

## Revised Vancouver EcoDensity Charter

May 2008

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This document is an appendix to a report to City Council on the Revised EcoDensity Charter and Revised Initial Actions. The Revised Charter is contained in this appendix and the Revised Actions are in Appendix B.

Key issues raised about the draft Charter during the consultation, and responded to in the revised Charter, are described as follows:

- How will the Charter be used? The Charter should respect Community Visions and not override existing policy.
- The Charter needs to recognize the key role of public input and community consultation as foundations of planning.
- Density should not be the goal of the Charter; it is a tool.
- The Charter needs more emphasis on affordability and more explanation of how density helps affordability.
- Density must be accompanied by amenities and facilities.
- All communities should have a role - Vancouverites don't just want a continually denser east side.
- The Charter should reflect the importance of keeping the unique character of each community.
- The Charter should have more emphasis on the transportation aspects of sustainability. Like density, transportation is a tool; it should be included more specifically.
- The Charter should acknowledge the need to act in the face of an ever-increasing environmental crisis.

## II. REVISED VANCOUVER ECODENSITY CHARTER

### How Density, Design, & Land Use Will Contribute to Environmental Sustainability, Affordability, & Livability

#### Preamble

Vancouver's Mission Statement:

*"To create a great city of communities which cares about its people, its environment and the opportunities to live, work and prosper."*

Vancouver's *CityPlan*:

*"As the Region grows and there is increased pressure on our environment, the City will give priority to actions that protect the environment... Residents want lower and modest income families to be able to live in the City... People will have more opportunities to live in their neighbourhoods as they pass through various ages and stages of their lives."*

Vancouver's Climate Change Action Plan:

*"The most important long-range strategy for managing housing and transportation related green-house gas emissions in an urban context is land use planning for higher density, mixed-use, walkable communities - frequently referred to as smart growth."*

This EcoDensity Charter builds on these past commitments, and challenges all of us to address change more proactively, and adapt our city and our way of life so that Vancouver's future is more sustainable, affordable and livable. We must change how we live as a city and region, and as communities and neighbourhoods, households, and individuals. We know that greater change must start now, but the "what, when and where" of change continues to be determined. The city-wide discourse that generated this Charter, and which will convert it into action, needs to continue.

This document represents a commitment statement of the City of Vancouver -- a Charter between the City and its citizens, both current and future.

#### The Facts

1. Vancouver is one of the most livable cities in the world. It has been planned and developed to respect and reflect the natural beauty that surrounds it, with a high level of design, public amenities and services.
2. Important steps have been taken over many years, through *CityPlan*, Community Visions, and many incremental decisions, to achieve a city of livable, diverse, neighbourhoods and compact, mixed-use, walkable communities for people. These steps and intentions must be built on and respected as we move forward to do more.
3. Vancouver's future is at risk. Climate change, environmental stress, resource depletion and rising costs-of-living are seriously threatening Vancouver's environment, economy, livability and long term sustainability.

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4. Vancouver City Council has set numerous goals related to climate change<sup>1</sup> and the addressing of the City's greenhouse gas emissions. Meeting these requires rapid and deep action.
5. The Region's population continues to grow, and if new, diverse homes are not built in our City, Vancouver's already expensive housing will only get more unaffordable while sprawl is pushed out elsewhere.
6. Vancouver is the region's downtown, providing employment to a broad range of households and household incomes, and housing should be available in the city that is affordable to those who work in it.
7. Vancouver's ecological and carbon footprints indicate that we are consuming too many resources and emitting too many greenhouse gases to sustain our lifestyles.<sup>2</sup> Despite our successes in building a livable city, Vancouver is contributing to climate change and is not as sustainable a city as it could be.
8. Our City's footprints are powerfully determined and influenced by our patterns of density, design and land use. Together, building and transportation energy alone make up 87% of our emissions.<sup>3</sup>
9. A compact city is an efficient, sustainable city. A more dense city uses less energy, provides easier access, and is more affordable than a less dense city.
10. The need for deeper and more rapid change has become clear as our achievements are being outpaced by accelerating environmental, affordability and quality-of-life threats.

### Because the City of Vancouver believes that...

- A. Climate change represents the most significant environmental, economic, social, livability and quality-of-life threat to the City's future, and more significant action to mitigate and prepare for it must begin today.
- B. The pace at which we move to climate stabilization, and achieve a more resilient, prepared city, is critical for Vancouver's future social, cultural, and economic sustainability.
- C. At the same time, the City's affordability and continued livability must be fostered in order for us to progress successfully, resiliently and sustainably.
- D. We need to do more, for ourselves and future generations, and as an influential model within the Region and to other North American cities, as our contribution to growing efforts around the globe.
- E. We have the opportunity to manage change, to choose and design our future in the face of these threats, to create a more ecologically sustainable, affordable, and livable city of neighbourhoods.

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<sup>1</sup> Including: 6% reduction in greenhouse gases (GHG) below 1990 levels by 2012; 33% reduction in GHGs below current levels by 2020; 80% reduction in GHGs below current levels by 2050; all new construction in Vancouver be GHG neutral by 2030. Source: City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 7.71 hectares of land per person is necessary to produce the goods and energy that the average Vancouver resident consumes. This equates to 4 planets' worth of resources if the whole world lived like Vancouver. The average resident also produces 4.9 tonnes of greenhouse gases. Sources: FCM, Ecological Footprints of Canadian Municipalities and Regions, 2001; City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Total of buildings and light- and heavy-duty vehicles combined. Source: City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.

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The City of Vancouver therefore commits to:

**I. AN OVER-ARCHING ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY**

- a. Make environmental sustainability a primary goal in ALL city-building decisions - in ways that also foster and support affordability and livability.
- b. Promote strategic, well-managed density, design and land use as primary tools in achieving this goal, in all city-building decisions.

**II. TOWARD AN *ECO-CITY***

- a. Align density, design, and land use holistically and comprehensively with other tools and methods for environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability, to achieve mutual and cumulative benefits, including sustainable strategies for:
  - transportation and parking;
  - green energy and waste systems;
  - affordable housing choices for all;
  - parks, public realm and recreation;
  - arts, culture and creativity;
  - heritage conservation;
  - urban health;
  - vitality and public safety;
  - urban agriculture and local food access;
  - social planning and development;
  - economic development opportunities;
  - and many other related City initiatives.

**III. A GREENER, DENSER CITY PATTERN**

- a. Achieve greater densities smartly and strategically, in land-use patterns, locations and designs where carbon footprint improvements and environmental gains are highest (e.g., around fixed-transit; walkable shopping, employment and amenity areas; district energy sources, etc.) and where affordability and livability are also fostered.
- b. Promote “gentle” (e.g., rowhouses, infill), “hidden” (e.g., lane-oriented housing) or “invisible” (e.g., secondary suites) forms of density in suitable locations across the City with design that respects neighbourhood identity and sense of place.
- c. Densify in ways that constantly enhance and reinforce a city of walkable neighbourhoods, improve biking and transit infrastructure and movement meaningfully and consistently over time, and reduce and de-emphasize automobile use and ownership.
- d. Protect and ensure proper space for diverse jobs and economic activity close to home for a balanced, resilient city with minimal commuting as the city grows, including protection of key commercial and industrial districts for economic activity rather than housing.

[REVISED CHARTER CONTINUED]

#### IV. MORE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, TYPES, AND CHOICES

- a. Use density, design and land use strategically to support and facilitate greater housing affordability and diversity, in partnership with all government levels, through:
  - an increased and consistent supply to help moderate housing prices;
  - the significant achievement of more affordable housing choices (sizes, types, finishes, locations and tenures), throughout the City and in every neighbourhood, including more affordable options for households with children, seniors, empty-nesters, singles, students and work-force;
  - the facilitation of purpose-built rental housing construction;
  - the facilitation of housing choices outside of the regular market system (such as co-operative housing); and
  - the reduction of living costs related to energy and transportation.
- b. Plan densification strategically - including when and where to densify - to recognize the value provided by existing affordable housing stock, including the strategic retention and enhancement of existing purpose-built rental options.

#### V. GREENER AND LIVABLE DESIGN WITH A "SENSE OF PLACE"

- a. Design all density with architecture and public realm that marries meaningful and significant ecological performance, with lively, beautiful, responsible, people-oriented design, particularly as density levels increase.
- b. Design new density to achieve both sustainable, timeless design, and respect for authentic neighbourhood values, context, character and identity, at all scales.
- c. Combine heritage conservation, and the sustainability inherent in retention/reuse of existing structures and materials, with more dense, efficient, sustainable design and technology.
- d. Design sites and buildings wherever possible, to replicate natural systems and functions (e.g., evaporation and infiltration of water) while minimizing waste.
- e. Incorporate extensive natural and designed green features in creative ways, on sites and on/within buildings, to maintain connections with nature and mitigate urban heat/greenhouse gases.
- f. Apply ecological "best practices" for public realm and infrastructure design to achieve sustainable, beautiful, safe, accessible, adaptable, and engaging streets, parks, and public places. Designs should embrace natural processes, use environmentally responsible materials, and consider opportunities for food and energy production.

#### VI. GREENER AND LIVABLE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- a. Ensure that parks, open space and public places, and other amenities, services, and infrastructure needed to support Vancouver's neighbourhoods as they grow, are provided in a timely way relative to the population levels they serve.
- b. Advance and achieve sustainable district energy systems, at all scales, and particularly at mid and higher densities that make such systems more feasible.

[REVISED CHARTER CONTINUED]

## VII. NEIGHBOURHOOD VOICE, NEIGHBOURHOOD RESPONSIBILITY

- a. These commitments will be achieved with creative education, engagement and dialogue with all voices, while anticipating the needs of future or un-represented voices.
- b. This requires a balance between the need for city-leadership, and respect for neighbourhood-level influence, capacity-building and ownership.
- c. We will respect and foster the voice of neighbourhoods, and their special values, aspirations and approaches.
- d. We will also challenge all neighbourhoods across the City to help meet the commitments of this Charter, and their shared responsibilities to their City and beyond, and to future generations.  
*An Eco-City must be made up of many Eco-Neighbourhoods.*

## VIII. HOW WILL THE CITY USE THIS CHARTER AND MEET OUR COMMITMENTS?

- a. We will consider this Charter in all aspects of our decision-making regarding the management of change in the City, and all decisions on city-building.
- b. We will coordinate achievement of these Charter commitments with continued implementation of *CityPlan*, Community Visions and area policies, the Community Climate Change Action Plan, and other Council-approved policies and plans.
- c. Where an existing policy, plan, standard or rule (hereafter referred to as “direction”) specifically requires or prohibits a decision that may conflict with commitments of this Charter, the City will continue to be governed by the specific requirement or prohibition (e.g., height, density or land use), until the direction is consciously reconsidered by Council after appropriate process and consultation.
- d. Where existing direction allows flexibility, discretion, interpretation or the weighing of choices, or where there is no governing or guiding direction, approaches that will support the achievement of these commitments will be emphasized.
- e. New directions and approaches will be reflective of the commitments of this Charter and will seek to overcome barriers and obstacles to its implementation. Existing directions will be brought into alignment with these commitments over time.
- f. We will bring to bear the appropriate resources, methods and timeframes for creative, responsible, thorough, transparent, engaging and educational planning and consultation to meet these commitments.
- g. We will foster a creative civic environment for learning through well-considered risk and experimentation that might challenge traditional practices, in order to achieve these commitments. We will monitor, adapt to learning and make adjustments in a more timely, dynamic manner. We will study and learn from the best and most creative ideas from around the globe to achieve these commitments.
- h. We will evaluate how considerations relate to the WHOLE of this Charter and its many balancing and tempering aspects, rather than focussing singly on individual passages to base support or opposition to an idea.

[REVISED CHARTER CONTINUED]

- i. We will think beyond our city limits, to regional, national and global needs, and champion change in other communities, at other levels of government and with other decision-makers to make these commitments a reality. We will partner creatively, do that which we can and should, and urge others to do what they can and should as well.



### III. PREVIOUS DRAFT ECODENSITY CHARTER

#### How Density, Design, & Land Use Will Contribute to Environmental Sustainability, Affordability, & Livability

WHEREAS in the City of Vancouver:

- Increasing climate change and the use of resources faster than the planet can replenish them represent serious threats to our future livability.
- Environmental sustainability is critical for Vancouver's long term resiliency and is the foundation for future social, cultural, and economic sustainability.
- Important steps have been taken over many years to create a livable city of neighbourhoods and compact, mixed-use, walkable communities.
- The need for deeper and more rapid change has become clear as our achievements are being challenged by accelerating environmental threats.
- We need to do more, for ourselves and future generations, and as our contribution to efforts being made around the globe.
- We have the opportunity to influence change, by using density, design, and land use to create more sustainable and affordable communities that are great places to live.

THEREFORE, the City of Vancouver makes a commitment to:

#### AN OVER-ARCHING ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY

- Make environmental sustainability a primary consideration in decisions about density, design, and land use - that will at the same time improve affordability and livability.
- Follow through on existing plans and policies that improve sustainability, and build on them to achieve even greater gains.
- Improve environmental performance across the city in all communities and in individual projects, while enhancing affordability across the city.
- Emphasize environmental sustainability now where existing policies allow, and develop new policies, rules or standards to overcome current barriers.

#### A GREEN LAND USE PATTERN

- Locate new density strategically by continuing to reinforce walking, biking, and transit, and in further support of accessible local jobs, shops, and services, and consider new green criteria for location, such as shared energy efficiencies.
- Contribute to economic prosperity and ensure adequate space for diverse jobs and economic activity close to home as the city grows, including protection of key commercial and industrial districts for economic activity rather than housing.

[PREVIOUS DRAFT CHARTER CONTINUED]

A RANGE OF HOUSING TYPES, NEEDS, AND COSTS

- **Accommodate density of different types and scales to meet a full range of housing needs**, including singles, families, empty-nesters, and seniors -- ranging from continued high density downtown; to new opportunities outside the downtown for a variety of housing types, from high and medium density apartments, to rowhouses, duplexes, small houses, coach-houses, and suites.
- **Use density to enable greater housing affordability** through a generally increased supply of more inherently affordable housing, and through consideration of how new development can help achieve social housing objectives; and by reconciling new development with the retention of existing affordable rental units.

GREENER AND LIVABLE DESIGN AND A SENSE OF PLACE

- **Design density with new and existing architecture that meshes greener performance, with values for neighbourhood context, character and identity**, for high quality and neighbourly buildings and developments, at all scales.
- **Combine respect for heritage conservation, and for the sustainability inherent in retention/reuse of existing structures and materials, with greener technology and denser development.**
- **Apply ecological best practices for public realm design** to achieve green, beautiful, safe, accessible, adaptable, and engaging streets, parks, and public places in all communities.

GREEN AND LIVABLE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- **Facilitate greener energy systems**, in all density contexts, in recognition that density generates the users to make new systems more feasible.
- **Work to provide the amenities, services, and infrastructure needed to support new and existing density levels**, using existing and new financial tools, with continued contributions from developers, City budgets, and other sources.

AN ECO-CITY

- **Champion new, holistic ways to align density, design, and land use with other tools** for environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability, to achieve mutual benefits -- including strategies for transportation and parking, green building strategies, heritage conservation, affordable housing strategies, urban agriculture and food policy, recycling, new energy systems, social development planning, and the many other related City initiatives.

[PREVIOUS DRAFT CHARTER CONTINUED]

**AND the City of Vancouver will continue to respect and apply these process principles:**

- **Engage and consult** with the broad public and with communities to prepare plans and policies to guide change and to build and reflect broad community ownership and capacity-building for a sustainable, resilient city; tie planning processes to community capacity building that supports communities' distinct approaches to meeting their needs.
- **Bring to bear the needed resources and timeframes** for responsible, thorough, transparent, and successful planning and consultation.
- **Base actions on Council-approved plans and policies, rather than ad hoc decisions; and plan and implement actions suitable for the short, medium and long terms;** encourage experimentation and look for ways to reward innovation; move further ahead as more is planned, known, and doable.
- **Work with other municipalities and levels of government;** seek partnerships with senior levels of government necessary to achieve goals; learn from others; and create models that will provide leadership for others.