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Back to the roots

Elk Park Ranch offers relaxed rural living next to city amenities

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You get up in the morning to the sound of birds singing in the forest outside your window, then spend a lazy day on horseback, watching the cattle graze as the sun goes down over the peaks of the mountains stretching above the Columbia River.

Could life get any better?

The romance of life on a ranch is what a new project near Radium, B.C. called Elk Park Ranch has to offer those yearning to go back to their rural roots, or to begin new ones. But it is a rural life with all the city amenities nearby.

As the first major master-planned community for the Columbia Valley, the expansive Schickedanz West development proposes an urban core adjacent to the existing town of Radium.

It's complete with single-family residences, condos, and a commercial/recreational centre.

It stretches almost 12 kilometres towards Spur Valley and includes 16 large acreages that can be turned into weekend rural residences or hobby farms.

Centred in the middle between the urban core and the large acreages, is the historic McKay ranch, which will be kept as a working ranch and centerpiece of the community.

Schickedanz West originally bought 4,000 hectares 10 years ago, knowing that any project would be long-term because all the land was originally in B.C.'s agricultural land reserve.

Now, company owner Fred Schickedanz expects the entire project will be eight or nine years to completion.

"We expect most of our buyers to be Albertans," he says. "It's close to Calgary, the weather is more reliable in the summer, and it's warmer -- and it's beautiful here."

Of the total land originally purchased, only 1,720 hectares will be used in the project -- 80 hectares earmarked for the urban area and 1,400 hectares for the acreages, to be called The Ranches.

In addition, 240 hectares will be centred around the original white ranch house, which has been upgraded complete with wrap-around porch and green portico.

The ranch, which has had additional water brought to the property by Schickedanz to make it more sustainable, is just across the road from the entrance to the acreage sites.

Plans call for it to provide stables, an outfitter/trail riding operation, and even organic gardening, along with other amenities for The Ranches.

The rest of the land remains in the agriculture reserve.

The whole project is steeped in the history and romance of the rural West.

Elk Park Ranch was originally settled by 18-year-old James McKay, who bought 6,000 hectares of land from the B.C. government in 1886.

Fifteen years later, he and his wife bought an Eaton's catalogue house and had it floated down the Columbia River from Golden to the ranch.

That original ranch house, which looks out to the Purcell Mountains, has been remodeled by the developer and will be used as a centre for site tours until a project presentation centre opens in November.

The ranch was purchased in 1946 by the Washington state-based Kirk Co., which used the land to produce Christmas trees.

The proposed urban centre, which is now part of the town of Radium, is expected to have about 850 housing units at completion, each with town water and sewer.

Schickedanz emphasizes it will not "look urban," because the trees and wetlands will be left and things like walking and bicycle trails will be enhanced.

There will also be a recreation centre with a pool, along with a commercial element in more of the "general store" fashion.

"There will be a sense of community that you don't typically find in a recreational area," he says.

As for The Ranches part of the community, the 16 acreages range in size from 14 hectares (36 acres) to 192 hectares (480 acres).

"Every one of the lots has a view to die for," says Schickedanz.

The eastern boundary of the acreages is Kootenay National Park. Meadows abound and two of the lots will abut Baptiste Lake.

That attraction -- other than they are "large, beautiful and close to what you want to do," says Schickedanz -- is that the lots offer privacy, but are close to amenities and creature comforts.

"No one else will be coming out here," he says. "It will be total privacy and yet it is two kilometres outside of Radium."

A new road is being built up to the properties, and power and wells will be installed this fall and spring.

There will be suggested locations for homes on the acreages provided to buyers, and driveways and ranch gates will be cut into each property. Each lot will also be given its own ranch brand.

"It will be up to the owners to decide if they want to fence the properties and run cattle or horses," says Schickedanz.

A homeowner association will look after plowing or roads and limited other services.

Prices for the acreages and for spots in the urban village won't be released until the fall.

Schickedanz West has been in the recreational property business since 1991, when it started in Cougar Creek in Canmore, with apartments and villas. It was also the first to build in SilverTip in Canmore.

"With the demographics, there was no surprise, even in 1991, that there would be a demand for recreational property," says Schickedanz.

"We saw the aging population, which was also wealthy and liked hanging out in pretty areas."

Schickedanz West was started by Fred and his brother Gary in 1980. It was bought out by the parent company, Schickedanz Bros., owned by Fred's father and three uncles.

Three years ago, it again went independent and is now owned by Fred along with four siblings and a cousin.

The company has other projects in Radium, including the Riverstone townhouse development; Eaglecrest on the Springs golf course; Greystone, a 200 unit project of multi-family, duplexes, bungalows and two-storey villas; and Lynx Ridge, an RV recreational development.

Schickedanz West also still works mainly in land development in Calgary and is just wrapping up large projects in Airdrie.

In Short:

WHAT: Elk Park Ranch, a master planned community, with large ranch acreages and an urban core mix of single family homes and condos.

DEVELOPER: Schickedanz West.

WHERE: Radium, B.C., in the popular Columbia Valley area.

PRICES: Have not yet been set, but the range for the ranch acreage lots is expected to be \$1.1 to \$4.5 million, with the average price at \$2 million for 80 hectares (200 acres). The highest priced property -- at around \$4.5 million -- will be sold on a reserve bid auction. It consists of 64 hectares (160 acres) on Baptist Lake. The single and multi-family residences are expected to start at \$500,000.

INFORMATION: A sales centre is expected to open in November. Visit www.elkparkranch.com or call 1-877-347-6838.

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