



## Broadway and Commercial: Exploring Options for a Transit-Oriented Community

Background

July 2013

## Broadway and Commercial. An important area. A unique opportunity. A regionally significant transit hub.

The Broadway and Commercial area hosts a regionally-important transit interchange located at the intersection of two SkyTrain lines. It is bisected by two major arterial streets and is home to a diverse range of shops, services and residences. This busy hub sits at the crossroads of two unique neighbourhoods and is also the gateway to Commercial Drive — a popular shopping and entertainment destination for both the neighbourhood and the region. As such, it is a key “sub-area” of the Grandview-Woodland community.

As part of the larger **Grandview-Woodland Community Plan** process, the City of Vancouver is now developing policy directions to guide long-term growth and change in the Broadway and Commercial area.

This process builds on input from the community planning process, started in April 2012, the **Kensington-Cedar Cottage Community Vision**, completed in 1998, and the **Broadway/Commercial Transit Village Plan**, Translink and CoV, 2006. It will also be shaped by approved city-wide policies — such as **Transportation 2040**, the City’s long-term transportation policy, and the **Greenest City Action Plan**, which aims to make Vancouver the greenest city in the world by 2040.

**Policy directions for this sub-area will also be shaped by substantial and meaningful community input.**



Workshop

The Grandview-Woodland Community Plan is a long-term plan, for the next 30 years. Future growth and development in the Broadway and Commercial area will need to support the goals of a transit-oriented community in a growing city. But, as many community members point out, there are different ways to ‘do’ higher-density. Concerns have been expressed about the high-rise forms shown in the first draft of the Emerging Directions. This is important feedback for the planning process, so let’s take another look at this area and start by acknowledging a few key points:

- We have heard clearly from the community that there is serious concern about the extent and height of tower building forms at Commercial & Broadway proposed in the Emerging Directions published in June. As a result, we will not be proceeding with that proposal
- While we’ve heard support through the planning process for additional density in the Broadway & Commercial area, it’s clear that there is a desire to explore different options that don’t involve a large concentration of tall towers

This workshop, and other Broadway/Commercial planning activities which follow, will provide an opportunity to begin to explore those options. These will also enable additional consultation, feedback and involvement from the wider community.

As part of our collective work, we need to plan for the future, this means change, but it also means working to ensure that the best aspects of the area are strengthened over time.

**So let’s figure this out together.  
Help us to get it right.**

### Reading this Backgrounder

This document is designed to provide you with some background material related to planning for the Broadway/Commercial area. It includes:

- **Broadway and Commercial** — Broader Planning Context
- **Community Input** — What We’ve Heard to date
- **Key Questions** — things to think about
- **Next Steps**

## BACKGROUND

### Broadway and Commercial – Broader Planning Context

#### Findings from the current Community Plan Process

When we look at the Broadway and Commercial sub-area, we must understand how it fits within the rest of the community we are planning for and with. Over the past year, and through a planning process that has involved significant community input, we have clarified a number of big-picture neighbourhood considerations:

- the need to provide a range of affordable housing options to meet the diverse needs of the community
- the importance of improving sustainable transportation options (walking, cycling, public transit)
- the role of the local economy — on high streets like Commercial Drive and Hastings Street, and elsewhere in the neighbourhood
- the significant value that residents place in neighbourhood heritage, social and cultural amenities

As part of this, our many discussions with the community over the past 15 months have also affirmed the role played by different parts of the neighbourhood — whether in the ‘Edwardian village’ that characterizes much of the area east of the Drive, the aforementioned high streets, the apartment areas and sites of industry. The Broadway and Commercial area has always been seen as a key area of focus for the community plan, and a reasonable place for future growth and development. This is an area with regionally significant transit infrastructure located within its bounds, an area where there is both the opportunity and community desire to improve retail, office and residential offerings, and a place where future growth and planning could work to ‘tame’ intensity of the main arterial roads (Broadway and Commercial) that are found at the heart of the area.

#### This is a critical time for Broadway and Commercial

Over the next few years, the Broadway and Commercial area will see some significant changes, including:

- an expanded station area for Broadway/Commercial SkyTrain in 2016
- improved capacity (train length, frequency) for the Expo Line
- increased traffic when the Evergreen Line is completed in 2016
- potential extension of the Millennium Line westward, and
- redevelopment in the vicinity and potential redevelopment of key sites, e.g. Safeway.

By planning proactively, we can attend to a number of the key opportunities that were identified in both the Grandview-Woodland planning process and the Kensington-Cedar Cottage Vision, including:

- providing a range of affordable housing choices
- creating new job space and supporting the local economy
- improving the public realm (particularly in the vicinity of the station)
- improving linkages along Commercial Drive (north and south of Broadway),
- supporting a variety of sustainable transportation options, and ensuring the optimization of public investment in transit.



Broadway at Commercial Drive

Ensuring appropriate land-use planning for Broadway and Commercial will also help to achieve a number of important city-wide planning goals:

- A denser, more diverse mix of services, amenities, jobs, and housing types in one of the region's most significant transit locations
- The location of major trip generators near rapid transit stations or along transit corridors, thereby further encouraging sustainable transportation.

A successful transit-oriented community at Commercial and Broadway could mean:

- focusing growth and density around high-volume public transit infrastructure, in both Grandview-Woodland and Kensington-Cedar Cottage neighbourhoods
- ensuring that growth and development is undertaken at a reasonable pace of change
- a mix of building forms and heights
- protecting key heritage, cultural and social amenities
- the provision of new and expanded public amenities to support population growth
- stronger, more lively public spaces with better pedestrian linkages, gathering places and street level features, and
- an increased diversity and supply of housing and job-space options to meet the needs of present and future residents.

## Transit-Oriented Community Planning

What is transit-oriented planning? And why focus on creating a transit-oriented community?

In general, transit-oriented planning focuses growth and development around a transit station or transit corridor, typically within a five to 10 minute walk of transit. It is an approach that the City advocates because it maximises the use of sustainable transportation, when done well. It also responds to several key challenges, including:

- increased energy costs, 'peak oil' concerns and climate change
- road congestion
- the need for quality residential and office space that is conveniently located, and
- the need to ensure that future growth and development is accommodated in well-designed, attractive, compact, walkable communities.

Transit-oriented communities are at their most efficient when they have a mix of land-uses, supporting a diverse population and their respective residential, job-space and amenity needs. The key elements of a transit-oriented community are transit-supportive density — which means higher density, a high quality public realm, good walkability and sense of connection.



Vacant Lot



12th Avenue at Commercial Drive

## The City-Wide Picture

Vancouver has a reputation for its high-quality of life. The City is working to ensure that the future growth and development continue to support this standard of liveability while responding to a number of major challenges:

- over-consumption of scarce resources and the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants at unsustainably high levels
- land use patterns and street design that continue to encourage high levels of motor vehicle use and are not supportive of transit oriented development
- unaffordable housing and an insufficient and aging rental stock, limited housing choices and a significant number of homeless – along with related concerns about displacement and gentrification
- high instances of public health problems – and the need to respond to these with health and social service infrastructure, and
- demographic changes, including increasing diversity and an aging population

Several city-wide policy initiatives form part of the story about Broadway and Commercial. These include:

**Transportation 2040** - a plan that guides transportation decisions for how people and goods will move in and around Vancouver over the next 30 years. It's our road map for a future where walking, cycling, and transit are attractive options for getting around. The plan also provides direction on land-use – and encourages measures to focus more density and jobs in close proximity to transit, while respecting neighbourhood context.

**The Greenest City 2020 Action Plan (2011)** – which provides a path towards a greener future for our community and our planet. It does this by address three overarching areas of focus: reducing carbon, reducing waste, and supporting healthy ecosystems. More specifically, the Greenest City Plan supports transportation and land use policies that increases the use of sustainable transportation options and reduces the average distance driven per resident.

**Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2011)** – which describes the City's overall direction for housing, at all points along the housing continuum, from the provision of emergency shelters to home ownership. It identifies the different kinds of housing necessary to meet the needs of our citizens, as well as ways to improve and better preserve the housing we currently have.

**Healthy City Strategy (on-going)** – Along with its key partner Vancouver Coastal Health, the City of Vancouver is developing a long-term strategy for healthier people, healthier places and a healthier planet



Playground under the Skytrain guideway

Many possible futures —  
let's find the responsible  
route forward.

## COMMUNITY INPUT

### Broadway and Commercial – Broader Planning Context

#### Back-story: The Grandview-Woodland Community Plan process

In April 2012, the City of Vancouver launched a Community Plan process for Grandview-Woodland that has four phases. When completed, the plan will set out a series of long-range directions (policies and priorities) for the neighbourhood. The new community plan will update and replace an older plan from 1979–82.

The community planning process is designed to develop policy directions for the whole neighbourhood in “neighbourhood wide policies”, and for key geographic areas of focus in specific “sub-area policies”. The Broadway and Commercial area is one of these areas of focus in Grandview-Woodland.

Phase One of the process, completed in August 2012, involved outreach and engagement, as well as the general identification of assets, issues and opportunities in the neighbourhood (that is, what people love about the community, and areas they’d like to see changed).

The recently completed Phase Two provided an opportunity to explore six general policy themes with the community:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Parks and Public Space
- Social Issues, Urban Health and Safety
- Arts and Culture
- Heritage and Character

The current Phase Three focuses on the development and refinement of an integrated set of **Emerging Directions**. These are best understood as goal statements, each setting a clear direction and set of related objectives and policies. The first draft was released at the beginning of June 2013.

The final phase of the community plan process,



World Cafe Event



Youth Dialogue Session

anticipated to begin in fall 2013, will focus on finalizing the Community Plan, and testing a complete draft document with the community.

To date, the neighbourhood planning process has involved input from several thousand people through a variety of means:

- Focus groups and meetings with neighbourhood organizations
- Youth, seniors, Aboriginal and Chinese-language workshops
- Assets, Issues Opportunities mapping
- Questionnaires (on-line and paper)
- Participation in community events – including Car Free Day, National Aboriginal Day, Italian Days
- Walking tours
- Open Houses (on-street, in parks and neighbourhood venues)
- Planning through Dialogue workshops

#### In more detail — Phase I and II of the Planning Process

The Broadway/Commercial sub-area has been discussed throughout the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan — in the Asset, Issues and Opportunities mapping work in May–July 2012, in the Core Planning Principles work in September 2012, during our Walking Tours workshop (September 2012), and in the Planning through Dialogue sessions, December 2012–Mar 2013.

Throughout these various events, participants expressed a high degree of interest in enhancements to the Broadway and Commercial Station area and surrounding area. The sub-area has been recognized as a significant opportunity for improvement and as a candidate to become a transit-oriented community — featuring housing, retail and other job space, the addition of enhanced public realm features,

open space and gathering areas and safety improvements, better station design, SkyTrain capacity and bus queuing.

## In more detail — Phase III – Emerging Directions

The draft Emerging Directions for the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan showcased one approach to creating a high-density transit-oriented community. This option was described through 19 draft policy directions covering aspects of Transit and Transportation, Built Form and Public Realm. In summary, the policies:

- proposed high-density development through a combination of high-rise and mid-rise forms
- created a hierarchy of Transit-Oriented Development opportunities with the tallest buildings (up to 36 storeys) on the Safeway Site, and other high buildings (up to and including 22-26 storeys)
- calibrated building heights to newer tower-form developments in other parts of the city
- sought to protect existing affordable rental stock through a pace-of-change mechanism that would limit the amount of development that could take place on an annual basis
- identified opportunities for expansion of retail and office space
- portrayed only the land-use changes in the sub-area — without noting likely development scenarios or other constraints, e.g. existing strata or recent developments that would constrain the extent/timing of new development
- did not identify, in a detailed way, public benefits and community amenities, e.g. creation of affordable housing, childcare, park space, etc. that could be derived as part of future development, and
- introduced new plaza space and public realm treatments, expanded park and garden space, and public safety improvements.

Of the 19 draft policies, one policy, #BC-10, has met with strong and significant disapproval from the community. This is the policy related to building heights and building form. Feedback on the draft Emerging Directions suggests that specific aspects of the directions pertaining to built-form and building heights needed to be revisited.

Community feedback to date indicates:

- strong concern about the upper height limits of buildings proposed and to the use of high-rise tower forms
- no general agreement on ‘how high is too high’ or overall density alternatives
- general, though inconsistent, support for the notion of Broadway and Commercial as a higher-density, transit oriented community
- strong desire to see more options and information available for different kinds of built form that high density could take, and
- specifically with regard to building heights, some stating that ‘mid-rise’ is acceptable, other respondents insisting on low-rise (four or fewer).

In addition, a number of specific concerns are mentioned around built form considerations, as currently proposed:

- towers are out of character with neighbourhood
- the transit hub is already too crowded
- higher buildings will increase traffic levels and parking issues
- there is no new park space in the immediate area for the increased population
- the lack of amenities for the increased population, i.e. community centres, library, school, etc.
- concern that towers ‘don’t build community’ and will make Grandview-Woodland ‘soul-less’
- concern that towers will raise land values, leading to higher rents in a low-income neighbourhood. This, in turn, means that towers do not promote affordable housing options, and
- concern that the potential pace of change in this area would be too quick.

In sum, while we’ve heard support through the planning process for additional density in the Broadway & Commercial area, we have also heard that there is serious concern about the proposed extent and height of tower building forms. As mentioned in the introduction, we will be exploring alternative proposals for this area.

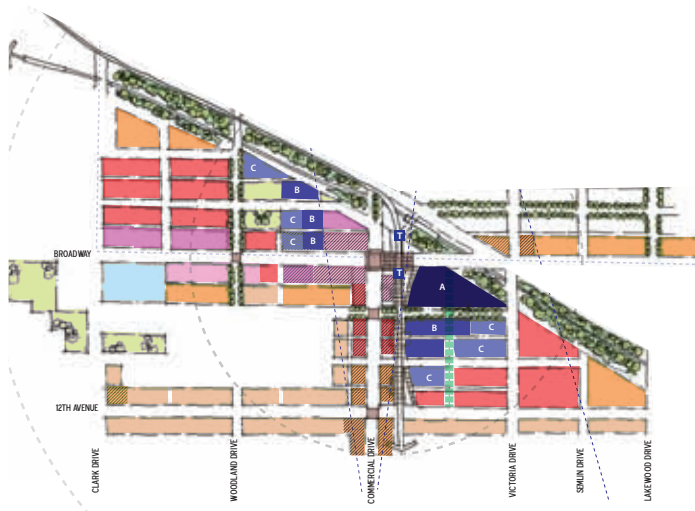
**The City and community need to work together to achieve the goals of transit-oriented community planning. Let’s turn these concerns into opportunities.**



June Open House Event

## Things to Think About . . .

The planning workshop and other engagement opportunities related to Broadway and Commercial will aim to explore a variety of considerations. In the context that growth and change are healthy attributes of a city, and as part of your own deliberations around Broadway and Commercial, here are some things you may want to think about (see bullets to the right):



Broadway and Commercial Sub-Area Map - June Open House 2013

- What sort of boundaries should be attached to the Broadway/Commercial transit-oriented community? The initial proposal for the sub-area used the Grandview Cut and E 12th as part of the boundaries. Are there other, more appropriate boundaries? (e.g. transit-oriented planning often uses a 5 or 10 minute walking radius)
- What is your ideal vision of the future? How do you imagine the Broadway/Commercial area in five years' time? In 10 years? In 30 years? What sorts of activities are taking place?
- Where is the 'heart' of the sub-area? Is there a place that does (or could) have this status?
- How high should the buildings be? How high would you ideally like them to be? How high would you be willing to accept?
- Should building height be consistent throughout the sub-area? Or should building heights be higher in some areas than others?
- What are the key public benefits that we should be striving for as part of the future development of this area, e.g. expanded community centre supports, social housing, public art, park space, childcare, etc.?
- Are there any social, cultural, and heritage assets that need to be noted, e.g. already mentioned: Rio Theatre, East Van Cross, sense of neighbourliness?

## What Comes Next?

The July workshop is one of a number of avenues for working through the future of Broadway and Commercial. It will be followed by further consultation, including additional events at the end of July which will seek feedback and involvement from the wider community (including people that we could not accommodate in the July workshop).

There is more work to be done on these and other aspects of the Community Plan – and no decisions will be made in the short-term around the future of the Broadway and Commercial area. This is an important part of the neighbourhood – and of the city. We need to make sure that we 'get it right'.

### Immediate Next Steps

Material from the July 6 workshop will be integrated with commentary received through the broader public input process coming out of the Emerging Directions. Technical information and analysis generated by the City's Planning and Engineering departments will also be integrated into the planning process.

The combined results will be:

- summarized into a mini-report by City staff
- reported back as part of additional events that will take place in late July (dates TBD) which will invite further feedback and commentary, and
- available on-line in a forum that enables further discussion and sharing of ideas.

Feedback gathered through all of these engagement opportunities will be used to further refine the overall Community Plan process prior to the release of the draft Plan in fall 2013.



## APPENDIX: Planning in Vancouver — Some Core Principles

As part of earlier work in the Community Planning process, a series of Core Planning Principles and Objectives were presented for discussion. Derived from approved city-wide policies, these Principles and Objectives provide high-level guidance for planning activities. A number of these relate to the current discussion around Broadway and Commercial.

- Locate higher densities and a mix of uses close to neighbourhood centres, existing shopping districts, transit services and areas where significant sustainability gains are possible (i.e. district energy sources). In doing so, ensure that new developments in higher density areas provide respectful transitions to adjacent lower density neighbourhoods and reflect the character of the existing neighbourhood.
- Maximize opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the integration of land use, transportation and energy.
- Increase the diversity of the housing stock by providing a range of housing forms, unit types and sizes to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- Recognize the value of existing affordable and low-income housing that meets the needs of low/moderate income households, including the retention, enhancement and renewal of secure purpose-built rental housing.
- Ensure job space is well integrated with the transportation network by providing greater proportions of office and other higher ridership uses in proximity to transit stations.
- Encourage transit improvements to increase capacity and ensure service that is fast, frequent, reliable, fully accessible, and comfortable.
- Make walking safe, convenient and delightful, and ensure streets and sidewalks support a vibrant public life that encourages a walking culture, healthy lifestyles, and social connectedness.
- Make cycling feel safe, convenient, and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities. Prioritize connections to important destinations like schools, community centres, transit stations, and shopping areas.
- Support shorter trips and sustainable transportation choices by creating compact, walkable, transit-oriented neighbourhoods.
- Ensure that residents enjoy good access to green spaces, including urban forests, parks, open spaces and space for food production.
- Work in partnership with the community, senior governments and other agencies to ensure appropriate social infrastructure and amenities are in place for residents.
- Ensure that public safety is a priority — so that people can live, work and play in the city where they feel safe at all times.

You can find these and other high-level planning principles in the materials from our September 12, 2012 Foundational Principles Open House materials.