



OTHER REPORT

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TO: Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
FROM: Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC)
SUBJECT: Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods Project

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive the Vancouver City Planning Commission's report on the *Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods* project for information.

COUNCIL POLICY

The Commission carried out this project under its mandate outlined in By-Law 5064, creating the Vancouver City Planning Commission and listing the following duties:

7. to assist City Council in an advisory capacity by considering and submitting reports to City Council on matters relating to the planning and development of the City and in particular, but without restricting the generality of the foregoing:
 - (a) to represent ideas and opinions about the future of the city, as citizens of the City of Vancouver;
 - (b) to consider and report to Council on any proposal likely to have a significant effect on the future of the City;
 - (c) to submit annually to Council a suggested budget.

PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the process followed by the Commission in carrying out the first phase of the *Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods* project, described to

Council in the Commission's work plan in June 2010. The report includes discussion of outcomes and concludes with lessons learned and a discussion of possible future directions.

BACKGROUND

Original Project Concept

Early in its term, the Commission set out to begin a dialogue about how Vancouver can evolve into a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods in ways that meet neighbourhood needs while advancing city-wide goals. As outlined in the Commission's work plan, presented to Council on June 24, 2010, the following themes emerged during discussions early in the Commission's development of the project concept and were central in the implementation:

- Widespread commitment to sustainable development as the framework for city building;
- Strong support for the City's sustainability initiatives of the past two decades;
- Some frustration that sustainability policies and programs are not being implemented quickly and effectively enough to meet urgent challenges;
- Some concerns that economic and social sustainability pillars are not sufficiently prominent;
- Support for a city vision that articulates and embraces sustainability goals in an integrated framework of sustainability policies that co-ordinates existing initiatives and provides an integrated sustainability plan for the city;
- Implementation of sustainability-based policies sometimes meets resistance at the neighbourhood level;
- CityPlan is the current over-arching vision for the city and is at the foundation of an extensive web of policies in areas including transportation, economy, downtown development and corporate planning, and a neighbourhood-based vision and implementation program;
- Neighbourhoods are at the heart of the CityPlan vision;
- With the completion of the West Point Grey Vision and Mount Pleasant Community Plan, every neighbourhood has been through a planning process, providing the occasion to look at the relationship between neighbourhood processes and city-wide planning and at inter-relationships among neighbourhoods;
- The implications of recent sustainability initiatives for existing neighbourhood visions and plans have not been explored at the neighbourhood grassroots level.

With predominantly single-family neighbourhoods accounting for almost half of Vancouver's land mass, figuring out how to realize sustainability at a neighbourhood level is critical to the sustainability of the city as a whole. The Commission believed that examining tensions that arise between neighbourhoods and the City on sustainability-related issues in order to understand their basis is vital to finding a way forward on the sustainability track.

If the City is to meet ambitious sustainability goals, many elements will need to be coordinated and aligned - policies, regulations, resources and the City's organizational capacity. The passion, energy and creativity of Vancouver's citizens are among those elements. The idea that the citizens can be powerful catalysts and key partners in accelerating and implementing the needed changes if they are included in imagining their communities as sustainable neighbourhoods in a sustainable city was the core idea at the heart of the project.

Original Project Outline

The project as originally outlined to Council had two phases. In the first phase, the Commission proposed to hold four dialogue sessions:

1. A preliminary session with representatives of neighbourhood groups involved in city-building at the neighbourhood level to help to shape three workshops.
2. A first internal City workshop to bring together core staff working to implement City sustainability policies in neighbourhoods.
3. A second workshop to bring together representatives from associations, institutions and firms engaged in urban development and sustainability practice in Vancouver, and working within the City's regulatory and policy framework to achieve sustainability objectives.
4. A third workshop to bring together community leaders and representatives from neighbourhood and city-wide community organizations in all sectors.

Each workshop was to be framed around key questions intended to probe for insights into the participants' experience with the City's visions, policies and plans. Examples proposed included:

- What would my neighbourhood be like as a sustainable neighbourhood within a sustainable city?
- What is needed in order for Vancouver to evolve into a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods? What's working? What's missing?
- How could neighbourhoods nurture their unique characters and their specific potential, and at the same time participate in city-wide initiatives that are essential for the achievement of Vancouver's sustainable development goals?
- What are the roles of a sustainable neighbourhood in a sustainable city?

The desired outcomes for the first phase of the project included the generation of themes, ideas and actions related to:

- The nature of the relationship between the City and neighbourhoods and among neighbourhoods in advancing sustainability goals,
- How well the current framework of visions and policies is serving the city's needs, including suggestions and options for improvement.
- How to advance the discussion with citizens on how to balance neighbourhood needs and city-wide sustainability goals, and

The outcomes from the first phase dialogue events were to form the basis for a report to advance the discussion about the idea of a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods, and to generate ideas and options for next steps for getting there. Participants from the phase one workshops would be involved in the planning of the second phase.

Amended Project

On June 24, 2010, Council provided specific direction to the Commission to:

- a) meet with and consider existing Vision Implementation Committees' plans and work;
- b) develop more robust strategies for outreach to neighbourhoods without Vision Implementation Committees; and
- c) meet with the Greenest Planning Team (GCAT) and consider how this work fits into their current engagement work on the GCAT 2010 plan.

These directions from Council were consistent with the Commission's planned process and were readily integrated. As the report describes, the effort to create and follow a robust and inclusive process proved to be far more challenging and time-consuming than anticipated, and at the same time resulted in a much more valuable learning experience. One unfortunate consequence was that the final dialogue - the symposium - had to be postponed twice resulting in a three-month delay, so that embarking on a second phase as described in the original work plan is not possible.

By taking the time to evaluate and respond to what the Commission learned during the process, the final dialogue - the symposium - took on a form that engaged neighbourhood groups and inspired participants to contribute creatively and generously to the discussions. As stated in the *Observations and Lessons Learned* and *Conclusion*, this project not only yielded some very valuable if unexpected outcomes, it also raised important questions for what a subsequent phase of neighbourhood engagement on sustainability might consist of and how it could be conducted.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1. Project Development: Outreach

The Commission intended the program for the public dialogue to be based on themes, priorities and directions on which there was some broad consensus. The Commission gathered this feedback through discussions with two key groups involved in action at the neighbourhood level to improve sustainability and livability: citizens' neighbourhood groups, and professionals from the City and from the non-profit and private sectors.¹

The Commission set out to engage organizations, to be represented by individuals, rather than individuals for two reasons. The first reason was to have a process to ensure diversity of participation based on focus of interest and locus of activity. The second reason was to incorporate into our process the capacity to involve not only the participating individual but also potentially all the members of their group and their associated networks.

¹ Appendix A: Workshops and Dialogues

1.1 Neighbourhoods - Neighbourhoods Advisory Group

Responding to Council's direction, the Commission expanded the scope of participation of neighbourhood groups in the process. Originally planning for one meeting with neighbourhood groups at the outset, the Commission modified the plan to comprise an initial meeting to obtain early feedback and up to three more meetings with a Neighbourhoods Advisory Group. The Neighbourhoods Advisory Group would be created at the initial meeting if participants were willing, and would continue to work with Commissioners to help shape the public dialogue and the invitation strategy.

The initial meeting with neighbourhood groups was held on July 26, 2010, to launch the initiative. The goal was to meet with a group of citizens representing groups drawn from all neighbourhoods that would be small enough for a meaningful dialogue. The Commission set out to invite one person from each of the 23 local areas to represent a neighbourhood residents' organization that has been actively involved in local planning matters and City processes.² The idea of convening a meeting to be attended by one person from one neighbourhood group in each local area with area-wide credibility seemed simple, however accomplishing the task proved to be a great challenge for a variety of reasons:

- Some local areas don't have an area-wide residents' organization.
- Some 'area'-wide organizations cover more than one local area.
- Some local areas have more than one active residents' organization.
- Vision Committees are not set up on a consistent basis - for example, one covers three local areas, another only part of a local area.

The Commission's primary source for names of organizations was the City of Vancouver's public *QuickFind* list on the City's public website,³ supplemented by enquiries of City staff who work with neighbourhood groups. After extensive research and discussions, the Commission decided on the following criteria for the composition of the inaugural group:

- CityPlan Vision Committees were selected for the Vision areas.
- Area-wide residents' associations, or equivalents, were selected in other areas.
- Where no area-wide organization was found, groups covering smaller geographic sub-areas were identified and approached to collaborate on identifying a representative.
- Downtown was divided into residential sub-areas (e.g., Coal Harbour, Chinatown) although it continued to be counted as one local area for analytical purposes.

There was no expectation that these organizations would be asked to represent their local areas in any rigorous political sense, or that the individuals were being asked to speak on behalf of their neighbourhoods. The idea was simply that their delegates would symbolically bring to the discussion something of their neighbourhood's experience in neighbourhood-City processes, and would be willing to be a link with their group and other neighbourhood groups, as appropriate.

The Commission's attempt to establish objective criteria for invitees to this neighbourhood meeting provoked discussion at the July meeting, with considerable criticism of the Commission's approach and questions as to why important neighbourhood residents' advocacy groups had been excluded. This group selection process led to some of the most significant lessons learned at the end of this report.

² Appendix B: Neighbourhood Groups Inaugural Meeting July 26

³ Non-City Organizations at http://vancouver.ca/qf_net/Default.aspx

At the inaugural meeting in July, all neighbourhoods were 'represented' in the above sense except for two. The representative of one of these neighbourhood groups had a last-minute emergency, while the other did not participate at any stage. There was extensive discussion of the project and the participation criteria. The highlights were compiled and distributed to the group as meeting notes. At the end of the evening, a number of individual indicated a willingness to continue to be involved, and the Commission agreed to inform all participants of the details of the first meeting of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group.

Three meetings of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group took place, on October 21, November 18, and January 17, and highlights from all the meetings were reported in meeting notes.⁴

The first meeting of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group on October 17 was attended by 11 people representing neighbourhood groups covering 15 local areas. The participants were asked to formalize the composition of the Advisory Group. They agreed on the benefit of keeping the group small in order to be effective. They also agreed that participating groups might not always send the same representative, and that other groups present on July 26 could attend when they were available. The Advisory Group was invited to propose additional groups that were not included in the July 26 meeting, resulting in the addition of Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver as a city-wide neighbourhoods group. The Advisory Group also developed an extensive list of categories of community groups to be invited to the public dialogue, and agreed to meet again in November to work on the list.

The second meeting on November 18 was attended by 13 people representing neighbourhood groups covering 13 local areas, and one person from the city-wide neighbourhood group. The purpose of the meeting was to begin the identification of neighbourhood-based groups from each local area to invite to the public dialogue in the new year. Three breakout groups were asked to come up with a list of groups for each local area, referring to the City's *QuickFind* lists as well as their own knowledge and experience. The goal was to produce a diverse list of organizations working across all sectors, including environment, health, economy, business, food, social justice, housing, family, youth, immigrant, aboriginal, faith and safety. The organizations could be registered charities, registered societies, or informal grassroots groups. The intention was to allow up to five neighbourhood-based groups from each of the 23 local areas,⁵ including each member of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group. Following the meeting, the Commission compiled a first invitee list from the selections made at the meeting. The draft invitee list was sent to all the groups that attended the inaugural meeting on July 26, asking participants to complete the selection of neighbourhood-based groups, and to propose additional city-wide groups.

The final meeting of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group on January 17 was attended by 11 people representing neighbourhoods covering 14 local areas, and one person from the city-wide neighbourhood group. The status of the invitation list was reviewed, and participants were requested to complete the lists for their neighbourhoods including contact information. Most of the meeting was spent on the program for the public dialogue, at this point referred to as a symposium. There was a wide-ranging discussion of possible themes for the symposium breakout discussion groups, with reference to a draft list of possible themes which the Commission had compiled from ideas gathered in earlier meetings with participants and at the December meetings with staff, and with non-profit and industry professionals. Following the meeting, the Commission developed a final draft list of questions for the symposium based on input from the Advisory Group.

⁴ Meeting Notes are online at <http://bit.ly/o07QUn>

⁵ Later reduced to four as part of scaling down the event.

The symposium was postponed, initially until February and ultimately re-scheduled for April, due to challenges and delays in compiling the invitee list, as well as problems with room availability.

The contribution of the participants in the Commission's Advisory Group meetings was invaluable in the development of the program for the symposium, and the Commission is very appreciative of their time and interest, understanding how much competition there is for their time both from the City in its consultation processes and from within their neighbourhoods.

1.2 Sustainability Practitioners in Neighbourhoods: Staff and Non-Profit/Private Sectors

In shaping the program for the symposium, the Commission also wanted to hear the perspectives and ideas of individuals from organizations that work on the ground in neighbourhoods to implement projects and initiatives that are seen as having sustainability benefits in one or more of the three pillars - social, economic, environmental. Two workshops were organized in December. As with the input from neighbourhood groups, the ideas and reflections from these two groups helped to shape the final themes and questions for the symposium.

1.2.1 City Staff Implementing Sustainability-based Initiatives in Neighbourhoods

A morning workshop was held for about 40 staff on December 1. Participants were asked to start by sharing a story from their experience of implementing a sustainability-based initiative (economic, social, environmental) in a neighbourhood that involved engaging with residents in some way, and highlighting one feature that contributed, or could have contributed, to its success. Participants were encouraged to identify any feature, at any scale, from a personal relationship or quality, to an aspect of the process, to a City practice. Next, participants were asked to identify key actions that could potentially help city-wide and neighbourhood sustainability plans mesh, and later to prioritize them and report out in a plenary discussion.

1.2.2 Non-Profit and Private Sector Sustainability Practitioners

An evening workshop was held on December 1 for about 20 professionals committed to sustainability principles, including architects, market and non-market developers, public space advocates, theatre managers and alternative energy specialists. The program was similar to the staff workshop program with some variations in focus. Participants were asked to start by sharing a story from their experience of implementing a sustainability-based initiative (economic/social/environmental) in a neighbourhood that involved engaging with residents in some way, and highlighting one feature that contributed, or could have contributed, to its success. Participants were encouraged to identify any feature, at any scale, from a personal relationship or quality, to an aspect of the process, to something in the City or regulatory context. Next, participants were asked to identify key actions that could potentially help city-wide and neighbourhood sustainability plans mesh, and later to prioritize them and report out in a plenary discussion.

1.2.3 Sustainability Practitioners Workshops - Outcomes

The Commission has not yet finalized the reports on these two sessions,⁶ however the key themes relevant to developing the symposium program were included in the *Themes to Inform Symposium Questions* reviewed with the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group at the January 17 meeting.⁷

1.3 Staff Assistance

The Commission received many helpful comments and insights from staff in the Planning and other departments during the course of this project. The Commission's intention has been to provide a result that is relevant to current issues and priorities in working with neighbourhoods. Staff assistance with identifying neighbourhood groups and contact lists, and with providing historical and current perspectives on the evolution of the City's neighbourhood structure and planning frameworks, has been invaluable.

With regard to Council's direction on June 24, 2010, that the Commission meet with the Greenest City Planning Team and consider how this work fits into their current engagement work, the Commission can report that there has been ongoing contact with the Greenest City staff. Greenest City staff participated in the staff workshop in December, and one of their staff provided facilitation at the symposium.

2. Symposium

The symposium was envisioned from the outset as a Saturday event for the community organizations to be invited through the selection process, preceded by a public Friday evening session. The original idea was that there would be a speaker or a panel at the Friday session to directly address the question of what sustainability is, and to establish the framework for discussion on the next day so that everyone would be working with some shared concepts about sustainability. The Saturday event was expected to be a fairly practical, hands-on working session in which representatives of community organizations would brainstorm on strategies in response to questions such as those posed on pages 3-4, and then develop specific concrete actions out of those strategies. However, in response to what the Commission learned in the preliminary dialogues, the symposium took a somewhat different form.

2.1 Symposium April 8 - Friday Public Event: *Setting the Framework*

Instead of bringing in speakers and leaders with widely recognized credentials who could speak with formal authority on sustainability, the Commission decided to organize the Friday evening around the idea of what sustainability means at the neighbourhood level - taking sustainability from the global to the local. Instead of an evening of formal information presentations and discussions, there would be an exploration and celebration of what the idea of a sustainable neighbourhood means to Vancouver citizens.⁸ The goal was to gather what was expected to be a multiplicity of themes and then identify common elements and themes.

⁶ To be available online upon completion

⁷ Appendix C: Themes to Inform Symposium Questions

⁸ Appendix D: Symposium April 8 Public Event Poster

In the first part of the evening, *Taking sustainability to the neighbourhood level*, the Commission's presentation asked the question "What is sustainability?" and described the Commission's journey during its preliminary dialogues seeking ways to answer this question, which included the following:

- An internationally adopted policy that has almost universal support, but is of limited help when making specific decisions about neighbourhoods and our city (the UN statements were featured on wall displays).
- A commitment made by the City of Vancouver 2002, which expands the Brundtland definition and underlies many initiatives to make the city more sustainable, but which is proving very challenging to implement (the 2002 policy was featured in a wall display).
- The way we used to live - memories of real or imagined villages or small neighbourhoods which embodied all the features of "sustainable communities" including a strong social and local business fabric.
- The proverbial elephant experienced by six blind men, an image that resonated with what the Commission heard so often, which is that sustainability means different things to different people, and that is why it is so difficult to come to agreement on specific 'sustainability' strategies.

The highlight of the evening was the second part in which representatives of ten wonderful local organizations that are engaged in contributing to the livability and sustainability of their neighbourhoods made a five-minute presentation.⁹ Each presentation spoke to 10 slides completing the statement:

"A neighbourhood isn't sustainable without..."

The responses were wide-ranging, impossible to summarize or reduce into a single statement, and suggested many possible additional themes:

- ...accessible mobility for all ages
- ...resilient and vibrant food networks
- ...community building through art and creativity
- ...seniors participating in the community
- ...schools as neighbourhood hubs
- ...mobilizing neighbourhood assets
- ...businesses committed to sustainability
- ...people reaching out to help people
- ...robust and accessible public spaces
- ...places to live for everyone

During the break at the conclusion of the presentation, the audience members were encouraged to continue adding their stickies to the many posters around the room sharing how they would complete the statement, "a neighbourhood isn't sustainable without..." In the third and final portion of the evening, there were comments on this topic from the audience and discussion. About 100 people attended the event.

At the end of the evening, Commissioners grouped the comments by theme in preparation for the Saturday symposium. Although the Commission did not request formal feedback on the

⁹ Appendix E: List of Friday night presenters and link to videos

event, many people expressed how much they had enjoyed hearing about the initiatives their city neighbours are involved in.

2.2 Symposium April 9 - Saturday Event: *Identifying Strategies and Actions*

The Saturday symposium was described to invitees as “a unique opportunity for community leaders to collaborate on a thriving future for our neighbourhoods and our city.”¹⁰ They were invited to the event to consider the questions:

How can neighbourhoods best contribute to the evolution of a sustainable Vancouver?
How can the City help your neighbourhood become more sustainable and livable?

The objectives for the day were those set out below:

- Brainstorm ideas for effectively integrating city-wide and neighbourhood-based sustainability initiatives.
- From these ideas, collectively identify specific actions or strategies that are most likely to be successful and replicable.
- Prioritize and select the top three to five actions and/or strategies for further development.

About 80 organizations participated on Saturday, with a majority having attended on Friday evening. In some cases, different people from the same organization attended the two parts of the symposium.¹¹ Many of our Neighbourhoods Advisory Group members were represented, along with a diversity of groups that do not often gather together. Many participants commented on how much they enjoyed the opportunity to meet people from organizations they did not know about.

The Commission had originally planned for 120 organizations, based on each of the 23 neighbourhoods sending four groups, plus 30 city-wide community organizations. In fact, with the resources available, it proved impossible to compile a complete list based on the criteria, including contact information, or to carry out the necessary follow-up without further postponement of the event.

The report on the Saturday event is organized into three sections that follow the sequence of the program: Presentations, Questions, Strategies.

2.2.1 Morning Presentations

The participants were welcomed with a presentation from the Commission summarizing the highlights of the previous evening, and focusing on a surprising discovery that emerged from trying to group together common themes from people’s stickies about sustainability in neighbourhoods. There were many comments about transit, governance, recycling, cycling, nature and other expected topics. But the largest number of stickies dealt with relationships and feelings, with knowing your neighbours, with fenceless communities, with acceptance and diversity, and quite a few with the words love and compassion.¹² This theme of social values and personal relationships at the neighbourhood level persisted as

¹⁰ Appendix F: Symposium April 8-9 Invitation for Community Organizations

¹¹ Appendix G: Community Organizations on RSVP list

¹² Videos of the Commission presentations from Friday evening and Saturday are at:
<http://www.youtube.com/neighbourhoods2011#p/u/0/1duVafuxERO>

an undercurrent throughout the day, and surfaced strongly at the conclusion of the project.

Following the Commission's morning presentation, four residents set the tone for the day by sharing success stories of City-neighbourhood collaborations:¹³

- Reclaiming streets for people: Car Free Vancouver.
- Collaborative community planning: Mount Pleasant Community Planning Process.
- Farmers markets and local food: Vancouver Farmers Markets.
- Preserving heritage and affordable housing, building community: Mole Hill Living Heritage Society.

2.2.2 Morning Discussions: Questions

Following the presentations and a group-building activity, there were three rounds of 25-minute discussion sessions at eight discussion stations hosted by a facilitator. Participants were encouraged to think of strategies that could be readily developed into action steps in the afternoon discussions, rather than dwell on large abstract ideas or descriptions of problems.

Each station featured a different question. The eight questions had been developed through the process outlined earlier in the report:

1. How can we develop partnerships between the City and its neighbourhoods to implement sustainability more quickly?
2. What responsibilities does a neighbourhood have to other neighbourhoods and to the wider city?
3. How can trust and communication between neighbourhoods and the City be improved?
4. How can the City's planning processes facilitate broader public understanding and participation?
5. What kind of education or process could lead to a common vision of sustainability for Vancouver as a city of neighbourhoods?
6. How can property developers and neighbourhoods work together more effectively?
7. In the planning of a city of neighbourhoods, what strategies foster equity among neighbourhoods?
8. How can we translate broad sustainability goals to an individual neighbourhood scale in a built-out city?

Notes from the discussions were made on flip charts by the hosts.¹⁴ During the lunch break, the facilitators worked with the discussion station hosts to distil major strategies that emerged during the morning discussions. These were pooled and then grouped according to general themes.

¹³ Appendix H: List of Saturday presenters and link to videos

¹⁴ Working documents from the symposium, including the source material are online: <http://bit.ly/mtUeSP>

2.2.3 Afternoon Discussions: Strategies leading to action

The eight strategies that seemed to have the most prominence at discussions stations, and that seemed to have potential for development into actions, were chosen for the afternoon discussion.

1. Invest in building neighbourhood capacity¹⁵ and empowerment (i.e., resources)
2. Involve neighbourhoods/residents from the beginning and throughout the process
3. Have a transparent process (i.e., name limitations, time frames, be clear about how input is used)
4. Connect historical and existing plans (work across silos, greenest city and city plan, incorporate what we already have when setting goals)
5. Foster dialogue across neighbourhoods (i.e., about values, neighbourhood to neighbourhood organizing model)
6. Need overall sustainability goals for city articulated and developed in collaboration with the neighbourhoods (shared understanding)
7. Long-term relationship building with staff, not departments

Participants were asked to identify some specific steps to make that strategy happen, and to ask some preliminary questions about how the actions could be accomplished.

After three 20-minute rounds, the participants gathered into a plenary session where the station hosts reported out and discussion followed. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient time to ask the group to prioritize the actions. The symposium concluded with participants being requested to vote on their top three strategies that they had been discussion during the afternoon, and also to leave their names if they were interested in further involvement in the process.

¹⁵ In the context of this report, the term 'capacity' as it relates to neighbourhoods, organizations or the Commission refers to a range of infrastructure items necessary for a project or initiative to be successful. These will vary by situation or group but may include:

- Human resources
- Material resources (i.e., space, office equipment)
- Financial resources
- Policies/procedures
- Organizational structure
- Systems (IT, communications etc.)
- Partnerships, collaboration, community connections
- Skills and training
- Community support
- Leadership
- Vision/strategy

3. Developing the Actions

Throughout the process, the Commission had stressed that it was seeking to collaboratively create a foundation for some kind action or actions that could help to strengthen the relationship between neighbourhoods and the City so that sustainability initiatives can be more readily implemented. The Commission had hoped that a set of actions would be agreed upon at the symposium, and a number of groups would step forward to be part of a steering group to develop it further at a subsequent meeting with Commissioners. The idea was that when the Commission took its report to Council, the idea for action would already have an outline and some local champions.

This was clearly an overly ambitious goal for the symposium, so the Commission developed a two-step follow-up process with the goal of identifying one or more actions and convening a supporting group.

The first step was to invite symposium participants to vote on their top actions using an online survey, and the second was to convene a special meeting on June 1 to develop these actions so that they could be presented to Council as part of the Commission's report.

2.3.1 Survey

At the close of the symposium, participants identified their top three strategies from the eight discussed in the afternoon session by recording their votes on wall posters:¹⁶

1. Invest in building neighbourhood capacity and empowerment
2. Involve neighbourhoods/residents from the beginning and throughout the process
3. Need overall sustainability goals for the city developed and articulated in collaboration with neighbourhoods

As only about 40 people, or less than half of the symposium attendees, posted their votes at the end of the day, the Commission included the same question on the post-symposium online survey to find out if the result would be corroborated. In the survey, 49 respondents ranked the strategies with the same result as in the symposium voting shown above.

In order to compile a list of actions on which participants could vote in the online survey, the Commissioners reviewed all the actions listed in the afternoon charts and attempted to group them together according to similar themes.¹⁷ However, although some of the actions were quite specific, others were general and there was a good deal of repetition so that there proved to be no clear way to organize the actions for voting. An interim step seemed necessary, so the actions under each of these five broad themes were distilled into a single broad action theme or direction. Respondents to the survey were asked to rank these five action directions according to what they considered the most important.

¹⁶ <http://bit.ly/ngwoBD>

¹⁷ <http://bit.ly/n5tJur>

One action direction or theme proved to be the top choice in the survey, with two more closely behind:

1. Convene a meeting to develop a practical action plan for building **capacity and representation in neighbourhoods** (including review of possible organizational models, successful practices and resources).
2. Organize a workshop to scope a process for establishing **sustainability goals** for neighbourhoods and developing neighbourhood-based sustainability plans that could help to shape a city-wide sustainability strategy (including review of current city-wide and neighbourhood policies and frameworks and of other jurisdictions).
3. Establish criteria for improved **consultation processes** (including review of past and current consultation practices and of other consultation models, and consideration of new approaches in City/neighbourhood/developer relationship).

The other two action directions in the list were:

4. Collaborate with the City on an initiative to expand intercultural dialogue on sustainability issues (includes establishing cross-cultural network of groups and volunteers).
5. Explore with City staff ways to improve online information and tools to support knowledge sharing across and within neighbourhoods.

It was interesting to note that the three action directions selected were fully consistent with the strategy priorities above, although with a re-ordering of the second and third choices in the actions.

2.3.2 Action Planning Meeting June 1

The Commission had maintained contact with symposium participants after the event, inviting their participation in the survey and notifying them of the June 1 meeting. Many sent in regrets for June 1 citing schedule conflicts, and the hockey playoffs may also have had an impact on attendance. The meeting convened with 10 participants.

Three breakout groups had been organized, one for each of the three action directions:

1. Capacity and representation in neighbourhoods
2. Sustainability goals
3. Consultation processes

Each of these action directions attracted two or more participants. The first part of the meeting was spent brainstorming to identify a specific action. Later, using worksheets, the groups identified key elements in 10 categories that could be considered 'conditions for success' in carrying out the action.

As at the symposium, the discussion in each group was thoughtful and revealed important perspectives about the challenges faced by residents who work actively at the grassroots level for the benefit of their neighbourhoods.

It was revealing that the groups developing an action under the *building capacity and representation in neighbourhoods* theme and the *sustainability goals for neighbourhoods* theme, identified similar actions as essential first steps:

- Develop a comprehensive list/profile of diverse neighbourhood activists/organizations/advocates
- Build a map of community/sustainability projects in neighbourhoods across the city

In the breakout groups and at the plenary, the discussion returned often to what had been the most powerful theme at the symposium, namely, that knowing what is going on in the neighbourhood and knowing your neighbours are essential features of a livable neighbourhood. And we heard that without the tools that enable neighbours to learn about what local groups are involved in, and that provide the opportunities to meet up, people are not likely to become engaged, especially if they are new to the country as well as to the neighbourhood.

The third group working on the *improved consultation processes* theme focused on an initiative that is already in early stages of development in one neighbourhood.

- Establish a liaison advocate in each neighbourhood who is well connected with the City, and well connected with the neighbourhood [pilot in one neighbourhood]

In the second session of the evening, the groups developed some specific steps for implementing these ideas and shared them at the plenary.¹⁸ However, while all the groups wanted to see work on these actions continue, we heard from these citizens that they are over-taxed and not able to be the leaders on carrying the three actions forward on a city-wide scale. At the conclusion of the evening, the discussion returned to the idea of a city-wide meeting for neighbourhood groups, at which they could begin a neighbourhood-led process to build neighbourhood structures, perhaps learning from those that exist in other cities.

Even though one or more specific actions, ready to include in this report, did not come out of the symposium process, there were many lessons learned about the challenges of evolving as 'a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods.'

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

How relevant were our objectives?

The Commission embarked on this project with the collective view that the move towards sustainability is important and imperative for our City and that the project well reflects the Commission's mandate:

To represent ideas and opinions about the future of the city, as citizens of the City of Vancouver¹⁹

We still hold that view. However, we discovered that, while important, sustainability is not the main priority for neighbourhoods in Vancouver at this time, whether narrowly seen as 'greening' initiatives or in the broader sense. There are a number of reasons for this and the Commission believes they must be taken seriously and addressed if the City is to build neighbourhood momentum in sustainability initiatives.

¹⁸ Meeting Notes are online at <http://bit.ly/o07QUj>

¹⁹ City of Vancouver By-law No. 5064

What is a neighbourhood?

There are problems with the 23 neighbourhoods because those neighbourhoods represent several neighbourhoods and some of them represent very disparate types of neighbours that don't have much in common.²⁰

We learned that neighbourhoods in Vancouver are not homogeneous; whether Downtown or Marpole, most neighbourhoods contain several sub-communities and pockets of activity within their City-defined boundaries. These sub-groups may be defined by the physical geography of a neighbourhood, by language or culture or by socio-economic status.

This presents challenges for both the City and for those who are engaged in planning processes as neighbourhood representatives. Despite best intentions, neighbourhood representatives may not have access to and contact with the various sub-communities. Sub-communities within a neighbourhood may feel differently about a specific issue and may not be heard in a typical engagement process. A way must be found for the various groups in our neighbourhoods to identify and engage each other and for the City to engage with them in a more rigorous way. It must also be acknowledged that in a city like Vancouver, the composition of neighbourhoods is constantly changing.

The concept of a neighbourhood profile or 'fingerprint' was identified as helpful, and it was observed that identification of groups and sub-communities should be ongoing and reviewed regularly to reflect such changes.

Who speaks for a neighbourhood?

Who is it that has the confidence and credibility and trust of people at the neighbourhood level that if they give the invitation and say 'come out'...? Some groups are trying to do that....but they don't have the credentials of the democracy process.

Within our current City administrative structure there are no truly representative or accountable agencies within neighbourhoods that the City can consult or tap into to get a snapshot or pulse of what is a priority or issue in the neighbourhood at a given time. Many established neighbourhood organizations do great work at the neighbourhood level, but this work is often focused around a specific issue or objective.

Groups generally lack the mandate, capacity, resources or authority to reflect and represent the full spectrum of issues in their neighbourhood fairly and transparently. This was a real challenge for the Commission when we set out to engage with neighbourhood groups. Evidence and anecdote suggest that the City and the development industry experience similar challenges when they seek to engage neighbourhoods around developments or new initiatives. Lack of a universal representative structure common to all neighbourhoods resulted in misunderstandings and damaged relationships, many of which persisted throughout the project.

²⁰ The indented and italicized text in the *Observations and Lessons Learned* section indicates direct quotations from participants in our meetings and events.

I have a real problem with these groups in my neighbourhood who purport to be spokespersons for the community historically but have no accountability back to the community. They're societies but not membership organizations. Somehow we have to make a decision about how we weight these organizations. We have other groups that are membership organizations that have AGMs that no one attends so they're completely run by self replicating boards and they're making decisions in my neighbourhood that are absolutely counter to the needs of the whole neighbourhood for the sake of their own organization.

There is a need to move beyond factions and special interests to a level of neighbourhood representation that is legitimate, broadly representative and uniform across neighbourhoods. These representative groups would benefit from a structure and mandate that requires them to ensure and demonstrate that they have listened to and acknowledged many voices within their particular neighbourhood on a given issue. This could be accomplished more quickly and effectively with resources and support from the City.

We suggest that future neighbourhood planning processes include the development of a pilot project on representative structures into their work plans.

It's entirely possible that we can't do (neighbourhood sustainability plans) until (neighbourhood capacity building) is done. The city doesn't have a place to knock on the door to reach a neighbourhood. In many cases there is no organizational capacity at the neighbourhood level to be reached.

How well connected are our neighbourhood groups?

The Commission convened a Neighbourhood Advisory Group as a means of identifying the diverse groups we wanted to hear from at our symposium. The goal was to identify up to five groups that were sources of capacity, passion and product in each of our 23 Vancouver neighbourhoods. We hoped that by engaging representatives of established neighbourhood groups, we could effectively connect with other groups in our neighbourhoods. It was encouraging to discover that there are many active, dedicated groups in Vancouver's neighbourhoods. However, even highly engaged groups and activists are often unable to name many other groups active in their neighbourhoods. Moreover, there are often competing claims among groups to characterize, represent or speak for a neighbourhood. This makes it very challenging for newcomers to learn what is going on in their neighbourhoods.

A major challenge is the lack of a comprehensive list of contact information for neighbourhood groups, making groups and people hard to identify and hard to reach. Neighbourhoods lack a portal or point of contact for engagement, whether for the City, newcomers, or stakeholders working in fields like health or safety. This makes it extremely difficult to put together a city-wide neighbourhoods conversation about any topic or issue, sustainability or otherwise.

A large amount of the Commission's time and resources on this project were spent identifying and establishing contact information for neighbourhood and city-wide groups and it is disheartening to think that another volunteer or City-funded group might need to go through the same process in the future.

How can we build neighbourhood organizational capacity in Vancouver?

When people become involved in something very small and very manageable - it could be something simple like a block party or volunteering and building a community garden on their street.. when people get involved and they

experience the feeling of what it's like to know who their neighbours are - that feeling is what leads to amazing things... in the absence of that people will not get involved - if people don't feel that there's a value to that investment in neighbourhood you can put all the great plans and money into place - people will not come out.

Neighbourhood capacity for engagement varies greatly across the city and resources must be directed to creating greater equity between neighbourhoods. At the same time it must be realized that while there are neighbourhoods in the city that genuinely lack the capacity to engage in a representative way with the City, there are other neighbourhoods that we can only assume choose not to engage because they see no direct benefit to such engagement. Despite the Commission's extensive research and ongoing follow-up, there were several neighbourhoods that did not participate in this project.

Currently, the capacity of a neighbourhood in Vancouver depends largely on the number of loyal, active long-term volunteers it can draw on. We heard that existing volunteer capacity in neighbourhoods is limited and over-burdened. Much of the volunteer responsibility is seen as falling to seniors and those with family support commitments. However, there is still a strong feeling that volunteerism should play a key role in capacity building in neighbourhoods, as citizen-initiated actions are perceived as being less bureaucratic and politicized than those initiated by the City. The key to success in this respect would be to increase the volunteer base in neighbourhoods. Those who step forward to volunteer need to feel that their time and effort is valued and that it can be effective in achieving desired outcomes. The City should find a way of more formally recognizing the efforts of these volunteers at the community level.

In addition, we suggest that the City consider an inventory of cheap/free meeting space for citizen/ neighbourhood representative groups, as well as support translation services, printing and graphic/website support in relation to an online collaboration on successful community initiated projects and best practices.

While it is acknowledged that the City's current priority is its Greenest City Action Plan, we encourage neighbourhoods to coalesce around areas of interest to them regardless of whether they are sustainability focused or not. Organized neighbourhoods will have greater capacity developed when they do decide to address issues of sustainability.

We give neighbours small grants-up to \$500 and they can do whatever they want selected through a Neighbourhood Volunteer Advisory Committee to select something that's important in that neighbourhood what we have seen are the most spectacular examples from this small grassroots \$250 that we give that have developed into incredible projects out of which came tens of thousands of dollars that they've mobilized at the neighbourhood level that was started by this small seed of money. So when you're talking about sustainability, this is a project that's eminently sustainable because it's a grassroots project - priorities are determined at the neighbourhood level. [Vancouver Foundation's Neighbourhood Small Grants program]

The Commission noted that perhaps the most challenging obstacle to neighbourhoods building their own capacity is the lack of a comprehensive inventory of people, groups, and 'assets' in neighbourhoods. City support for the development and ongoing maintenance of a city-wide database of neighbourhood organizations, individuals and successful initiatives would make these volunteers' tasks immeasurably easier and associated forums for dialogue would support community building.

An online collaboration space might allow neighbourhoods to view successes and best practices. Ideally it should be in more than one language or translatable so everyone can share ideas. It would keep ideas and contributions from getting lost when an active resident moves or dies. Over time, it could become an archive of the neighbourhood, a place for people to tell stories and for a shared history and sense of place to be nurtured.

The City may be able to take a small step to support this sharing of stories of neighbourhood initiatives by making its data base of organizations that apply for City grants accessible and searchable online on its new website. Grant applicants represent some of the city's most active organizations and the stories of their work could inspire others to become engaged. This could form the core of a future online resource where neighbourhood representatives, City staff and newcomers to the city could go to find out more about what's happening in a neighbourhood. Future grant applications could include a requirement to register or update the database with current information and to submit a brief summary of the outcome. Over time this could form a valuable resource for those developing the neighbourhood profiles that so many have indicated would be helpful.

How can we make the relationship between the City and its neighbourhoods better?

The Commission discovered that resilient relationships do not happen instantly or easily. They have to be built and there is no substitute for time and effort in this task. At the outset of this project the work of the Commission was not well known and the initiative was treated with considerable skepticism. However, we hope that over the course of the last two years we have built relationships with neighbourhoods that are mutually beneficial.

The relationship between the City and its neighbourhoods is no different. Trust can only be built step-by-step in an honest and equal engagement that requires nurture and support. Building constructive relationships takes considerable time and, while there is always the temptation to streamline or compress initiatives in times of fiscal restraint, the critical role that time devoted to relationship-building can play in the successful outcome of an initiative should not be underestimated. Compressing processes due to resource limitations can prove counter-productive when resources must be diverted later to address any resulting negative impacts.

There is a strong feeling that lines of communication between neighbourhoods and the City should be strengthened and better defined and that they must be open and ongoing. This requires the City to provide adequate support and resources for the Planning Department to this end.

There were many concerns related to imbalances in the relationship between the City, neighbourhoods and the development industry. Neighbourhoods feel they are at a disadvantage in dealing with the professional expertise of the property development industry. Developer and citizen relationships with Council and City staff were not felt to have equal value. The relationship a developer has with the City has been clarified and refined over time and is expressed in our current development process. Neighbourhoods have a less clearly defined relationship with the City and no clear access to a process that can bring their ideas to fruition. We heard over and over again that a specific point person in the community with access to and knowledge of City Hall might help to balance the relationships.

How might a better relationship inform the engagement process?

It is acknowledged that the City's current discretionary development process offers many advantages to our city, but a more honest discussion of its drawbacks in the context of built-out neighbourhoods and established communities is urgently needed. Our reliance on the development industry to provide the city with amenities and the public realm in which we take such pride must be honestly acknowledged as an underlying cause of many of the grievances expressed by our participants.

Transparency is a key concern, as is neighbourhood involvement in discussions and dialogue at the beginning and on an ongoing basis throughout any major development or rezoning. Both the City and the neighbourhoods might benefit if limitations and measurable objectives were identified at the outset. Within the context of the process itself a code of conduct might be helpful. Participants must feel that they can speak out without fear, and that quieter and more reflective voices are as relevant as strident and overbearing ones. Listening should be valued as an essential part of facilitation and understanding.

There is no doubt that a process of this type would take more time, but there is no substitute for ongoing communication. If there is to be public perception that the process genuinely seeks public opinion and that feedback can have impact, this investment of time is necessary.

Would an overarching vision help?

In the absence of having something on which to focus the way forward assessing where we are is useful but its going to limit where we go from there....different neighbourhoods are at different levels in terms of their understanding of themselves, their capacity and their sustainability and their future. Having models that enable neighbourhoods to see where they fit in that continuum and be able to plug into it is more concrete than just knowing where you're at.

There were many ways in which a city-wide long-term vision was felt to be a missing piece in the discussion around neighbourhood sustainability. Such a vision would help us to know where we are now, and provide a lens through which to view projects. This would enable the City and its neighbourhoods to evaluate projects in the context of an overall current coordinated plan. Many also felt an overall physical plan at the city-wide level was important. We heard that it is important that we take a longer-term view and perhaps consider a 50-100 year plan.

The Greenest City goals are not adequate in this respect as they lack the planning focus relevant to such an initiative. They also give inadequate prominence to the social and economic concerns that are central to many neighbourhood issues. Closer integration of the Greenest City goals and CityPlan defining statements might be a starting point to incorporate environmental, social and economic aspects.

Neighbourhoods need to share the City's social problems, but in order to do so, they need a common awareness and acceptance of social justice values. However, we should not try to force a common vision on all neighbourhoods; each one may have different vision or even multiple visions for itself.

We suggest that the City incorporate a dialogue of shared values, especially with regard to equity and social justice, into future neighbourhood planning processes.

The Importance of neighbourhood equity

This project left the Commission with considerable concerns about the equity of our neighbourhoods. Of course, further discussion of this would require a definition of "equity."

Is equity realistic?

Throughout the course of this project, the Commission had very different experiences of individual neighbourhoods. Some had many groups eager to engage in a discussion about sustainable neighbourhoods, while others either had few or no groups we could connect with, or had groups with a specific focus or issue that did not coincide with ours. We need a broader understanding of inequities between neighbourhoods. This might be achieved if many of the special-interest groups in our neighbourhoods were encouraged to engage in more regular and diverse community conversations.

We need to support opportunities for neighbourhoods to think how they can individually contribute to addressing social problems.

How can we make our engagement cross-cultural?

This project highlighted to the Commission the importance of broader dialogue with multi-cultural groups. Despite our best efforts to identify and make contact with various groups, we felt that there was inadequate multicultural and visible minority representation at our symposium event. However, those groups that did attend provided fascinating insights into the multicultural challenges and opportunity that sustainability offers.

There are many different cultural experiences of public participation - many immigrants come from societies where public input or engagement is not encouraged or even welcomed. This may lead to a 'fear factor' or mistrust of government processes.

Sustainability means a variety of things in different cultural contexts. Many of our immigrants come from countries and lifestyles that are much more sustainable than our own and there is much we can learn from them. They may also practice sustainable activities as diverse as care and support of seniors and composting in a manner different to our stated 'best practice,' and further exploration of these practices may offer new ideas and more options to the community as a whole. One size does not fit all in our move towards sustainability.

Conversely, many immigrants also face the challenge of our unsustainable lifestyles being associated with 'progress' or 'success.' Someone who moved to Canada ten years ago and rides a bicycle in Vancouver may have to contend with their perceived 'lack of success' to family and friends back home.

These insights point to the importance of dialogue and discussion of values with multicultural groups. As a city, we need to support intercultural dialogue at the neighbourhood level. This might take the form of hosting a network of willing multicultural contacts/volunteers who are willing to translate documents/invitations/notices for community groups.

How can we be more inclusive?

The Commission received positive feedback about the diversity of groups represented at the symposium. Many attendees remarked that they had rarely seen such diversity of groups at an event of this type, and how interesting and energizing it was to hear new voices in the

dialogue. Achieving broad coverage and diversity at the symposium was a specific goal of the Commission and proved to be a huge challenge. We learned that to secure broad attendance, it is necessary to identify and target a broadly representative range of groups and that personal follow-up is essential.

We discovered that many of the groups we targeted did not see their relevance to the sustainability of the city as a whole. Many groups in the social or economic sphere felt that since they were not 'green' in focus, they had little to contribute to a sustainability-related event. This is extremely unfortunate and problematic as we move forward. Dialogue is needed to broaden our understanding of what sustainability involves and to include voices and groups that are active in many areas but not usually involved civic affairs.

We need to find effective ways to make bridges to those who are currently under-represented in dialogues. We should engage youth, seniors, social agencies and ethnic communities as well as local business. We could also tap into the energy of youth leaders and students by providing opportunities for them to gain education credits through their involvement with sustainability initiatives and by empowering them to become educators to the broader community. Partnerships with community organizations and institutions might also allow us to celebrate sustainability through arts, cultural events, drama and music.

On a more practical level, we learned that there is a huge appetite for dialogue of all kinds in the city and we heard of the need for affordable places to meet and talk/participate in neighbourhoods. It would be helpful to support opportunities for dialogue among those who face similar challenges in different parts of the City, such as neighbourhood representatives or strata councils.

Our specific goal should be to make sure everyone has a voice at City Hall.

The importance of dialogue

We are inextricably connected to one another. And the issues that we experience as a community - both positive and negative - are also intertwined. We are more likely to judge the quality of life in our community as high and to perceive ourselves as happy when we feel a sense of belonging and when we believe we can trust our neighbours. [Vancouver Foundation's Vital Signs for Metro Vancouver]

We need tools with which to connect people at the neighbourhood level.

The long-term goal is that people form relationships with each other and realize that there's a value in strengthening connections and building the city as a whole through neighbourhoods.

Over the course of this project, the Commission became aware of a hunger for conversation and connection between individuals and groups. We learned that people want to connect, share stories, and have the opportunity to inspire others. These findings have much in common with those of other groups such as the Vancouver Foundation in their *Vital Signs for Metro Vancouver* report.

This theme also played out in our Friday evening symposium session where participants were asked to complete the phrase 'a neighbourhood isn't sustainable without.....' When the responses were grouped by theme, by far the largest group related to feelings such as love, inclusiveness, knowing your neighbour and acceptance of diversity. It is important to note that these feelings of inclusiveness, trust and acceptance far outweighed any physical characteristics that might typically be used to define a sustainable neighbourhood, and this is an important theme as we frame a city dialogue around sustainability.

Neighbourhood planning must start with neighbours. We learned that relationships - some kind of personal connection - are generally a prerequisite to someone getting involved in a neighbourhood activity. Kitchen table sessions, study groups or regularly scheduled casual conversations similar to a book club were suggested as ways to meet the need for connection.

The importance of conversation and face-to-face communication in the face of disagreements and difficult relationships was also a lesson learned first hand by the Commission. While e-mail communications and social media can play an important role in information distribution and notification, their potential to escalate rhetoric and deepen division should not be underestimated. Individuals who are rude and aggressive by e-mail rarely follow through on their pronouncements face-to-face, and that shift towards greater civility is usually sustained in future exchanges. One-to-one communication should be a key priority between residents and perceived external threats like corporations, developers and politicians.

We strongly suggest that the City support, when opportunities arise, the provision of spaces for dialogue to happen in neighbourhoods, at a smaller and more casual scale.

How can we make sustainability relevant?

The long-term goal is that neighbourhoods are better self-identified and cohesive; each neighbourhood has a recognized sustainability direction/plan.

Sustainability is 'discovered' by people experiencing things and then infecting others through communication with the inspiration to follow the example- from the specific to the many specifics rather than from the general to the many specifics.

The Commission's experience on this project suggests that the language around sustainability needs to be re-framed to be relevant to neighbourhoods and to reflect the values they see as important. These are remarkably consistent across neighbourhoods and are expressed by the feelings and phrases identified at our Friday night symposium session. They included expressions of feelings such as trust, sense of belonging, working together and acceptance.

These social goals and aspirations are not incompatible with sustainability. A case could be made that they are crucial in the practical realization of sustainability at the neighbourhood level. Sustainability may, in fact, be the by-product in neighbourhoods where these characteristics are promoted, valued and predominate.

Failure to incorporate the social dimension in sustainability initiatives undermines the City's credibility as we move forward. 'Sustainable' and 'green' are not the same thing, and our citizens are increasingly aware of the difference. Social values should be given more prominence if the dialogue is to resonate broadly across our neighbourhoods. The City's frequent lack of acknowledgement of the affordable housing crisis as an underlying and ongoing barrier to sustainability is an example of this credibility gap.

What has the Commission learned about itself?

It would be an omission to exclude the lessons the Commission learned about itself in this process. It is fair to say that when we embarked on this project, we grossly underestimated the time, effort and commitment it would take to bring it to completion. Our experience would indicate that while this work is important - some might say essential - to the sustainable future of our city, the Commission, as a group of volunteers with limited resources and a limited term, may not be the best group to do it. Our goal was to implement the lessons learned along the way and this inevitably led to time spent building relationships,

communicating comprehensively and ensuring the transparency and accountability of our process wherever possible. In trying to do this to the best of our abilities, we experienced exactly the same capacity limitations and fatigue as we observed in our neighbourhood groups.

As a diverse group of volunteers with differing expertise and expectations, the time that individual Commissioners are able to devote to a given project varies greatly. At the end of a process spanning almost two and a half years, we finally feel that we have valuable insights into strategies and actions that could be implemented at just the time we have exhausted our personal and collective resources to move them forward. The Commission shares this handicap with other advisory groups now locked into three-year terms.

The Commission offers the foregoing observations and suggestions for actions with the acknowledgement that, at the conclusion of our project, individual and group support to move them forward has not been identified at this time at the neighbourhood or Commission level. However, it is our hope that our suggestions may be considered by future groups and in planning processes, and that we might have the opportunity to support such initiatives as they arise.

CONCLUSION

The *Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods* initiative has been a journey of discovery for the Commission. Much of what we heard is not new to those who are deeply engaged in neighbourhood work at the grassroots level, through various City-led consultations and local neighbourhood dialogues, and is recorded in our working documents. However, the final outcomes were not what we expected.

As described in the report, it was the Commission's intention to work with neighbourhood and city-wide community groups to identify a few simple, specific actions on which neighbourhoods could collaborate with the City on sustainability directions for neighbourhoods. The actions were for the participants to identify. They could be of any type, so long as they could be achieved in a reasonable amount of time with modest resources, and would be championed by a number of neighbourhood groups.

The actions that emerged at the concluding action planning session were not the actions that the Commission would have predicted at the outset of the initiative. We imagined practical, product-oriented actions, such as panel discussions, speakers, charrettes, or task groups on neighbourhood sustainability. These actions would identify and lead to further concrete actions. Instead, we learned that the highest priority as a first step is to learn about what is going on in our neighbourhoods, in a way that existing media and resources do not reveal.

Two of the working groups (*Sustainability Goals for Neighbourhoods* and *Building Neighbourhood Capacity*), independently came up with similar actions, agreeing that an essential prerequisite for taking on specific tasks was a profile of neighbourhood groups and people who are actively involved in initiatives, showing the location and telling the story of their work. In other words, both groups agreed that before any specific work relating to neighbourhood sustainability, as conventionally understood, could begin, people in neighbourhoods need to find out about each other and what others are doing.

The Commission's process did not culminate in the formation of groups to take these related actions forward. The open discussion at the final session centred on three themes that are very relevant to assessing the organizational capacity of neighbourhood groups for taking on sustainability and related initiatives. One theme was a sense that many engaged citizens feel

over-extended in their volunteer work, and would like to connect with others who have similar goals and interests. The other was the sense that there are hundreds of active organizations in neighbourhoods involved in all kinds of initiatives who don't know about each other, even if they work only a few blocks apart. The third theme is that there are many people not engaged who would love to get involved, given the appropriate conditions. The outcomes of implementing the actions identified at our final session would be expanded neighbourhood networks of people working together on things that matter to them, inspired by each others' successes, collaborating on similar initiatives and engaging new people.

This idea that connections among people within neighbourhoods are the priority concern for many people in thinking about sustainability at a local level was an unexpected outcome. The idea surfaced right at the outset in the public session of the April symposium when people were asked to write the most important features of a sustainable neighbourhood. By far, the greatest number of comments related to knowing your neighbours, people helping others, and compassion. We have since learned that the Vancouver Foundation, in their Vital Signs project, found that the sense of belonging and trusting neighbours was essential to people's experience of the quality of life in their communities, and through their grant programs they have found that personal connections are generally a pre-requisite for people to become involved in activities.

While there were many themes that emerged throughout the Commission's project, and many ideas for actions and initiatives, it seems very clear that the most important investments for the City to make in neighbourhoods are those that strengthen and extend connections among people and groups in ways that build trust. Generally, neighbourhood residents will know better than the City where these investments are needed most.

Over time, the two actions identified in the final action planning session might find local champions and take off on their own. It is clear that developing these inventories or maps of community groups and activities needs to be a neighbourhood/City collaboration, ideally with other partners, rather than a City-led project. If these actions were to be an initial step in a city-wide neighbourhood capacity building initiative, they should first be validated as a city-wide neighbourhood priority through a consultation or polling process with a sample group that includes the symposium participants whose work led to their development.

This project started as a proposal to hold a series of dialogues about how Vancouver can evolve as a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods. Along the way, through the generous participation of many neighbourhood activists, Commissioners learned about the enormous range of formal and informal grassroots organizations and initiatives active in Vancouver's neighbourhoods. These engaged citizens, including those who made inspiring presentations at the symposium about their groups' work in their neighbourhoods, are the City's greatest resource as it seeks to shape a sustainable future for its citizens.

After much consideration the Commission has elected to submit this report for information and make no formal recommendations. This is not intended to imply that there are no critical issues that need to be addressed, but rather that what we heard is needed cannot be achieved by a request from an advisory body for a specific City action.

The anticipated outcome for this initiative was the adoption of a specific idea or ideas championed by some of our neighbourhood groups for development into a specific initiative. The reality is that our process did not identify one or more groups currently ready to step forward to champion such an initiative. This does not mean that this will not happen in the future and the Commission is optimistic that this will be the case. However the Commission acknowledges that further development and support of such an initiative is not possible for

the Commission to undertake. In the absence of current neighbourhood groups to champion these issues, it would be inappropriate for the Commission to develop the ideas we heard to a level that would give them a reasonable chance of support at the City level.

In the course of the project we heard many inspirational ideas from citizen groups, but our overwhelming impression is that a recommendation that the City spearhead any of these actions would be counter to their intention. A process initiated and managed by the City is not what is wanted or needed. There have been many of these and, almost without exception, they have not achieved the desired results identified by our participants. There may, indeed, be an argument for stepping back from the current intensive, exhaustive and highly institutionalized engagement processes currently undertaken by the City. Instead, it might be more appropriate for the City to take a supporting role in neighbourhood-initiated efforts to define themselves and shape their own unique identity.

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Workshops and Dialogues

Participants	Meeting type	Date
Neighbourhood groups Groups involved in local planning-related process from each local area	Project launch, and invitation to neighbourhoods to participate in the project Neighbourhood Advisory Group	July 24, 2010
Neighbourhoods Advisory Group Individuals representing groups that participated in the July meeting	First meeting for the group, to formalize composition of the group, develop criteria for invitation to the public symposium, and identify next steps	October 21, 2010
Neighbourhoods Advisory Group Individuals representing groups from the October meeting, based on the list adapted by the group, with individuals from additional groups that participated in the July meeting.	Second meeting of the group, to develop a first draft of neighbourhood-based groups to be invited to the symposium	November 18, 2010
City staff Staff with experience in working at the neighbourhood level on City-led and local sustainability-related initiatives	Workshop to identify common themes in successful City-neighbourhood sustainability-based initiatives, and to identify top priorities for action to help city-wide and neighbourhood sustainability plans and initiatives mesh	December 1, 2010
Sustainability practitioners non-profit & private sector Representatives from associations, institutions and firms engaged in urban development and sustainability practice, including planners, architects, sustainability consultants, engineers, builders, lenders, developers, urbanists and educators - individuals who work within the City's regulatory and policy framework to achieve sustainability objectives.	Workshop to identify common themes in successful projects carried out in Vancouver neighbourhoods, and to identify top priorities for action to help with implementation of sustainability-based projects	December 9, 2010
Neighbourhoods Advisory Group Individuals representing groups from the October and November meetings, with individuals from additional groups that participated in the July meeting.	Third meeting, to review new symposium timing, status of the symposium invitation list and program concept for the symposium; and to report on the December workshops and discuss next steps.	January 17, 2011
Neighbourhood and city-wide groups Individuals representing community organizations working in neighbourhoods across the three pillars of sustainability and from all sectors, including housing, food, transportation, health; individuals described as 'champions of sustainability'	Symposium Action Planning Meeting	April 8-9, 2011 June 1, 2011

Neighbourhood Groups Inaugural Meeting, July 26, 2010, Attendees

Neighbourhood Group	Local Area(s)	
ARKS Vision Committee	Arbutus Ridge-Kerrisdale-Shaughnessy	Yes
Coal Harbour Residents Association	Downtown	Yes
Gathering Place	Downtown South	Yes
False Creek Residents Association	Downtown	Yes
Chinatown Revitalization Committee	Downtown	Yes
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Assn	Downtown Eastside	No
Dunbar Vision Implementation Committee	Dunbar-Southlands	Yes
Friends of Southlands	Dunbar-Southlands	No
False Creek South Neighbourhood Association	Fairview	Yes
Grandview Woodlands Area Council	Grandview-Woodlands	Yes
Hastings-Sunrise Vision Implementation Ctee	Hastings-Sunrise	Yes
KCC CityPlan Committee	Kensington-Cedar Cottage	Yes
Kitsilano Residents Associations	Kitsilano	Yes
Marpole-Oakridge Community Association	Marpole & Oakridge	Yes
Mount Pleasant Community Liaison Group/SCG	Mount Pleasant	Yes
R-C Vision Implementation Committee	Renfrew-Collingwood	Yes
RPSC Vision Implementation Committee	RileyPark-South Cambie	Yes
Strathcona Residenta Association	Strathcona	Yes
Sunset Vision Implementation Committee	Sunset	Yes
VFK Vision Committee	Victoria-Fraserview-Killarney	Yes
West End Residents Association	West End	Yes
West Point Grey Community Liaison Group	West Point Grey	Yes

Themes to Inform Symposium Questions

Prepared for review with Neighbourhoods Advisory Group

*How can city-wide and neighbourhood-based sustainability initiatives mesh?
... to create ...*

A Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods

Shaping the World Café Questions for the Symposium of Community Organizations

Background Notes:

- This list of themes was compiled by Commissioners to provide a springboard for a discussion at the January 17 meeting of the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group about potential questions for the World Café sessions at the symposium of community organizations (see reporting on symposium and themes in the Meeting Notes).
- The list represents an initial gathering of themes that have emerged at the Commission's meetings with neighbourhood groups, with City staff, and with sustainability practitioners in the private and not-for-profit sectors, and is not intended for distribution as a stand-alone document.
- These themes were generally echoed in more than one group, and most were echoed all the groups.
- The sequence in the list is random, and the number of bullets under a heading does not indicate relative significance or recurrence.
- During discussion at the January 17 meeting, numerous comments were made and additional themes suggested. These are reported in the Meeting Notes but are not included here. The version below incorporates a few minor edits for correction or clarification, a re-assignment of some bullets to more appropriate headings, and minor re-formatting to fit the pages. Subsequent reports will include a more detailed account of themes that have emerged during the course of this initiative.

Themes

Sustainable neighbourhoods are the basic building blocks of a sustainability city

- A sustainable city is seen as a network of walkable communities connected by transit. If we are to develop sustainably, then we may need to replace the map of 23 local areas with a map of the city's walkable community networks.
- There is an economic aspect to sustainable neighbourhoods, needed to make their walkability viable.
- In a sustainable city, each neighbourhood contributes to the health and vitality of the whole and to the achievement of city-wide goals.
- Neighbourhoods should benefit from committing to specific targets that support city-wide goals.
- Tangible modest changes in the neighbourhood can help achieve the sustainability agenda. For example, installing a little community garden plot is a modest but important step.

Sustainability is a fundamental concept that needs to be better understood and locally adopted

- Sustainability is universally acknowledged as a key concept, but we need a shared understanding of what it means for people, for neighbourhoods, and for the city.
- Art and culture are often listed as the fourth pillar of sustainability; where these are included in plans in strategies, the outcomes seem more successful.
- A broad but clear sustainability context and focus is essential if we are to make good choices. Everyone needs to understand the framework, the values and the goals.
- We must find a way to talk about a sustainable future that is meaningful to people.
- Claims about sustainability are sometimes based on conflicting values, especially in the promotion of new initiatives and developments. These values and claims need to be examined.
- Housing affordability is the city's and neighbourhoods' biggest sustainability challenge.
- The City has many policy documents supporting sustainable directions, but a sustainability planning framework is needed to help create sustainable neighbourhoods..

Trust building between the City and neighbourhoods is needed

- Trust can be built in many ways: by following up on projects to determine whether the outcomes were as expected or feared; by fixing daily irritants and delivering results right away; by openly reviewing mistakes; by adopting open engagement approaches like appreciative enquiry.
- New approaches are needed to keep dialogues between neighbourhoods and City open and constructive.
- Engagement at a personal level is important to building trust.
- Trust requires transparency.
- Neighbourhood buy-in is necessary to achieving sustainability objectives.

Themes to Inform Symposium Questions (cont'd)

Prepared for review with Neighbourhoods Advisory Group

Engagement process needs to be more effective and reach out to people where they are

- The best conversations are in small groups, face-to-face interactions.
- Conflicts and disagreements can be opportunities to look more closely at a topic and arrive at a better idea, if there is time and everyone is around the table.
- Better communication and consultation throughout a planning initiative and through the implementation could improve the results.
- There is a big challenge in reaching those who are typically not engaged – who don't own property, or with full-time jobs and children.
- Bringing the developers into the original visioning could help to produce a project which both fits with community values and is economically viable.
- The best engagement process take place in neighbourhood contexts where people spend time – community centres, dog parks, coffee shops.
- CityPlan was a watershed document for engaging the public.

Education about sustainability and City processes is needed to develop community capacity and build support for sustainability initiatives

- Good, informed decisions require understanding of all the variables.
- City should showcase successes in sustainability initiatives and place-making.
- The City should play a leadership role to advance sustainability projects that meet city-wide goals

The City has a challenge in treating neighbourhoods equitably while reflecting neighbourhood values

- Neighbourhoods are not equal in their capacity for civic engagement or in their civic organization.
- Perhaps neighbourhoods could propose strategies for contributing to the achievement of city-wide goals.
- Focusing on the goals first, in collaboration with neighbourhoods, rather than on the limited resources available, could open up new solutions and strategies.

Implementing sustainability at the neighbourhood level through genuine collaboration can lead to greater success at all levels

- There is a wealth of knowledge and capacity in neighbourhoods.
- Partnering between City and organizations like BIA can quickly address some important issues.
- We can start to redefine the relationship between the community and the City as more of a partnership, with the City providing funds and the community providing time, creativity and entrepreneurship.
- When the community takes ownership of a project, the success is greater and the capacity of the community is strengthened.
- Successful neighbourhood projects need local champions empowered to work with each other.
- With some support and removal of barriers, community volunteers could undertake neighbourhood projects.
- Collaboration among all the stakeholders is key to good decisions and projects

Political will is essential to bring about needed change

- Elected officials need good information and public support to lead innovative sustainability initiatives.
- Why is something as important as sustainability so slow to happen?

Strategies are needed to achieve success with limited resources

- Collaborations and partnerships open the door to additional resources, such as in-kind contributions.
- Available resources may be greater than they seem if the focus is on the ultimate goals.
- There is benefit to all in moving away from a charity/grant model to a partnership/social enterprise model.

Time is needed for good policy development and engagement

- Success requires sufficient time, and dialogue
- Education, and providing good and complete information, takes time
- For a program to have broad support, there needs to be time to move at the pace of the group; rushing can result in loss of support.
- Time to develop community capacity and engagement is essential to a successful process.

Symposium Public Event April 8 - Poster

Hosted by the Vancouver City Planning Commission

A City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods: HOW DO WE GET THERE?



A neighbourhood isn't sustainable without:

Active and accessible transportation
Art in communities
Businesses committed to sustainability
Celebrations, diverse and multicultural
Elders improving the community
Fabulous public spaces
Local waste solutions
Neighbourhood food networks
People reaching out to help each other
Places to live for everyone
Schools as neighbourhood hubs
And, what else?

Presenting Organizations:

Avenue for/des Arts
BEST (Better Environmentally Sound Transportation)
Discovery Organics
Sandhog Creations Society
UBC Urban Design Students
United We Can
Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks
Vancouver Public Space Network
Windermere Secondary School
Women Elders in Action Society (WE*ACT)
Zero Waste Vancouver



Vancouver City Planning Commission

A Council-appointed volunteer advisory body

'A Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods' is an initiative of the Vancouver City Planning Commission and not the City of Vancouver.

A SYMPOSIUM: Setting the Framework

The Vancouver City Planning Commission invites you to an evening of exploration and celebration of what the idea of a sustainable neighbourhood means to Vancouver citizens.

How can neighbourhoods best contribute to the evolution of a sustainable Vancouver? How can the City help neighbourhoods become more sustainable and livable?

TIME AND LOCATION

Friday, April 8, 7 - 10 pm, Registration: 6:30 pm
Vancouver Public Library Conference Centre (lower level)
350 West Georgia Street, Alice MacKay Room

THE PROGRAM

1. Taking sustainability to the neighbourhood level

Since the idea of sustainable development emerged as an international goal 30 years ago, it has been embraced by cities around the globe as a local imperative. How do we apply these ambitious aspirational goals at a neighbourhood level to achieve critical sustainability outcomes?

Commissioners will provide an introduction and overview of their initiative *A Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods*.

2. What does sustainability mean in neighbourhoods?

The highlight of the evening is a series of presentations in the Pecha Kucha format by representatives of some wonderful local organizations engaged in contributing to the livability and sustainability of their neighbourhoods.

Each presentation completes the statement: "A neighbourhood isn't sustainable without _____."

3. Your ideas on sustainability at the neighbourhood level

The presenters' themes represent some of the features that are essential to a sustainable neighbourhood. We invite your ideas about how we evolve as a city of sustainable neighbourhoods, to help set the framework for the evolving conversation.

- How would you complete the statement: "A neighbourhood isn't sustainable without _____"?
- What are your comments on the City's 2002 sustainability definition and principles?
- How do we get to a shared understanding of sustainability at the neighbourhood level?

This event is the public portion of a symposium that continues on Saturday. Community organizations that work at neighbourhood and city-wide levels to enhance Vancouver's livability, will brainstorm strategies and actions for collaboration on a sustainable future for our great city.

RSVP: Please e-mail vcpc@vancouver.ca

We look forward to seeing you!

Symposium Public Event April 8 Presenters

A neighbourhood isn't sustainable without....

...accessible mobility for all ages

Margaret Mahan

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation

...resilient & vibrant food networks

Ian Marcuse

Grandview Woodland Food Connection

...community building through art & creativity

Jenn Strom

Avenue for/des Arts

...seniors participating in the community

Elsie Dean

Women Elders In Action Society (WE*ACT)

...schools as neighbourhood hubs

Brendan Chan, Cassandra Ly

Windermere Secondary School

...mobilizing neighbourhood assets

Helen Spiegelman

Zero Waste Vancouver

...businesses committed to sustainability

Trish Kelly

Discovery Organics

...people reaching out to help people

Ken Lyotier

United We Can

...robust and accessible public spaces

Erin O'Melinn, Adam Vasilevich

Vancouver Public Space Network

...places to live for everyone

Pat Chan, Lisa Lang, James Godwin, Niall MacRae

UBC School of Community & Regional Planning

Link to videos of presentations:

<http://www.youtube.com/neighbourhoods2011#p/u/15/1duVafuxERO>

Symposium Event April 8-9 - Invitation to Community Groups

Hosted by the Vancouver City Planning Commission

A City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods:

HOW DO WE GET THERE?



A Symposium

A unique opportunity for community leaders to collaborate on a thriving future for our neighbourhoods and our city

How can neighbourhoods best contribute to the evolution of a sustainable Vancouver? How can the City help your neighbourhood become more sustainable and livable?

We're bringing together 150 citizens from community organizations who are actively involved in sustainability initiatives in the city and its neighbourhoods. You've been identified as a leader and we'd like to invite you to participate in this two-day symposium to provide your input.

THE SYMPOSIUM

Part 1: Setting the Framework

Friday, April 8, 7 - 10 pm

- Ten local champions speak on key ingredients of sustainability for neighbourhoods
- Share your ideas on what is essential to the sustainability of a neighbourhood, and on the City's definition of sustainability

Part 2: Identifying Strategies and Actions

Saturday, April 9, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

- Hear success stories of neighbourhood/City collaborations for sustainable development
- World Café: brainstorm key strategies
- Lunch and refreshments
- Plenary session to prioritize actions

LOCATION

Vancouver Public Library Conference Centre (lower level),
350 West Georgia Street, Alice MacKay Room

RSVP: Please e-mail vcpc@vancouver.ca by Thursday, March 31.

OBJECTIVES

- Bring together community leaders from across the city and sectors to brainstorm ideas for effectively integrating city-wide and neighbourhood-based sustainability initiatives.
- Collectively identify from these ideas specific actions or strategies that are most likely to be replicable and successful.
- Prioritize and select the top three to five actions and/or strategies for further development.

OUTCOMES

The Commission will present the recommendations from the symposium to Council. The symposium will be a thought-provoking and interactive experience with peers from throughout the city and across sectors.

We look forward to seeing you!



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Community Organizations on RSVP List

This is a working list: some were unable to attend at the last minute, while other groups who had not been expected participated.

411 Seniors Centre	Multifaith Action Society
Avenue for/des Arts	Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver
BC Cooperative Association	Norquay Neighbours
Better Environmentally Sound Transportation	Performing Arts Lodge
Car Free Vancouver	Progressive Intercultural Community Services Soc PICS
Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House	Quest Food Exchange
Climate Smart	RangiChangi Roots Intercultural Alliance for Climate Action
Coal Harbour Residents Association	Renfrew Collingwood Vision Implementation Committee
Collingwood Neighbourhood House	Riley Park Community Association
Community Arts Council	Riley Park South Cambie Vision Committee
Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO)	Science World
David Suzuki Foundation	South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
Dr. Sun Yat Sen Chinese Garden	Southeast Vancouver Seniors Arts and Cultural Society
DRIFT	Strathcona BIA
Dunbar Vision Implementation Committee	Strathcona Residents Association
Evergreen BC	Strathcona Vision 2010
False Creek Residents Association	Sunset Community Centre Association
False Creek South Neighbourhood Association	Sunset Vision Implementation Committee
False Creek Watershed Society	United Way of the Lower Mainland
Fresh Roots Urban Farm	United We Can
Gathering Place Community Centre, The	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society
Grandview Woodland Area Council (GWAC)	Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition
Grandview Woodland Food Connection	Vancouver Coastal Health- Insite and Onsite
Grandview-Woodland Community Policing Centre	Vancouver Farmers' Markets
Hastings Community Centre Association	Vancouver Heritage Foundation
Hastings Sunrise Village	Vancouver Public Space Network
Hastings Sunrise Visions Implementation Committee	Vancouver Society of Children's Centres
Kettle Friendship Society	Victoria Fraserview Killarney City Plan Vision Committee
Kitsilano Residents Groups	Village Vancouver
Kitsilano Transition village	Watari Youth, Family and Community Services
Langara College - Sustainability/Community Development	West 4th Ave Community Association
Light House Sustainable Building Centre	West End Neighbours
Marpole Business Improvement Association	West End Residents Association (WERA)
Marpole Oakridge Area Council Society	West Point Grey Community Liaison Group
Marpole Residents Alliance	Windermere School
Mount Pleasant BIA	Women Elders in Action WE*ACT Society
Mount Pleasant Community Liaison Group	YMCA
Mount Pleasant Watershed Committee	Zero Waste Vancouver

Symposium April 9 Presenters

Success Stories in Neighbourhood-City Collaboration

Reclaiming streets for people: car-free days

Joey Moore

Car Free Vancouver

Collaborative community planning: Mount Pleasant Community Plan

Denise Wrathall

Mount Pleasant Community Liaison Group

Farmers markets & local food

Tara McDonald

Vancouver Farmers Markets

Preserving heritage & affordable housing, building community

Sean McEwen

Mole Hill Living Heritage Society

Link to videos of presentations:

<http://www.youtube.com/neighbourhoods2011#p/u/5/ckwlGZ5epF8>