

2 PURPOSE

The City of Vancouver's purpose in holding various discussions and meetings was threefold:

1. Provide information and background regarding False Creek Flats land use, transportation, and the Phase 1 Scoping process;
2. Obtain a sense of the views and issues related to land use and transportation planning in the Flats from the perspectives of different community groups; and
3. Help prepare staff and stakeholders for next steps including participation in June Stakeholder Workshops

3 PARTICIPANTS

The search for potential participants focussed on people most likely to be affected by planning decisions and/or who could provide information useful to future vision and planning for the site. More specifically, the City's community-based meetings¹ focussed on four community neighbourhoods surrounding the Flats: Mount Pleasant, CityGate/Strathcona, Downtown East Side, and Grandview/Woodlands. Representatives from local resident associations, community centres, local area networking groups, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), NGOs (e.g., those concerned with employment, history/heritage, education/learning, stewardship, youth, arts, safety), and First Nations were invited to participate. Thirty people confirmed agreement to participate; twenty-four actually participated. A full list of invitees and participants/organizations is included in Appendix A.

4 THE MEETINGS

Meetings were designed to meet the following objectives:

- a. Provide 'the Story' of the Flats in terms of current state, in process and possible future plans (policies, ideas, proposals);
- b. Explore participants' issues, concerns and ideas regarding current and future planning;
- c. Obtain recommendations for information exchange, consultation and participation in the ongoing planning process.

Learning about respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions to planning options and opportunities was the key task. Interaction among participants enriched information available to both staff and participants and helped to determine what issues were most salient and why. A brief summary of the discussion outcomes follow.

¹ Note that, concurrent with City planning of Phase 1 & 2, a series of Flats-related community-based workshops were held just prior to, and independent from, the City's meetings. These workshops were conducted as part of an NGO visioning project funded by a VanCity Community Solutions Fund grant. While the objectives of these independent workshops were somewhat different from City meetings' objectives, in the main, issues and concerns expressed in both series of meetings were similar. A summary report of the NGO workshops is provided in Appendix E

4.1 The 'Story'

Participants were informed that the City is embarking on a long term planning process and that two phases had thus far been articulated with Phase 1 being a scoping stage to be followed by a Phase 2 Visioning process in the fall. It was emphasized that the current meetings, as step 2 in the Phase 1 scoping process, should be seen as an early pre-planning stage of the overall planning process.

City of Vancouver staff provided background information on zoning, land uses, movement today, and plans for movement tomorrow. A brief overview of land use ideas that have been presented or tentatively explored with the City was also provided (e.g., Providence Health Centre, Whitecaps Stadium, Casino, film studios) though the status and/or likelihood of receiving formal proposals for any of these remains a question. Topic specific maps were used to facilitate understanding (Refer Appendix B) Participants often expanded on 'the story' by providing additional information regarding past plans and current and historic uses of areas of the site. The storytelling served as a basis for further discussion and provided staff with additional information for further investigation.

4.2 Issues & Ideas

Participants raised a number of questions, highlighted various issues and concerns, and offered ideas throughout the discussions. Three main issues areas emerged out of meeting discussions:

- Business & Industry
- Movement/Mobility
- Nature & Greenspaces

Each of these is discussed below. Additional concerns that received rather less discussion but are nonetheless important are also captured. (For notes detail by-community see Appendix C)

4.21 Business & Industry

*Retain &
Strengthen
I2 & I3
Industry*

Very strong support exists for retaining and strengthening industry in the I2 and I3 areas of the flats as well as current uses in the surround (e.g., 1000 Parker artist areas). Light manufacturing and warehousing uses are seen as critical for assuring local employment (especially entry level jobs). There is an interest in increasing the level and diversity of activity in the Flats, especially those that reflect the historic "city-serving" uses, and finding ways to encourage companies that need rail or port proximity to stay/relocate in the Flats.

*Provide
Incentives*

Participants noted that a number of businesses had been drawn away from the flats; that there are certain potential barriers that need to be overcome (land values and property taxes are a particular concern); and that incentives are likely to be essential for retaining and attracting businesses to the Flats. Incentives suggested included such things as: tax incentives; possible breaks for doing needed environmental assessments and clean up; providing ease of access (throughways for walking/biking to work; transit; parking); live/work opportunities; ensuring access to local amenities.

Specify/
redefine
'industrial'

Explore
New Opps

&

Alternate
Uses

What would constitute 'appropriate uses' for the Flats is of some concern. There are questions about what 'industry' or 'industrial' really means given what participants are seeing evolve in the Flats (especially in I3 which appears to be "just offices"). Participants suggested that 'industry' be redefined or more precisely defined, and that support for more traditional light industry and manufacturing uses be reflected in that definition. It was very clear that participants did not want to see more "big box retail" or auto malls in the Flats. These are seen to be "ugly" 'destination locations' that increase traffic and draw a lot of people to the Flats without any benefit to the surrounding neighborhoods. Tourism is seen as a business opportunity and a means to connect communities by highlighting and re-routing visitors to surrounding neighborhoods. Providing alternate uses and access to the I2 and I3 areas of the Flats during off hours is seen as one of the means to draw visitors to the area and create greater exposure to and connection with surrounding businesses and neighborhoods..

4.22 Movement/Mobility

Maintain,
Strengthen,
&
Consolidate

Movement-related issues are numerous and central to all participant groups. Given its centrality in the Flats it was not surprising that **rail** received a good deal of attention. The economic importance of rail and its advantage over trucking (traffic, green house gasses) is recognized and support exists for maintaining and possibly increasing the role of rail. There is interest in exploring the possibility of consolidating tracks and thereby opening up opportunities for improved linkage and "vibrancy" in the Flats area. Further exploration is required to determine the degree to which sound or vibration may impact on adjacent developments, especially residential, that might be proposed as a result of this 'opening up.'

Access &
Pathways

Most of the rail-related concerns focussed on rail as a barrier to movement to and across the Flats. Some throughways exist, however, they are on rail property and, much to the dismay of local area residents, rail companies have begun to fine trespassers and block some crossings. Participants appear eager to find ways to ensure safe, continued access to these throughways. There is also significant interest in increasing access to the Flats' industrial areas and providing safe viewing of rail operations as another way to both draw visitors to the area and provide community connectivity.

Safe
Crossings

Traffic
calming/
re-routing

Greenways

Aside from rail, discussion focussed primarily on issues of safety, traffic and flow issues (roadways, transit), and on improving connections and linkages across the Flats and with neighbor communities. **Safety** is a critical issue. Participants identified the need for safe pedestrian and bike crossings in several areas including rail lines; Main Street (none exist between National and Terminal); and Great Northern Way (especially by the Consortium lands). Traffic re-routing or calming measures were called for to prevent 'cut through' problems in residential areas (e.g., 6th & Carolina, Windsor). Greenways plans were seen favorably as both a means to provide safe and aesthetic pedestrian/bike ways, and for enabling movement around and through the Flats to areas beyond. Additional greenway routes were suggested for consideration (e.g., from Atlantic through the western Flats, including the Providence site, to the Strathcona Gardens and on to Clark).

Safety and general community well-being was also central to discussion of **roadways**. At least two groups were very strongly opposed to seeing any more major arterial roads around the site and were pleased that none were thus far planned. That said, a number of roadways are of concern to surrounding neighborhoods:

*Business
Access*

Main Street is an issue due to a lack of crossings near CityGate, lack of parking (business access), and its importance as a main trucking route. There is some concern that “Urban Transportation Showcase” plans to create pedestrian and transit “bulges” (make the street more pedestrian-friendly) may further slow traffic and inhibit visitors to area merchants.

Aesthetics

Terminal Avenue is seen as an “ugly and embarrassing” gateway to the City and in need of both safety-oriented and aesthetic improvements. Notwithstanding, Terminal is also seen to have potential as a ‘hub’ and connecting point for the Flats and surrounding communities.

*Commuter
Traffic*

Commuter traffic along *Venables, Commercial, and Victoria Drive* is a concern to Grandview Woodlands in particular. Alternative routes suggested include re-routing along National or along Malkin; it was noted, however, that the latter would raise substantial opposition from Strathcona residents. Finding ways to route traffic from downtown to primary exit routes (Hastings, 1st Avenue) while minimizing impacts on Flats area residential neighborhoods is a critical challenge.

Service

Transit improvements are seen to be one means of reducing at least some of the traffic problems. Participants were pleased to see future plans and ideas for transit improvements and the ways these may encourage a reduction in car use. In the shorter term, however, participants pointed to the need for increased bus service (especially along Great Northern Way) and other means to better connect communities. Suggestions included providing shuttle busses to downtown, and expanding the idea of a streetcar/trolley into the Flats to include eastward extension possibly as far as Commercial.

*Improve &
Optimize*

The need for better **linkages and connectors** focussed on movement as well as particular areas. Specific linkages for attention include: Broadway-Main-Terminal; St. George-Fraser; Grandview to Downtown; VCC and Great Northern Way; Consortium and surrounding community. Exploring the possibility of Station Street as an alternate north-south route connecting to Prior was one suggestion considered worthy of further consideration.

Optimizing the use of existing areas to improve connection, access and draw visitors to the Flats and surround is seen as critical. Pacific Central Station and the Trillium Park-Strathcona Community Gardens area are seen as two ‘hub’ areas that could address these aims. As noted above, improving access and view-ability of industrial and rail operations may also have potential. Participants also suggested a review be undertaken of the “transition block” between Main and Station Streets, north of National and south of the Viaduct (including Thornton Park as discussed previously).

4.23 Nature & Green Spaces

Support
Natural
Systems

All groups spoke to concerns about the impacts on natural systems and/or and sought actions that would support natural systems. Concerns focussed particularly on the air quality impacts of increased traffic (especially with regards to certain proposals), and on contaminated soils as a variable for development and attracting new business to the area. Suggestions for supporting/revealing natural systems included daylighting streams; the possibility of revealing the tidal flats; establishing/maintaining ‘wild’ spaces for social well-being and wildlife areas/corridors (a local wildlife inventory has been done); and taking advantage of sustainability opportunities such as green roofs and geothermal.

Improve,
Maintain &
Protect
Parks

Concerns were also expressed regarding existing and future park areas. **Thornton Park** is seen as an unsafe and unpleasant area revealing a number of social issues in need of direct attention. As a ‘bridge’ between Pacific Central Station and Main Street businesses, and as a “first view” for visitors exiting the Station, changes are required.

A lot of concern was expressed about the impacts of possible development and transportation plans on the **Strathcona Community Gardens** area. This area (incorporating food gardens, youth garden, a composting demonstration site and Cottonwood Park) is considered the “heart” of the community and a “very special” place to Strathcona and to others. **Trillium Park**, just to the west of these gardens and as yet undeveloped, has been identified as a “hot, critical and major community unifying issue” for the Downtown East Side, Strathcona, and Mt.Pleasant. The intention (and strong desire) is for this to be a “natural”, community park (as opposed to a park used for playing fields or other recreational facilities) and that it serve as a link to pedestrian/bike/greenways through the area.

4.24 Additional Issues/Concerns

Assess
conditions
& needs

Additional issues/concerns raised included heritage, housing, amenities, and response to various proposals; some ideals were also expressed. **Heritage** includes both natural systems (as above) and built forms. There is a desire to protect heritage buildings and a need to reassess and re-inventory the area (apparently current records are approximately ten years old). Assessing **housing** needs is also seen as critical. The VCC expansion, the future of the Academic Consortium, and a possible hospital suggest an increased demand for housing, especially rental housing, for incoming staff and students. Providing **amenities** to serve an increased population is also important. One participant expressed the desire for more recreational facilities for the surrounding community especially given the increase in residents at CityGate and possible increase in demands dependent on what occurs on Consortium lands or other developments. Aquatics and racquet sports in walkable distance were identified as key elements.

Impacts

Proposal ideas were not discussed in detail but certain issues were highlighted. All proposals raised concerns about parking and increased traffic. Noise issues were raised around possibilities of a casino, stadium and hospital (sirens). Staff noted that casino and stadium proponents may have already found other more preferred sites. That said, despite the fact that a casino might provide local jobs, a casino was generally not desired (seen to “feed addictions”). There was no indication of

opposition to a possible increase in housing on Consortium lands although questions were raised about how to bridge this “isolated fortress” to the surrounding community.

Integration

Hospital-related discussion extended beyond issues of traffic, parking and noise. The degree to which the hospital would be socially and economically integrated with the surrounding communities is seen as important. There are concerns about accommodating the possible increase in housing demands. There is an interest in integrating Trillium Park with the hospital should Providence plans go forward. Other hospital-related discussion were outside of transportation and land use issues per se (e.g., private/public facility), and/or could not yet be addressed (e.g., other uses, community opportunities to consult with Providence).

Some of the ‘*ideals*’ include a vision of a vibrant, village-like area with bike and walking paths; water features; and good cross-community connection and synergy (especially with Chinatown/Main Street, the Consortium, and Commercial Avenue). A planning horizon that considers more than 20-30 years ahead is also desired. Finally there is a desire for more information, consultation and direct, ongoing, involvement in Flats planning and decision-making (more below).

4.3 Process Guides

Website

The Flats website and planned listserve are seen as useful tools for those with computer access. Including timelines, meetings and studies reports, and ‘next steps’ announcements on the website is seen as important. The listserve is considered a particularly good idea especially if it provides:

Listserve

- regular updates concerning planning progress, milestones, opportunities for further involvement;
- announcements whenever new information was placed on the website; and
- additional opportunities for community member (and other stakeholder) input and exchange.

*Online
Forums*

The idea of an online discussion forum to facilitate commentary and exchange among community members and with City staff was greeted favorably in general and quite enthusiastically by some. There was concern, however, that many people in the neighborhoods are either unfamiliar with computer technology or do not have ease of access. In order to ensure community members continue to be informed, it was suggested that downloadable ‘short sheets’ be available for distribution/posting in neighborhoods. Further, that local organizations and networks be key contacts and serve as distribution centres.

Short Sheets

Local Networks

Mail-outs

Signage

Media

Participants noted that more outreach and additional vehicles may be needed to help ensure community awareness of and participation in future Flats planning. Route drops/mail-outs for specific area issues, and provocative signage along pedestrian and bikeways and at transit stops/stations were suggested. Media involvement and local newspaper/newsletter announcements (e.g., Carnegie Newsletter) should also be part of overall info-out plans

Participants made it clear that communities have a desire to be continuously informed about and involved in the Flats planning process. Currently there is an interest in receiving information about studies that have or are being undertaken, and the status of current transportation policies/plans. Participants indicated they wanted to be consulted at various points in the planning process especially on particular aspects of the plans (movement in particular) before decisions were finalized. Each group recommended individuals for June workshop participation; a number of participants themselves offered to participate. Meeting participants will be among the initial key contacts for receiving additional information.

5 NEXT STEPS

By the time of the release of this report, meeting participants will have had an opportunity to review and comment on a draft. Providing such review opportunities at various stages of the planning process is part of the City's overall planning strategy. Near future next steps include:

- Follow-up with various stakeholders/stakeholder groups and with Strathcona community residents in particular (under-represented in meetings)
- Developing a comprehensive communications plan (incorporating ideas discussed above)
- Studies reporting (see Appendix D for current studies and status)
- Multi-stakeholder Scoping Workshop (Phase 1, Step 3): June
- Preparation of a Terms of Reference for Phase 2 (Phase 1, Step 4): July (draft); September (Council)
- Visioning Process (Phase 2): October

Although not within the City's purview, it is anticipated that local groups will be increasing awareness within their communities and providing information regarding the Flats planning process.

6 FINAL REMARKS

The main goal of the current Work Program is to establish a vision for the Flats that ensures environmental health, social well-being and an economic future in the long term. Various rail, industry and employment studies (completed or underway); transportation plans and transit studies; as well as ongoing consultations with various stakeholders, will help inform the planning process.

The City's community meetings have provided information useful to the overall scoping phase of the Work Program. They have also helped to facilitate awareness, interest and involvement in ongoing planning; and established critical vehicles and partners for ensuring continued stakeholder participation in the process. The overall success of the Work Program will depend on the degree to which stakeholders continue to be meaningfully involved in the Flats planning/decision-making, and, together with the City, how well they are able to negotiate mutually agreeable outcomes.