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Downtown South

Developers (most active): Concert Properties, Bosa, Polygon Homes, Cressey, Lintall Properties, Amacon
Urban Design Concept: Aitken Wreglesworth [overall], Hotson Bakker [Granville St] (City’s consultants)
Public Realm Design: Chris Phillips, Landscape Architects; Hadfield Turner (detailed public realm);
 Richard Stevenson, Landscape Architect (City Park) **Architects** (major projects): Davidson Yuen Simpson,
 Rafii Architects, Stuart Howard, Hancock Bruckner, Kasian Kennedy, Joe Wai, Hewitt Kwasnicki, Paul
 Merrick, Rositch Hemphill, Howard Bingham Hill, Bing Thom, VIA Architecture, Lawrence Doyle, Busby &
 Assoc., Stantec Architecture (with Arthur Erickson) **Principal City Staff:** Larry Beasley (Overview);
 Jill Davidson, Nathan Edelson (Area Planning); Ralph Segal (Urban Design/Development Planning);
 Jeff Brooks (Social Planning); Jim Lowden (Park Board); Victoria Garland (Housing) [refer also to p.57]

NEIGHBOURHOOD DATA
Net Area: 35.6 ha (88 ac)
Population: 10,000
Density (upa): 135 (approx.)
Housing Units: 12,000 (est.)
Non-market Units: 1,000 (est.)
Parks/Open Space: 1.6 ha (4 ac)



Downtown South – 1982



“The Wellspring” provides non-market, non-family housing

Downtown South, comprising about 33 city blocks, is one of several new inner city neighbourhoods which have developed on Vancouver’s downtown peninsula in recent years. Its planning resulted from a major City planning initiative in the early 1990’s in which nearly 750 000 m² (8 million sq. ft.) of excess downtown office space was converted to residential use. This initiative, as articulated in the 1991 Central Area Plan, has been the road map for downtown Vancouver’s “Living First” growth strategy ever since. Increasing land values and decreasing supply, coupled with changing local demographics, which have seen an influx of new residents who would readily accept alternatives to low density suburban housing, have also played their part in the appeal of this high density, high rise community.

Pressure to re-plan Downtown South also came from the development community. Previous rezoning attempts for high density residential had not succeeded, and the message coming back was that the then current density formula of 3.0 FSR residential + 2.0 FSR commercial was not marketable. Another impetus behind Downtown South’s redevelopment was that it would ease pressure on the established West End neighbourhood, which was being threatened with a loss of affordable housing. Downtown South was then a low density warehousing and service commercial area with high vacancy rates, clearly an under-developed part of the city, ripe for redevelopment.

Downtown South did not lend itself to the typical processes of community planning. It was one of the first new areas planned where there was no substantial existing residential population. The Community Arts Council stepped forward as a surrogate community stakeholder, while the development community was a major influence in the planning process, largely through the Downtown Vancouver Association’s participation. One of the area’s most significant neighbourhood planning contributions was its introduction of the first Development Cost Levy (DCL) authorized in the city. This provided contributions towards parks, community facilities, and non-market housing. This mechanism has since become a well-established planning tool across the city.

MICHAEL SHERMAN PHOTO (FOR HOWARD BINGHAM HILL ARCHITECTS)



“Oscar” lobby and townhouses provide “eyes on the street”

PAUL NOWARRE ILLUSTRATION (FOR HOTSON BAKKER ARCHITECTS)



Granville Street – Revitalization Concept

HADFIELD TURNER ILLUSTRATION



Sketch of Downtown South Streetscape Concept

West End District

Downtown South



Downtown South has had to face many challenges, not least of which was how to ameliorate Granville Street, one of Vancouver’s most significant historical thoroughfares but which had deteriorated in recent years. It needed a revitalization strategy. Part of that strategy was a recognition that Granville Street needed more residents nearby to animate it and create a sense of community stewardship. Another strategy was to limit the density increase along this street to maintain its heritage built form character and protect existing low income residents. Yet another part of the strategy involved creating a special entertainment zone along the street. The challenge of Granville Street continues but the street is starting to rebound in exciting ways.

In a major demographic remake of this part of the city, about 11,000 new residents have been added to its 1,000 pre-existing residents. New high rise towers support an active community which relishes its urban context, thereby complimenting and helping to rejuvenate adjacent areas such as historic Yaletown to the east. Street fronting rowhouses have domesticated what were sterile streets. A limited amount of parkspace has been achieved, recognizing that the much larger waterfront parks of Concord Pacific Place are nearby. Special public realm and streetscape standards were developed for the area, and these increasingly define Downtown South as it is built out. A building setback along most streets has helped create a more residential pedestrian environment, and many new street trees have been planted, often in double rows. Downtown South is coming together as a model for a higher density, high rise urban residential neighbourhood achieved through incremental development within a traditional street grid structure.

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Davie Street setback encourages shops to spill out onto street



"Oscar" townhouses on Drake Street



"Citycrest" was an early model for Downtown South's slim towers and street-defining podiums



"The 501" tower makes a strong statement at the Richards/Pacific corner



Residents of townhouses in the “Mondrian” are “reclaiming” Richards Street



Downtown South tree grate detail



“Mondrian’s” two generously spaced towers integrate with a strong townhouse base along Richards Street and the Contemporary Art Gallery at the Nelson Street corner.

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Downtown South



Emery Barnes Park public art



Emery Barnes Park Phase One



Emery Barnes Park serves residents of the surrounding high density neighbourhood



Phase One of Emery Barnes Park, which will soon be doubled in size to incorporate almost an entire city block



"Scotiabank Dance Centre" incorporates heritage bank facade into contemporary design

STANTEC ARCHITECTURE PHOTO

DANI O'REILLY PHOTO (FOR STUART HOWARD ARCHITECT)



"Metropolis" integrates a new tower with the heritage former Canadian Linen Building which has been converted to commercial use

VIA ARCHITECTURE PHOTO



"Citycrest" tower and podium with architectural references to Yaletown's loading dock canopies

DAVIDSON YUEN SIMPSON ARCHITECTS PHOTO



"Seymour Place" provides non-market housing and Coast Foundation social services



"The Beresford", with its mid-rise massing and masonry materials, relates to adjacent Yaletown context