

MOTION

1. EcoDensity (VanRIMS No. 11-2200-21)

MOVED by Councillor Anton
SECONDED by Mayor Sullivan

WHEREAS:

- A. The Mayor has announced an initiative along with Guiding Principles to create an EcoDensity Charter;
- B. Housing is a key element of working towards an EcoDense City that is environmentally friendly, liveable and affordable;
- C. Increased housing choice will allow families to raise children and seniors to age in their neighbourhoods;
- D. Excellent public amenities are needed along with increased housing;
- E. On 19 January 2006 this council directed staff to identify opportunities to fast-track the development of social and affordable housing through the use of densification and alternative housing forms;
- F. Through the Community Visions program, citizens have identified new housing types and locations in their neighbourhoods;
- G. The Neighbourhood Centres Program works with communities to implement Community Vision Directions for new housing through the introduction of new zoning schedules and an associated array of community amenities;
- H. The introduction of new housing in Vancouver is consistent with the GVRD's goals of concentrating growth in regional centres;

THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED THAT:

1. This council support the development of an EcoDensity charter and toolkit;
2. An EcoDensity Forum be convened no later than the spring of 2007, as a key step in the development of the Charter, to discuss actions that lead to:
 - (a) Opportunities to improve housing affordability;
 - (b) Increased housing supply including citywide approaches for new housing;
 - (c) Zoning designations which may allow fee-simple ownership of small lots or row housing;

- (d) Economic analysis of proposed new housing types and zonings;
 - (e) Development of public amenities to meet the needs of new housing;
3. Council allocate \$300,000 from 2006 Contingency Reserve to be spent in 2006 and 2007 on the EcoDensity Forum for initial planning and research, staffing, community outreach, information materials, event staging and developing EcoDensity principles and toolkit, with a report back this Fall with details on work plan and resource requirements.
 4. Staff report back following the EcoDensity Forum with recommendations on how to put into action the conclusions of the Forum and the principles of the EcoDensity Charter;
 5. The CityPlan Community Vision Implementation Committees, the general public and the business community be invited to participate in the EcoDensity Forum and the development of the EcoDensity Charter.

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Vancouver EcoDensity



Initiative

EcoDensity Vancouver



Mayor Sam Sullivan:

NEW HOUSING for a New Century



Our city currently consumes resources and produces waste at a rate well beyond the planet's ability to sustain and replenish. If all people on Earth lived the way we do in Vancouver, it would take four planets, not one, to sustain the population. Cities like Vancouver, a world leader in sustainable development, must do more to help protect our local and global environment.

Of the many actions that are needed to slow and reverse this trend, I want to focus on one that will yield significant benefits to the environment, as well as improve the livability and affordability of Vancouver neighbourhoods: high quality density.

I believe the time has come for Vancouver to move towards something I am calling the EcoDensity Initiative – a new approach to housing development that will reduce our ecological footprint while making home ownership more economical.

Over the next year, I will be encouraging our citizens, urban planners, architects, developers and community organizations to join me and our Council in becoming part of the global solution. I want us to work together toward the development of an EcoDensity Charter that will inform future development into the next century.

I would like all of us to think about opportunities for high quality density, to expand housing choices for all residents, including young families and the elderly, and to provide for new investment in public amenities such as parks, green space, cultural facilities and community centres throughout the city.

Why EcoDensity?

The citizens of Vancouver have made it clear they want a future Vancouver that is healthy, clean and green. They want a city that is livable, accessible and affordable. These are shared values, and only through collaboration between the City, residents, businesses and developers have we been able to achieve many of the remarkable things that make Vancouver one of the top-ranked cities in the world. The next step on our path is to meet the challenge of becoming a truly sustainable city.

We have said 'no' to freeways running through our city, and instead promote walking, biking and public transit. We have created livable, and at the same time, dense, mixed use neighbourhoods in our Downtown. We are developing neighbourhood centres in the older single family areas that provide increased housing choices around commercial shops and services. We seek integrated and inclusive developments for people of all ages, abilities and incomes. We are advancing the design of green buildings, and with the development of Southeast False Creek underway, an entire sustainable community is about to become reality. We are responsible stewards, challenging ourselves to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. And we are proud that all of these decisions have been made through processes and programs that engage and involve the citizens of Vancouver.

Yet despite all this work, Vancouver and our region, like all urban centres in the world, are on a path that may not lead to a future that is healthy, clean and green. For the first time in human history, urban regions hold over half of the global population, use three quarters of the world's resources and produce three quarters of the world's pollution. We are depleting resources,



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destroying ecosystems and polluting the planet at a rate we cannot afford.

As regions grow in size and population, and become the prime drivers of the world's economy, our choices are having profound impacts on the world's climate. All informed conversations about climate change are now about how fast it is happening, how serious the impacts will be for all living things, and what steps are absolutely essential to minimize the damage caused by the last century of development.

More attention than ever before is being paid to addressing the factors leading to climate change. However, too much focus has been on finding cleaner sources of energy to service a lifestyle focused on the automobile, and to producing ever-increasing, low density sprawl.

Sprawl is compromising our environment with more and more land being dedicated to low-density housing and office parks, facilitated by billions of dollars of new investment in an infrastructure that is dedicated to the automobile. We are also pushing out the very uses that provide significant benefits to communities, yet have the least ability to compete: green-space, agricultural and industrial areas.

The cost to every citizen in this region will grow as a greater portion of income is devoted to maintaining and operating this infrastructure, not to mention the associated costs to physical and mental health. Housing will become even less affordable as the supply is constrained by low density development. Housing choice will be limited as the needs of residents who want to stay in their neighbourhoods, particularly young families and the elderly, cannot, because there are no alternatives to single family homes, such as row houses, infill and duplexes.



I believe the time has come for Vancouver to move towards something I am calling the EcoDensity Initiative – a new approach to housing development that will reduce our ecological footprint while making home ownership more economical.



EcoDensity Vancouver

A “one planet” city consumes resources at a rate that can be sustained by the planet’s ability to replenish those resources.

HOW MANY
PLANETS
do you want
to live on?

While Vancouver has made great progress in our efforts to become a sustainable city, we are not a one planet city. It will take all of us, working together, to reduce our ecological footprint by undertaking a number of initiatives in our city, in our neighbourhoods and in our homes.



Of the many actions that will help us become a one planet city, high quality densification is something we can begin to address immediately.

High Quality Densification:

- Helps reduce fossil fuel emissions, as people live closer to where they work, shop and play;
- Reduces our ecological footprint by making better use of resources and existing infrastructure such as roads, bridges, sewers and sidewalks;
- Significantly improves housing choice for all residents, including young families and the elderly;
- Improves housing affordability by increasing the housing supply;
- Directly reinvests resources into new and better community amenities such as parks, libraries, cultural facilities, community centres, swimming pools and recreational fields;
- Promotes neighbourhood character and public safety through better, more responsive design;
- Reduces the need for taxpayers to finance public investments in new hard infrastructure costs such as roads, sewers and water;
- Makes transit systems more viable and efficient;
- Helps keep residential and business property taxes lower by sharing costs over a greater population;
- Helps keep the local economy vibrant and healthy;
- Reduces the pressure on developing agricultural and industrial land as well as existing green space.



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How will we get there?

I will be recommending to Council that Vancouver develop an EcoDensity Charter to build on the successes to date and to do an even better job of reducing our impact on the environment. The Charter will include principles that will guide future decisions on planning and development in Vancouver to achieve high quality densification, and fit within the broader *City Principles of Sustainability*, adopted by City Council in 2002. It will also include an EcoDensity Toolkit, produced in partnership with leading experts in our local universities, which will help citizens and professionals to understand and analyze the environmental implications of choices they make whether at the scale of a home, a neighbourhood or the entire city.

The process around the development of the Charter will include a dialogue with citizens, with access to the best urban

thinkers, and will have a significant focus on high quality housing density. This process will also help to articulate the City's response to and participation in the Livable Region Strategic Plan update.

I would also like to establish an EcoDensity Forum to be held in the Spring of 2007. This Forum will be a key step in the development of the Charter, and will result in the development of actions to address housing affordability, supply and innovation in housing design, performance and tenure.

We also need to take action in the short term. We must support and expedite the current efforts of communities to increase housing choice and public amenities in neighbourhoods, by taking advantage of opportunities to implement the Neighbourhood Centres identified in Community Visions, and to undertake planning around the new Canada Line stations. This will be done by having City Council direct appropriate resources to these programs.

I also challenge other cities in the region and throughout the world to do the same; to work with communities and to contemplate the role that high quality densification can play in reducing our footprint on the planet. I put forward today a number of principles to help guide this discussion.

*EcoDensity Charter
EcoDensity Forum*



Guiding Principles for



The Role of HIGH QUALITY DENSITY

High quality density will help to increase the livability, quality and beauty of our neighbourhoods, ensuring the highest standards of architecture and urban design, creating interesting and lively public places, and expanding community amenities.

Effective planning for land use is a critical activity, including the creation of regional centres, industrial employment areas, green spaces and areas for population growth. EcoDensity also addresses a range of social issues, including housing options for low income earners, those at risk and the homeless. Land use planning at the local level, in particular high quality densification, offers significant opportunity and is a tool that cities control exclusively. This will be the emphasis of the EcoDensity Vancouver Charter.

Lower Resource Consumption and Use Existing Infrastructure More Efficiently •

Cities with high quality densities consume less land for development and energy for heating, cooling and transportation. They also make for more efficient use of costly investments such as new bridges, roads, water and waste systems.

Enhance the Livability and Beauty of Neighbourhoods •

High quality density will help to increase the livability, quality and beauty of our neighbourhoods, ensuring the highest standards of architecture and urban design, creating interesting and lively public places, and expanding community amenities.

Increase Housing Choice, especially for Young Families and the Elderly •

A dense city provides more opportunities for housing for all stages of the life cycle, such as infill, duplexes, and row houses or higher density options on large or unique sites. Higher density developments need to recognize the needs of all people, including families that require bigger units or more bedrooms, as well as provide public amenities for children and seniors.

Create Mixed Use Neighbourhood Centres

- Complete neighbourhoods have housing diversity within walking distance of shops and services, and provide convenient access to transit. These neighbourhood centres reduce reliance on the car, allow independence for seniors and youth, and facilitate daily interactions.

Increase Public Safety •

- Growth can make neighbourhoods safer through more active streets and public spaces, quality designs that prevent crime, and a civic commitment to deal with annoyances, nuisances and other activities that detract from the quality of neighbourhood life.



EcoDensity

Support our Local Economy • A growing pool of residential homeowners will contribute to a new customer base for our local merchants and help keep our economy vibrant.

Maintain Competitive Tax Rates While Shifting Tax Burdens onto Less

Sustainable Activities • Increased densities will serve to broaden the tax base, and will relieve pressure on both residential and business property taxes. Tax shifting away from income and property, and toward sprawl, waste and pollution will enhance our long-term sustainability.

Preserve and Expand Employment Areas •

Employment areas and goods movement are critical to the functioning of cities, providing jobs and services for residents and businesses. Increased densities can help foster a strong industrial base and orderly, rational commercial development, which are essential to our economic sustainability.

Make Sustainable Transportation Choices •

A more sustainable city is supported by investments in infrastructure that ensure mobility for all and provide alternatives to the car. Transit, cycling, and walking all become more efficient with higher densities.

Restore and Expand Natural Environments that Reflect Our Ecology •

Urban green space provides numerous benefits to city residents, providing space for recreation and natural experiences, improving the urban ecology and natural habitat, and fostering a sense of community that is a part of the landscape.

Improve Building Design • New housing types will be needed to meet the demand for medium-density, ground-oriented housing in Vancouver. Designs need to challenge existing norms and be at the frontier for affordability, performance and sustainability.

Work With Communities to Make Choices •

Working with communities in addressing housing needs, as Vancouver does through CityPlan, allows for housing capacity to increase in a way that reflects local needs and interests.

Access the World's Best Thinkers and

Designers • Neighbourhoods seeking high quality density should be provided with access to some of the world's best urban thinkers and designers, along with information and toolkits necessary to understand the environmental implications of different development choices.





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