

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

June 23, 2010

Mayor Robertson and Councillors
City of Vancouver
453 West 12 Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Re: Vancouver City Planning Commission Report to Council June 24, 2010

The report B.2 PROJECT INITIATIVES - a. "SUSTAINABLE CITY, SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS – NEXT STEPS"

(<http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100624/documents/penv1.pdf>) that is coming to the City Council Planning & Environment meeting this Thursday, June 24, 2010 raises a number of concerns. On page 4 of the report, the Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC) is proposing to implement planning for an "Eco" CityPlan.

The "Eco" City Plan is Action C-1 of the EcoDensity Initial Actions (www.vancouver-ecodensity.ca/webupload/File/actions-FINAL.pdf). Action C-1 is listed at the end of this letter for reference.

We do not support the Vancouver City Planning Commission's proposal.

"Eco" CityPlan includes centralized implementation of CityPlan Community Visions. This is in conflict with the CityPlan Terms of Reference which require neighbourhood-based planning processes to implement Community Visions.

Instead, of "Eco" CityPlan we would request that Council reinstate the budgets for the Vision Implementation Committees for outreach in determining how best each neighbourhood can implement their Vision as intended under CityPlan within neighbourhood based planning processes.

We continue to have concerns about the EcoDensity initiative, which we previously raised with Council. We would remind Council that they made election commitments in 2008 to reconsider EcoDensity.

Even if this EcoDensity Action and VCPC initiative were appropriate and acceptable, which, for the reasons given, they are not, the proposed consultation is problematic for a number of reasons.

The Vancouver City Planning Commission should not be leading this initiative. The VCPC is an appointed volunteer board that is not independent and does not have the time or the expertise to implement the Action. The VCPC will consequently rely heavily on staff expertise and guidance. This will result in the same kinds of consultation processes that the City presently uses except the public will be kept at arms length from the City staff and decision makers.

The “invitational” workshops lack accountability--as does separating city staff and professionals from community representatives. Moreover, the “first session,” presumably the one consisting of “preliminary dialogue with representatives of neighbourhood groups involved in city building at the neighbourhood level” is planned for “early summer,” when many key participants will be away.

We do not support the Vancouver City Planning Commission's proposal. Instead, of “Eco” CityPlan we would request that each neighbourhood implement their Vision as intended under CityPlan within neighbourhood based planning processes, including sustainability initiatives that are consistent with Approved Vision Directions.

Regards,

Ned Jacobs
On behalf of the Steering Committee
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

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Action C-1 is in the EcoDensity Initial Actions document (www.vancouver-ecodensity.ca/webupload/File/actions-FINAL.pdf) is listed on pages 11-12 as follows from the website:

An “Eco” CityPlan

Staff be directed to report back to Council on a proposed work program and resource needs to develop a new city-wide plan, that builds on and respects CityPlan and the many Community Visions, rather than replacing them, to form an approved physical direction that will manage change and density across the city to meet the commitments of the EcoDensity Charter.

The work program, at a minimum, should consider approaches and techniques as follows:

Dialogue and consultation

Engage, educate, and learn from the public at city-wide and neighbourhood [sic] scales, in all steps of this work, to promote neighbourhood voice and ownership in keeping with the Charter.

Shared city-wide responsibility

Form solutions that balance neighbourhood ownership with neighbourhood responsibility toward the city-wide goals of EcoDensity. The intent is to promote an “eco-city” of “eco-neighbourhoods.”

Identify the “Status Quo”

Identify and build on existing density and population potential under existing policy and zoning; existing density-to-amenity ratios and relationships (e.g., which neighbourhoods are better served with existing amenity-to-population than others); existing neighbourhoods where key affordability goals are being achieved; etc.

Goal setting and measurement

Set goals and measurements of success around key “eco city” indicators, on a city-wide and neighbourhood scale, such as: greenhouse gas emissions per capita; reductions in carbon and ecological footprints; energy use and costs; mitigation and preparation for climate change; mode split and distances traveled; retention of existing and creation of new affordable housing; range of incomes and ages living in the city; adequacy of amenities; etc.

International best practices

Identify and evaluate approaches, tools, and best practices from other cities and countries in neighbourhood patterns, densification, design, district energy, land use, etc. that can help to achieve the desired goals on city-wide and neighbourhood scales.

Create and evaluate scenarios

Identify conditions that could impact Vancouver in the future, to imagine what might be very different than traditional projections could suggest (e.g., rising sea levels, rising energy prices, etc.)

Physical plan development

Develop and evaluate plan options to physically describe more sustainable growth at various scales, addressing both city-wide needs and neighbourhood specifics, that build on existing density and population potential under zoning and policy. Evaluate options to assess how well they would meet the agreed goals and measurements discussed above.

Layers of strategies/plans

Include multiple new “layers” of strategies, including links to other new City initiatives, that support density, design, and land use and are necessary for a lower-footprint city pattern -- including layers on transportation, district energy, new amenity and services approaches, social development issues, urban agriculture and local food access, affordability and Housing Actions Plans, etc. The Regional context must also be considered.

Follow-up, monitor, adapt

Use the goals and measurements developed as part of this work to monitor progress and discuss and adapt as needed.

Discussion (on website)

CityPlan is now over ten years old and many Community Visions have been prepared and approved since then (the last will be considered by Council later this year). Although they considered many issues, these policy documents did not present a precise physical vision to answer the question, “What exactly will the City look like in the decades to come?”

This same question has been asked many times since the EcoDensity work program was launched. Although it was not the original intention of this work program to answer such a question with the creation of a physical Plan (the intended deliverables were a high-level charter, and new tools and actions), it has become clear throughout the community dialogue that the ability to answer this question in Plan-form over time, is critical. Such a Plan exercise at a city-wide context would provide a way to identify and assess scenarios, options, and issues for the future growth of the City, in keeping with the Charter commitments.

Council approval of this Action would mean that staff will report back on a proposal for a program for long-term plan development. This would be an extensive, complex city-wide program that would require considerable resources and public involvement.

Staff have already collected many ideas for this Plan development from the public dialogue thus far.

Certain previous EcoDensity actions are suggested to be combined in this action as “layers” of the Plan and part of a series of coordinated strategies. Former Action 13 relating to a new district energy strategy would represent a key layer of the Plan. Former Action 18, related to the development of a broad amenity strategy for the City, would similarly represent a significant layer of the Plan. Many other issues would have their own layers, with every aspect of sustainable city-building represented.