

# EcoDensity and Housing



## Mount Pleasant

City of Vancouver  
**Community**  
planning program

EcoDensity is a concept currently being discussed with the Vancouver community. In brief, EcoDensity is an acknowledgement that high quality and strategically located density can make Vancouver more sustainable, livable, and affordable.

### Why EcoDensity?

As with the rest of the world, Vancouver's future is not certain. Climate change is scientifically documented. Non-renewable energy to heat our buildings and power our vehicles is becoming more limited and expensive. We are using resources at a rate greater than they can be replenished. In short, our ecological footprint is greater than the planet's ability to sustain us, as a city, as a region, and ultimately as a planet.

Faced with such serious challenges, governments, corporations, neighbourhoods, and individuals can take action to improve our environmental sustainability. Some of the most effective sustainability measures can be implemented by municipalities.

Density - high quality, green in design, strategically located, and properly implemented - provides cities with a powerful opportunity to improve environmental sustainability, along with affordability and livability.

Through dialogue with the citizens and stakeholders of Vancouver - sharing of ideas, approaches and concerns regarding density - EcoDensity has been gradually shaped into draft principles, policies, tools, and actions, based on the idea that density done well can

move us toward the goal of greater sustainability and a smaller ecological footprint.

### Density and Sustainability

Two key contributors to climate change are transportation and building energy use. Well-located density puts people close to shops, jobs, amenities and services, meaning more trips are made by walking, biking and transit, instead of by car. This also creates a larger customer base for local shopping areas, supporting a wider array of shops and services, which in turn, means that even more needs can be fulfilled close to home. Similarly, putting people close to transit means more trips are made using transit, and makes better transit service more feasible.

Density also reduces building energy use. Housing with shared walls uses less energy. Density also makes renewable energy sources more feasible and affordable. Systems like neighbourhood energy utilities generate energy with little or no greenhouse gasses. And, when combined with green building features, density can go even further to reduce greenhouse gases, as well as to conserve water, reduce waste, and provide other environmental benefits.

Containing sprawl also minimizes the regional impacts on vital agricultural and conservation lands.

### Density and Affordability

Density can contribute to affordability by adding more inherently affordable housing types and tenures (i.e., smaller units, rental units); if demand nonetheless

outpaces supply, increasing supply helps to moderate the price increases. Density also has the potential to facilitate more affordable living arrangements (i.e., reduced car ownership, lower energy costs and mortgage helpers such as secondary suites, coach houses).

In addition, density can help provide deeper affordability through large scale rezonings that can provide social housing. While increased supply is a necessary foundation to affordability, it cannot replace funding from the Federal and Provincial governments to achieve the most affordable units. In a built-up city like Vancouver, affordability is extremely complex with many factors outside City control. EcoDensity goals suggest the balancing of new supply with retention of existing affordable rental. One example is the City's recent rate-of-change by-law to protect rental housing in apartment zoned areas throughout the city.

### Council Actions and Public Process

In November 2006, Council approved the EcoDensity Terms of Reference and directed staff to initiate a process leading to an EcoDensity Forum in June 2007. The consultation process started in Fall 2006 and included an EcoDensity Fair, a Speaker Series, several workshops to review progress, and ongoing communication through the website. In November 2007, Council referred a draft EcoDensity Charter and draft Initial Actions to public consultation.

A number of community workshops and public meetings were held in January and February 2008 where people:

- Learned more about the draft Charter and draft Initial Actions
- Heard what others are thinking
- Submitted comments to City Council through a feedback form.

Special Council Meetings were held during February, March and April to hear directly from the public on the draft EcoDensity Charter and draft Initial Actions.

For more information on EcoDensity and the draft EcoDensity Charter and draft Initial Actions, refer to:

[vancouver.ca/ecodensity](http://vancouver.ca/ecodensity)

#### What's Next?

Council will decide on the next steps in the EcoDensity Program on April 15, 2008. Some of the questions the City could continue to explore include:

- Should the City make it easier for residents in single-family zoned areas to build a secondary suite above their garage, or convert their garage to a coach house?
- Do people want the City to take more advantage of streets and nodes well served by transit or areas located around Skytrain and future Canada Line stations by increasing density significantly in those areas?
- How could the City promote a greater range of types, sizes, locations and tenures of housing?

#### Other City Initiatives

EcoDensity is the density, design, and land use part of sustainability and affordability. Other City programs and actions which impact on sustainability and affordability include:

#### Green Building Strategy

The Green Building Strategy will ensure that all new buildings offer better environmental and health performance.

#### Climate Protection

Goals have been set to reduce green house gas emissions for both City- and community-operations and are articulated through a set of Actions Plans.

#### Food Security

Ongoing projects to address food security include: the Vancouver Food Charter to further a just and sustainable food system, community gardens, and urban bee-keeping.

#### Waste and Recycling

City initiatives to reduce waste and encourage recycling include, a user pay system for garbage collection, Blue box recycling and leaf collection.

#### Southeast False Creek (SEFC)

Consisting of City-owned and privately-owned lands, SEFC is being developed as a community that incorporates principles of energy-efficient design and demonstrates a model sustainable community.

#### Transportation

The Transportation Branch's responsibilities include Transportation planning, development review with respect to transportation impacts, neighbourhood traffic plans, and management, bicycling and pedestrian issues, and parking.

#### Affordable Housing

The Housing Centre tracks the key factors that affect the city and metropolitan housing markets, monitors affordability and identifies emerging housing issues.

#### Heritage

The City works with the Heritage Commission to conserve and protect existing places of significance which advance cultural sustainability sense of place, and the

ecological sustainability of existing buildings and materials.

#### Parks

The Park Board creates and maintains Vancouver's public green spaces and protects our natural environment. It provides facilities that support wellness and bring people together.

#### Social Infrastructure and Social Development Plans

The City has initiated a Social Infrastructure Plan to guide investment and location decisions for social infrastructure throughout the City.

#### Economic Sustainability

The City has an Industrial Lands Strategy to protect needed industrial land, and is finalizing the Metro Core Jobs and Economy Land Use Plan to ensure adequate land supply for future job growth and economic activity in the Metro Core.

#### Norquay Village Neighbourhood Centre Program

The Neighbourhood Centre Program is designed to deliver improvements to the shopping area and to plan for small scale housing around it. The Norquay Village area was identified as a Neighbourhood Centre in the Renfrew-Collingwood Community Vision in 2004.

#### One Day Vancouver

The One Day program is the City's community engagement process in support of its Community Climate Change Action Plan.

Source:

City of Vancouver

[vancouver.ca](http://vancouver.ca)

Vancouver EcoDensity Planning Initiative  
[vancouver.ca/ecodensity](http://vancouver.ca/ecodensity)