Eagle Creeks) as a supporting residential community.

Whereas planning has previously occurred section by section moving westwards, our recommendation is to look at all remaining lands below 1200 feet as a whole to concentrate their development potential in and around a higher density, mixed-use village located in the area of the first switchback on Cypress Bowl Road. This approach will avoid piecemeal planning and a sprawling land use pattern that is high in infrastructure demands.

Clustering development provides a means to meet environmental and recreational goals (by preserving land for these purposes), and at the same time achieve sound community planning objectives. Our recommendations envision the compact development of diverse housing types that provide a residential base to support commercial uses in a sustainable village served by efficient infrastructure.



Early concepts (2006) envision a Mountain Path leading to a community centre and civic plaza in Cypress Village

To guide the development of future neighbourhoods below 1200 feet our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.3.1.1** Development be clustered around a mixed-use Cypress Village to minimize the area developed and required infrastructure, and to ensure a sustainable village with a strong sense of community.
- 3.3.1.2** The residential development potential from all remaining lands below 1200 feet west of Eagle Creek be transferred to:
 - a) the Cypress Village area (between Cave and Cypress Creeks) as the primary focus for future neighbourhood development in the Upper Lands;
 - b) and the Cypress West area (between Cypress and Eagle Creeks) as a secondary community supporting Cypress Village.
- 3.3.1.3** Density of development be regulated appropriately to meet environmental protection objectives, provide for a variety of housing types and tenures, and support commercial services in Cypress Village.
- 3.3.1.4** The community benefit of new development be maximized, through financial and in kind amenity contributions and the provision of necessary infrastructure and facilities.



3.3.2 Future Neighbourhoods Recommendations for Cypress Village and Cypress West

Discussion

Our recommendations for Cypress Village and Cypress West are intended to guide comprehensive planning at the more detailed level, to ensure that economic viability, community transportation and housing objectives, and excellence in urban design are achieved.

Shops and services, community amenities and facilities, and public transit all become more viable and efficient in higher density, walkable, multifamily, mixed-use nodes, as opposed to detached housing dispersed across an extensive area. Clustering development minimizes the amount of land impacted by development; our recommendations also speak to minimizing the impact of development on the land through ecologically-sensitive, sustainable design.

Our Working Group also recommends that a comprehensive housing mix be provided to support a diverse community. There is a significant opportunity when planning these new neighbourhoods to increase the community's housing options in a manner that would be harder to achieve in established neighbourhoods.



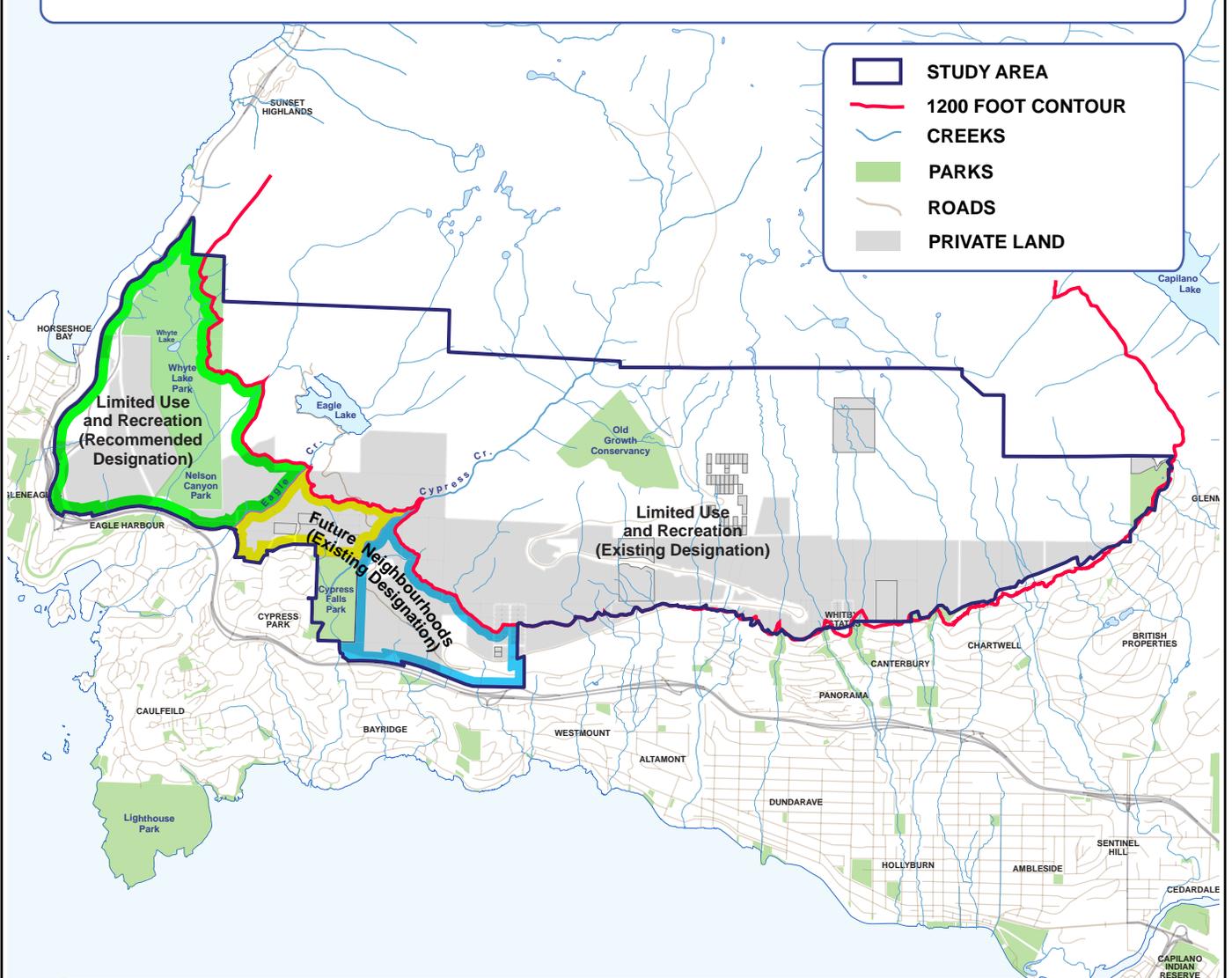
Early concepts (2006) envision Cypress Village as a transportation hub for mountain recreation with restaurants and retail.

To advance the planning of Cypress Village and Cypress West neighbourhoods our Working Group recommends that:

- 3.3.2.1** Cypress Village be established as a unique gateway to mountain recreation, incorporating distinctive uses and features (such as unique retail, a civic plaza, community and recreational facilities, and other public amenities) in addition to commercial and institutional uses that serve the local community.
- 3.3.2.2** An economic feasibility study be conducted to determine the viability and potential mix of commercial uses in Cypress Village and the required residential density to support a desired level of commercial development.
- 3.3.2.3** A range of housing types and unit sizes (including affordable, purpose built rental, family, and seniors housing) be included within the Cypress Village and Cypress West neighbourhoods to meet the needs of residents of different ages and incomes.
- 3.3.2.4** Cypress Village and Cypress West be 'designed with nature' by responding sensitively to terrain, creeks, vegetation, and other natural features and systems.
- 3.3.2.5** An integrated circulation network (for pedestrians, hikers, bicycles, transit and vehicles) be created to optimize movement to and through the new Cypress Village and Cypress West neighbourhoods.
- 3.3.2.6** Planning for Cypress Village commence on completion of the Upper Lands Study Review and implementation of this plan proceed as a District priority.



Illustrative Map: Future Neighbourhoods



Key Components of our Working Group's Draft Recommendations:



Residential development potential from lands below 1200 feet west of Eagle Creek would be transferred to lands east of Eagle Creek below 1200 feet



Cypress Village area would be the primary focus for future neighbourhood development in the Upper Lands:

- development clustered around a sustainable mixed-use village
- serves as a gateway to mountain recreation
- includes shops, services, transit, and community amenities / facilities
- provides a range of housing types for different ages and incomes
- village is 'designed with nature' and responds sensitively to its location



Cypress West area would be a secondary community supporting Cypress Village:

- provides a range of housing types for different ages and incomes
- neighbourhood is 'designed with nature' and responds sensitively to its location



CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS

The Upper Lands are a large area, with mixed environmental conditions and values, held under both private and public ownership, with different permitted uses, that host a range of community and recreational interests. A comprehensive description of the lands is contained in Part Two: Background of this report.

Our Working Group's review has sought to identify and analyze the information that should provide the context for future Council decisions, and to articulate the community's principles and values that should inform those decisions. The community's interest as we understand it is in preserving the land, while also enhancing recreational uses, and allowing for residential development that is accessible, sustainable, and in character with the surrounding lands.

The emerging vision that has emerged from our review to date and which would be realized through the implementation of our draft recommendations is of an Upper Lands where:

- there would be no residential development above 1200 feet or west of Eagle Creek
- a new OCP would designate over 90% of undeveloped lands as "Limited Use and Recreation"
- the portion of the Upper Lands designated for "Future Neighbourhoods" would be reduced from 25% (as in the current OCP) to less than 10%
- approximately 3000 acres of publicly-owned land would be dedicated in perpetuity as parkland
- diverse recreational activities would be managed in a balanced and responsible way through a Trails Plan
- privately-owned lands with high environmental and recreational value would be acquired and protected through a managed development planning process
- people would live in compact and sustainable neighbourhoods, clustered around the future Cypress Village, whose amenities and facilities would benefit the broader community
- a range of housing types in the Upper Lands would meet the needs of residents of different ages, abilities and incomes

We are now seeking feedback on the directions we are proposing for the Upper Lands. Further to that feedback, our draft recommendations will be reviewed and revised as appropriate before their presentation to Council.

It is anticipated that these strategic recommendations will then inform a range of future municipal initiatives and provide the foundation for amendments to District bylaws and policies as appropriate. Principal among these:

- Review of Upper Lands policies in the OCP
- Commencement of a Cypress Village Area Development Plan
- Preparation of a Trails Plan
- Amendments to MetroVancouver's Regional land Use Designations

