

Vancouver City Planning Commission

Annual Report 2015¹

SUMMARY

During 2015, the Vancouver City Planning Commission carried out its work plan comprising dialogues and public events on broad planning themes relevant to the future of the city, and engagement on selected current planning topics and initiatives.

Under part a)² of its mandate, the Planning Commission organized a number of dialogue events on the theme of Vancouver's planning culture and principles, and completed the publication of the first edition of an online timeline of milestones in Vancouver's planning and development.

Under part b)³ of its mandate, the Planning Commission provided feedback to staff on a number of current planning initiatives, and gave consideration to other current planning initiatives in discussion, with particular attention focused on the central downtown waterfront hub, the transportation and transit plebiscite, and the removal of the viaducts.

EVENTS, DIALOGUES AND PROJECTS (Mandate part a)

The Planning Commission worked with a number of community partners on several events and projects designed to foster informed dialogue on themes important to the future of the city.

A. Growing Social Inequality in Vancouver – A City for All? – Panel Discussion

In November, the Planning Commission co-presented, with SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement, a panel discussion on the underlying issues and impacts of the growing social inequality in Vancouver. Six panellists shared examples of successful community and government interventions to improve social equity, and offered policy ideas for civic governments to consider. In follow-up discussions and a meeting with staff, Commissioners explored some of these ideas and directions, including: requirement for a social impact assessment of all major redevelopments, an affordability impact study of the loss of cheaper old housing to make way for new residential development, and a strategy to improve the rate of census form completions to ensure an appropriate share for the City of federal transfer payments.

B. Vancouver's Planning Culture and Principles – Dialogue Events

In October 2015, the Planning Commission was part of a collaboration with community partner organizations to produce three events exploring urban planning in Vancouver under the theme *Vancouver's Planning Principles and Culture*.⁴

¹ This report formed Appendix A in the VCPC's [Report to Council](#) at the April 20, 2016 meeting of the Standing Committee on City Finance Services. The report also included the VCPC grant request for 2016 and the 2016 work plan.

² [By-law No. 5064](#), Mandate Section 7 part a): the Commission is directed to "represent ideas and opinions about the future of the city, as citizens of the City of Vancouver."

³ [By-law No. 5064](#), Mandate Section 7 part a): the Commission is directed to "consider and report to Council on any proposal likely to have a significant effect on the future of the City."

⁴ *Vancouver's Planning Culture and Principles*. [Documentation](#)

1. Stories from the Ground: Identifying core principles to guide Vancouver’s planning future (with UBC SCARP)

In a facilitated discussion, a diverse group of 60 individuals from many backgrounds and with experience of engaging with planning processes in Vancouver shared personal stories that highlighted significant practices, lessons and values. Working in small groups, participants examined their pool of lived experience with a view to identifying a set of planning principles that have represented us at our best, and that have continuing value as we plan for the future of our city and its neighbourhoods. As an early report-out, the student facilitation team compiled a set of key themes based on their notes and experience: *An aspirational portrait of Vancouver’s planning culture*.

2. Politics and Planning: Vancouver’s next planning director (with SFU City Conversations)

Marguerite Ford and Peter Ladner, former City Councillors, and Frances Bula, urban affairs journalist, discussed the relationship between politics and planning in Vancouver, drawing on their experience within city politics. Themes explored in the audience discussion included: the importance of explaining the ‘why’ behind decisions; the value of a community discussion about distribution of growth among neighbourhoods; the potential benefits of a comprehensive plan to co-ordinate the variety of policies and to provide the context for neighbourhood-specific planning processes; and the question of whose voices are being heard as the basis for decision-making.

3. Future and Past: Planners and planning in Vancouver (with SFU City Program)

Larry Beasley, Ann McAfee, Ray Spaxman and Brent Toderian, former Vancouver planning directors, discussed their experience with planning in the city and shared ideas for the future. They were asked to speak to the challenges that the new chief planner must face, and to identify questions we should be asking not just of the candidates but of ourselves: What vision for our city are we asking of our planner, staff and council? How do we generate the enthusiasm and capacity to build partnerships — and a passion for our city and region? The discussion was moderated by Gord Price.

C. Vancouver’s Planning Legacy and the City’s Future: A Chronology of Planning and Development Milestones – Special Project

The Planning Commission seeks to ground its future-oriented work in an understanding of the roots of the present and the legacy from the past. Although there are many excellent histories of Vancouver, and numerous useful thematic chronologies, there was no reliable resource that provided a comprehensive chronology of milestones in the city’s planning and development. In 2014, following a round table discussion with past Planning Commissioners, the Planning Commission set out to develop one.

With the assistance of an advisory panel⁵ and community partners including UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Vancouver Heritage Commission and Vancouver Archives, the Planning Commission completed the first edition of the chronology in 2015,

⁵ Chronology advisory panel: John Atkin, Ken Cameron, Norm Hotson, Marta Farevaag, Michael Kluckner, Bruce Macdonald, Catherine Sinasac (COV).

published as an online timeline.⁶ The content for the first edition was generated by students registered in a special course created by the UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture for students in planning-related disciplines. The course was designed as an introduction to historical research and analysis within the framework of a practical research assignment. The students worked under the direction of Adjunct Professor Marta Farevaag, and with access to the expertise of the advisory panel and other external advisors.

The timeline was launched at a panel discussion⁷ in January as part of a multi-layered community engagement process to identify significant planning and development events of 2015. An initial draft list of significant events was brainstormed at two workshops with 40 urban professionals. The four panellists provided their perspectives, while the panel audience provided written comments on display panels featuring the proposed significant events, and engaged in moderated discussion with the panellists. The panel event was produced as pilot project, and may be repeated annually as a venue for a reflection on the previous year in planning and development and as a process for updating the online timeline. The timeline is currently featured as one of the exhibits at a dedicated computer station at the Museum of Vancouver, within the exhibition presented by the Vancouver Urbanarium Society, *Your Future Home: Creating the New Vancouver* (January-May, 2016).

D. Social Engagement Through Planning

The collaboration with the Museum of Vancouver, outlined in the 2015 work plan, to pilot a neighbourhood engagement project as a test some of the lessons learned in the Commission's *Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods*⁸ initiative of 2010-11, did not proceed in 2015 due to the unexpected resignation of the project champion. The Sustainable Neighbourhoods initiative was intended as the foundation for further work with neighbourhoods on neighbourhood engagement, and the Museum's The Vancouver Project offered the opportunity to develop this direction. One concept explored was a demonstration project involving the participation of community groups and residents in re-imagining an underutilized small public space as a place of neighbourhood social connection. This project may be re-activated in the future.

CURRENT INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS (Mandate part b)

In addition to considering items on Council's agenda and current planning initiatives, Commissioners also participated actively in discussion of urban issues relevant to the future of the city.

A. Research and Comment

1. Transportation and Transit Plebiscite

The Planning Commission took an active interest in the Transportation and Transit Plebiscite. Given the importance of the outcome for the future of the city and the region, discussion started in January at a special meeting to explore a possible role for the Planning Commission leading up to the vote. Directions explored included ways to support community discussion through dialogue events, channels to express Commission support for a YES vote, and avenues to participate in YES advocacy campaigns where appropriate. The Planning Commission

⁶ *Chronology of Vancouver's Planning and Development*: [Background](#) and [Timeline](#)

⁷ Panellists: Frances Bula, Jennifer Marshall, Bob Rennie, Noha Sedky. Moderator: Stephen Quinn.

⁸ *Sustainable City of Sustainable Neighbourhoods* (2010-2011). [Documentation](#)

approached both staff and potential community partners to explore possible collaborations; however, as the YES campaign took shape it became clear that the directions explored were already being incorporated into the strategy. The Planning Commission elected to provide support for the YES vote with a blog post⁹ outlining reasons to vote ‘yes’ and providing links to online information.

2. Waterfront Hub Framework

The Central Waterfront Hub Framework, with its ambitious vision for a spectacular waterfront, a world-class transit interchange, a vibrant waterfront district, and a welcoming ‘front door’ to Vancouver, was a focus of interest for the Planning Commission in 2015. The Planning Commission began to look closely at the Central Waterfront Hub Framework in response to public concerns raised by the development proposal at 555 West Cordova. To further its understanding, the Planning Commission participated in a SFU City Conversations event on this topic by providing the online documentation of the public discussion.¹⁰ The Commission also hosted a presentation/conversation with City staff, and a presentation by the Downtown Waterfront Working Group. Based on this work, combined with background research, discussion, and meetings with Council liaisons, the Planning Commission drafted a memo¹¹ to Mayor and Council advocating the development of a comprehensive implementation strategy and proceeding with identification of the project champion, as well as outlining five key areas for attention: phasing of development in step with transit facilities and other improvements; detailed urban design and development guidelines; a rigorous hazard mitigation plan; a robust public process during implementation; and commitment to a high level of environmental sustainability and a vibrant public realm.

3. Viaducts Removal

The Planning Commission appeared before Council in October to express its support¹² for the removal of the viaducts as the start of a process of regeneration of a neglected part of the city. In the statement, the Planning Commission also noted concerns in four areas: the form that the continuing public engagement would take; the advisability of frequent updates both on the cost of the project and on the level of public benefits expected from the density increases provided to developers; the opportunity to significantly ‘raise the bar’ on the affected sites in support of both Greenest City and housing affordability goals; and, confirmation that all potential cost impacts on the Skytrain guideway have been taken into account in calculating to costs to the City.

B. Engagement through City Processes

1. Urban Design Panel

The Planning Commission reviews development and rezoning applications on the agendas of upcoming Urban Panel Design meetings, and receives a report on the Panel advice given to applications reviewed at recent UDP meetings. The Planning Commission’s representative brings a broad urban planning and urban review perspective to the Panel, generally based on relevant City guidelines, plans and policies, as these represent community values and were often adopted following public consultation. New concerns and issues, as raised in Planning

⁹ *Voting YES*, May 15, 2015. [Article](#)

¹⁰ *Future of Our Downtown Waterfront*: SFU City Conversation, June 4, 2015. [Video and transcripts.](#)

¹¹ *Memo to Mayor and Council on Central Waterfront Hub Framework*, submitted March 2016. [Text](#)

¹² *Statement to Council on Removal of the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts*, October 21, 2015. [Text](#)

Commission discussions, are also communicated at the UDP by the Planning Commission representative.

2. Staff Consultations

The Commission received presentations from staff on the following current planning initiatives as part of staff's consultations with the public, stakeholders and advisory groups, and provided feedback to staff:

- Cambie Corridor III Planning Program
- Viaducts Removal
- Heritage Action Plan

3. Other Current Topics

During its bi-weekly meetings, the Planning Commission also considered other issues with long-term implications for the city's future in discussion with liaison Commissioners from Council, Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Parks Board, including:

- City Operating Budget consultation for advisory groups
- COV Family Housing Research and Policy Update*
- False Creek Flats Planning
- Character Home Zoning (Heritage Action Plan) consultation
- Joyce Collingwood Station Precinct Review - workshops
- Vancouver Art Gallery – new site
- Jericho Lands – sale and development issues
- St. Paul's Hospital – new site
- Seawall Improvements - consultations
- Telus Garden Media Screen
- City-wide planning – future directions
- Transit and Transportation Plebiscite
- Community Amenity Contributions and Rezoning
- Downtown Central Waterfront Hub*
- Metro Vancouver Housing and Transportation Cost Burden Study*
- COV Earthquake and Emergency Preparedness Planning*
- COV Healthy City Strategy & Social Sustainability Indicators*
- DV BIA Imagining Downtown Vancouver*

*Presentations received from speakers.

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Commissioners frequently attend external conferences, panel discussions and other events on planning and development issues relevant to the City's future. Sharing knowledge and experience from these events forms a part of the Commission's meeting agendas. In 2015, these events included:

- SFU City Conversations on various topics
- SFU/Heritage Vancouver: Shaping Vancouver – Conversations on the Heritage Action Plan
- DV BIA Imagine Downtown: Vancouver Roundtables
- SFU Transportation Lectures

- DTES Hastings Crossing BIA Community Wise workshops
- UBC SCARP Symposium: [De]Constructing the Pacific Northwest
- Greenest City Carbon Talks Bright Green Summer Celebration
- WE ARE CITIES Cityworks Roundtable
- PICS Paris Climate Conference Overview
- SFU Housing Affordability Symposium
- SFU Resilient Cities Carbon Talks

PLANNING COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS TO OTHER CIVIC BODIES

1. Urban Design Panel

A member of the Commission served on the Urban Design Panel, as prescribed by Council By-law No. 4722. The Commission appointed Neal LaMontagne to this role.

2. Heritage Action Plan Advisory Committee

The Planning Commission continued to participate in the Heritage Action Plan Advisory Committee in 2015. The Planning Commission had received a request last year from the General Manager of Planning and Development Services to provide a representative to for the Committee, established as a sub-committee of the Vancouver Heritage Commission to assist in the implementation of the HAP approved by Council in 2013 and 2014. The Planning Commission appointed Matthew Carter to this role.

COMMISSIONERS DURING 2015

This report covers the work carried out during the year by the following Commissioners:

Danielle Bauer (Chair)
 Matthew Carter
 Caitriona Feeney
 Lihua Huang
 Am Johal (Vice-Chair)
 Brad Jones
 Neal LaMontagne
 Robert Matas
 Anthony Perl [Commission appointee]
 Nola Kate Seymoar
 Andy Yan [Commission appointee]
 Brandon Yan

Commissioner Lihua Huang was appointed in March to fill the space left by the early resignation of Commissioner Julia Payson. Commissioner Rebecca Chaster, appointed for 2015-2016, resigned in June; her vacancy was not filled, resulting in a cohort of 12 Commissioners for the year.

The following Commissioners served as non-voting members, providing liaison with their elected bodies:

Councillors Adriane Carr and Andrea Reimer, Vancouver City Council
 Trustee Mike Lombardi, Vancouver School Board
 Commissioner Casey Crawford, Vancouver Parks Board