

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

February 19, 2008

Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver is a city wide ad hoc organization of 28 neighbourhood groups that includes residents associations, CityPlan Vision implementation committees, ratepayers associations and community groups. This is the first time in the city's history that such a diverse, broad representation of neighbourhood groups from across the city have come together to carefully consider and address a City initiative. We oppose the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions. The summary of our recommendations are outlined below:

Sustainability - 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, social, and cultural sustainability. EcoDensity as currently proposed does not accomplish this.

Process - To date, the community consultation process leading up to a public hearing on February 26, 2008 has been inadequate and imposes an impossible timeline. At this point many still feel that the meetings and workshops staged by the City are more about selling the EcoDensity initiative than engaging the public in a dialogue to bring genuine community input into creating the Charter and Actions. Although staff has indicated they will be recommending substantive changes in a third draft of the Charter and Actions, any revised proposal should be released for additional community dialogue and feedback prior to consideration by Council. We need a new process that is democratic, transparent, and community-based. The process must be extended over a reasonable timeline, not just rushed through. Many feel that the City should put the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions to referendum as part of the November 2008 civic election.

The Charter – The question of whether or not the city needs an EcoDensity Charter has never been debated publicly. There are many who feel that it is not required at all and object to the use of the word 'charter'. Its role in this context and what its powers are in relation to other city policies has never been clearly defined. If we do proceed with one, we need it to use a balanced sustainability approach, not making density the main priority and tool. This must NOT be a direction-to-policy document that may be used to change inconvenient policy or to circumvent due process. Even if it would not immediately change existing policy, Council could at any time approve 'Actions' under the Charter to selectively alter existing policies, such as Initial Action 2 that would override existing Community Visions. This erodes confidence in the public process and discourages public participation. The draft is an overly prescriptive document that mostly lists actions or opinions, and fails to establish a higher level statement of principle for sustainability. The only section in the entire proposed draft Charter that we support keeping is the "ECO-CITY" section as follows:

"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."

We recommend adding the following text:

"Density is one of many tools for sustainability, but density must not take priority over other City objectives, including affordability and liveability. Conserving embodied energy through the retention of existing buildings is an important element for achieving sustainability, with particular emphasis on retention of character and heritage buildings."

And, finally, there must be adequate accountability, conflict resolution and public appeal provisions, including restoration of the longstanding right of third-party appeals to the Board of Variance.

Draft Initial Actions – There are so many initial actions proposed that it is impossible for the public to properly understand and consider the actions with all their complex implications. It is therefore, premature to be proposing their adoption or implementation. The City should first be engaging in a comprehensive planning process for both the short term and long term, including improved community consultation that is democratic, transparent, and community-based. The community must be part of creating the concept with their opinions incorporated. The initial actions should be limited to a very small number for further consideration only, with much more time for consultation. A summary of a few of our recommendations regarding the initial actions include the following:

- Sufficient and sustainable public transit must be in place prior to increasing densification.
- Green buildings should be required, not bonused.
- LEED is not an adequate rating system for sustainability. It does not give enough weight to the conservation of the embodied energy of retaining existing buildings, with character and heritage buildings of most concern.

For more detailed comments on the Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions, refer to the group letter to Mayor and Council dated December 19, 2007, available by request through the group email.

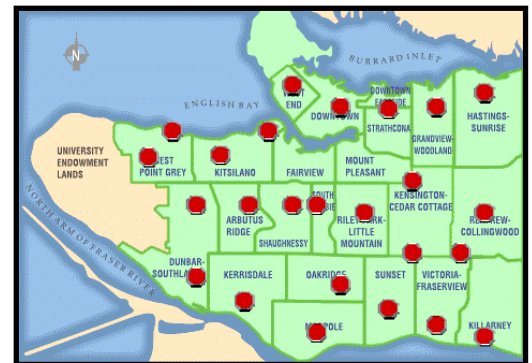
We ask that the City withdraw the proposed Draft EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions, and follow our recommendations.

We encourage people to sign up to speak at the public hearing on February 26, 2008 at 7:00 pm. Add your name to the speakers list by contacting the City Clerk's Office at 604-873-7276.

Group contact email: agroupofvancouverneighbourhoods@hotmail.com

Supporting Group names:

- Arbutus Ridge Concerned Citizens Association
- Arbutus Ridge/Kerrisdale/Shaugnessy CityPlan Vision
- Building Better Neighbourhoods
- Citywide Housing Coalition
- Douglas Park Residents Association
- Dunbar CityPlanVision Implementation Committee
- 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