

# 2008 Civic Election Candidate Questionnaire

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver is a city wide ad hoc organization of neighbourhood groups that includes residents' associations, CityPlan Vision implementation committees, ratepayers' associations and community groups. We are contacting all party candidates to request their opinions on various issues of importance to our member groups.

**1. Please provide your name:** Michael Geller

**2. Please provide your civic party name:** NPA

**3. Please enter the date:** October 6, 2008

## **Neighbourhood Based Planning**

The CityPlan Community Visions process was initiated as a long-range planning initiative that would guide Vancouver's development into the new century as an ecologically sustainable "City of Neighbourhoods". Community-based planning ensures that core CityPlan sustainability principles, including densification, are embraced and implemented in a way that promotes and preserves the distinct qualities and character of individual neighbourhoods. The consultation phase of the CityPlan process is only now being completed in the single-family neighbourhoods. Other neighbourhoods have local area plans or would like to also go through a CityPlan visioning process. The implementation of Community Visions is well underway. The CityPlan Vision process represents twelve years of planning and neighbourhood community resources to date.

**4. Do you support CityPlan and related neighbourhood-based Community Visioning as the primary basis for future planning in Vancouver neighbourhoods?**

➤ Yes

*Comments:* However, as noted, this planning process began 12 years ago, and the world today is quite different than it was 12 years ago. I therefore support ongoing revisions to neighbourhood plans to reflect the times, and the increased focus on environmental concerns.

**5. Do you support that CityPlan Community Visions developed through a decade-long neighbourhood consultation process should be respected and faithfully implemented?**

➤ See comment

*Comments:* I cannot answer yes or know without understanding what you mean by 'faithfully'. please see my comments above.

**6. Do you agree that CityPlan Community Visions should only be implemented through an inclusive neighbourhood-based planning process that is supported by a clear majority of local citizens?**

➤ Yes

*Comments:* Yes, subject to the comments above about the need for ongoing revisions and modifications to earlier plans. I also believe that there may need to be some planning initiatives that do not initially enjoy 'clear majority' support in the first instance. For example, there was not 'clear majority' support for the redevelopment of the South Shore of False Creek when it was initially approved. But it has become a great success.

<b>7. Would you increase the staff resources for CityPlan Vision implementation?</b>	➤ See comment
<i>Comments:</i> I need more information on the current staff resources in order to answer this question.	

<b>Objective and Meaningful Public Consultation Processes</b>	
<i>The City's consultation process is generally not genuine or meaningful and is often orchestrated to yield a preconceived result.</i>	
<b>8. Do you agree that City consultation processes should be genuine, democratic, transparent, and inclusive?</b>	➤ Yes
<i>Comments:</i> I do not agree with your assessment that the process is generally not genuine...	

<b>9. Should Council members be required to attend public hearings in order to vote on the related issues (despite the technical loophole provided by recent amendments to the Vancouver Charter)?</b>	➤ See comment
<i>Comments:</i> Please elaborate.	

<b>10. Would you endeavour to make the City approval process more responsive to citizen input and ensure the right of citizens to speak directly on issues before Council (in contrast with a recent precedent to permit only written submissions)?</b>	➤ See comment
<i>Comments:</i> I believe citizens should have a right to be heard. I also think there is a need to review how the city and other organizations hear from the public. As this survey demonstrates, technology has changed how we can communicate. I think it is important to consider the implications of the new technologies.	

<b>11. Do you agree that City staff should be objective and unbiased in the solicitation, analysis and reporting of public opinion to Council?</b>	➤ See comment
<i>Comments:</i> I believe professional planners and other staff should be allowed to share their opinions. If you consider this being 'biased', then I would answer no.	

<b>12. Do you agree that there should be a larger role for scientific polling and referenda in determining the level of public support for major civic policy decisions?</b>	➤ See comment
<i>Comments:</i> As answered above, I believe there is an opportunity for using new technologies and information gathering mechanisms to get public input, in addition to long exhausting public hearings!	

<b>13. Do you agree that neighbourhood and community groups representing the public interest are not “lobbyists organizations”, as has been implied by a recent report to Council?</b>	➤ See comment
--	---------------

*Comments:* I am not aware of this report. But I do detect a bias to these questions! Do you think questionnaires such as this should be objective and unbiased in the solicitation, analysis and reporting of public opinion to the public and Council?

<b>14. Do you agree that the City of Vancouver should establish stringent regulations and restrictions on the lobbying of elected City officials and staff?</b>	➤ See comment
---	---------------

*Comments:* I would be concerned if such regulations prevented members of council from hearing a variety of points of view.

**Reconsideration of EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions**

*There is no shortage of consensus that Vancouver’s future should be ecologically sustainable and that judicious densification can be an effective tool in limiting urban sprawl. The focus of debate around the EcoDensity Charter is whether densification should be the primary focus of the City’s sustainability strategy and the way in which an advantageous level of densification should be achieved.*

*Public Hearings on the EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions extended for seven sessions between February 26 and April 3, 2008 and heard from about 150 speakers. Despite an evident lack of public support and significant subsequent revision of the draft Charter, Council refused to allow the public to speak prior to voting on the final document at the June 10 Council meeting, permitting only written submissions.*

*In advance of the June 10 meeting, the City received 164 written submissions. Based on the letters posted to the City’s website, only 23% of the public wrote letters in unequivocal support of EcoDensity compared with 77%, calling for the proposed Charter and Actions to be withdrawn or revised. With no reasonable opportunity provided for staff or Council to read, consider or address the substance of written submissions prior to voting, the Director of Planning presented a radically different assessment of the public response prior to Council’s voting and unanimous adoption of the Charter.*

*Thus, despite the very significant implications of the EcoDensity Charter and Actions, and its potential to profoundly change land use across the city, more than 150 public submissions, including a critical but constructive review of EcoDensity by Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver which represents 29 neighbourhood groups across the city, were virtually ignored.*

<p><b>15. Based on the above, if elected, would you support an extension of the EcoDensity public process to address outstanding concerns related to the EcoDensity Initial Actions and their implementation?</b></p>	<p>➤ See comment</p>
<p><i>Comments:</i> I do not agree that the community views were 'virtually ignored'. However, I do agree that there is a need for and extension of the EcoDensity public process. I participated in the initial launch of EcoDensity and suggested at the time that this should be viewed as a way of protecting single family neighbourhoods. I also suggested it should be viewed as a way of increasing housing affordability. Overall, I am disappointed with the way in which the EcoDensity initiatives have been understood. I agree there is a need to repair some misunderstandings and move forward with strategies that will ensure that community facilities keep pace with population growth. I also think there is need for more community demonstration projects before widespread application.</p>	

**The City's Existing Zoned Capacity**

*There are estimated by the City to be 590,000 residents in Vancouver now and 656,000 residents by 2021, assuming projections based on the last few record breaking years with no future economic recession. This is well under today's existing zoned capacity of 670,000 residents. The 670,000 is a low calculation because it only includes the 'outright zoned' sites most likely to be built and does not include any additional discretionary Comprehensive Development CD1 rezoning or the additional zoning potential identified in the unimplemented Community Visions. Therefore, according to the City's own figures there is already sufficient zoned capacity for anticipated growth within the foreseeable future.*

<p><b>16. In view of foregoing facts, do you agree that the City should focus on implementing the greater variety of housing options already supported through the CityPlan process rather than imposing unsupported rezoning policy on neighbourhoods?</b></p>	<p>➤ See comment</p>
<p><i>Comments:</i> I do not agree that there is adequately zoned multi family land, if that is the question.</p>	

**The City's 2005 Community Climate Change Action Plan**

<p><b>17. Would you put more resources into updating and implementing the Community Climate Change Action Plan?</b></p>	<p>➤ Yes</p>
<p><i>Comments:</i> Yes, a lot more is known today than in 2005. I think any effective plan must be updated.</p>	

### **Reinstatement of Third Party Appeals**

Third party appeals to the Board of Variance were a right of citizens for over 40 years until a 2006 ruling by the BC Supreme Court reinterpreted related language in the Vancouver Charter and effectively closed this critical avenue for neighbourhood-level challenge of unreasonable development impacts.

**18. Would you be in favour of the reinstatement of Board of Variance third party appeals and would you make a request to the Province to clarify this through appropriate amendment of the Vancouver Charter?**

➤ Yes

*Comments:* I think it is important to have a vehicle for third party appeals, provided the terms of reference are clearly defined. I do believe some of the matters that were taken to the Board were beyond the terms of reference of the Board.

### **Development Topics**

**19. Would you protect existing non-strata and purpose built rental buildings from redevelopment and conversion to strata?**

➤ See comment

*Comments:* This is much too general a question for a yes and no answer. In general, I think it is important to increase the stock of rental housing. We should be looking at a variety of different ways of achieving this goal.

**20. Given that older buildings are more affordable than new construction, would you craft new zoning to give incentives to retain, upgrade and densify existing character buildings to optimize the reuse of embodied energy and promote affordability?**

➤ Yes

*Comments:* as a general comment, I think it is important to make the best use of what we have, wherever this can be done in a feasible design and cost manner.

<b>21. Do you support planning the updating of infrastructure, transportation and amenities (including green space) before more development?</b>	➤ Yes
--	-------

*Comments:* absolutely. It is folly to have more development without adequate provisions for infrastructure, transportation and amenities.

<b>22. Do you oppose the transfer of density from the downtown Heritage Density Bank onto landing sites outside of the currently-approved areas, into communities across the City?</b>	➤ Yes
--	-------

*Comments:* yes, this may be necessary in order to ensure the preservation of important heritage properties.

<b>23. Do you oppose the Provincial government downloading their responsibilities onto the City by exploiting development density bonusing within municipal jurisdictions to fund provincial responsibilities, including schools and transit?</b>	➤ Yes
---	-------

*Comments:* this applies to present and future provincial governments

**Civic Political Party Reform**

<b>24. Do you support requiring full disclosure of all donations to civic political parties, posted to the City’s website upon being received, all the time, not just at elections?</b>	➤ Yes
---	-------

<b>25. Do you support banning corporate and union donations to civic political parties?</b>	➤ Yes
---	-------

*Comments:* Yes, philosophically I do support this. But it may require a complete overhaul of our electoral system. I do not necessarily support political parties at the municipal level.

<b>26. Do you support limiting personal donations to civic political parties?</b>	➤ Yes
---	-------

<b>27. Do you support limiting campaign financing to civic political parties?</b>	➤ Yes
---	-------

<b>28. Do you support restricting memberships to civic political parties to only people who are eligible to vote in City of Vancouver civic elections?</b>	➤ See comment
--	---------------

*Comments:* See my comment about political parties above. But if parties do exist, I can support the 'Young Vision' or 'Young NPA' chapters

<p><b>29. Do you agree that people who have an inherent potential conflict of interest (such as realtors, developers, and those in the development industry) should not be allowed to run for Council?</b></p>	<p>➤ No</p>
<p><i>Comments:</i> Absolutely not. I do not agree that such people have an inherent conflict of interest, any more than a former union leader has an inherent conflict of interest. Approximately 75% of the decisions made by a city council relate to land use, and I think it is very important that architects, planners and others with knowledge in this field should be not only allowed, but encouraged to run.</p>	

<p><b>Additional Comments &amp; Completion</b></p>
<p><b>30. Please provide any additional comments, if you have any:</b> I have responded to this questionnaire in good faith and hope that my responses will be treated accordingly. Many of the questions, and especially the last one demonstrate a very strong bias with which I disagree. However, I do believe that through dialogue and collaboration we can make this a better city. I hope the authors of this questionnaire agree. I am a past president of the Urban Development Institute. However, I am also the former Program Manager of Social Housing for CMHC and can provide very reasoned advice at Council on how best to address housing affordability in the city. I am also a registered planner and recently inducted into the Canadian Institute of Planners College of Fellows. I believe the experience I gained from my involvement with False Creek, UniverCity and other community developments will be valuable on council I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the authors of this questionnaire to discuss these matters further during the course of the election. I hope my comments are helpful, and look forward to reading the results of your survey. Especially the question about real estate related professionals running for Council! Can you please send me a copy of my completed answers if the technology will not allow me to copy my responses. Thank you.</p>
<p><b>31. Name:</b> Michael Geller</p>