

December 19, 2007

Mayor Sullivan and City Councillors  
City of Vancouver  
453 West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

**Re: Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions – Report to Council dated Nov. 20, 2007**

Further to our letter of November 13, 2007, this letter is to advise Mayor and Council that we, the under signed neighbourhood groups, have great concerns about the report to Council dated November 20, 2007. Our concerns include the lack of community process that has led up to this draft, the proposed brief consultation leading up to a public hearing on February 26, 2008, and the content of the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions. This letter is long; however, we encourage you to read it in its entirety, as this is an important and complex issue.

We support the concept of creating a truly sustainable future for Vancouver based on a holistic balanced approach that accommodates the full definition of environmental, economic, and social sustainability. EcoDensity, as it is presently proposed, does not accomplish this. We therefore request that the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Draft Initial Actions be withdrawn based on the following objections, and that the recommendations as outlined below be given your consideration.

**SUMMARY:**

**1.) Process:**

- ▶ *Objection: To date, the community consultation process has been woefully inadequate. The proposed consultation process leading up to a public hearing on February 26, 2008 is equally inadequate and imposes an impossible timeline.*
- ▶ *Recommendation: Provide a new public process to allow for more comprehensive democratic community involvement with each individual neighbourhood and a realistic extended timeline.*

**2.) Draft EcoDensity Charter:**

- ▶ *Objection: An over-arching density priority.*
- ▶ *Recommendation: Use density as one of many tools to reduce the ecological footprint, where it has community support. Do not make density the primary objective.*
  
- ▶ *Objection: The EcoDensity Charter overrides neighbourhood planning.*
- ▶ *Recommendation: Give local neighbourhood planning priority, respect existing plans, and create a more democratic and local community-led neighbourhood planning process that requires broad majority support of local residents.*
  
- ▶ *Objection: Third party appeals are now unavailable to residents. The lack of such appeals gives the Charter even more power.*
- ▶ *Recommendation: Reinstate third party appeals for community checks and balances.*
  
- ▶ *Objection: Skewed towards demolition of the older building stock.*
- ▶ *Recommendation: Make reuse of existing buildings a priority.*

- ▶ Objection: Density does not necessarily improve affordability or liveability.
- ▶ Recommendation: Include affordability and liveability as important objectives of sustainability.

### 3.) Draft Initial Actions:

- ▶ Objection: Using density bonusing for green buildings.
- ▶ Recommendation: Incorporate green building technology into the building codes and bylaws with no density bonuses. Green buildings should be required not bonused. (See 3.1 below.) Density bonusing should be available for other local neighbourhood public benefits, not green buildings.
  
- ▶ Objection: Using density bonusing as the main tool for providing public benefits.
- ▶ Recommendation: Use multiple regulatory options and funding sources for providing public amenities. It is not feasible or sustainable to depend mostly on density bonusing.
  
- ▶ Objection: Lack of public transportation to service proposed density increase.
- ▶ Recommendation: Adequate public transit must be in place and funded prior to additional density being approved.
  
- ▶ Objection: Lack of community amenities to service proposed density increase.
- ▶ Recommendation: Adequate community amenities must be in place and funded prior to additional density being approved.
  
- ▶ Objection: Creating large amounts of new density, which will undermine the ability of density bonuses to provide public amenities.
- ▶ Recommendation: Make it a requirement for developers to pay for new density at a true market value, rather than creating a giveaway for the development industry by blanket rezoning over neighbourhoods. Use another measure than 'land lift'.
  
- ▶ Objection: Environmental impact of increased demolition.
- ▶ Recommendation: Policies and planning should be directed toward encouraging through incentives to retain and reuse existing buildings wherever possible. For instance, make laneway housing and additional secondary suites (other than the suites already allowed) subject to retention of the existing buildings.

For comments and recommendations on all the proposed Draft Initial Actions, please see sections 3 and 4 below.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **1.0 - PROCESS**

***Objection:*** We feel that the activities to date and those proposed in the Council report dated November 20, 2007, do not provide for adequate consultation, especially considering this is such a sweeping initiative. The proposed timeline for the community consultation process coming forward to a public hearing on February 26, 2008, is completely inadequate. December and part of January are typically holiday season, so people will be away. This leaves about a month to consult with stakeholders, revise the draft report to reflect the outcome of the consultation, review the revised report with the stakeholders, and resubmit to Council by February. *This is an impossible timeline.*

- *Recommendation:* Provide a new public process to allow for more comprehensive democratic community involvement with each individual neighbourhood and a realistic extended timeline. Include both neighbourhoods that are within the Community Vision process and those that are not.

## **2.0 - DRAFT ECODENSITY CHARTER**

**We oppose this draft EcoDensity Charter, as it is fundamentally flawed.**

**2.1 Objection: An over-arching density priority:** The commitments in the first section of the Charter are in direct conflict with last section “AN ECO-CITY”. The first section states that creating additional density is the first city objective, that density is what leads to improved affordability and liveability, and therefore, overrides the more holistic approach suggested in the Eco-City section.

- *Recommendation: A truly sustainable future for Vancouver should be the primary goal, with increased density as only one of many tools to reduce the ecological footprint, which must be equally balanced to achieve all the aspects of environmental, economic, and social sustainability.*

**2.2 Objection: Overrides neighbourhood planning:** The proposed over-arching priority of density over all other factors empowers the EcoDensity Charter to allow increases in density and development, which override past, current and future neighbourhood planning processes such as Visions. Third party appeals are now unavailable to residents. The lack of such appeals gives the Charter even more power.

- *Recommendation: Neighbourhood planning, including existing plans, should be given the priority with a more democratic local community-led planning process that requires support of a broad majority of residents.*
- *Recommendation: Reinstate third party appeals for community checks and balances.*

**2.3 Objection: Skewed towards the demolition of the older building stock:** The EcoDensity Charter is skewed towards demolition of existing structures and replacement with new construction. This approach does not give enough weight to the embodied energy of the existing stock, with the opportunities for increasing densities through the reuse of existing buildings and upgrading them. When you factor in the embodied energy of existing buildings, new construction always has higher environmental input costs than the reuse of existing buildings.

- *Recommendation: Make reuse of existing buildings a priority.*

**2.4 Objection: Density does not necessarily improve affordability:** Increased density does not necessarily lead to improved affordability. New construction is more expensive than older buildings. For instance, an older bungalow on a small lot with mortgage helper secondary suites will generally be more affordable than a new half duplex or row house in the same area. In spite of all the new density created downtown, the sale price of new units is often \$1,000 - \$2,000 per sq. ft., because that is what the international marketplace will bear for new construction. As the supply of newly constructed units increases, so does the international demand. With the global economy and the desirability of Vancouver, many people from around the world are buying here, often as a second or third home that is left empty for most of the year. That drives up prices and actually increases the ecological footprint.

- *Recommendation: Include affordability as an important objective of sustainability.*

**2.5 Objection: Density does not necessarily improve liveability:** Increased density does not necessarily lead to improved liveability. If increased density reduces on-site green space, it reduces the air quality and other environmental qualities through the reduction of the mature landscapes, urban forest, permeable surfaces, gardens and the potential for food production on private property. Also, because of downloading from senior governments, the City intends to use even more increased density bonusing to provide the services, amenities and green building for the increased density. This becomes a self-defeating scenario. When increased density leads to an increase in cars, it reduces liveability in a number of ways and defeats the objective of reducing the eco-footprint.

- *Recommendation: Include liveability as an important objective of sustainability*

### **3.0 - DRAFT ECODENSITY INITIAL ACTIONS**

**We oppose the proposed Draft Initial Actions, based on the following:**

#### **3.1 - Part 1: Raising Green Standards**

**Objection: Using density bonusing to reward developers for green buildings..**

The Raising Green Standards section places too much reliance on LEED for rating environmental standards. LEED is a rating system developed by the construction industry-led U.S. Green Building Council. It gives too little credit for the embodied energy in the retention of existing buildings, and too much credit for items that are no cost, or even provide cost savings to the developer, or are already required under existing bylaws, such as:

- o Building close to transit (no cost)
- o Reduced on-site parking (cost saving)
- o Reducing water usage by not putting in an irrigation system (cost saving)
- o Environmental site remediation (existing requirement)
- o Water metering (already required in Vancouver for all developments of more than 2 units)
- o Hooking up to district energy systems (cost saving since the developer does not have to provide boilers and heating equipment)

For meeting these construction industry standards, the Draft Initial Actions propose granting the developers extra density bonuses, which in some cases even override existing neighbourhood planning processes, such as Visions. There is no cost analysis proposed to assess what benefit the public is receiving for any green building density bonus. This is an unearned giveaway to the development industry and takes away from other opportunities for public benefits and amenities. Green building technology only attempts to partially mitigate the environmental damage done by new construction, such as the environmental impact of the loss of the embodied energy when existing buildings are demolished, and new materials that are harvested and manufactured for new construction, such as wood, aggregates, metals, plastics, glass, etc. Developers should not be rewarded for using green building practices; they should be required to do so.

- *Recommendation: Incorporate green building technology into the building codes and bylaws with no density bonuses. Green buildings should be required not bonused. Density bonusing should be available for other local neighbourhood public benefits, not green buildings.*

#### **3.2 - Part III (10) – Enabling District Energy**

**Objection: Using District Energy Systems as a basis for giving developers density bonuses.**

Developers should not receive density bonuses for hooking up to district energy systems, when it in fact saves them construction costs, because they do not have to provide boilers or other heating equipment. (See City of Vancouver Policy Report – “Enactment of New Energy Utility System Bylaw”, page 4, dated Oct. 29, 2007.) Also, district energy programs need much more research and consultation around which are the best energy sources for these systems. For instance, biofuels have not been proven to reduce the ecological footprint when the environmental impacts of production and manufacturing are considered.

- *Recommendation: Green buildings based on district energy systems should be required through regulation, not rewarded by giving unearned density bonuses. (See 3.1 above.)*

#### **3.3 - Part III (11) – Amenity Tools**

**Objection: Using density bonusing as the main tool for providing public benefits.**

It is an unsustainable approach to use density bonusing as the main tool for providing public benefits. In addition to density bonusing, use multiple regulatory options and funding sources for providing public amenities. There must also be funding from senior governments provided for amenities, rather than downloading everything to the City level.

- *Recommendation: Use multiple regulatory options and funding sources for providing public amenities. It is not feasible or sustainable to depend mostly on density bonusing.*

**Objection: Lack of public transportation to service proposed density increase.**

We do not want to create areas of increased density around proposed transit that may or may not ever be provided. Densification should not occur in any transportation corridor where existing demand for public transit has not been satisfied, and riders routinely cannot board buses or trains due to overcrowding, or cannot obtain a seat after boarding.

- *Recommendation: Adequate public transit needs to be built, provided and funded, well in advance of increased density approvals*

**Objection: Lack of community amenities to service proposed density increase.**

Other community amenities also need to be planned and funded in advance of approvals of density increases

- *Recommendation: Adequate community amenities must be planned and funded prior to additional density being approved.*

**Objection: Creating large amounts of new density which will undermine the ability of density bonuses to provide public amenities.**

Creating large amounts of new density, undermines the ability of density bonuses to provide public amenities. Make it a requirement for developers to pay for new density at true market value. Where density is purchased from the heritage density bank, the donating and receiving sites must be in the same neighbourhood, as per existing policies. Under no circumstances should density be transferred from heritage sites in the downtown area to the neighbourhoods in other areas across the city. (See sections 4.1 and 4.2 below)

- *Recommendation: Make it a requirement for developers to pay for new density at a true market value, rather than creating a giveaway for the development industry by blanket rezoning over neighbourhoods*

### **3.4 - Part II (7) – More options for secondary suites within buildings**

**Objection: The EcoDensity Charter overriding neighbourhood planning.**

*Single-Family and Duplex Zones:*

One secondary suite is already allowed in all single-family houses and duplexes for both existing buildings and new construction. If the city is considering allowing another secondary suite in addition to the one already allowed under bylaw, they should only be allowed if, when and where local neighbourhoods support it, and should not be imposed on a city-wide basis through the EcoDensity Charter actions. Where the City approves another secondary suite in addition to the one already allowed under bylaw for existing and new construction, keep the additional secondary suite as an incentive to encourage retention and upgrade of existing character buildings. This will help to protect existing heritage programs, give incentives to retain and upgrade older housing stock, and encourage rental housing where it is most affordable in older buildings. If more than one secondary suite is given outright to new construction, there is no incentive to retain older buildings, so the affordability aspect would ultimately be lost.

- *Recommendation: If the city is considering allowing another secondary suite in addition to the one already allowed under bylaw, they should only be allowed if, when and where local neighbourhoods support it. Also, keep this additional one as a non-strata rental or family suite that is conditional as an incentive for the retention of an existing character building.*

*Row-houses and Apartments:*

Generally new construction row-houses and apartments will have limited practical ability to provide affordable rental secondary suites. The additional capital cost of building extra self contained facilities requiring more floor space, bathrooms and kitchens in new construction, may be prohibitive

based on the market value of that additional unit. Secondary suites in new construction will not be as affordable as a conversion of an existing older home where the capital costs are only for the renovation of an existing space.

### **3.5 - Part II (8) – New options for backyard laneway infill housing pilot projects in select areas**

#### **Objection: The EcoDensity Charter overriding neighbourhood planning.**

Infill housing should only be allowed if, when and where a local neighbourhood supports it and not imposed on a city-wide basis through the EcoDensity Charter actions. As with secondary suites, piloting laneway housing through the local neighbourhood planning process will provide an opportunity to monitor and correct any unintended consequences over time, before they are implemented in other areas or neighbourhoods. Laneway housing should be conditional as an incentive to retain and upgrade existing character buildings, as affordable non-strata secondary suite rental for owners' mortgage helpers, and as family suites. On-site green space improves air quality through the preservation of the mature landscape, urban forest, gardens, groundwater absorption of permeable surfaces and the potential for food production on private property. Therefore, keep the infill within the footprint above the allowable garage. The site width, street frontage and depth of lot should all be specifically considered in the neighbourhood planning process. Pilot projects should include 33 foot and wider lots as well.

- *Recommendation: Infill laneway housing pilot projects should only be allowed if, when and where a local neighbourhood supports it. Monitor for unintended consequences over time before expanding to other areas, as may be approved by local neighbourhood planning. Also, keep laneway housing as a non-strata rental or family suite that is conditional as an incentive for the retention of an existing character building.*

### **3.6 - Part II (9) – New options for arterial mid-rise housing**

#### **Objection: The EcoDensity Charter overriding neighbourhood planning.**

Any additional upzoning along arterials should only be done within the specific local neighbourhood planning process and not imposed through the EcoDensity Charter actions. The arterial designation is far too broad and all encompassing to form a major criterion for rezoning. Many arterials already have older houses with multiple suites and older rental apartment buildings that are sources of existing affordable density, which should be given consideration.

- *Recommendation: Upzoning along arterials should only be allowed if, when and where a local neighbourhood supports it in each specific location, as the arterial designation is too broad to be a basis for rezoning.*

## **4.0 – ADDITIONAL PROPOSED INITIAL ACTIONS**

**We oppose the additional initial actions added by Council at the meeting Nov. 27, 2007 for the following reasons:**

### **4.1 – Consider policies to relax building height and density on sites in the city's heritage neighbourhoods of Gastown, Chinatown, and the Downtown East Side**

#### **Objection: This would destroy the heritage character of these heritage districts and overrides neighbourhood planning.**

Any additional density bonuses for the preservation of heritage buildings and other public benefits should be dealt with through the neighbourhood heritage planning process, as per existing city policies. This proposed action is just another example of the EcoDensity Charter overriding local area planning.

- *Recommendation: Respect existing heritage neighbourhood planning processes.*

**4.2 – In the Central Area Downtown District, allow a density bonus of 10% to be added over the maximum density and height allowed under current zoning, without having to rezone the property, for any green building**

**Objection: Do not give density bonuses based on green certification of buildings.**

There already is an allowance for a 10% increase in density and height in this area for heritage density transfers from the density bank, without requiring rezoning. This proposal to density bonus an additional 10% for green buildings, will create a total of 20% additional density and height being added without requiring rezoning. We are concerned that this is a developer windfall and should not be allowed for green buildings. Green technology should be incorporated into the building codes and bylaws, and not bonused. (See 3.1 above) Any additional density allowed should be purchased from the density bank as per existing policy. Density transfers should be controlled and managed directly by the City (like DCCs). Density bonuses should not be issued directly to the developer as a commodity to be traded. Density should only be issued once a donor site is identified and priced based on the new site, so less density bonusing is created. Under no circumstances should density be transferred from the downtown area into the outside neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods need to use any density bonuses created in their area for local public benefits, as supported, determined and approved through local community planning.

- *Recommendation: Green building technology should be incorporated into building codes and bylaws, not through density bonusing, which takes away from providing public amenities.*

**4.3 – Left Over Lots**

Considering relaxations in existing multi-family, medium density areas on minimum lot sizes, setback requirements, and parking regulations may threaten the last remaining heritage and character houses in these areas, which often have multiple affordable rental suites. Any relaxations should require the retention of these character buildings.

**4.4 – Community Gathering Places**

Neighbourhood plazas and gathering places should only be considered as part of the ongoing local neighbourhood planning processes and not imposed through EcoDensity.

**4.5 – New Green Single Family Zone to Replace RS5**

**Objection: Using density bonusing for green single family houses.**

RS-5 is a discretionary zoning for character design, which would be replaced with a zoning that allows density bonusing for green buildings. This will only encourage the demolition of smaller older bungalows and replacement with big monster houses, which RS-5 design guidelines were created to avoid.

- *Recommendation: Instead of bonusing density through a new zoning schedule to create even bigger houses which enlarge the ecological footprint, green building technology should be required for new construction under the building codes and bylaws, especially in single family zoning. The last concept that EcoDensity should be encouraging is larger new single-family houses.*

In conclusion, we, the undersigned neighbourhood groups, demand that the City provide a more realistic timeframe for a new, more comprehensive individual local neighbourhood consultation process. We also request that the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Draft Initial Actions be withdrawn based on the above objections; and that the enclosed recommendations be given your careful consideration.

For reply, comments or questions please contact:  
[agroupofvancouverneighbourhoods@hotmail.com](mailto:agroupofvancouverneighbourhoods@hotmail.com)

Regards,  
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

*Supporting Group Names (updated February 24, 2008):*

- Arbutus Ridge Concerned Citizens Association
- Arbutus Ridge/Kerrisdale/Shaugnessy CityPlan Vision Implementation Committee
- Britannia Neighbours in Action
- Building Better Neighbourhoods
- Burrardview Community Association
- Citywide Housing Coalition
- Douglas Park Residents Association
- Dunbar Residents' Association
- East Fraser Lands Committee – Sharon Saunders \*\*
- Friends of Southlands Society
- Grandview Woodlands Area Council
- Hastings Sunrise CityPlan Vision Implementation Committee \*
- Kensington Cedar Cottage CityPlan Vision Implementation Committee
- Kitsilano Arbutus Residents' Association
- Kitsilano Point Residents' Association
- Marpole Oakridge Area Council Society
- Norquay Neighbours – Joe Jones \*\*
- North West Point Grey Home Owners' Association
- Reinstate Third Party Appeals
- Riley Park / South Cambie CityPlan Vision Implementation Committee
- Shaughnessy Heights Property Owners Association
- South Hill Initiative for Neighbourhood Engagement (SHINE)
- Southwest Marine Drive Ratepayers' Association
- Upper Kitsilano Residents Association
- Victoria Fraserview Killarney CityPlan Committee – Andrea Rolls \*\*
- Victoria Park Group – Gail Mountain \*\*
- West End Residents Association (WERA)
- West Kitsilano Residents Association
- West Point Grey CityPlan Vision Community Liaison Group \*

\* Members of the group indicate support for the letter, but have not voted on it yet due to timelines.

\*\* Signed as an individual member

Cc: Brent Toderian, Director of Planning  
Ronda Howard, Assistant Director of Planning – City-Wide and Regional Planning  
Kent Munro, Assistant Director of Planning – Community Planning Division  
Rob Jenkins, Assistant Director, Current Planning Initiatives Branch  
Thor Kuhlmann, Planner, City-Wide Regional Planning