

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

To: Vancouver City Mayoral and Council Candidates:
Re: November 2014 Election Platform

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver (NSV) is a grassroots organization dedicated to Vancouver 's future as a truly sustainable and progressive City of Neighbourhoods that reflects the diversity and values of its citizens. NSV is guided by the following set of basic principles that we believe are essential to that future (see website for fuller details: <http://nsvancouver.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/NSV-Council-Principles-and-Policies-2014-V19-Aug.17-2014.pdf>)

NSV – BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. Make City Hall Open and Accountable
2. Advance Campaign Finance Reform
3. Value Vancouver as Community—not Commodity
4. Respect Community Supported Local Area Plans and Community Visions
5. Support Neighbourhood-based Planning
6. Community Initiative
7. Promote a Diverse and Sustainable Economy
8. Advance Social Justice and End Homelessness
9. Make Real Progress on Housing Affordability
10. Protect and Expand Rental Housing
11. Support the Arts, Film, Culture and Tourism
12. Protect Heritage Buildings and Viewscapes
13. Improve Public Transit
14. Reject Development-Based Funding Models for Public Transit
15. Support Active Transportation
16. Promote Environmental Sustainability

As a registered third party sponsor for the 2014 civic election, NSV's aim is to give a political voice to these principles by recommending a broad slate of candidates that share our perspectives and are committed to restoring public accountability at Vancouver City Hall.

Please respond to the attached list of questions and return the completed form to info@nsvancouver.ca by Sunday, Nov, 2, 2014. Responses will be circulated and used to inform the final shape of NSV's recommended 2014 Slate.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our request.

Kind regards,
The Steering Committee
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver
e-mail: info@nsvancouver.ca

2014 Vancouver Civic Election All Party Candidate Questionnaire

Name of Candidate: _____
Civic Party: _____
Date: _____

Please complete the following questions and return this form to:
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver at
info@nsvancouver.ca

NSV Basic Principles:

1. Please review NSV Basic Principles as per list and website on previous page.
Are you generally supportive of these principles?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Neighbourhood Based Planning:

Vancouver is world renowned for its dedication to progressive planning and particularly for CityPlan as an innovative model for participatory neighbourhood-based planning. As “the overall planning document for the City”, CityPlan provides a comprehensive planning framework to guide Vancouver’s future development as a sustainable “City of Neighbourhoods”, committed to following core Directions:

- *Promote environmental sustainability*
- *Define and preserve neighbourhood character*
- *Involve people in decisions affecting their neighbourhood*
- *Increase the variety and affordability of housing*
- *Reduce reliance on the automobile*
- *Strengthen Neighbourhood Centres*
- *Expand and diversify parks and public places*
- *Enhance local commerce and community services*

Remarkably, despite unprecedented public support, and with the initial phase of the Community Visions process yet to be completed, funding to local Vision Implementation Committees was terminated and the Vision Implementation Program abandoned in 2010 (read more at <http://nsvancouver.ca/priority-concerns/neighbourhood-planning-process/>).

Notably, subsequent community planning processes have avoided a key element of the CityPlan process; the Choices Survey, an inclusive, neighbourhood-wide survey (combined with a random control survey) to establish the extent of support for local planning directions. NSV believes that the resulting lack of real democratic influence over planning outcomes explains why more recent planning processes have been plagued by controversy and public opposition.

2. Do you support a recommitment to CityPlan and related neighbourhood-based planning as the primary policy framework for planning and development in Vancouver's neighbourhoods?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

3. Do you agree that long-established Local Area Plans (LAPs) and Community Visions developed through CityPlan should be respected and that the extent of local support for any new planning initiatives should be established through inclusive, neighbourhood-wide surveys consistent with the CityPlan (Choices Survey) standard?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

4. Would you support local neighbourhood referendums to determine the extent of local support for more recent Community Plans developed outside the CityPlan framework?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

5. Do you believe that the recently formed Citizen's Assembly in Grandview-Woodland, which utilizes City-appointed volunteers chosen based on demographics chosen by lottery, is a good model for public consultation and is likely to yield an outcome that the broader community will embrace and support?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

6. Further, in regard to the Grandview-Woodlands Citizen's Assembly, are you in favour of public consultation and/or planning processes that restrict broader participation and exclude citizens from taking part on the basis of demographics?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

7. Since 2008 a range of city-wide policy initiatives, including EcoDensity, STIR (Short-Term Incentives for Rental), Cambie Corridor Plan, Mayors Task Force on Affordable Housing, Frequent Transit Development Areas, have been employed as a basis for approving spot rezonings that are out of scale and character with local neighbourhoods and in conflict with established local planning (LAPs/Community Visions).

Do you support the adoption and use of city-wide planning policy as a tool for enabling forms of development that are in conflict with established local planning and predictably unpopular?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

8. With reference to the previous question, the City and its planners claim that growth projections for Vancouver demand major densification and that large-scale rezoning enabled by foregoing city-wide polices is a necessity. Others, including NSV, have argued that projected growth can be largely accommodated within Vancouver's currently zoned capacity and that the outcome would be a more sustainable, livable and affordable city. Despite continued requests for accurate accounting of present zoned capacity, however, the City refuses to provide these data.

If elected, would you take action to ensure that the City undertakes and makes public a timely review and accurate accounting of current zoned housing potential across the Vancouver (including potential capacity supported through established local planning – LAPs/Community Visions)?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Housing Affordability:

Housing affordability is a key concern for individuals and families across Vancouver. The appearance is that currently Vancouver City Hall is convinced the only way to address the problem is to increase supply and that the only way to increase supply is to remove all barriers to development. This is reflected in the unprecedented number of development permits issued over the last year and the extent to which related development is being enabled by predictably unpopular rezoning that is placing profit ahead of planning.

9. Do you agree that, first and foremost, Vancouver must be valued as a community, rather than a commodity?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

10. Do you believe that housing affordability can be boiled down to basic "supply and demand" and that the resulting outcome would be a sustainable Vancouver?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

11. NSV has argued that spot rezoning undermines affordability by permitting the development industry to focus on high-rise luxury product that is attractive to a global commodity market and that, instead, the primary focus should be on forms of development supported through established local planning that are generally less attractive to global investors and, consequently, more affordable for Vancouverites.

Do you agree with this point of view?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

12. Do you admit that external speculation in Vancouver's housing market is a significant contributor to the present housing affordability problem in Vancouver and that a range of appropriate disincentives should be considered to control the extent of global market forces on the cost of housing in Vancouver?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

13. With the majority of Vancouverites currently renting their homes, NSV believes that efforts to control the cost of housing must go well beyond market housing and ensure the availability of affordable rental and low-income housing.

Do you agree that incentives are required to encourage retention and upgrading of the city's current stock of affordable rental housing?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

14. Do you agree that where existing rental housing stock is redeveloped, that a city-wide inclusionary policy should be applicable, requiring a significant and fixed percentage of units be purpose-built rentals (below-market/rent-controlled if rezoning is involved) for the life of the building?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Objective and Meaningful Public Consultation Processes:

Although the City talks a lot about "extensive public consultation", the public is not always convinced that consultation is genuine or meaningful and there is often a perception that "consultation" is orchestrated to yield a preconceived result.

15. Do you believe that the City's current public consultation processes are designed to seek public input and opinion in an objective and unbiased fashion or orchestrated to create the appearance of public support for predetermined outcomes?

Objective/Unbiased ___ Orchestrated ___ Comments:

16. Do you agree that the City's public consultation processes should be objective, transparent, and inclusive of all citizens wanting to participate?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

17. To the extent that public consultation is undertaken to inform City Council's decision on a given issue, do you believe that the process should establish the balance of related public opinion through unbiased and verifiable surveys, scientific polling or other broadly supported methods?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

18. Recently, the City has sought to make greater use of telephone and on-line surveys as means of gauging public support for proposed policy and/or related initiatives.

Do you agree that these surveys should be vetted through an open and independent review process to ensure that surveys are objective and unbiased?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

19. Do you agree that City staff should be entirely objective and unbiased in the analysis and reporting of public opinion to City Council?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Democratic Decision Making:

Recently, concerns have been raised about the extent to which Vancouver City Hall is committed to democratic decision making and whether the public has sufficient ongoing influence on significant policy adopted by City Council.

20. Some have suggested that civic elections provide elected representatives with the necessary mandate to advance a policy agenda no matter what the extent of public opposition.

Do you share that view?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

21. Despite a well-established balance of public opinion against the Province's proposal to extend the municipal election cycle from 3 to 4 years, the City of Vancouver and its council representatives to the Lower Mainland Local Government Association had a significant role in encouraging its adoption. As a consequence, Vancouver voters are now deprived of the opportunity to elect their mayor and city council every third year.

Do you think that this outcome is good news for our local democracy?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

22. Members of Vancouver City Council have also expressed strong support for campaign finance reform, but some members continue to accept unlimited campaign contributions from sponsors with direct financial interest in council decisions.

Have you or the political party you are affiliated with accepted campaign contributions in 2014 from

(a) development industry organizations doing business with the City of Vancouver?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

(b) labour organizations representing City of Vancouver staff?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

23.

(a) Would you consider requesting the Province to amend the Vancouver Charter to include provisions to regulate the lobbying of City staff and elected officials?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

(b) Do you agree that lobbyist organizations include those who are seeking corporate or financial gains from the City and not community groups?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

24. As it stands, public hearings are commonly perceived by the public as an opportunity of last resort to oppose the adoption of controversial policy. In recent years there have been several protracted public hearings with a clear majority of opposition expressed but effectively ignored.

Do you agree that a threshold should be established such that sufficient opposition raised through a public hearing process (or alternatively through a petition-based mechanism) would trigger review, extended consultation or other procedure for determining the balance of public opinion on exceptionally controversial issues?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

25. In 2012 Vancouver City Council adopted amendments to the procedural by-law for public hearings, limiting public participation and allowing members of city council to vote on the issue without attending the public hearing. The amendments were perceived by many as an attempt to avoid public filibuster in opposition to unpopular, but predictable policy decisions.

Do you support by-law amendments designed to limit public influence on the decision making process at Vancouver City Hall?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Do you agree that these amendments should be reversed?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

26. Do you believe that there should be a larger role for plebiscites in determining the level of public support for major civic policy decisions?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

27. Prior to a 2006 ruling by the BC Supreme Court, third party appeals to the Board of Variance provided a crucial and longstanding avenue of appeal for citizens affected by rezoning and development decisions. The Court reinterpreted related language in the Vancouver Charter and effectively closed this critical avenue for neighbourhood-level challenge of unreasonable development impacts.

Would you be in favour of reinstating third party appeals and would you make a request to the Province to clarify this through appropriate amendment of the Vancouver Charter?
Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Sustainable Public Transportation for a Livable City:

Everyone agrees that sustainable public transportation is an essential part of Vancouver's future. It is also widely appreciated that mass transit links between Vancouver and surrounding municipalities are key to efficient and sustainable long-range commuting across the region. Unfortunately, what we also know is that delivery of mass transit infrastructure is uniquely high cost and long in the making. Competing transportation visions for the city have far-reaching and transformational implications for the future shape of Vancouver and surrounding region.

According to the Vancouver's Transportation 2040 plan, the City's top public transit priority is to "work with partners to deliver an underground Millennium Line extension serving the Broadway Corridor". We also know that the City has defined the Broadway Corridor as "roughly 500 metres north and south of Broadway/10th Avenue, from Commercial Drive to Blanca", a broad swath of Vancouver that has already been identified as a "future frequent transit development area" as part of the City's Regional Context Statement in compliance with the Regional Growth Strategy.

Although many voters have no idea of the planning and development implications associated with various visions currently on offer for Broadway Corridor/UBC Line rapid transit, the City's Cambie Corridor plan and ongoing development offers a practical perspective on the extent to which "neighbourhood context and character" will take a back seat to "densities and forms that meet city and regional needs".

28. Recognizing the development implications of rapid transit, to what extent do you support an underground Millennium Line extension?

Not at all ___ to Granville ___ to Burrard ___ to Arbutus ___ to UBC ___

Comments:

29. Others have suggested that for a fraction of the cost of a Broadway Corridor rapid transit line, serving UBC, Vancouver's entire public transit grid could be converted, in large part from unsustainable diesel buses, to a combination of zero-emission electric trolleys and streetcars. Proponents argue that in addition to a major reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the approach would encourage a finer-grained, human-scale pattern of development that makes for a more sustainable and livable city.

Do you share this view?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

30. As a remote commuter campus, and more recently through rapid residential development, UBC represents an increasing challenge to both local and regional transportation networks. Unlike SFU, UBC has shown little interest in establishing significant satellite campuses to reduce transportation demand across Vancouver.

Do you believe that UBC's rapid growth is sustainable?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

31. TransLink's mandate to generate revenue through strategic real estate investments (which TransLink calls the "Hong Kong model") constitutes a systemic conflict of interest and would contribute to speculative inflation of land values if implemented. Proceeds from rezonings currently support civic amenities and social housing. Diverting this crucial revenue stream from Vancouver to TransLink would impact the City's capital budget and create pressure for property tax increases (downloading).

Would you reject development-based funding models for public transit?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

32. Given uncertain funding and delivery of major transit infrastructure, buses will continue to deliver the majority of public transit in Vancouver. The City's Transportation 2040 plan calls for reduced transit-related environmental and noise emissions and supports an expansion of the electric trolley network.

Given noise, air quality and health impacts of diesel buses, do you agree that expanded bus capacity should place a priority on low-noise, zero-emission electric trolleys over fossil-fueled vehicles?

Yes ___ No ___ Comments:

Signed: _____

Dated: _____