

POLICY REPORT
ENVIRONMENT

Date: April 30, 1996
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TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: Special Office for the Environment
SUBJECT: Environmental Agenda

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Environmental Policy statement contained in this report as Appendix B be adopted.
- B. THAT the Environmental Agenda (Appendix D*) be endorsed and that staff be instructed to print and broadly circulate the document.
- C. THAT the Special Office for the Environment investigate and report back on the feasibility, costs and benefits of enrolling the City of Vancouver in the international Local Agenda 21 campaign.

GENERAL MANAGERS' COMMENTS

The General Managers of Community Services and Engineering Services RECOMMEND approval of A, B and C.

COUNCIL POLICY

The City's Mission Statement speaks of a City which cares about its environment. The associated objectives include the "protection and improvement of the environment". The City's values include excellence, responsiveness and leadership. Council received the City's first State of the Environment Report in late 1994.

PURPOSE

This report brings before Council a proposed Environmental Policy and a draft Environmental Agenda which endeavour to operationalize and formalize the principles espoused in the City's Mission Statement. The Environmental Agenda seeks to indicate some relative priorities to the expenditure of public money to achieve the protection and improvement of the environment.

BACKGROUND

In 1994 the Special Office for the Environment presented Council with the first State of the Environment Report for the City. This "report card" on the environment gave some indication of where the City's efforts to protect and improve the environment might best be channelled.

One way of looking at the implementation of the City's stated objectives of protecting and improving the environment is illustrated in Figure 1.

Flowing from the City's Mission statement are a series of objectives, including protection and improvement of the environment. Although the City has a number of programs, policies and initiatives which seek to achieve these objectives, we are lacking a concise set of environmental policies which we can point to as reflective of our organizational commitment to the environment.

Flowing from the corporate environmental policies is the environmental scan, or State of the Environment Report along with input and advice from the public and advisory bodies such as the Focus Group on the Environment. The State of the Environment Report is not in itself an ending; it only serves to indicate where we are in our stewardship of the

environment.

The next step is usually some form of environmental agenda or action plan through which we begin to correct some of our past damage and prevent future degradation of the environment. An environmental agenda can take many forms and can be quite general or quite specific. Staff have chosen to parallel the structure of the State of the Environment Report and focus on the same categories of issues.

DISCUSSION

Staff have identified a need to formalize and link the stated City objectives of protecting and improving the environment with the actions already underway and those proposed in the Environmental Agenda. A number of municipal organizations and many private sector companies have adopted environmental policies which formalize for internal and external constituents what the organization has committed itself to. For example, a copy of Calgary's environmental policy statement is attached for Council's information as Appendix A. These should be viewed as corporate policy rather than political direction, leaving Council free to comment on senior government environmental initiatives. The existence of an environmental management plan, including environmental policies which are achievable, is part of a prudent approach to environmental protection and is supported by our external auditors.

The proposed wording for an Environmental Policy for the City of Vancouver is contained in Appendix B and closely parallels wording used in Calgary, Edmonton and other Canadian cities. The intent contained in the wording is not new - we have been applying these principles for many years. For the first time, however, it will be formally adopted by Council and set down in writing for communication to our communities and our employees.

Since the receipt of the State of the Environment Report by Council in 1994 staff have been working on the preparation of an environmental agenda and action plan. One of the products of this work is an Environmental Trends document (attached as Appendix C*) which parallels the Finance Department's Trends document but focuses on environmental indicators. This document will be updated every three years to enable the City to track trends over time. The structure of the Environmental Agenda follows a general format as follows:

- Issue (including "grade and trend" from the SOER)
- Current Status (including indicators, data availability)
- Goals & Objectives (including Council Policy & time lines)
- Action Plan (including priority, approx. \$ cost & Lead Agency)

The preparation of an Environmental Agenda was a challenge for several reasons:

- many of the actions contained in the document are already underway (thereby implying a high priority).
- some of the actions have been mandated by senior levels of government, with little choice for the City but to do them.
- lack of data in some areas, especially costs and benefits.
- lack of a recognized framework for assigning priorities to environmental improvements.

This last issue has been the most challenging and the most frustrating, given that Council has requested some kind of prioritization of environmental issues by staff over the past five years. Staff note that considerable work is being done, both in Canada and elsewhere on this issue and we hope to be able to report back within the next year or two on an acceptable prioritization methodology. In the meantime some of the "tools" or criteria available are:

- cost/benefit analysis utilizing full cost accounting
- scope and severity of the environmental risk
- social equity
- impacts on the economy
- absence/presence of adverse effects (human & ecological)
- ease of implementation
- effectiveness of intervention
- appropriateness (of jurisdiction)
- political/public support
- current trend and previous grade on SOER

These have been used to roughly distinguish between high and medium priority issues and actions in this version of the Environmental Agenda. With further refinements in the criteria and their application we hope to fine tune the prioritization in future updates of the Agenda.

The inescapable reality is that, given competing interests and unfunded mandates from senior governments, there will never be enough resources available to implement all of the actions concurrently. Although Vancouver citizens have, in previous questionnaires expressed support for paying a little more (~\$200/yr) in taxes to fund environmental improvements, it is highly likely that these incremental resources would be swallowed up very quickly within just one of the issue areas. Fortunately, not all of the actions listed in the draft Agenda require the expenditure of resources. In some cases the environmental improvement can be effected through behaviour change, in other cases through sustainable land use and transportation policy; and in others by advocating for action by senior levels of government.

Public Involvement:

Ideally the production of an Environmental Agenda would involve the public in some fashion, as has been the case in other jurisdictions and for other initiatives (e.g. City Plan, Transportation Plan) in Vancouver. The Agenda as presented is predominantly a staff-generated document based nonetheless on issues and priorities that the public has indicated are of concern to them. The draft document was reviewed by the Focus Group on the Environment but this review generated few suggestions for change. A lot of what is included in the Environmental Agenda is based on existing public consultation through various public processes (e.g. City Plan, Cloude of Change, Transportation Plan, Urban Landscape Task Force). Staff do not perceive much added value in subjecting the Agenda to a broader consultative process at this time.

Local Agenda 21

The Environmental Agenda, combined with the other consultative processes such as City Plan and the Transportation Plan, fits very nicely into the definition of a Local Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 is the UN-recognized process for implementing sustainable development at the local level. Agenda 21, the U.N. global action plan for sustainable development adopted by UNCED in June 1992, states that "by 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on a 'Local Agenda 21' for their community."

Staff are of the opinion that the Environmental Agenda, coupled with the consultative processes such as City Plan, the Urban Landscape Task Force and the Transportation Plan, meets the definition of a Local Agenda 21. Submitting the Environmental Agenda to the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) would reinforce Vancouver's commitment to "Think Globally, Act Locally". The only other Canadian city that we are aware of that has registered a Local Agenda 21 is Hamilton-Wentworth. Staff would explore any associated costs and implications of registering as a Local Agenda 21 before proceeding.

IMPLEMENTATION/COMMUNICATION PLAN

The Environmental Agenda will be printed and broadly distributed upon adoption. In addition, it will be put on the City's Web site. The potential registration of the Environmental Agenda as a Local Agenda 21 will also provide some national and international exposure and awareness of Vancouver's commitments to the environment.

The Environmental Policy, if adopted, will be communicated to all employees and new hires and will be conspicuously posted in civic work sites. In addition it will be broadly circulated in the community, both in hard copy and electronic versions.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The adoption of a prioritized Environmental Agenda should, all things being equal, result in gradual but noticeable improvements in the local, regional and global environment.

The imposition of lower priority environmental improvements by other levels of government, especially if they are unfunded or underfunded mandates, may delay or negatively impact on the delivery of higher priority environmental programs at the local level.

SOCIAL IMPACTS/IMPACTS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Our children and youth may well benefit from environmental improvements carried out in a planned and prioritized fashion, without unnecessarily jeopardizing the financial viability of the City.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

The practice of environmental stewardship and urban sustainability can lead to financial benefits if delivered in a cost effective, prioritized fashion. Many environmental programs have positive net present values (e.g. energy retrofits or reduction in fuel consumption). Other initiatives have high costs which can be recovered through user-pay approaches, providing a positive feedback on the true costs of our choices and behavior.

The costs of producing and distributing a finalized Environmental Agenda are minimal and can be dealt with within existing budgets.

CONCLUSION

This report recommends the adoption of two major policies which will formalize the means by which the City seeks to meet

its stated objectives of protecting and enhancing the environment. The first is an Environmental Policy for the City, flowing from its Mission Statement and Key Principles. The second is an Environmental Agenda, a road-map of sorts, to guide the City into the next millennium in its endeavours to create a sustainable community.

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APPENDICES (except for Appendix B) are on file in the City Clerk's Office.

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APPENDIX B

CITY OF VANCOUVER
ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The City of Vancouver is committed to protecting and improving its natural environment by adhering to and promoting the principles of urban sustainability. The City of Vancouver, together with its citizens, has a significant influence on the local, regional and global environment. The City believes that stewardship of the environment is a responsibility shared by all Vancouverites and undertakes to foster and encourage this stewardship by:

1. Ensuring environmental considerations are integrated into all City of Vancouver decisions respecting planning, growth, service delivery, finance and operations;
2. Initiating and promoting compliance with municipal by-laws protective of the environment;
3. Advocating for appropriate environmental protection action by other levels of government and the private sector;
4. Ensuring that the City's own operations comply with environmental legislation;
5. Involving and communicating with its citizens and businesses in the establishment and attainment of the City's environmental objectives;
6. Encouraging and demonstrating the wise use of natural and fiscal resources; and
7. Adopting and updating an environmental agenda and action plan to achieve the City's environmental objectives.

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