



OTHER REPORT

Report Date: June 9, 2010  
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Meeting Date: June 24, 2010

TO: Standing Committee on Planning and Environment  
FROM: Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC)  
SUBJECT: Vancouver City Planning Commission 2009 Report and 2010 Work Plan

**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council receive the Vancouver City Planning Commission's 2009 report and 2010 work plan for information and comment.

**CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

This report outlines the work plan for the VCPC for 2010. The Commission proposes two main areas of work - *Sustainable City, Sustainable Neighbourhoods - Next Steps* and *False Creek Flats - Enhancing Vancouver's Sustainability and Prosperity* a project being done in partnership with the VEDC. Both projects will make a contribution toward Council's considerations of the challenge of integrating sustainability across city wide planning processes. As the City considers new ways of engaging citizens in future planning processes across the City, the work of the Commission will bring an important perspective. The City Manager recommends acceptance of the report and the proposed work plan.

## COUNCIL POLICY

The applicable Council policy is By-Law 5064 creating the Vancouver City Planning Commission and outlining 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.

## BACKGROUND

The Commission is a citizen's advisory body that serves Council by reviewing City projects and initiatives through a long-term lens, and by addressing issues with significant future implications. In the course of its work, the Commission consults with the public to gather input, collaborates with practitioners and thought-leaders on knowledge-sharing and idea generation, and convenes stakeholders and public groups on specific topics. A sampling of recent initiatives is included in Appendix A.

The Commission reports to Council as often as required in carrying out its mandate, and at least annually on its work during the past year and its future plans.

## **A. VCPC ANNUAL REPORT 2009**

The Commission's work in 2009 centred on three primary areas, described below.

### **A.1. COMMENT ON PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

The Commission reviewed and provided comments to staff on the following major projects following presentations from staff and subsequent discussion:

- Historic Area Height Review
- Downtown Capacity and View Corridors Study
- Northeast False Creek High Level (NEFC) Review

### **A.2. COMMISSION INTERNAL REVIEW**

In its report to Council on February 19, 2009, the outgoing Commission highlighted issues relating to the role and structure of the Commission. One challenge that faced the current Commission at the outset was the loss of continuity in knowledge and experience among Commissioners, with only two returning members having an average of one year's service. To address this challenge, the Commission held a number of orientation sessions, including one with the Urban Design and Development senior planner on the Commission's role and responsibilities on the Urban Design Panel, and one with the Director of Planning on the Planning Department's work plan. The incoming Commission also initiated an examination of the Commission's past record and an exploration of the role it can play in future, a process which informed the development of the work plan (see A.3). A number of members took the advisory group training session with Eli Mina.

Recognizing that frequent turnover of members as dictated by the bylaw hampers the Commission in its effectiveness and productivity, and after losing two members during the year, the Commission requested Council to extend the terms of four members whose appointment would otherwise have ended in December after only nine effective months of service and taking with them the learning gained during the first year. Council's consent enabled the Commission to begin the 2010 year in a stronger position to carry out its mandate effectively.

### **A.3. DEVELOPING THE COMMISSION'S WORK PLAN**

In May 2009, the Commission held a knowledge-sharing and capacity-building event with over 30 former Commissioners, together with past and present senior planning staff and Council liaisons. Past Commissioners represent an informed body of citizens with a long and often prominent history of engagement in urban affairs and reflection on city planning and development. One of the questions explored by the group at the one-day event was: "what are the top issues and priorities as the city looks to its future and how is the Commission well positioned to address them?" The learning from this event formed the basis of the Commission's work planning for 2010, as described below.

## B. VCPC WORKPLAN 2010

### B.1 INTRODUCTION

In addition to reviewing current development projects in order to provide comment to staff or Council, the Commission carries out specific projects involving consultation with the public and stakeholders on timely issues and concerns relating to the long-term future of the city.

The Commission is planning two initiatives for 2010. The first is a set of citizen workshops to begin a dialogue about the relationship between city and neighbourhoods in a sustainable city. The second is participation on the Vancouver Economic Development Commission's proposed Task Force on the future of False Creek Flats.

### B.2 PROJECT INITIATIVES

#### a. "SUSTAINABLE CITY, SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS - NEXT STEPS"

##### *PROPOSAL SUMMARY*

The Commission proposes to begin a dialogue to explore how Vancouver can evolve into a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods in ways that meets neighbourhood needs while advancing city-wide sustainability goals.

This initiative is planned to have two phases over a two-year period. In the first phase, the Commission will hold a series of four invitational workshops with representatives of key groups from all sectors who are involved in city building. These preliminary workshops will generate themes and a plan for the second phase in 2011, which will involve greater public engagement to generate ideas and options for the next steps toward becoming a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods. This report describes the first phase.

##### *BACKGROUND*

In discussions held by the VCPC last year, internally and with past commissioners, senior staff and Council liaisons, the Commission found very strong support for the City's sustainability initiatives introduced in the past two decades. The commitment to sustainable development was endorsed as the most responsible and equitable foundation for city-building. At the same time, in probing for the top issues relating to Vancouver's future, there were expressions of frustration that sustainability policies and programs are not being implemented at a pace and scale that corresponds to the urgency of changes necessary to significantly reduce both carbon emissions and the city's ecological footprint as a whole. Some expressed concerns that the economic and social dimensions of sustainability were not sufficiently prominent.

There was also extensive support for a city vision that articulates and embraces sustainability goals in an integrated framework of sustainability policies. Some proposed that such a vision and framework would strengthen the city's capacity to adopt and introduce sustainable practices more rapidly, effectively and efficiently, both city-wide and in neighbourhoods.

The Commission found the idea of a new sustainability vision and framework echoed in the *Greenest City Vancouver 2020* report, recommending the need for an "over-arching vision and structure" for policy and decision making within an integrated plan to achieve the

sustainability goals.”<sup>\*</sup> The Commission also noted the earlier EcoDensity recommendation to prepare an EcoCity Plan “that builds on CityPlan and the Community Visions to form an approved physical direction to manage change and density across the city to meet the commitments of the EcoDensity Charter.”<sup>†</sup> These recommendations indicate that the idea of a new plan has support. However, these two references describe different kinds of comprehensive plans. More exploration would be necessary to clearly understand how either or both would further empower the City to advance sustainability goals, their relationship to existing policies, and how each manages change in neighbourhoods.

Through its own research and discussions with City staff, the Commission learned that there is no shortage of Council-adopted vision statements and policies that are supportive of sustainability goals. The policies relate to transportation, social sustainability, green buildings, parks and many other areas, and some are at the leading edge of urban sustainability policies. However, these visions and policies are not aggregated and organized in a way that is readily accessible to citizens.

In reviewing CityPlan’s directions for a City of Neighbourhoods, the Commission noted that the City’s efforts to implement policies with the intent of enhancing sustainability are sometimes met with resistance at the neighbourhood level, often with claims that the impacts conflict with CityPlan directions and undermine sustainability. Recent examples include HEAT shelters and STIR.<sup>‡</sup> With predominantly single-family neighbourhoods accounting for approximately 70% of Vancouver’s land mass, addressing the realization of sustainability at a neighbourhood level is critical to the sustainability for the city as a whole. The Commission believes that it is important to examine this tension in order to understand its basis and to find a way forward.

### CityPlan Foundation

The current over-arching vision document for the City of Vancouver is CityPlan, adopted in 1995 after extensive public consultation. As a “broad vision,” CityPlan set directions for the next 20 to 30 years.<sup>§</sup> It has provided the foundation for a broad web of city-wide policies in areas including transportation, economy, downtown development and corporate planning, and also a neighbourhood-based vision and implementation program.

The idea of a “City of Neighbourhoods” that emerged from the CityPlan process has been at the heart of many planning processes. The core values articulated within the components of the CityPlan vision continue to inform current discussion and decision-making. A set of aspirational goals for the City created today, 15 years later, would probably include aspects of all eight directions<sup>\*\*</sup> and 21 vision elements.<sup>††</sup> In that respect, CityPlan has stood the test of time. It was cited frequently during Ecodensity discussions as a guiding vision and remains a living document for many citizen groups and within City policy-making. The City’s transportation, greenways, downtown residential, cultural, social sustainability, and laneway housing plans can all be traced back to the CityPlan directions.

CityPlan was based on broad community engagement that directly involved 20,000 residents; as many as 100,000 appear to have been touched in some way by the process. The subsequent

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<sup>\*</sup> Page 25

<sup>†</sup> Initial Action C-1

<sup>‡</sup> Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT); Short Term Incentives for Rental Housing (STIR)

<sup>§</sup> Both figures appear in documents

<sup>\*\*</sup> <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/cityplan/cityplan.htm>

<sup>††</sup> <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/cityplan/dfvf.htm>

development of Community Visions in the nine neighbourhoods that had not previously had a planning process involved extensive participatory engagement by residents.

### **More Recent City-wide Sustainability-based Policies**

The world within which the city evolves has changed dramatically since the early 1990s. There is a growing understanding of the looming impacts of climate change, resource depletion including peak oil, and ecosystem degradation. The integration of land use and transportation has been recognized as central to shaping sustainable neighbourhoods and cities. There is wide agreement that urban development and human activity must meet new environmental standards and reflect the city's social and economic sustainability dimensions.

In response to the new challenges, the City has introduced numerous important and innovative policies to guide decision-making in areas from transportation to culture. Council's 'Greenest City' initiative launched in 2009 includes an action plan for becoming the world's greenest city by 2020, a milestone on the journey towards a one-planet-city destination. The Green Capital city branding is a strategic effort to leverage economic development that is consistent with sustainability values.

### **Planning for Neighbourhoods**

These new city-wide sustainability policies are seen as critical to Vancouver's future as a green, economically prosperous and socially inclusive city. They are also key to meeting specific important and urgent goals, including environmental targets in GHG reduction, social policy targets in the provision of affordable housing, and economic targets in the development of the city's industrial and commercial base.

These policies have been led by Council and developed by staff in parallel with neighbourhood-based planning and implementation processes. Although they are consistent with CityPlan directions, they were introduced without broad city-wide consultation on the underlying principles. As a result, the implications of some of these new policies for existing neighbourhood visions and plans have not been explored at the grassroots level.

### **Towards a Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods**

CityPlan was an inspiring and dynamic plan for its time, before the era of climate change and peak oil, and before the concept of sustainable development had been introduced in to city planning. For a number of reasons, 2010 is an opportune year in which to initiate a discussion of how CityPlan, its legacies and recent policies are serving Vancouver in its sustainability journey:

- The legacies of the successful Olympics are a valuable backdrop for thinking about how the city will evolve over the next decades.
- The lessons learned from 15 years of CityPlan about how to work with citizens to shape their neighbourhoods, may provide a framework for finding better ways to realize urgent sustainability goals.
- The completion of the West Point Grey Community Vision marks the first time that 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.

- With Vancouver preparing to celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011, there will be a great deal of reflection on the past and speculation about the future to inspire conversations about achieving sustainability goals at the neighbourhood level.

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 one of those many elements. They 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.

### *PROJECT OUTLINE*

The Commission proposes to initiate a city-wide public dialogue about how Vancouver can evolve into a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods in way that meets neighbourhood needs while advancing city-wide sustainability goals. Citizens will be invited to imagine their communities as sustainable neighbourhoods within a sustainable city. They will also be asked to explore how well the city's vision and policy frameworks are working to bring about a sustainable future for the city and its neighbourhoods, to identify what might be missing, and to consider ideas and options to guide next steps.

The dialogue will have two phases.

- In the first phase, the Commission will hold a series of four invitational workshops with representatives of key groups involved in city building from all sectors. These preliminary workshops will generate themes and ideas, and a plan for the second phase.
- The second phase, next year, will be a broader public engagement to generate ideas and explore options for next steps toward becoming a sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods

The purpose of the first phase of four preliminary workshops leading up to the public engagement is to provide these groups with the opportunity and space to reflect on and share their unique experiences and insights. The reflections gathered from these informed groups will form the basis for a stimulating and thought-provoking broad public engagement next year.

The series of the first phase workshops is outlined below:

1. A preliminary dialogue with representatives of neighbourhood groups involved in city-building at the neighbourhood level will help to shape the three dialogue events.
2. The first workshop will be an internal City workshop that will bring together core staff in City departments as well as representatives of the Parks Board, Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Economic Development Commission - individuals with insights to offer from their experience on the ground in implementing sustainability policies and strategies of Council or their own organizations.
3. The second workshop will bring together representatives from associations, institutions and firms engaged in urban development and sustainability practice in Vancouver, 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.

4. The third workshop will bring together community leaders and representatives from neighbourhood and city-wide community organizations in all sectors - individuals who are active as citizens in shaping communities, locally or city-wide, and who are also personally affected as residents at a neighbourhood level by City policies and urban development initiatives.

Each workshop will be framed around key questions intended to probe for insights into the participants' experience with the City's visions, policies and plans, and tailored to the specific group. An advisory group will help to frame the questions, which could be drawn from the following:

- 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?

#### ***PROJECT OUTCOMES, REPORTING AND TIMELINE- FIRST PHASE***

The desired outcomes for the first phase of the project include the generation of themes and ideas about:

- 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 will form the basis for a report to Council. The report will include a proposal for a broader public engagement process in based on the phase one workshops. The phase two public engagement will be designed 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 will be involved in the planning of phase two.

The first session is planned for early summer. The remaining sessions are planned for the fall/winter, with a report to Council in February.



## **b. FALSE CREEK FLATS - ENHANCING VANCOUVER'S SUSTAINABILITY AND PROSPERITY**

### ***DESCRIPTION***

The Commission has been invited to participate in an initiative of the Vancouver Economic Development Commission to consider directions for the False Creek Flats. With its industrial land base, the False Creek Flats can play a vital role in Vancouver's ongoing sustainable development, and the Commission looks forward to contributing to this important initiative.

## **C. INTERNAL REVIEW**

In 2010, the Commission will continue its internal review into governance and operations to identify how the Commission can better provide Council with valuable comment and support in the long term in fulfillment of its mandate. Three areas are the focus of its review:

1. The impact of recent bylaw changes with regard to appointment terms on the effectiveness of the Commission where considerable familiarity with issues and their city context is necessary to provide helpful comment, and
2. The preparation of a backgrounder for new Commissioners on City policies relating to the City's long-term sustainability.
3. The development of a process using online and other tools by which the Commission can bring the informed perspectives of Vancouver's community, business and thought leaders into its discussions in the course of developing its own comments on city issues.

The Commission will make a report to Council on these areas in its next report.

## **D. BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The annual budget allocation to the Commission for 2010 is \$57,000. Approximately 85% of this amount is allocated to core expenses including staff, meeting support and Commission functions, leaving a budget approximately \$8,000 to fund basic engagement, communications, consultation, outreach and reporting in support of the Commission's ongoing work.

Given the City's financial circumstances at this time, the Commission will carry out the work within existing resources, with the "Sustainable City, Sustainable Neighbourhoods" being scaled to be deliverable within existing funds. Volunteers will be invited to help carry out the project, but it will be necessary to limit the extent of recording and reporting for the events.

The Commission seeks collaboration with City staff to ensure that its work ultimately contributes to the achievement of sustainability objectives, while recognizing that the reduced complement of staff is faced with increased demands on their time. Identification of what level of staff involvement is practical and productive will be determined in the initial scoping.

## CONCLUSION

The Commission has developed its work plan in the tradition and spirit of being of service to the city in convening residents to engage in an informed and creative dialogue about how Vancouver can continue to evolve as a vibrant, livable, sustainable city of sustainable neighbourhoods.

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## Appendix: Vancouver City Planning Commission - Historical Note

Since the Planning Department took on the planning function for the City, the Commission has evolved into a citizen's advisory body that serves Council by representing "ideas and opinions about the future of the city" and commenting "on any proposal likely to have a significant effect on the future of the City" (By-law 5064). In this role, the Commission consults with the public to gather input, collaborates with practitioners and thought-leaders on knowledge-sharing and idea generation, and convenes stakeholders and public groups on specific topics.

### Examples of Recent Commission Initiatives

In 2008, the Commission led the YouMap Vancouver pilot community asset-mapping project in two communities to demonstrate the benefits of a participatory appreciative enquiry approach to community consultation.

In 2007, the Commission conducted an exploration of the theme of adaptability as a core sustainability principle applicable to urban design, from buildings to public space.

In 2006, the Commission worked with SFU and Smart Growth BC to produce the Affordability by Design housing conference, and co-ordinated a Sustainable Strategic Planning event and report.

In 2005, the Commission conducted a review of neighbourhood engagement in Vancouver, resulting in the adoption by Council of seven recommendations to strengthen and revitalize relationships.

### In earlier years:

In 1980, the Commission conducted a broadly based consultation that resulted in "Goals for Vancouver," a report that contributed to the framework for the CityPlan process.

In 1997, the Commission organized a workshop on sustainability considerations for the development of Southeast False Creek that contributed to the sustainability guidelines for SEFC.