

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF NORTH VANCOUVER

Meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission  
Held at City Hall, 141 West 14th Street, North Vancouver, B.C.  
in Conference Room A on Wednesday, November 9th, 2011

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**MINUTES**

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Present: B. Curtis (Chair)  
H. Goodland  
P. McCann  
D. Olson  
B. Phillips  
J. Plato  
M. Rahbar  
M. Robinson  
Councillor Heywood

Staff: S. Smith, Planner, Community Development  
S. Kimm-Jones, Committee Clerk  
Gary Penway, Deputy Director, Community Development  
Isabel Gordon, Director of Finance  
Karen Wong, Planning Technician, Community Development

Guests: None

Absent: J. Jensen  
M. Tasi

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A quorum being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

1. **Minutes of Meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission held October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

It was regularly moved and seconded

**THAT** the minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission held October 12th, 2011 be adopted.

**Unanimously Carried**

2. **Business Arising**

None from the October meeting.

There was a short discussion on the status of businesses in Lower Lonsdale; many of the small businesses are facing significant increases in rent due to redevelopment

and are being pushed out which seems to go counter to the goal of activating and animating the streetscape. What can be done to maintain this important goal? Staff noted that it would be a good discussion topic for a future meeting, perhaps at the December meeting. The hope is to add more people through redevelopment but there is a transition time. Some of the comments on the Cityshaping Community Engagement process mentioned vacant store fronts. It was suggested to promote a wider range of businesses rather than just coffee and hair shops for example. A Business Improvement Area (BIA) could support existing businesses. It was noted that the Lower Lonsdale Business Association are looking at alternatives to a BIA as the idea was very divisive among Lower Lonsdale businesses. It was noted that one of the most successful stores on Lower Lonsdale is the Salvation Army Thrift Store.

It was agreed to have an economic discussion at the December APC meeting. The discussion could be on small business, encouraging a diversity of businesses, ways to animate the streets and attract traffic; also where it is working. What does success look like? Perhaps the Lower Lonsdale Business Association will be asked to send a representative. Staff suggested as an alternative that the discussion would start with the City's Economic Development Strategy at a higher level and talk about some of the more specific issues as an OCP discussion.

### **3. Staff Update**

250-252 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street (Rezoning, Heritage Designation and Strata Conversion): Received Second Reading on October 24<sup>th</sup> and Third Reading on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

M4 Zoning Minor Modification in Lower Lonsdale: A delegation to Council requested an amendment to allow the sale of retail or servicing of household or personal goods and to increase Accessory Retail Use to 30% of the Gross Floor Area of the Building. A decision was deferred to full Council.

137 St. David's Avenue: Final Adoption occurred on October 24<sup>th</sup>.

721 Chesterfield: The DVP was approved at the October 17<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

615 Mahon Avenue: This project was referred to Public Hearing on November 14<sup>th</sup>.

351 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street: This project was referred to Public Hearing on November 14<sup>th</sup>.

Megaphone Magazine: Council approved a one year pilot project for vendors to sell Megaphone Magazine on City sidewalks.

Bicycle Master Plan Update: Council approved referral of the report to Advisory Bodies for their comments prior to being brought back to Council for their consideration.

Third and Forbes Pedestrian and Cycling Facility improvements were approved at the November 7<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

CityShaping: Stage 1 of the CityShaping Community Engagement process, including input from over 1200 community members to-date, was endorsed by Council and released to the public.

#### 4. CityShaping Workshop – Housing for All

G. Penway and S. Smith reviewed population diversity, housing stock and affordability and the factors affecting cost and the diversity of housing. The group then discussed critical issues and possible responses to them.

Staff noted that the workshop is merely an introduction, description of the background and beginning of discussion. The City is still working towards defining the issue.

The City is committed to being a diverse community. At the beginning of its history, the City evolved into a shipbuilding community and working class neighbourhood. There is a strong consciousness of wanting to accommodate a diverse range of people which is reflected in the housing stock.

The age of the population is similar to the metro average with a higher percentage of those aged 25-54. The majority of school age children are in the town centre with 33% in Lower Lonsdale, 28% in Central Lonsdale.

Housing stock of approximately 22,000 dwelling units is comprised of 16% single family home and approximately 85% multifamily dwellings. The amount of rental housing has stayed about the same, non-market rental has increased.

The Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy has allocated population and housing growth by region; the population for the City is projected to grow from 47,000 in 2006 to 56,000 in 2021, with dwelling units increasing from 22,360 to 25,600 in 2021. Historically the population of the City has grown about 1 ½% per year.

There will be a need for 600 affordable rental units in 10 years: 300 for moderate income, 300 for low income people. The challenge will be to find a solution to deliver the units. Over the last 10 years the City delivered about 165 units. Business as usual will not deliver enough affordable housing to meet demand.

The above projections assume that the City will keep the current stock and add to it. However building stock is getting older and will be demolished and could be replaced by condo developments.

Metro Vancouver has commissioned a study on the vulnerability of the housing stock which is at risk due to market forces. The City is at risk of losing a large number of units.

The owners of rental buildings do not get tax benefits for renovating rental buildings and get more to rebuild. The City is not allowed to zone for rental.

Renters earn approximately \$38,180 compared to home owners who earn an average of \$61,740.

What is affordable? Actual rents are higher than 30% of average income.

An analysis of different housing forms and relative costs was done. Higher density units are cheaper to build than single family units. Wood frame buildings are both cheaper economically and environmentally to build than concrete high rises.

The City can remove some costs e.g. DCC's but it is still expensive to build.

Choices made on land use have an impact on who is in the community.

The City has an aging population but it is important to be aware of the large numbers of children in Central and Lower Lonsdale. There are fewer people living in single family neighbourhoods and some families prefer to live in smaller dwellings.

There has been a steady decline in rental dwellings relative to owned dwellings because a lot of condos have been added; there are currently over 9,800 rental units.

Questions we need to be asking ourselves include: What are the housing needs over the next 10 to 50 years? What can be done to reduce the cost of homeownership? What can be done to maintain the supply of market rental housing? What can be done to meet the demand for affordable rental housing?

**Questions and comments from the APC included, but were not limited to:**

Senior levels of government need to be at the table to make it happen.

Should we be targeting different segments of the population e.g. families, seniors?

A large part of rental stock was built in the 70's with the help of government incentives. Staff: The majority of the units were built by mom and pop groups. This would be a national problem if there were housing pricing issues everywhere. Housing is in the provincial domain and not all provinces have high house prices.

There should be a map showing the distribution of affordable housing in the City; both market and non-market housing. We should be thinking about in terms of community uses e.g. transport.

Older buildings are not efficient to run with significant operating costs, perhaps an incentive for a major retrofit for energy efficiency could be offered. A study has shown that just replacing the facade with one built to the original specifications can result in 10-15% in energy savings.

Most owners do not meter the individual units so the cost of energy is averaged out and there is no incentive for the tenant to save energy; owners have trouble making them work.

I know of one building where most of the gas heating goes to one unit because the owner has an elderly cat. You should install wireless readers to show people what they are using.

What about retrofitting to the Lonsdale Energy Corporation? Staff: We would need to provide an incentive to make it cheaper; most older rentals are on hot water heat.

Illegal suites in duplexes provide a good stock of affordable housing and are a good solution for rental units in single family areas. Staff: Council voted on Monday to support suites in one duplex and to consider this issue in the OCP update. The new Council should have a policy on it.

A feasibility study on the affordable units in Lower Lonsdale might be a starting point to help owners think about bringing the buildings up to date.

Rents would not go up as fast if buildings were remediated. The cost of living is not included in the cost of rental.

Interest rates have been at their lowest for five to six years, when they go up it will really affect affordability.

The \$8 billion federal shipping contract will attract 3200 new workers, how will we house them or will they just drive in? People working here are not necessarily living here.

Did anything come out of the 100 Year Vision that has not been captured in the document? Staff: The vision has been received by Council but is not official policy. Land use patterning was included.

Staff: This is not something to be solved easily; do you want to come back to the December meeting with ideas to be incorporated?

A sub-committee comprising Marni Robinson, Helen Goodland, Paul McCann and Bill Curtis will meet on November 26<sup>th</sup> and report back at the December APC meeting.

## **5. City Shaping Discussion Paper – Sustaining our Natural Capital**

I. Gordon, Director of Finance and K. Wong, Planning Technician, Community Development reviewed the discussion paper presented at the October 17<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting.

This is a background paper for the new Official Community Plan which describes the economic concept of valuing services provided by nature; services which are highly valuable and probably irreplaceable. Mainline economic decision making has a bias as looking at nature to be exploited without an understanding that it provides tremendous value in itself.

There is a lot of value in the services in terms of things municipalities are responsible for e.g. sewers etc.

Why measure natural capital and what do we have? Traditionally municipal spending has been on playing and landscaped areas but there are less visible aspects e.g. clean air, the effect on lowering temperature. By assigning a value natural environments can be protected.

An inventory of the City shows 135.5 hectares of parks and natural areas including trails, the Spirit Trail and “green necklace”, creeks and ponds, the waterfront, Burrard Inlet, urban forests and approximately 6000 street trees.

This report provides a new way in which to think about the future of the city eg energy emissions, climate change and carbon storage through trees and forests, and park planning for all ages. The key theme is to move towards greater resiliency in terms of planting and building design to help us deal with the impact of climate change e.g. rain gardens, permeable surfaces, more trees to shade buildings.

There are implications in terms of local food systems and encouraging people to think about locally produced food.

Economic options do not work in isolation but need to work with policy and regulations by means of payments for ecosystem systems, user fees, environmental footprint based taxation, for example. Landowners would be compensated for using land in ways to benefit natural capital e.g. riparian areas. The provincial government might broaden the scope to help with uncovering creeks for example.

User fees are a powerful way to shape behaviour and the City could review the things user fees are charged for e.g. garbage, sewer, water. An analysis of street litter discovered it was costing quite a bit to deal with items such as dog waste.

There could be environmentally based taxation for things like storm drainage as impermeable surfaces have a big impact on the natural environment. We would like BC Assessment to give a percentage of permeable versus impermeable surface and base storm water management fees on it. Tree retention needs to be encouraged on private land too.

#### **Questions and comments from the APC included, but were not limited to:**

- What about manmade parks such as Harbourside? A: This is a challenge in a highly urbanized area such as the City. There is a continuum between the totally urbanized and totally natural. Many parks are still highly contrived, we should be trying to make parks more natural. The OCP does have environmentally sensitive areas shown on a map which is a starting point.
- Would we be measuring the increase in GHG savings? A: At the moment we are discussing the commitment to become carbon neutral, should we be allowed to count the things we are already doing?
- What does it mean about the trees on private property? A: Tree retention on private property is a big issue and a policy could be considered. We need to make people more aware and accountable.
- I think the concept is brilliant. The main challenge is we do not have a price for carbon.
- We should know exactly how many trees we have. A study has shown that a street tree increases the value of the property it is next to by 17%.
- As houses become smaller the outside is more valuable and important.
- You should consider collaboration with the public schools as playgrounds, open areas add to natural capital. The natural turf field was lost at Sutherland.
- You have done a great job of capturing the work already done. It would be worthwhile to put something about the ongoing volunteer work. A: The OCP wants to encourage volunteers.
- This brings to mind the idea of Natural Debt with the City having to pay off the debt to nature for using all it does for example the handling of storm water and

the effect on Burrard Inlet. We need something major to deal with storm water such as the long settling ponds built in Seattle; we are still building sidewalks and curbs and gutters. Staff: In the 100 Year Vision every other street was to become a green street with bioswales, storm water management, vegetable growing.

- Are you aware of other municipalities doing this work? A: We are not aware of others incorporating it into their OCP. Whistler and North Vancouver District have done something similar but different with the natural step.
- I am interested in the concept of debt and how everything is interconnected. As a group APC should be auditing projects on what they are taking away from nature.
- There could be rewards for recycling. The City of Philadelphia gives out gift cards of up to \$400 for households who recycle. We need to take ownership of everything in our pipes e.g. in Australia they own the water.

## **6. Review of Low Density, Duplex and Infill Residential Design Guidelines**

S. Smith showed a PowerPoint presentation on low density residential design guidelines. Members of the Commission were asked for their comments on required storage in cellars to preclude garages being turned into storage lockers thereby creating parking issues on the street; the symmetrical versus the asymmetrical design approach; reducing the front yard from 25 feet to 18 feet in order to create a generous rear yard, and the proposed three feet increase in the height envelope to allow more daylight into cellars and to open the doors to more modern building design in the community.

### **Comments from the APC included, but were not limited to:**

- Street front averaging process would work better in Heritage areas, for example, rather than moving everything forward.
- It should be made explicit that raising the height to 33 feet is to raise the basement out of the ground.
- There is not a real issue on how to pull the cellar out of the ground. Building grade is the basis and it should be able to work under current rules. There should be a response to how building grades are defined.
- Roof top decks are an issue.
- We want people out of back yards to animate the streetscape.
- It is a Victorian idea to have a single house on one lot so that it feels palatial. We should be cutting down on the waste of space of large front yards.
- What is the problem with the building envelope as it stands? Staff: Increasing the height envelope is good for contemporary design and interesting roof lines.
- Does changing the setback change how much green space would be preserved? A: You cannot build additional floor area and there is no site coverage increase.
- Are there any guidelines on permeable surfaces? A: Not at the moment.

It was regularly moved and seconded

**THAT** the Advisory Planning Commission has reviewed the draft Low Density, Duplex and Infill Residential Design Guidelines. The Commission supports the general direction of the guidelines with consideration of the following issues:

- Any front yard setback adjustments should reflect the context and heritage of the neighbourhood;
- Applicants should be advised of the need to submit sufficient information about topographical features and the character of adjacent properties;
- Building grades should more accurately reflect surrounding elevations to enable the design of a building optimize to its presence on the street;
- The creation of a maximum impermeable surface lot coverage mechanism.

The Advisory Planning Commission supports measures to improve the liveability of accessory secondary suites including access to as much natural light as possible.

**Carried unanimously**

*Jeff Plato left the meeting at 9:30 p.m.*

#### **7. CityShaping Summary of Stage 1 Community Engagement**

S. Smith reviewed the report submitted to Council on November 7<sup>th</sup> which summarized Stage 1 Community Engagement in the CityShaping process.

The process received more input in first five months than in the whole of the last OCP process.

January to April will be a deep and targeted approach to hard-to-reach groups with topic-based workshops for the broader community, workbooks for community organizations and an online discussion forum.

A member of the Commission noted that it would be useful to know how many young people would be entering the housing market in the period of time covered by the OCP. 90% of the Noma project was brought by people who live in North Vancouver. There is a need to identify the groups the City is trying to house.

#### **8. Other**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission will be held on Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011, one week earlier than usual.

Chair

