PROJECT PROFILE

Fair weather, fairways featured at Fairwinds

Master-planned community at Nanoose Bay has plenty to offer busy retirees and semi-retirees.

Bonnington Ridge at Fairwinds

Location: Nanoose Bay, ocean view and golf course frontage properties in the Fairwinds community

Project size/ scope: a strata development consisting of eight single-family lots ranging from 13,000 – 38,000 sq. ft. Part of the 2,500-home Fairwinds community

Prices: $209,000 – $319,000 (plus HST)

Monthly fees: The strata fees are $66 per month

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Developers: Fairwinds Real Estate Management

Occupancy: Properties are currently available

BY SUZANNE MORPHET

Imagine having a forested parkland bigger than Stanley Park as your backyard. And out front, a shoreline with spectacular ocean views. Throw in a 360-slip marina, an 18-hole golf course, a tennis court, 20 kilometres of hiking trails and an indoor swimming pool — and you've got Fairwinds Community and Resort, a master-planned community in Nanoose Bay on Vancouver Island.
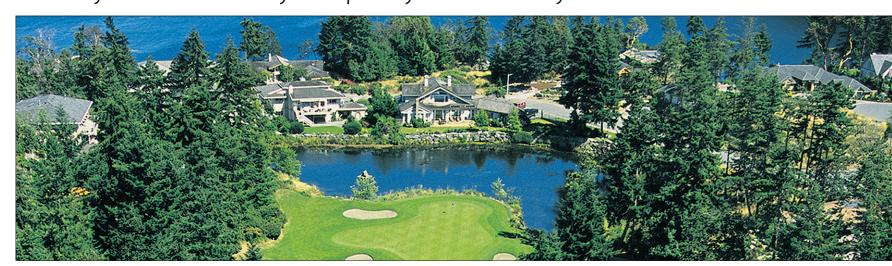
Located on a peninsula that juts into the Strait of Georgia between Nanaimo and Parksville, Fairwinds has something else going for it too: the weather.

"This is one of the driest spots on the east coast of the island. We get about eight inches less rain than Nanaimo a year," says Dave Scott, development manager for the property. "We even have cactus growing on it," he laughs.

Fairwinds largely attracts retired or semi-retired buyers, but they're active and the weather is conducive to their lifestyle. "I have an uncle who's 89 and goes out fishing just about every day," adds Scott.

Scott's father was one of the principals in the company that conceived of the oceanside development in the early 1980s. Even then, it was aimed at active adults – the Les Furber-designed par-71 golf course was the first completed piece of the puzzle.

The first homes came in 1988, and in 1999, the original investors sold the property to a pension fund, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation.

Today, Fairwinds has developed 720 single-family homes, town houses or lots for homes.

One of the newest neighbourhoods is Bonnington Ridge. Four of the eight lots on a cul-de-sac there have sold. Most have ocean views or are on the edge of the golf course, and are priced between $209,000 and $319,000.

Plans for 32 town houses, mostly duplex style and also at Bonnington Ridge, are in the approval process with the Nanaimo Regional District. Scott hopes to get the go-ahead for them later this year or early next.

In the meantime, in the adjacent Rockcliffe Park neighbourhood, 26 "patio" homes are under construction. A show home is available and 12 homes have been built, of which 10 have sold. These homes range from 1,600 to 3,000 square feet and are priced from $550,000 to $750,000.

Fairwinds doesn't design or build homes, but works with a builder. In the case of Rockcliffe Park, the homes are being built by Georgia Strait Development, a company with 35 years experience, including a couple of decades designing luxury homes and commercial developments in Whistler. "We reviewed their work," says Scott, "and were impressed with the high-end quality of their homes and felt that they would be a perfect fit for Fairwinds."

Neil Mawdsley, the owner of Georgia Strait Development, says the West Coast architecture of the homes at Rockcliffe Park was inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, with wood and stone accents, exposed beams, wide terraces, open floor plans and custom millwork. There are three design plans from which to choose.The homes incorporate state-of-the-art products such as kitchen countertops that Mawdsley says are better than granite. "It's called Silestone and it's a man-made quartz product ... how it's better than granite is that it doesn't need any sealers on it to keep things from absorbing into the product, but it also has a thing called Microban, an anti-bacterial inhibitor."

Silestone is probably the most expensive countertop available, according to Mawdsley, but he says price alone doesn't determine the products he uses. "We don't put the most expensive stuff in necessarily, but we put the stuff in that we know has been tried, tested and proven."

Another example is the windows in the homes at Rockcliffe Park. Made by West Coast Windows in Delta, they're highly efficient with low-E glass, a product that helps glass retain heat and can reduce energy loss by as much as 30 to 50 per cent, according to the Encyclopedia of Alternative Energy and Sustainable Living.

The homes and lots at both Rockcliffe Park and Bonnington Ridge are "bareland strata," meaning the roads are privately owned and maintained by the residents, along with any common land.

By the time it's all said and done, Fairwinds will be built out in about 20 years with 2,500 homes in total – at least that's according to the latest version of the master plan, which is just going through its first major revision since the original plan of 1983.

"We have a ways to go yet," says Scott, referring to the 1,780 homes yet to come. He adds the total is unlikely to change since it's been part of the Official Community Plan since the 1980s.

In this newest rendition of the master plan, 40 per cent or 300 of the 1,350 acres, is designated parkland, more than originally planned. "Everybody obviously likes more parkland,"

Rockcliffe Park at Fairwinds

Location: Nanoose Bay, situated on a park-like property adjacent to the Fairwinds Centre and a short distance from the golf course and marina

Project size/scope: a strata development consisting of 26 patio homes, with lots ranging from 5,500 to 8,500 sq. ft. All properties share a landscaped garden in the centre of the project

Prices: $550,000 – $700,000 (plus HST)

Monthly fees: The strata fees are $76 per month and cover items such as common property landscaping

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Developers: Fairwinds Development

Builder: Georgia Strait Developments

Designer: Design Marque, Vancouver

Interiors: Zina Interior Design, Qualicum Beach

Occupancy: available immediately

laughs Scott.

That's probably no surprise, given the active people who are attracted to Fairwinds. Take John and Gwen DeFrancesco, who bought a home in the Rockcliffe Park neighbourhood three years ago and moved from Calgary. They're in their seventies and have golfed for years.

"We chose this area because of its proximity to shopping both in Nanaimo and Parksville, as well as ferries, airports and the convenience of having a golf course at your doorstep," they wrote by email. "The architecture, quality of construction, attention to detail, follow-up service requests were all completed in a professional and courteous manner."

Ron and Karen Hanson moved from Ontario about the same time and decided to buy a lot at Fairwinds and build a home. Ron was a golfer, but they were also attracted by the quietness and natural beauty. "We have found so much to do in the area: the Fairwinds Rec Centre for workouts, the Diners Club, book clubs, social clubs, outings and more," they wrote.

Hugo and Georgina Martin describe themselves as in their "youthful sixties" and they too have made Fairwinds home, although they moved just down the road from Nanaimo. "For us, the lure was the rural, oceanside setting comprising a marina, hiking trails and of course golfing."

A master-planned community might seem easy to pull off," but Scott says that's not the case. "Typically, to get one of these underway, there's a lot of a lot of up-front money. Roads, water, and sewer and all those types of things, so it's very capital intensive on the front end."

Special to The Sun

Dry, sunny weather, a forested golf course at the back door and a view of the ocean at the front add to the attraction of Fairwinds Community and Resort.

The influence of the Arts and Crafts style is evident in the Rockcliffe Park homes.