

Notes from Feb 22nd CED Forum, taken by City of Vancouver staff

The Forum was opened with a welcome and acknowledgement of the territories and First Peoples, with a strong focus on including the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the CED work ahead, that a lens of social justice and reconciliation needs to be applied to this work. About 50 attendees were present.

Staff then shared updates about the ongoing work regarding heritage retention, capital investments, emerging design guidelines, granting to non-profits and social enterprise, deployment of City owned assets to assist with vending and capacity building in the informal economy, and some case studies of work that community partners are doing in the context of the plan, particularly around low-barrier job creation and increasing income opportunities for residents.

The conversation was then opened up to the floor.

There is a real sense of urgency to address some issues as quickly as possible, retail gentrification and loss of local (low-income serving in particular) small businesses due to unaffordability and displacement being one, poverty and income levels in general being another. Concerns about the rate of change and availability of affordable housing, particularly shelter rate, were raised, that much change has happened already and that residents harbour deep concerns about what the neighbourhood may look like if we do not respond to these trends quickly with meaningful actions, and that they would feel excluded in their own neighbourhood.

This being said there were also concerns that any kind of CED Strategy not be built around an October Council Report date or July or August draft deadline. Some things may take longer to work on, into 2017, particularly governance issues regarding the CED Review Committee itself or larger-scale projects and possible policy or regulatory changes that may need close examination.

Staff affirmed this concern and emphasized that as a Community Led process of co-creation the City was not trying to rush community organizations into anything, that how the envisioned Community Economic Development Review committee best engages in its work will be determined by the committee itself, but that staff has been directed to report to Council in October and that there are ideas that community organizations, residents, business owners etc. have brought up over the past three years that can be put into action in the near-term to address concerns over poverty, incomes, inclusion, and the economic health of communities in the DTES.

One attendee had brought a sign with recalling the intention of the DTES Local Area Plan to serve the needs of low-income residents first and foremost, and had commented on the Neighbourhood Fit Tool as requiring more specific attention and wording acknowledging low-income residents specifically.

At the same time another attendee raised concerns that working poor, middle-class families, single mothers and others should not be excluded in the context of CED and that certain things like childcare spaces were integral to both the ability of parents to make incomes and to aiding in healthy early childhood development.

There were questions about what exactly was going to be ‘strategic’ about this work ahead, to which staff elaborated on some opportunities to leverage major projects like the relocation of St Paul’s and other developments that the community could help meet the material, services and labor demands of. That in order to do so there may be a need to invest in capacity building, to scale up existing or create new social ventures, invest in particular forms of training and skill development for example, and consider the policy and regulatory updates that could structurally change some of the over-arching systems that are contributing to pressures on locally owned small businesses, non-profits and charities over the long-run. The possibilities for new forms of community investment and considerations of how the City itself could use its own assets in ways that aligned with community potential were also included in the response.

Staff emphasized how unique the opportunity is for the community to engage the municipality through the CED Planner and DTES Planning Team in this way. These staff resources are unique in the scope and type of work they do after plans have been approved, monitoring and implementation, granting, engaging the community on an ongoing basis etc. The commitment for a three-year Community Economic Development Coordinator position to be embedded in the community to work with the CED Planner, CED Review Committee and others was also emphasized as a unique asset at the community’s disposal through the CED Review Committee.

Policy Ideas raised at the meeting

Heritage as a place, and other important intangibles, not just a building (retain the space within a new building for a purpose?) this was brought up in the context of the businesses being displaced from the Hastings and Gore development proposed by Wall Financial.

Tax Deferrals for local (and particularly low-income) serving small businesses being hit with “soaring assessments” and sharp increases in taxes

Co-op community investment vehicles and land trust examples from other cities were also shared briefly

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