

Vancouver City Planning Commission: Work Plan for the Year 2017

BACKGROUND

The mandate of the Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC) is to advise City Council on matters relating to the planning and development of the City as citizens of the City of Vancouver; and in particular, to represent ideas and opinions about the future of the city and to consider and report to Council on any proposal likely to have a significant effect on this future.

To help inform its work in 2016, the VCPC looked to Habitat III's New Urban Agenda (NUA), which lays out a framework for resilient and sustainable urban development at the local, national and international level for the next 20 years. The NUA has benefited from the highest level of expertise from around the world in its background papers, and a series of extensive consultations (Preparatory Committee meetings) and meetings conducted by partner organizations. The negotiated text was adopted at the Habitat III Summit in Quito Ecuador in October 2016. Ignoring the UN-speak, the document outlines a bold vision to which cities should aspire. VCPC has embraced these aspirations for Vancouver and has adopted the NUA as a framework to guide its work for the next 5 years and beyond.

It is clear that Vancouver has already made considerable progress on many of the basic building blocks identified within the NUA and many other cities often look to the City as a model, nationally and internationally. This is a matter of well-deserved pride on behalf of Vancouver's elected officials and professional staff, businesses, community organizations and citizens.

At the same time, the City is confronting several 'wicked' problems - particularly complex issues involving many levels of government and sometimes competing objectives of groups within the City. The growing gap between the rich and poor; affordability in general, and of housing in particular; the credibility gap between public consultation processes and perceived results; the relationship of planning programs to the development of sustainable and healthy neighbourhoods, and concerns related to the sustainability and quality of public space and public amenities; to name a few of Vancouver's more challenging development-related issues. These highly complex issues could benefit from ideas, tools and techniques gathered at Habitat III and brought home by delegates from the region and also from a framework for designing new approaches, implementing them and reflecting on their successes and failures within an overall participatory learning-city model.

VCPC'S APPROACH

VCPC aspires to serve as a catalyst for dialogue and action, using its convening power to build synergy with the efforts of partners, thus bringing forward to Council the best advice VCPC can on behalf of Vancouver citizens. The Commission is cognizant of its small size, limited resources and the need to operate within a regional context, particularly on matters such as resilience. Thus it has established the following operating parameters to guide its work plan:

- Work with partners,
- Call upon an extensive network of Associates and Researchers (volunteers), and
- Operate in an inclusive and participatory way - bringing people to its work who might not usually be involved in providing advice to City Council.

THE WAY FORWARD

While Vancouver has been very successful in many of its visionary plans: the Greenest City Action Plan, the Healthy City, the Renewable City, the Inclusive City - to name but a few; the City has been less successful in integrating these plans and with inclusive and participatory governance.

VCPC believes it can play a useful role by using the NUA to look out 20 years and recommending to Council and partners ways in which Vancouver and the region can implement the NUA, in particular by encouraging a more integrated approach, within a participatory planning and implementation framework. VCPC believes this is best done by an 'inside/outside' commission that can experiment, reflect and learn in an iterative loop.

In 2017, VCPC proposes to undertake a series of workshops, working group meetings and events, that will come together in the winter of 2017 in a Vancouver Summit focused on the future. The workshops, meetings and events are intended to reach out to the broad Vancouver community (and its diverse and varied constituents) to best understand community concerns, aspirations, and priorities as well as benefit from collective wisdom in identifying potential strategies. The Summit would bring together the best ideas from the various working groups and selected associates and researchers to establish a baseline for future actions. Having identified the vision, the Summit would start a process to set our 5 year goals, including outcomes, monitoring and reporting methodologies.

Although the specific topics of focus will be modified by ongoing analysis of the Quito outcomes and consultations over 2017, several themes have been identified as of particular interest to the Commission: They include:

- **'Engagement for Real'** - Participatory and responsive planning, including exploring the quality of consultation/engagement and communication as an ongoing endeavor;
- **A 'City for All'** - ensuring an inclusive community with no one left behind (including but not limited to issues such as reconciliation);
- **The 'publicness' of the city** - related to public space, a sense of public ownership over city processes, and the financing of public space and amenities;
- **The development of sustainable communities/neighbourhoods:** complete communities, an understanding of neighbourhoods and their evolution in light of mobility corridors and affordability.
- **The challenge of a resilient and adaptive city.**

In 2017 VCPC will continue expanding its working network and formalizing relationships with volunteers by recognizing significant experts who serve the Commission on sub committees, as 'Advisors' or 'Associates' and students as 'Research Assistants', or 'Research Associates'.

The VCPC will also continue working with community partners, advisors and volunteers who have collaborated on the *Chronology of Vancouver's Planning and Development Milestones* to enrich the content and expand the information available in the online timeline.¹

Finally, the VCPC will continue to examine current planning and development initiatives and engage in discussion around issues relating to the long-term future of the city with a view to providing comment that adds value to community discussion; and will report to Council as appropriate. As part of this role, Commissioners will continue to participate in the Heritage Action Plan Advisory Committee, the Urban Design Panel, and the Transportation Stakeholder Advisory Group.

¹¹ *Chronology of Vancouver's Planning and Development*: [Background](#) and [Timeline](#)

RESOURCES

Since July 2016, with the regularizing of the part time Executive Director position, the Commission has become acutely aware of the resource challenges faced in delivering on the core mandate and proposed work plan of the VCPC. The Commission had historically benefited from significant volunteer contributions from not only Commissioners but also from additional hours worked by the Executive Director beyond the part-time hours compensated. As part of regularizing the Commission's status, its work plan and resource needs for 2018 will be part of the upcoming budget process within the City Clerk's office. Given the scope of our work plan for 2017 we anticipate requesting additional resources in 2018.

The Commission is working diligently to leverage resources effectively, fulfill its mandate, and deliver valuable initiatives in a cost-effective manner. This includes seeking in-kind support for events and projects where possible, and looking at external funding partnerships for key initiatives - such as the proposed November 2017 Summit.

The Commission wishes to make the Chronology Project an ongoing VCPC-led program additionally included in the annual operating budget for the Commission. The VCPC's Chronology of Vancouver's Planning and Development Milestones is, so far, the only informed record of the most important city planning and development events or decisions that have significantly affected the future of the City. The VCPC will explore external partnerships with groups such as UBC SCARP to help resource the program.

* * * * *