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Real Estate Buzz: Developers: It's time for a new approach

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One of the great things about this job is every once in a while you get paid to do something unexpected like read a Dr. Seuss book.

We tackled “The Lorax” because Lorax Partners is the name of a new Seattle development company. The partners, **Brian Fyall** and **PJ Santos**, previously worked for hard-hit Opus Northwest. Fyall left Opus five years ago to work for another development company, Urban Visions. He and Santos began forming Lorax last fall, several months before Opus laid off Santos.

“I saw the writing on the wall,” said Santos, who decided it was time to re-invent himself professionally. He said he wanted to be part of a company that approaches development with balance rather than pursue “more for more’s sake.” Hearing his ideas, his wife, **Karen**, handed him a copy of “The Lorax” and suggested he name his company that.

“The Lorax” is a story about development gone awry. Driven by greed, a character called the Once-ler decimates a forest of truffula trees, whose “softer-than-silk” tufts make a lovely body suit, or “thneed.” Short story shorter, the Once-ler chops down the entire forest despite the protests of the Lorax, described as a “shortish, oldish, brownish and mossy” fellow. The Lorax tells the Once-ler: “I speak for the trees, which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please.”

Santos said he likes the story’s sustainability message as well as the importance of a business whose returns are equitable for everyone. He wants to develop what he calls projects with “the highest good” without “trying to squeeze out as much profit as possible.”

Santos said that’s a big shift in thinking for developers, but it needs to happen. To make his case, he recites one of the story’s last lines in which the remorseful Once-ler tells a visitor:

“Now that you’re here, the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”



Santos is the deal maker, and Fyall is an architect-turned-contractor. Their experience includes the \$50 million Bremerton Harborside, built in 2003, and the 610,000-square-foot Opus Center@Union Station, developed 10 years ago during the dot-com bonanza.

Lorax Partners shares office space with Hinthorne Mott Architects, and is preparing to grow by forming an alliance with a group that Santos wouldn’t name.

Lorax is pursuing a \$30 million mixed-use deal in downtown Bremerton, which has become a more lively place in recent years. The DJC carried a story about that project June 23. With apologies to the great Dr. Seuss, here’s a description of it:

Just in case, there’ll be a garage at the base. A cinema comes next, to fill in the text. Houses and stores round out the deal, to give ol’ B-town a more urban feel.

