

# DESIGNING PLACES WITH PEOPLE:

Developing a Process for Participatory Urban Design in the City of New Westminster



a project by

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the City of New Westminster**

by

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We accept this project as conforming  
to the required standard

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*-- Christopher Atkins*

*Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. -- Mother Teresa*

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*image on cover page courtesy of the national parks service 2002*



## Executive Summary

The purpose of this research project is to present recommendations that will strengthen the role of public participation in urban design in the City of New Westminster. It recommends a process of participatory urban design that is effective and accountable, that focuses not only on participation in the visioning stage but also in the implementation stage. The recommended process will engage the community members and professionals of New Westminster to work towards the development of a city-wide vision, and towards design guidelines that will inform project-level decision-making. It will also propose a structure for an advisory design committee that will act as the steward of this vision.

There are several assumptions underlying this project. First, full participatory urban design is critical to realizing a successful urban design vision; full participation requires a partnership between citizens, city staff, and design professionals that exceeds consultation. The second assumption is that public participation in urban design, while essential, is not perfect. Participation is a dialogue carried out with no guarantee of a specific result, nor that it will satisfy the expectations of the majority. Finally, this project assumes that there will always be a role for specialists in the participatory design process. Urban designers, planners, engineers and other professionals have a specific knowledge, and this knowledge should be incorporated.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of theory concerning urban design visioning, implementation and participatory urban design. Chapter 3 presents a toolkit and case studies of participatory design techniques that have proven successful in other communities. Chapter 4 analyzes the existing practices of public participation and urban design in New Westminster.

Chapter 5 presents a series of recommendations to strengthen public participation in urban design in order to better implement an urban design vision for New Westminster. The recommendations are organized into three sections, and are as follows:

### A. Creating the urban design vision.

#### I. Improve participation in the creation of an urban design vision:

1. Establish a Steering Committee under the direction of the Planning Division, whose sole purpose is to organize, coordinate and oversee the visioning process;
2. Reach out to a broad range of constituents to be involved in the creation of the design vision;
3. Help residents visualize what they have in their community and what they want their community to become;
4. Record and illustrate the community's urban design vision;

5. Establish a body to act as stewards of the urban design vision;
  6. Adopt the urban design vision as legally binding.
- B. Implementing the urban design vision.
- II. Translate the vision into regulations and guidelines:
    1. Develop design principles and guidelines;
    2. Educate the community on the design guidelines;
    3. Illustrate how the design guidelines will translate into actual design;
    4. Ensure design guidelines are legally binding.
  - III. Create an Integrated Design Review Board.
    1. Introduce a new design review board to act as a steward of the urban design vision;
    2. Clearly define the mandate, procedures and duties of the Integrated Design Review Board;
    3. Diversify the role and membership of the Integrated Design Review Board;
    4. Open Integrated Design Review Board meetings to the public;
    5. Improve communication and participation among developers, neighbours and the City in the design of new projects;
    6. Entrench the authority of the Integrated Design Review Board's recommendations.
- C. Maintaining the urban design vision.
- IV. Ensure the continuity of the design vision:
    1. Present the urban design vision back to the community;
    2. Develop and cultivate a collective memory and understanding of the urban design vision;
    3. Provide training for Integrated Design Review Board members;
    4. Stagger citizen appointments to the Integrated Design Review Board.

This work is only the beginning. A more complex and nuanced strategy, considering in greater detail the implications and costs of the techniques, is required. The development of this strategy will be undertaken in the near future as a follow up to this research.

# 1.0 Introduction

## *1. Purpose of this Project*

The purpose of this research project is to present recommendations that will strengthen the role of public participation in urban design in the City of New Westminster. It recommends a process of participatory urban design that is effective and accountable, that focuses not only on participation in the visioning stage but also in the implementation stage. The recommended process will engage the community members and professionals of New Westminster to work towards the development of a city-wide vision, and towards design guidelines that will inform project-level decision-making. It will also propose a structure for an advisory design committee that will act as the steward of this vision.

There are several assumptions underlying this project. First, full participatory urban design is critical to realizing a successful urban design vision. Full participation requires a partnership between citizens, city staff, and design professionals that exceeds consultation. Arnstein (1969) argues that there are several levels of public involvement in planning and in urban design, ranging from empty gestures that amount to little more than an exercise in public relations, through “token” information-sharing and consultation measures, to full participation in decision-making and implementation, where citizen power is realized.

Different levels of public involvement are appropriate for different situations. Full participation is not necessarily required in order to upgrade a crosswalk or replace a bus stop. However, more substantive decisions affecting the quality of life of citizens arguably do require full participation. This project deals with the upper end of the spectrum of participation, the techniques that result in full participation and the realization of citizen power. The theoretical assumption of this project is that nothing less than full participation, as defined by the ability of citizens to be involved in decision-making and implementation, is acceptable in the realization of an urban design vision. Therefore, this project does not discuss efforts of public involvement that do not go beyond education and token gestures of consultation.

The second assumption is that public participation in urban design, while essential, is not perfect. It is not an end in itself. It must bring action in the form of implementation, through a process that is accountable. Nor can participation guarantee it will satisfy the expectations of the majority. Participation is a dialogue, not a poll, carried out with no guarantee of a specific result, but as a matter of effort and direction enabling different views to be presented and discussed.

Finally, this project assumes that there will always be a role for specialists in urban design. Urban designers, planners, engineers and other professionals have a specific knowledge, and this knowledge



**an open house in new Westminster.**  
**-source: city of new westminster graphics database**



**-source: leinonen 2002**

should be incorporated. Training in architecture and planning provides skills and knowledge that citizens do not have, just as local knowledge offers a particular expertise of a place that design specialists do not have (Guy 2002). In many cases, specialists must therefore be allowed to carry out their role and make decisions that sometimes overrule the desires of the public.



**aerial view of new Westminster**  
*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*

## II. Context

As the geographic centre and oldest city in the Lower Mainland, New Westminster, BC has a strong sense of history and a dense urban form that many cities envy. Incorporated in 1863, it is a small and walkable city with a population of approximately 60,000 people. Like many older cities in North America, it has undergone considerable decline in its fortunes from its peak in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

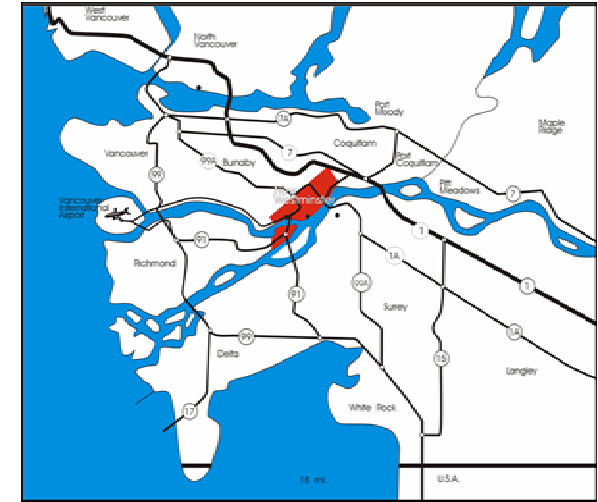
The City of New Westminster is best understood as being defined by two distinct areas, the dense, urban "Mainland" of New Westminster that is adjacent to Burnaby and Coquitlam, and the rural, less developed neighbourhood of Queensborough which borders Richmond on Lulu Island. The Mainland can further be broken down into smaller neighbourhoods, such as the Downtown, Uptown, Queen's Park, and the West End.

Identified as a Regional Town Centre in the Livable Region Strategic Plan, and as a major transportation hub (with access to the Skytrain and several regional highways), New Westminster is well positioned to capitalize on the development and construction boom that has taken place in the Lower Mainland for the past several decades. Redevelopment is occurring at a rapid pace in this community, and many residents, both new and old, hope to see the city revitalized. The development approvals process for individual applicants can be difficult, however, due to the complexities of infill development, and an inherent resistance to change within much of the community.

## III. Problem Statement

An urban design vision is important. A vision details how we want our urban environment to look, feel, and interact with the world around it, and it details how to achieve that. Without defining a vision and the tools to achieve it, the development of the urban environment may be piecemeal, subject to the decisions of outside forces.

New Westminster has defined an urban design vision in its *Official Community Plan* (2004). The process that led to the development of New Westminster's *Official Community Plan* and the urban design vision found within involved significant citizen consultation in its initial stages. But to achieve that urban design vision and build a strong sense of place, more is needed than simply defining the vision and incorporating limited public consultation. Public participation requires more than just the best of intentions.



**map of the gvr. new westminster is in the geographic centre.**  
-source: city of new westminster graphics database



**the neighbourhoods of new Westminster**  
-source: city of new westminster graphics database



-source: city of new westminster 2004b

To be successful, an urban design vision for New Westminster should move beyond definition. The vision needs to be implemented, and it should be implemented consistently. It must also be flexible, allowing for changes in the values of residents over time. To ensure that the implementation of that vision remains consistent, it is important to create an urban design process that is participatory and accountable, with clearly defined roles and tangible guidelines that will give it direction. Despite the fact that the City of New Westminster has an urban design vision, many of the elements of the vision have not been realized. As such, many in New Westminster feel that development does not reflect the historic character of the City.

The City has not maintained the connection between the urban design vision and New Westminster's built form. The cause for this is the failure of a process that is neither sufficiently effective, inclusive nor accountable. Design guidelines to assist developers and City staff judge the merits of a development against the urban design vision do not exist at a level of detail to ensure vision implementation; public participation that ends at the visioning stage results in misunderstandings as to what the urban design vision is attempting to achieve and in conflicts between citizens, developers, and the City; and the lack of a representative committee that incorporates the views and voices of all the relevant players in the development process means no one has the responsibility to ensure that the design of the physical environment maintains a connection to the urban design vision.

Local citizens have limited opportunity to provide input into the local urban design process through the Advisory Planning Commission. While the foundation for significant input exists, the current structure is not truly representative. Rather, it creates a situation that encourages citizens to vent dislike of a project at the later stages of development, resulting in an urban design process that is reactionary and characterized by conflict. This can lead to a politicized situation, where decision-makers see only opposition to a project. Often, the result is that projects that achieve the intention of the design vision are dismantled, and projects that do not achieve the intention but avoid immediate conflict are approved.

#### *IV. Project Goals and Objectives*

The overall goal of this project is to determine what elements would enhance public participation in urban design, and to develop a process that will make realizing the urban design vision more accountable. In order to achieve this goal, the project will discuss alternative methods of citizen participation in urban design at two stages: visioning and implementation.

With respect to the first stage, visioning, this project will present a participatory design process that will improve the ability of the citizens of New Westminster to develop a vision for urban design in their



community. With respect to the second stage, implementation, the project will present techniques to continue public participation through the review and monitoring of ongoing developments.

The objective of this project is to provide the following outcomes:

- an outline for a process that improves public participation in the development of an urban design vision for New Westminster;
- a participatory process for translating the vision into principles and design guidelines that will act as a practical guide to direct future development projects; and,
- a structure for a committee that acts as stewards of the design vision for New Westminster.

## *V. Visions, Goals, Objectives, Principles and Guidelines*

It is important to note the key differences between vision, principles, and guidelines (Punter 1999). For the purposes of this project, they are defined as follows:

- The vision articulates the desired future form of a place. It is the dream of the residents who make the City of New Westminster their home.
- Goals are the general statements of what a community wants as its desired future.
- Objectives are more precise statements of what a design should achieve.
- Principles are the ideas from which guidelines emerge and help to rationalize and validate the vision.
- Guidelines specify how to meet a principle. They are the standards and regulations that respond to the principles and direct how they appear in the physical realm. Guidelines can be prescriptive or performance-based (conformity vs. compatability).

## *VI. Structure*

The structure of this project is as follows:

- Chapter 2: A literature review of theory concerning urban design visioning, implementation, and participatory urban design;



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- Chapter 3: A toolkit and case studies of participatory design techniques that have been successful in other communities;
- Chapter 4: A discussion of the existing practices of public participation and urban design in New Westminster, and the issues concerning these practices;
- Chapter 5: A series of recommendations to strengthen public participation in urban design in order to better implement an urban design vision for New Westminster.



## 2.0 Literature Review

This section evaluates theories of place, design, and participation and discusses the importance of participatory urban design. The chapter begins with a discussion of how our use and perception of design has changed over the past 75 years, then explains the relevance of urban design, and finally the importance of involving residents in the design of the place in which they live.

### *1. The Commercialization and Commodification of Space*

As cities and communities mature, we would expect that their character, culture, and sense of place would also mature. Unfortunately in many contemporary communities, the opposite is happening. Character and regional nuances are disappearing, and what are emerging are disorganized, cluttered, and homogenous landscapes in anonymous places. Gottdeiner (1997) and Lefebvre (2003) would comment that space as a place for the interaction of people and ideas has been overshadowed by the economic value and marketability of space. The urban environment is increasingly in the hands of large scale developers (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987), and is characterized by an approach to development and land use that is tied to the pursuit of profit. Thus, the urban realm is defined not by “community”, but as “commodity”.

There are reasons for and consequences of the commodification of space. The contemporary design of the urban realm is a response to the dissatisfaction with the modernist planning of the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Punter 1999). Modernist planning, with its desire for rational, efficient, and easily administered environments (Relph 1976), resulted in large scale redevelopments, urban renewal, and standardized building forms. It also resulted in a loss of local landmarks, reduced access to the natural world, and an erosion of the fabric and identity of the urban environment.

Logan and Molotch (1987) argue that the great urban reform movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, such as modernist planning, were a result of private entrepreneurs seeking a higher return on their land investments as opposed to the actions of residents trying to build better communities and improve their lives. The “exchange value” that entrepreneurs place on land (i.e. the return of rents) has a weak attachment to place, except as a commodity. In contrast, residents are more likely to attribute a “use value” to place, one that values experiences and emotional connections with a particular setting, characterized by intense feelings and commitments. The contemporary design approach is a continuation of the exchange value of place.

The post-modern response to the failure of modernist planning seeks to simulate distinct cultural places and bring identity and familiarity back to the urban realm. This response has resulted in further dissatisfaction,



*commodified space*  
-source: mexico cancan home 2005



*commodified space*  
-source: eastern connecticut state university 2003



**commodified space**  
 -source: *anaheim desert inn and suites*  
 2005

however. Though a product of more sophisticated design controls, the post-modern attempt to foster a sense of identity and familiarity does so through a globalized, commodified approach. This commodified response, which is indeed a simulation, relies on a “franchise” approach to design that has resulted in further dissatisfaction. Rather than genuine, locally-oriented design, it has resulted in an environment that has been themed, subject to fake and “façadist” designs that leave the city feeling commodified and generic (Punter 1999).

With the commodification of space and the mass production of our built environment, our places have become increasingly place-less. With little sense of local history and context, we risk creating an interchangeable landscape that lacks depth, a landscape Edward Relph (1976) would describe as a “flatscape.” In such a landscape, citizens often feel less control over their neighbourhoods and cities. They become places without meaning, beyond their citizens’ grasp, where things happen without warning, and without their participation (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987).

The reaction to these placeless urban environments has been to search again for meaning in our built environment. The city should no longer exist primarily at the convenience of the market and capital alone, but should also serve human needs, valuing the historical, cultural and social complexity of a place. The planner, mindful of the possibility of placelessness should, as part of his or her role, endeavour to reinforce unique and meaningful places, allow for flexibility, innovation and change, and work without destroying the qualities of an existing place (Relph 1976). Participatory urban design, which can harness the imagination of those who live in a place, is one tool to capture its meaning.

## *II. The Relevance of Urban Design*

Urban design is critical to creating a sense of place in a community, and is concerned with much more than designing buildings. As Jacobs explains, design deals with “the sensuous, aesthetic and visual qualities of the urban environment. It is concerned with the ‘visual and other sensory relationships between people and their environments, with their feeling of time and place, and their sense of well-being’” (1980, p. 192). Urban design can give a place identity and character, or reinforce the identity and character it already has.

It is more than just creating or enhancing a sensory experience, however. Urban design is about creating quality places, preserving history, solving problems, managing and directing growth, educating citizens, and providing services. It is about listening to, coordinating and incorporating interests from different stakeholders and users and relating those interests to the physical and spatial form.

Christopher Alexander (1977) argues that there exists a deeply rooted connection between the quality of our lives and the quality of our built environment. It is the place in which we live our lives. Good urban design requires that we design places to ensure that we have access to services that we require, to ensure that we feel safe when we walk, to ensure that we have places to socialize with friends and family. Gans (1968) suggests appreciating a physical environment for more than its formal attributes (such as the “exchange value” referred to previously), but also as an effective environment that services the social, emotional, and aesthetic needs of the user. In other words, we all live in built environments, and we all react to those built environments in a variety of ways. For that reason, it serves us to direct the development of cities that help us to meet our needs and live to the best of our abilities.

Barnett (1982) explains that urban design in the post-modern era is an effective method to deal with the allocation of land and resources, while avoiding the unnecessary destruction of the valuable physical products of years of urban history. Whereas modernism in planning often led to the destruction of existing cities (or portions thereof), and their replacement with something more rational and hygienic, the relevance and contribution of post-modern urban design today is in solving problems and making physical improvements in the existing city while embracing that history.

Yet cities are more than a physical representation of history. Hayden (1995) argues that cities are our connection to our personal histories. They educate us as to where we come from, and who we are. Mumford agrees, stating that the city records and transmits the attitudes of a culture (1938). It passes down values and understandings of the world. Design must maintain this connection. Gehl (2003) argues urban design is about overcoming functionalism in cities, eliminating distances between people, and between their homes, places of work, and places of play. Good urban design works to bring these elements back together and solve the problems that separation creates.

Solving problems is thus another aspect of urban design. According to Relph (1976), there is a persistent challenge between designing places for people and incorporating the private vehicle. This is an aspect of yet another problem to be solved: safety. Jane Jacobs (1961) argues that a community, in order to be successful, has to be safe and therefore has to have people looking onto and using the street. Designing the urban environment so people are interacting with the public realm therefore allows citizens to self-police their neighbourhood.

Larry Beasley of the City of Vancouver consistently argues that designing complete communities will lead to a more equitable community, one that provides services and allows for mixed incomes, housing styles and lifestyle choices (2003). Urban design, furthermore, can create a humane building form that will address other problems, negative externalities such as noise, danger, lack of privacy, insensitivity to the needs of children, air quality, and shading. Lynch has a similar perspective, stating that the criterion for good urban form includes efficiency and justice (1960).



**-source: city of new westminster 2004b**



-source: city of new westminster 2004b

Mumford also takes a similar point of view, arguing that a city should be subservient to the social and cultural needs of its users, creating an environment that is central to people's quality of life, health, and happiness. We design places to ensure that the built environment that surrounds us can sustain us culturally, economically, socially, and physically (1938). Mumford describes as the social nucleus the accessibility of schools, libraries, theatres, and community centres. The urban environment is human scale, necessary to effective social intercourse (Mumford 1937).

Good design should not be reactionary. It requires proactive decision making and action. Much of what takes place in the design of the contemporary urban realm is about filling in space without creating a place. Much of the urban realm, therefore, is commodified, defined by its exchange value. In other words, it is defined by its ability to generate wealth, rather than its use and its value as a place. While this has meaning to some, it has less meaning to the people who live there and intimately connect to it as their home. Urban design is emerging as a tool for finding solutions to the deadening form of a mass-produced landscape, particularly when it involves those who live there.

### *III. The Importance of Principles and Guidelines in Urban Design*

Defining a vision can be critical in determining or reinforcing the form of a place. It is the articulation of a will for the future. Successful urban design requires more than a vision, however. Successful design also requires a framework consisting of principles and guidelines that are entrenched, quantifiable, and accepted by the community. Principles and guidelines go hand in hand. Principles are the ideas from which guidelines emerge. Guidelines are the standards and regulations that direct how the principles appear in the physical realm.

Kelbaugh (1997) states that it is essential to develop principles and guidelines that codify, in a clear manner, agreed upon design principles that have been generated in the community through a public process. A solid framework of design principles and guidelines, graphically illustrating the desired outcome of the urban form, should establish a clear agenda and set of development policies that are attractive to both community members and developers. Specifically, it assists community members in deciding what to conserve, revitalize, and redevelop. The process of developing an urban design framework can help residents determine what they have now, and which directions they want their community to go. In this sense, design becomes no different than any other area of public policy.

A design framework, one created through a participatory process, instills an even greater level of predictability and certainty into the development process. As it represents the will of the community, it makes it easier for public agencies, private developers, and citizens to work with each other (Morrish and

Brown 2000). Ideally, a framework created with participation of residents will decrease the likelihood that residents will come back at a later time to derail a project when residents' immediate interests overshadow the interests of the community. In such cases, a framework can offer developers solid ground with which to defend their project. Such constraints, if they are clearly laid out and have the support of the community and decision-makers, are usually welcomed by developers. Developers and investors get frustrated at inconsistencies in regulations and codes in jurisdictions.

A design framework is one of three elements in a system of stable, effective planning (Kelbaugh 1997) that also includes the neighbourhood plan and comprehensive plan (i.e. *Official Community Plans*). Principles and guidelines for design illustrate the character and physical configuration of a development, informing the neighbourhood plan that maps out the future of a particular neighbourhood. The comprehensive plan provides a vision that directs the others (Kelbaugh 2002).

#### IV. *The Value of Participation in Urban Design*

The rootlessness of the design profession is part of the reason our cities have become placeless (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987). Designers often approach a design from the perspective of the professional culture, with only a superficial connection to a particular place. Far too often, designers design for places and people they do not know, and grant them little power or acknowledgement. Yet it is critical that some part of the urban environment belongs to the people who live there.

Citizen participation in governance is important. It is important because people are physically and emotionally connected to their community, and therefore should have the right to provide input into how it is shaped. Literature arguing this point is abundant. Advocates of participation agree that true citizen participation is more than voting for representatives or providing input into a process through consultation, processes described by Arnstein as tokenism. True participation is the direct engagement of citizens in a partnership with their government, with the objective of solving community problems (Arnstein 1969). True participation is a process where power is redistributed, such that citizens are free to share views and responsibilities between themselves, city staff and design professionals, then come to agreements and take joint action. Participation requires that citizens make decisions, and take ownership of the community by being involved in the management of their environment and the implementation of solutions.

"Participation of the governed in their government" is "the cornerstone of democracy" (Arnstein 1969, p.216). The greater participation residents have in the shaping of their community, the more likely it is that it will accurately reflect their needs and concerns. Such participation leads to a greater sense of ownership and greater determination on their part to see that the changes get implemented. If residents have

Reasons for establishing a framework for urban design (Kelbaugh 2002):

1. Provides a guide for the future development of the built environment
2. Identifies tasks that need to be carried out to improve the built environment
3. Provides guidelines that give weight to residents concerns when a project proposal is inconsistent with the community vision
4. Prioritizes funding and service allocation by the city
5. Increases the likelihood that improvements will occur

ownership and determination, it is harder for those who want to build there to ignore the wishes of the community.

Participatory urban design responds to the demand by local communities that they be involved in the planning and management of their built environment. In other words, place-making is not left up only to professionals, such as architects, developers and planners, whose understanding of a place may be different than the understanding of those who interact with a place on a daily basis. Sanoff states that “users have a particular expertise different than, but equally important to, that of the designer” (Sanoff, 1978 in Guy 2002, p.2)

Improving the quality and quantity of public involvement in urban design is one of the keys to improving the built environment (Wates et al. 1998). This does not preclude the value of expertise and knowledge of professionals in the world of planning; the value of a strong designer who can articulate a vision for a community should not be ignored (McNally 1999). But to find a common ground is to develop a sense of community and communal responsibility.

When the process of design becomes specialized, we lose variety and the depth of knowledge that comes from the residents of a place (Alexander et al. 1977). In such places as New Westminster, where greenfield and brownfield sites are rare, residents have local knowledge of the place, of the history, and of the values of the community. If the planning of a place is to affect people, everyone who could potentially be affected should be entitled to have their opinions, concerns and interpretations heard. Ideally, control of the design process, therefore, could be given back to the people who live in that place. Jacobs and Appleyard argue that participants are as important in the building process as are buildings and spaces (1987).

Jones (1990) details three specific benefits of greater democratic participation in planning that can be applied to participatory design

1. The greater the participation of residents in a planning process, the more likely it is that the plan will accurately reflect their needs and concerns
2. The greater the participation, the greater is the sense of ownership. This translates into a greater determination that the result gets implemented, and not derailed
3. The greater the participation, the harder it is for others to ignore the outcome.

There are many different approaches to participatory design. Each approach has different expectations of involvement and effort required by those who participate. There is no one best way to involve local communities in designing places. Each situation requires a different approach, and choosing an inappropriate approach from the options available can often lead to frustration and failure.

Towers (1995) states that effective participation starts with a recognition that people with no experience of design need to understand something of the process. Without that understanding, the best of intentions on the part of planners and urban designers can lead to frustrated expectations and conflict. The first step to success is to empower community members by accepting that urban design can be considered another element of public participation.

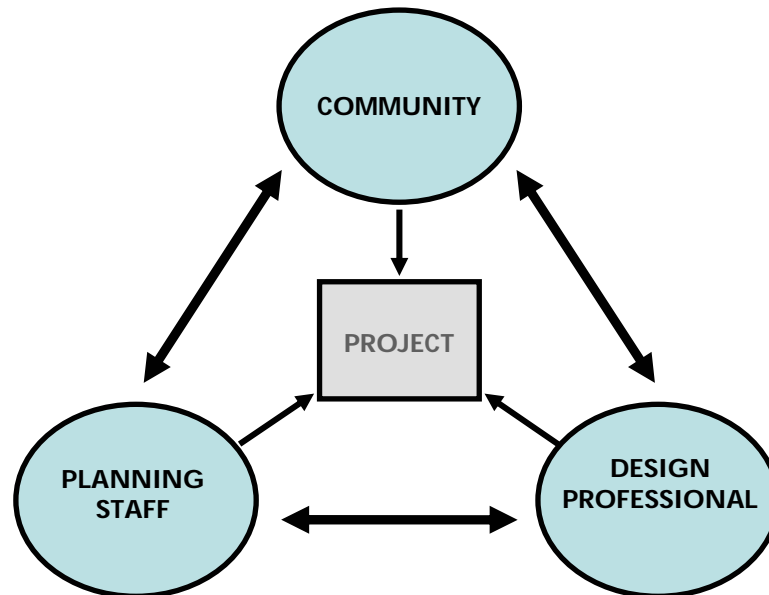
It is important to note that the talents and skills of the designer will always be essential. Every actor, in fact, has a critical role in the participatory design process. Most critical is to enhance the ability of the community and the designer to communicate ideas about design (Greene 1992). The community member articulates the vision of their community. The design professional responds to this and brings it to life. The



planner leads the process to capture the vision, and ensures that it is achieved. Both the planner and the community members must take ownership of the process in order to ensure its continuity. If neither takes ownership, it risks failing due to inaction.

Design professionals and their clients may, however, have difficulty accepting that they should allow for input into their design. Design is often a personal expression achieved through a creative process, and it may be difficult to expose that creative process to one that is more participatory. Because urban designers are trained in a variety of academic programs – there are few distinct urban design programs – there are often different approaches to public collaboration and participation. Architecture tends to be individualistic, whereas Geography and Sociology typically do not involve action. Planning and Landscape Architecture, meanwhile, increasingly share an affinity towards both the physical and social contexts of design.

This process, including collaboration and participation, is necessary to shift away from a view of the urban realm as strictly private, commercial space, allowing us instead to develop the urban realm as a place of identity and community. Guy (2002) points out that good design is not objective, and other users of that place may not agree with a design. Expanding the “circle of input” is a means to diffuse that conflict. Rather than dictate an urban form, design professionals should therefore work with communities to develop the historical and social complexity of a place. As Lynch argues, there should be an intimate connection between the forms of places and the values and needs of their users.



*the participatory design process*

The Development Process. (Urban Land Institute 1985)

1. planning/programming
2. schematic design
3. design development
4. alternative scenarios
5. contract documents
6. permitting and design review board
7. construction management

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8. occupation
9. post-occupancy evaluation

The key to breaking down the mystique of the design process is to improve communication so that participants have an understanding of the process and the options available (Kelbaugh 1999). Participation is only meaningful if there is a high level of understanding amongst the participants and an opportunity to share ideas. Kelbaugh argues that cities, in contrast to current practice, should not be planned according to abstract policies and non-visual formulae. Rather, designing places for people is an interactive process that needs to illustrate and test proposed policies in three dimensions before adopting them.

There are definite financial and political advantages to participatory design, furthermore. Typically, a public review of design proposals is reactive rather than proactive (Guy 2002). Bringing the community into the design and development process at the beginning will therefore benefit both the public and private sectors. The Urban Land Institute argues that the “benefits of cooperation – and the costs of conflict – far outweigh the benefits of the unwilling compromises reached through confrontation and struggle” (1985, p.3), while Logan and Molotch state that the goals of entrepreneurs are facilitated when residents “become part of the development consensus” (1987, p.39) just as residents can benefit when their goals are supported through the efforts of the entrepreneur. Cooperation assures higher quality and lower development costs; reduces delays, risks and uncertainty; eases the timely provision of needed infrastructure and amenities; and avoids litigation (Guy 2002, Urban Land Institute 1985). Debating design issues in an inclusive process becomes an avenue to conflict resolution rather than positioning and disagreement.

It is an ambitious task to develop community-wide agreement on design principles for development. It is impossible to achieve perfect participation. Individuals and groups involved in such a process will typically identify different issues of priority to them. But Kelly and Becker (2000) argue that, more often than not, the top issues usually coincide. Hence, while it may seem to be a difficult process, it can produce tangible pay-offs by providing a quick, effective way to define the major issues reflecting a community and represent its collective will.

## *V. Implementation: Getting from Planning to Action*

The participatory planning process can be frustrating if no action or results are apparent. For a plan to succeed, particularly when shaping the places in which people live, it needs to have a strategy for action. For such a process to sustain itself, an effective advisory group must monitor projects to ensure that the guidelines and vision are being honoured (Morrish and Brown 2000). Effective monitoring establishes proper expectations for all parties involved. Ideally, the purpose of design review is to serve an urban design vision specifically developed for the place (Scheer 1994).



Arnstein argues that little thought is given to ensuring continued citizen participation during the stage of implementation (1969). An approach is needed that offers citizens a level of influence over the urban design process through design to implementation. This approach involves several components. It is necessary to have local support and capital; it must also have a structure, an action plan, and the involvement of responsible participants in a monitoring program that is designed to ensure proper implementation yet is flexible enough to allow for changes after implementation. As community development is dynamic, it is better to design a broad-based process that provides guidance and direction, identifies key issues, and can be adapted as the situation evolves rather than create a fixed blue print or adopt a planning process from elsewhere (Frank and Smith 1999).

One component of this framework for participatory urban design should involve design guidelines. Guidelines, ideally expressed in an official planning document, are the standards and regulations that clearly detail to design professionals how the vision is realized in the physical realm. Many US municipalities use urban design guidelines as a critical component of stable, effective planning (Kelbaugh 1997) that also includes neighbourhood plans and state-required comprehensive plans.

Another key component of a framework for participatory urban design is a citizen review board, such as an advisory committee. An advisory committee can be an asset for implementing community planning initiatives (Smith 1993). If rooted in the community, it can act as a repository for the community's collective memory, and as a stabilizing force in a neighbourhood seeing significant change (Jones 1990). Participation in an advisory committee can also facilitate partnerships between and amongst citizens, private sector developers and designers, and city staff, relationships that are difficult to develop for those who are traditionally not involved in planning and design activities (Guy 2002).

Finally, advisory committees can be used as sounding boards for planning proposals and to perform certain tasks in conjunction with planning. In this capacity, they can reduce barriers to participation in planning and can also supplement the resources of the planning department.

Arnstein (1969) cautions against allowing advisory committees to become rubber stamps that give legitimacy to a process that is not truly participatory. Rather, using a committee of residents, planners and designers to direct the participatory process, participate in the formulations and options, and report these back to the general public will strengthen the process. The outcome should be approved by the general public.

There are certain requirements in order for advisory committees to be successful (Frank and Smith 1999):

1. They must be properly organized and used;
2. Care must be shown in selecting members;
3. They must have a program for their activity.



-source: national parks service 2002

## VI. *Interdepartmental Communication*

Successful implementation cannot be achieved without good interdepartmental communication. Forester (1999) suggests that departments should not make decisions all by themselves, and can not make decisions that are not based on the views of all the people involved in decision-making. It is important to communicate with other City departments, and accept that there will be some conflicts as a result of divergent approaches. These conflicts, however, do not preclude a successful coordination of efforts.

A cooperative process that results in actions needs to be coordinated in advance, in order that interdepartmental decision-making not be as challenging. Understanding the objectives of each department, with a knowledge of what its goals are, makes it possible to realize joint gains through the inevitable need to negotiate, using a solution that is agreed upon by all. For the process itself to work, furthermore, it must exist within a departmental structure, under the direction and guidance of a specific department that takes ownership of it.

An approach that has proven to be successful is to convene a predevelopment roundtable conference that brings together representatives of the developer and all necessary City departments (Van Hemert 2005). Such a review process, which deals with the project at both the initial design and the design approvals stage, can result in clear and predictable standards, relatively low costs, and shared ownership of problems and solutions. It also results in a city that is fully involved in the development and design review process, and is cognizant of its responsibilities towards providing and funding infrastructure improvements.

## conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight the importance of public participation in urban design. Critics of contemporary urban design increasingly comment upon the lack of meaning and identity in the urban environment. These critics are not only found amongst design professionals, but also amongst the residents who live in these environments. The response, then, should be to develop a vision for the city. That vision can be achieved through greater participation in urban design processes to foster a greater attachment to its place and has a greater meaning to those that live there. Such a step, therefore, requires the participation of residents of a place in the development of an urban design vision. More importantly, they should be fully engaged in the realization of that vision.

This is not to say that the responsibility for realizing the urban design vision rests solely with residents. Planners and other design professionals have skills and expertise suited to the creation of excellent urban places. These skills, however, do not supercede the needs of the community. Local knowledge has a value of its own, and it should be respected for its contribution to good urban design.

## 3.0 Best Practices

The intent of this chapter is to demonstrate possibilities. Involving residents in urban design is not as difficult as it is often considered to be. There are a number of techniques to foster greater participation in urban design, and there are a number of cities that have adopted these techniques. Many of these places are closer to New Westminster than may be expected.

This chapter is in two sections. The first section, **toolkit: methods of participatory design**, presents a toolkit of participatory design methods beginning with those that reach out to citizens to involve them in the process. The toolkit also presents techniques for visualizing the urban environment, understanding the basics of how it looks and how it works in the present, and how residents envision it to be in the future. This is followed by ideas on planning strategies to realize that vision. The toolkit section ends with techniques of implementation.

The second section, **best practices; case studies**, summarizes some best practices of participatory design. These best practices have been drawn from around the Lower Mainland, Seattle, and Portland. Some are theoretical approaches, which show promise but have yet to prove they work in a municipal context. Many, however, have demonstrated success in involving residents in urban design from visualization to implementation. They have, furthermore, proven that the quality and successes of participatory design are ongoing.

## toolkit: methods of participatory design

### *I. Outreach*

#### *NEWSPAPER SUPPLEMENT*

A newspaper supplement is a special page or insert placed in a local newspaper that presents specific information that is of interest to residents of an area, such as New Westminster's *City Page*.

The newspaper supplement can include information, questionnaires and surveys. It is an effective means of spreading planning and design ideas to a large number of people, and of generating public debate. Information sheets are particularly useful for presenting proposals from action planning events, such as a design workshop or local design statement, and generating discussion and feedback. Questionnaires and surveys can be used to collect opinions and preferences on various options for improvement.

It is important to establish a working relationship between those who are promoting a community's planning initiatives, and the local paper's staff. Standard newspaper coverage is used to publicize activities and generate debates, and special supplements are used to provide in-depth coverage of proposals and community planning activities, in this case design guidelines. Feedback is generated through letters, polls, and follow-up features.

The benefits are

- Coverage: reaches a very high proportion of the population;
- Credibility: has greater credibility than a consultants report;
- Familiarity: has a level of familiarity with the public, and is non-threatening;
- Format: allows drawings to be published at a reasonable scale;
- Immediacy: allows for quick publication and distribution;
- Cost: is inexpensive to produce and distribute;
- Skills: utilizes journalistic skill.

(source: Wates 2000, Towers 1995)



-source: national parks service 2002

## *NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING OFFICES*

A neighbourhood planning office is a resource centre offering local planning and development information.

Neighbourhood planning offices are open to the public, and are typically located in a neighbourhood's central commercial district. Neighbourhood planning offices provide an important local focal point for community planning activity and make it easier to follow up and sustain initiatives. They are particularly valuable in areas where there is a lot of building activity. They should be in a prominent location, preferably with street frontage, and they become a resource and first point of contact for local people on planning issues. This is best staffed by an independent body.

(source: Wates, 2000)



*-source: city of new westminster 1996*

## *ARCHITECTURE CENTRE*

Architecture centres are open display centres, almost like visitor information centres, set up in a community to help people understand and become engaged in the local built environment.

Architecture centres can become focal points for local initiatives, a meeting place for residents who are involved in shaping the future of their built environment, and a resource for people seeking ideas and information. Architecture centres are set up in a building of local or historical interest and house exhibits related to the local built environment. A program of activities is organized to stimulate interest, encourage debate and start initiatives.

Centres can be themed depending on the needs of the locality. In the case of New Westminster, it could be called a "Design Centre" that focuses on exhibitions and activities that capture people's preferences for the design and appearance of the local built environment. Some concerns may surround the operating costs of staffing, running exhibits, and maintaining space. They also need time to generate momentum, so this is a long-term exercise.

The role of the architecture centre can be duplicated to a certain extent on-line through a community internet site.

(source: Wates, 2000)



*-source: national parks service 2002*

## *COMMUNITY INTERNET SITE*

A community internet site is an on-line resource offering local planning and development information.

The role of the neighbourhood planning office and architecture can be duplicated to a certain extent on-line through a community internet site and act as a comprehensive source of commercial information. Community internet sites can be linked to existing city websites and can be operated by the City or by an independent group.

## *II. Visualization*

### *PHOTO SURVEY/PORTFOLIO*

Photo surveys are photographic documentations of a subject, in this case the built form of a city.

Photo surveys help groups develop design ideas, preferences and principles by taking and discussing photos of their existing environment. They can be used as part of a wider community profiling or action planning event, or in conjunction with a Visual Preference Survey (see below), allowing residents to make images of what in their local environment is important to them, and then sharing them with others.

Participants go around their neighbourhood individually or in groups and take photos of places and images according to objectives and themes agreed upon by participants. The images are then sorted and presented on boards or sheets for comment.

(source: Wates 2000, Towers 1995, Al-Kodmany 2001)



*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*

### *FIELD TRIPS*

Field trips, also known as site visits, are walkabouts that are used to familiarize everyone with the physical environment and key issues at the start of the community planning process.

Field trips involve the direct inspection of an area that is the focus of the participatory planning exercise by mixed teams of local people and technical experts/specialists. They can also be used as visits to specific

locations that have the attributes of a desired outcome, and can be a simple, effective method to demonstrate design possibilities.

A route that includes key local features and issues is selected, and is toured as a group. The group makes notes, sketches, and takes photos and talks informally to people, and at the end of the trip a debriefing is held, and the notes and other materials are compiled into a resource that is useful to the next stage of the planning process.

(source: Wates 2000, Guy 2002, Towers 1995)

### *ELEVATION MONTAGE*

An elevation montage is a visual, often photographic documentation of the streetscape.

The montage shows the façade of a street and its buildings, and is useful for helping people gain an understanding of the building fabric, indicate preferences, and suggest improvements. By assembling photos of individual buildings, an elevation of the street is created. Under the images, people are asked to place comment on preferences, concerns, likes and dislikes.

This method is a good starting point for a participatory design exercise, as it helps participants and design professionals gain a visual understanding of the environment they are dealing with.

(source: RTP Community Planning Project 2005)

### *CHOICE CATALOGUES*

Choice catalogues are similar to a menu, demonstrating options.

Choice catalogues provide a way to make design choices at a range of levels, from housing layouts to public spaces. They are particularly useful for helping people understand the range of options available and provide a way for making choices where large numbers of people are involved. Options are presented in the form of a simple menu made as visual as possible, using photographs or sketches.

(source: RTP Community Planning Project 2005)



**choice catalogue**  
-source: RTP community planning  
project 2005

### *KNOWLEDGE OF EMERGING ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATIONS STRATEGIES*

The *Knowledge of Emerging Environmental Preservations* (KEEPs) method is a graphic visual technique demonstrating the evolution of a town or neighbourhood from the past to a possible future.

KEEPs is a successful technique for expanding community participation in design and planning. Specifically, the method involves creating three drawings depicting the evolution of a town or neighbourhood, its past, present, and future. It demonstrates what could potentially be lost, and gained, through the process of development. The goal is to establish guidelines for preserving the desired characteristics of a town. Residents begin by noting what has been lost in their community, what elements should be retained, and sharing these viewpoints with other residents. They then select goals statements that promote these qualities. This method is useful at the early stages of a planning process to learn what types of designs are appealing to citizens.

(source: Al-Kodmany 2001)

### *FEELING MAPS*

A feeling map, also known as a preference or satisfaction map, is a method based on surveying a person's emotions as they experience an area, as emotions can change as people are engaged in different places and different activities.

The feeling map survey method can be carried out as people walk through an area, and reflect on how an environment affects them. It can also be carried out as they experience it through a visual display. In such a scenario, drawings or models of a proposed scheme or design principle are placed on a table, and people vote on what they like or dislike by placing sticky dots on the voting sheets (dot-mocracy). Ideas boards, developed for display at public meetings, can also be used. Ideas boards are large cards prepared with photographs or sketches of different methods of solving a problem. Participants are given the opportunity to indicate their preferences. Space is also provided for more detailed comments.



These methods allow large numbers of people to understand and make input into developments and other changes to the built form. The results are analyzed to inform the next stage of the planning process.

(source: Rofe 2005, Wates 2000)

### *THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODELING*

Three-dimensional visualization refers to the computerized creation of a building or collection of buildings in three-dimensions so that they can be viewed from multiple angles.

Three-dimensional visualization is one of the most natural ways to communicate, so the technique can be understood intuitively. Birds-eye views are particularly constructive in conveying streetscapes and architectural massing. Using the three-dimensional model, it is possible to involve participants directly in several aspects of the design process.

(source: Al-Kodmany 2001)

### *VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEYS*

The visual preference survey is a research visualization method employing photographs, and is used to promote democratic design and planning.

The visual preference survey allows for community residents to articulate their impressions of their community, and the preferences for what they want it to look like. The survey consists of photographic images, evaluation forms, and questionnaires.

Residents are asked to rate images of their town and other places on a scale, such as +10 to -10. The resulting product is a common vision plan that provides consensus on the present physical character of the community and the desired design of future development. Developers can use the results to understand what the community wants, and planners have an illustrated reference document for a design review process.

(source: Al-Kodmany 2001)



***three-dimensional model***  
***-source: city of new westminster graphics database***

### *III. Strategic Planning*

#### *COMMUNITY PLANNING FORUM*

Community planning forums are open, multipurpose events lasting several hours.

The community planning forum is designed to secure information, generate ideas and create interaction between interest groups. These forums are particularly useful at the early stages of a participation or development process.

The format typically combines interactive displays, an open forum/debate, workshops, and an opportunity to network. Professional practitioners who have been involved in community planning forums have commented that it is a "very effective formula. It allowed us, as a group, to find out what the inhabitants expected of their place for the future" (Wates 2000, p.40).

(source: Wates 2000)



*community forum*  
*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*

#### *COMMUNITY PROFILING*

A community profile is the result of residents gathering and/or evaluating information about their community.

The community profile process involves building up a picture of the nature, needs, capacity and resources of a community with the active participation of that community. It is a useful first stage in any community planning process. A range of profiling methods are used to enable the community to develop an understanding of itself. Methods that would contribute to the development of a Framework for Urban Design Guidelines include

- Building profile: recording the state and nature of built environment;
- Historical profile: identifying and listing key events and trends in a community's past;
- Mapping: making maps showing characteristics of the built environment;
- Organization review: reviewing existing organizations to assess their potential and roles; and,

- Transect walk: systematically walking through an area to observe and record key features, such as land use.

(source: Wates 2000)

### *OPEN HOUSE EVENT*

An open house is an informal gathering held in a public place for anyone wishing to attend and gather information.

Open house events allow those who are initiating a planning project to present it to a wider public audience, and receive feedback and reactions in an informal manner. They are less structured than a workshop and more informal than a traditional exhibition. They can be easily organized by any participant at any stage in a design or planning process, and can last from a few hours to a few weeks.

The venue is arranged with a number of displays on the proposals and options using a variety of interactive display techniques. Organizers are present to answer questions and queries, gather feedback and engage in debate. Comments and information gathered from participants are used to further develop and refine the initiative.

This method allows the organizer to gauge public reaction to a planning proposal or initiative, and to get public involvement in proposals from a design workshop or planning event.

The public meeting is often thought to be the epitome of public participation. Everyone who is affected can be invited and has the opportunity to give their views, exchange ideas, and reach a conclusion. It is certainly an effective way to initiate a process. However, it is flawed. They are rarely well-attended, but if they do attract a large gathering, they are a poor forum for discussion. Small groups are the most useful forum for creative discussion.

(source: Wates 2000, Towers 1995)

### *URBAN DESIGN STUDIO*

Urban design studios are special units attached to a university or other educational institution which undertake project work in the built environment.



***open house***  
***-source: city of new westminster graphics database***

Urban design studios provide both a valuable educational experience for students and a valuable resource and skill base for local communities, allowing them to debate and solve local planning issues.

They are normally independent units set up at the institution, such as a school of planning, architecture or landscape architecture. The studios have access to all the resources of the institution, and can work on a variety of projects for the community similar to consultants: projects such as preparing design ideas for sites, building models, developing visual aids, and preparing surveys. There may therefore be an opportunity to partner with UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning, which has experience in developing urban design principles in a studio environment for communities.

(source: Wates 2000)

### *REVIEW SESSION*

Review sessions are a useful method of monitoring the success and maintaining the momentum of a planning process.

Review sessions can be conducted at any time in the course of a community planning initiative. All those involved in the process are invited back to a session normally lasting for one day, and are provided with background information that evaluates the outcome and progress of the process. Participants review and discuss this information, propose changes in the process, and determine the next steps

(source: Wates 2000)



***a neighbourhood planning workshop***  
***-source: city of kamloops 2004***

### *WORKSHOPS*

Workshops are a meeting of people to discuss and perform practical work in a subject or activity.

Workshops offer a great opportunity to bring a diverse group of people together and have them generate ideas, share and gather information, and make things happen. The combination of large group presentations and small group interactive sessions increases the opportunities for participation and dialogue. They do require strong facilitation to ensure there is good communication and active listening among the participants so that consensus can be reached.

The size and duration of a workshop depends entirely on the situation. They are flexible enough to work with a dozen people, or hundreds, over hours or days, and for a variety of tasks. As an example, a workshop can be used for identifying a community vision, and for setting goals and priorities. Typical workshops begin with an instruction section introducing the purpose of the charrette and the tasks of the group. Both are essential for successful workshops.

The following steps should be followed to ensure a workshop runs smoothly and achieves its purpose:

- Form a small planning group: this group of key players will plan the workshop, including brainstorming topics, formats, and schedules. The planning group should also detail the objectives, desired outcomes, and follow-up strategies;
- Do logistics: ensure the venue is suitable, and the necessary resources are available;
- Run the workshop; and,
- Follow up: prepare and distribute the results of the workshop.

The following are a list of different types of workshops:

### *briefing workshop*

Briefing workshops are simple, easy to organize working sessions that are held to establish a project agenda. It is a useful tool at the start of a project or action planning event to

- introduce people to a project;
- establish the key issues;
- get people involved and motivated;
- identify useful talent and experience;
- identify the next steps needed.

Potential participants in a project are invited to attend a short workshop. Steps involve

- introducing the purpose of the event and the participants;
- brainstorming ideas, concerns, and strategies;
- categorizing responses;



***a workshop in new westminster  
-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database***



***-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database***

- presenting the results;
- discussing the results and the next stage of the process. If the workshop is part of a larger action planning event, a report will be made back to a plenary session.

This method could be used in the early stages of the process to create a framework for urban design, to introduce the residents of New Westminster to the purpose of the process, and to get residents thinking of the issues they wish to address.

### *visioning workshop*

A visioning workshop is typically a one-day process by which a community describes the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it. Interested parties work intensively together to develop preferences and options for urban design. It allows key parties to work creatively together to devise and explore options for a site, neighbourhood, or city. The aim is to include a cross-section of the main stakeholders.

Participants are invited by the organizers of the initiative and receive a briefing pack that sets out the aim of the day, as well as background information and relevant planning processes so that everyone starts the day fully informed. Facilitators and designers graphically capture the ideas of participants during the workshop. The workshop format is designed to encourage the development of creative ideas that can be published in a summary report and circulated to the wider public. The outcome is a set of professionally edited and illustrated proposals for action, presented to the community as an exhibition and in print.



***design charrette***  
***-source: city of new westminster graphics database***

### *design charrette*

Similar to a visioning workshop, participants of a design charrette gather to envision and illustrate a possible future for a site or neighbourhood. Charrettes are more intensive than visioning workshops, however, and are focused on generating design ideas and implementation in addition to visioning. A charrette is typically held over several days, and is a hands-on session allowing small groups of professionals and non-professionals to work creatively together to develop planning and design ideas. It is normally part of a larger planning event. Where a visioning workshop is meant to inform policy, a charrette is meant to respond to policy and advance creative but feasible solutions to real problems and specific projects.

People work in groups around tables with plans or flexible models. Each participant is encouraged to sketch and illustrate their ideas for planning and design solutions. Each group should have a facilitator,

note-taker, and mapper. Different groups can work with different areas, or the same area at different scales.

Charrettes are ideal for launching a project. They allow for design ideas to be generated in a cooperative, creative and open atmosphere, for people to visualize possibilities, and for the opportunity to draw attention to a resource and its value to a community.

Charrettes can serve many purposes, including

- to help communities solve problems and build consensus;
- to test new ideas and policies generated within the community;
- to seize on nascent possibilities;
- to build according to how the community understands itself;
- to bring in leading designers and other professionals who might otherwise be unaffordable;
- to stimulate university students and faculty, and put to use institutional resources and expertise.

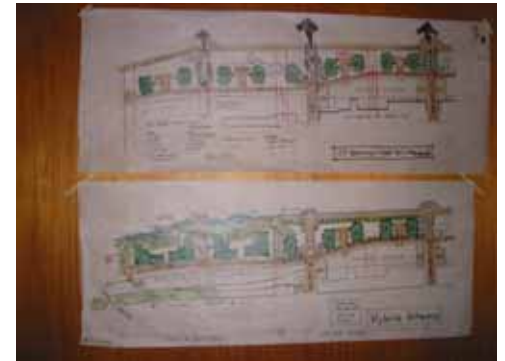
(source: Wates 2000, Guy 2002, National Park Service: Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program 2002, Condon and Profit 1999)

### *RURAL/URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAMS*

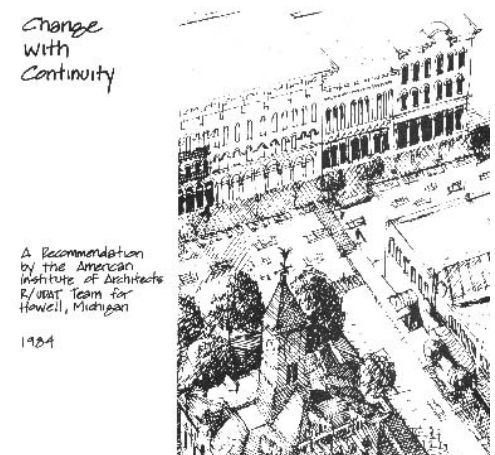
The Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team Program is an assisted community-planning initiative that outlines of strategies for problem-solving.

The R/UDAT program is a results-driven community design program based on the principles of public participation, interdisciplinary cooperation, and objectivity. The program combines local resources with the expertise of a multi-disciplinary team of design professionals in order to identify methods to encourage positive change in a community. As independent professionals, often from outside the community, they are less likely to hold particular biases and to be influenced by conflicting agendas, politics and personalities.

The Design Assistance Team visits the community for a series of intense workshops and meetings with community members over a number of days, gathering the concerns and ideas of residents, community leaders and interested groups. The team also visits and assesses the study area. After several days, the R/UDAT prepares and publishes a report of recommendations that is presented in a public meeting on the last day. Following the presentation, the community analyzes the recommendations, identifies priorities,



*an illustration from a design charrette*  
*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*



*R/UDAT poster*  
*-source: american institute of architects 2005*

undertakes immediate objectives, and prepares an action plan. Members of the R/UDAT will return a year later to evaluate progress and advise on implementation.

(source: American Institute of Architects 2005)

#### *IV. Implementation*

##### *USER GROUPS*

A user group is an assembly of residents who work together to learn, share skills, and serve their community.

User groups act as representatives of those who will use the end product of an urban design process, with the mandate of championing their vision, managing oversight and maintaining the momentum of the process. The creation of these user groups is a key element for successful community planning.

These groups can take many forms, including an advisory committee/board, and should include as many interests as possible and represent the end users of any initiative. These groups should be formally organized with democratic procedures and preferably legal status. For larger projects or purposes, several different groups, sub-groups or working parties may be useful to focus on specific issues.

The nature of the group should be clearly understood, and it is advisable to set down the purpose, powers, accountability, funding, and meeting schedule in a "terms of reference".

People who might be involved in user groups include

- architects/planners/designers;
- health and social workers;
- city staff;
- local business people;
- local residents representatives; and,
- police liaison officers.

(source: RTP/ Community Planning Project 2005, Guy 2002)



## best practices; case studies

### I. *Visioning and Workshops*

#### *PUBLIC PROCESS FOR SMART GROWTH ON THE GROUND IN MAPLE RIDGE*

The Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative is a unique partnership between three organizations: the Real Estate Institute of BC, Smart Growth BC, and the UBC Sustainable Communities Program. The intent of the Maple Ridge Initiative was to develop a plan for sustainable development in the downtown area. A serious obstacle to achieving this goal was that local stakeholders were divided and skeptical. Rather than accept this as defeat, organizers saw this as an opportunity to develop a public engagement process based on consensus-building and use it to overcome this obstacle.

The critical partners in the program are the local community and the municipal government. All groups with an interest and an involvement in the downtown were engaged in the creation of a design brief which instructed the development of the plan. Representatives from the different groups within the community then participated in a collaborative design event in which a development plan for the downtown of Maple Ridge was completed.

#### Principles and process

The process used by Smart Growth on the Ground initiative in Maple Ridge, BC, involved the entire community in the creation of not only the plan, but also the planning process. A Project Committee of citizens, Maple Ridge District staff and organizational representatives as well as a number of resource people acted as the “keeper” of the process, ensuring it respected its integrity as a participatory process

The Smart Growth on the Ground process is based on significant public outreach and decision-making, and is organized around a series of workshops and a design charrette. The process operates with 8 key principles, which were present in the creation of the Maple Ridge sustainable development plan. These principles are as follows:

1. Each community is complete;
2. Options to the car are emphasized;
3. Process is in harmony with natural systems;
4. Buildings and infrastructure are greener, smarter, and cheaper;



*maple ridge concept plan  
-source: smart growth on the ground  
2004*

5. Housing meets the needs of the whole community;
6. Good jobs are close to home;
7. The spirit of each community is honoured;
8. Everyone has a voice.



**maple ridge concept plan aerial view**  
**-source: smart growth on the ground**  
**2004**

The process also focuses on action and implementation, including the adoption of bylaw and policies consistent with the plan. This final act is, by necessity, the responsibility of the municipal government. They were, however, participants in the process throughout and should be supportive of the outcome.

#### Conclusion and Relevance

Throughout the process, a high level of engagement characterized the public participation process. There was also a significant and sophisticated level of understanding of the issues by the stakeholders. Stakeholders supported the environmental values that were at the heart of the initiative, particularly when supported by adequate research and analysis.

The open and inclusive process overcame a highly charged and contentious atmosphere. Many skeptics to the original plan were convinced of its merits, so potential opponents instead became allies, and the "local ownership" model created champions of the plan. This is critical for the implementation stage to be a success. Local councilors also took note of the success of the process, as a majority attended the final presentations of the outcome of the design charrette.

(source: Smart Growth on the Ground 2004)

#### *UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD PUBLIC SPACE WORKSHOP*

The *University Boulevard Public Space Workshop* was a series of two participatory design exercises developed to inform the University of British Columbia's University Town Development. These particular workshops built upon the framework of the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan, and provided community input that was eventually incorporated by participants in the University Boulevard Architectural Competition.

The *Public Space Workshop* was designed and organized by the Public Space Working Group, which consisted of campus stakeholders.

### Principles and Process

The principle behind the workshops was to involve the University community in stating the public space needs for this central feature of University Town. The participants therefore discussed, provided input, and created a list of public space needs and activities for the boulevard. The two stated objectives of the *Workshop* series included:

1. To develop a Public Space Program as identified by students, faculty, staff, alumni representatives and university residents that will occur within the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan
2. To prioritize these uses and identify their optimal sizes, configurations and locations.

In order to achieve these objectives, the workshop series was held over two days and involved the following. The workshops began with presentations which provided participants with background knowledge of the area. The presentations were followed by a field trip to the area, where designated focus points were visited and discussed. Upon return to the workshop venue, a collective visioning of the University Boulevard was held, led by an outside consultant hired to facilitate the process. Participants chose areas of interest and were given the task of describing key elements that they believed should be incorporated into the University Boulevard once it was built. Ideas were captured in both written and visual form, as table-sized base maps were provided so that participants could brainstorm graphically.

### Conclusion

Participation in the workshop series was small but enthusiastic. The participants in the workshop series agreed the key ideas would be valuable contributions to the University Boulevard competition program. The winning applicant appears to have incorporated many of the recommendations of the workshops, whereas the other two finalists did not. The decision of these two applicants not to incorporate the recommendations appears to have jeopardized their submission, as they were perceived to be acontextual and unresponsive.

(source: University of British Columbia 2004a, 2004b)

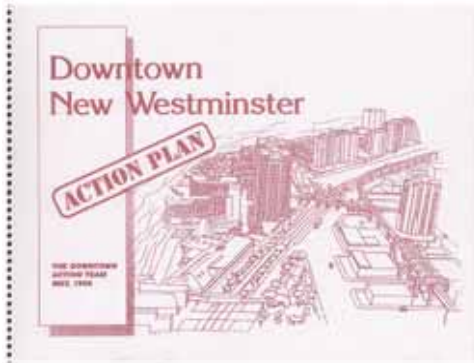
Ideas from the University of British Columbia's Public Space Workshops were organized into the following categories:

- Sense of Place;
- Activity and Use;
- Character and Design;
- Circulation;
- Environment;
- Landscape.

## *II. Strategic Plans*

### *DOWNTOWN NEW WESTMINSTER ACTION PLAN*

The Downtown New Westminster Action Plan was the result of a two year consultation process, initiated by the New Westminster Business Improvement Association. The business community saw the need for a public



-source: city of new westminster graphics database

The categories for action in the Downtown Action Plan include:

- Downtown;
- Social;
- Transportation;
- Waterfront;
- Arts, culture, and heritage;
- Economic development and investment.

process that would create a vision for the future development and enhancement of the downtown, and asked the City of New Westminster to direct a visioning process.

The visioning process began by establishing the Downtown Action Team consisting of a Steering Committee and six Visioning Committees focusing on different aspects of downtown life. Meetings were held at the Downtown Visioning Storefront (similar to a neighbourhood planning office), which acted as forum for public interaction during the process and housed a model of downtown, an ideas wall, and examples of successful downtowns from around the world. The six Visioning Committees met on a regular basis to draft the *Action Plan*. After the first public meeting was held to review the first draft, the plan was revised and distributed at a second public meeting. A one-day community visioning workshop was held, where ideas generated by a large cross-section of local stakeholders for the downtown were translated into graphic visualizations.

### Principles

A number of principles that provided the framework for the visioning process can be inferred from the plan. Some of these principles include

- Creating a vision and options for downtown;
- Revitalizing the downtown;
- Develop a timeframe and actions to accomplish;
- Involve the community; build consensus;
- Build partnerships among merchants, residents, property owners, and the City.

### Conclusion/Relevance

The outcome of the Downtown visioning process and workshop was the *Action Plan* and associated implementation strategy, arrived at through a participatory process. The plan detailed actions to be carried out in six different categories, the immediate and longer-term strategies for carrying them out, and the stakeholder responsible for each action.

(source: City of New Westminster 1996)

## CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER LOWER TWELFTH STREET AREA PLAN

The Lower Twelfth Area Plan is a land use vision that provides development direction to an area of New Westminster characterized by light industrial and vacant land uses. The express purpose of the plan was to create a diverse residential community based on smart growth principles that fits into the local and regional context as identified in New Westminster's *Official Community Plan*, and the GVRD's *Livable Region Strategic Plan*.

The Lower Twelfth Area Planning process is based on extensive public participation involving public meetings, workshops, and questionnaires that were carried out over several months. The process included a systematic investigation and analysis of the area and its related issues.

### Principles

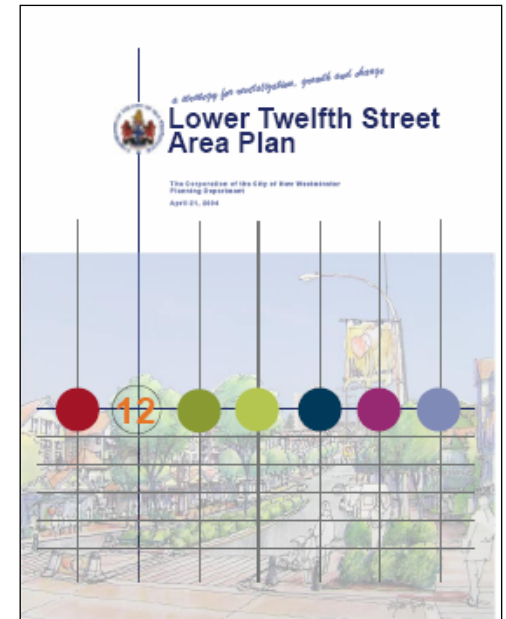
The principles behind the *Lower Twelfth Area Plan* are geared towards the revitalization of an area of New Westminster that is perceived to be problematic in terms of safety and marketability. The principles that support the redevelopment of the Lower Twelfth Area to a vibrant residential district connected to the rest of the city include

- Respect smart growth goals;
- Meet the goals of the LRSP;
- Create a safe, inviting neighbourhood;
- Connect to surrounding neighbourhoods;
- Improve public safety; and,
- Preserve local heritage.

There are guidelines for Urban Design and Heritage preservation in the Plan that respond directly to these principles.

### Conclusion/Relevance

The Lower Twelfth Area Plan is a successful example of the benefits and strengths of incorporating significant and meaningful public participation in planning processes. By directly involving the community throughout the process, from issues identification to plan completion, a strong area plan with clear guidelines, principles and policies has been established. Furthermore, it demonstrates the knowledge and awareness citizens have regarding sustainable principles and the importance of creating a sense of place.



**-source: city of new westminster graphics database**

Steps in the Lower Twelfth Area Plan participatory process included:

- Information Inventory (including site analysis and review of environmental and policy considerations);
- Economic Evaluation;
- Citizen's Support Group, Community Questionnaire, and Open House and Workshop;
- Identification of Opportunities and Constraints;
- Charrette and Options Development (that involved residents, staff, Council members);
- Preparation of Draft Land Use Plan;
- Review of Draft Plan (at an Open House with staff and residents);
- Final Plan (based on feedback from the above, as well as Council).

Council took notice of the Lower Twelfth Area Plan, as well. Council members were directly involved throughout the process, taking active parts in the public workshops, and in the vetting of the plan elements. Though the necessary amendment to the *OCP* has yet to proceed, the level of ownership of the plan by community residents, City staff, and City Council ensures the amendment will likely proceed.

(source: City of New Westminster 2004)

### *CITY OF SEATTLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE SEATTLE*

The City of Seattle offers a case study for developing a strategy for an urban design vision that is implemented through participatory design review process. Seattle's *Comprehensive Plan* is an example of an urban design concept that offers a comprehensible city-wide vision (Punter 1999, p.204). The plan also offers a review process that is fair to the developer, while allowing the community to determine parameters that are appropriate to the site and the context.

#### Principles and Process

The *Comprehensive Plan: Towards a Sustainable Seattle* is based on three core values: stewardship of the environment, promotion of economic opportunity, and an equitable distribution of costs and benefits (Punter, 1999). The plan was adopted in 1994, and was the product of four years of public participation in the Growth Management Act. Intended as a plan to deal with city-wide issues, the planning process involved neighbourhood-level public meetings, questionnaires and focus groups concerning land use, transportation, housing, and infrastructure provision. Through the planning process, urban design guidance initiatives emerged as the means to achieve a "sustainable Seattle".

The cornerstone of the plan is a strategy to concentrate growth into a series of urban centres and villages, with a strong core of commercial and community facilities and a mix of housing types and uses. It is in the urban villages that the design guidance initiatives are incorporated. Both city-wide and locally prepared design guidelines for new developments ensure that the urban villages maintain their character and amenities, particularly multi-family and commercial buildings.

The design guidelines detail design elements such as site planning, height, scale, architectural elements, pedestrian environment and landscaping. The guidelines are implemented through a system of design review which provides a forum for the neighbourhood and the developer to work towards a better quality development. The process begins with a pre-development meeting with the design review board consisting of seven local members, a written agreement on community priorities, and a staff review, all of which must occur before the design process begins.

## Conclusion

The design process ensures that the perspective of citizens and staff are incorporated before the design work is undertaken. This approach to design control exemplifies Seattle's community-based approach to planning, and its development of a comprehensible, city-wide urban design vision that is relevant at a local level.

(source: Punter 1999)

### *III. Guidelines and Regulations*

#### *CITY OF PORTLAND CENTRAL CITY DESIGN GUIDELINES*

Portland is an exemplar in terms of its participatory processes and its design guidelines for the Central City (Punter 1999). What distinguishes them is that the city's design objectives are clear, simple and well presented, and are built on a thorough public consultation process.

#### Principles and Process

The City of Portland has established one of the most participatory planning processes in the USA. The City's planning process is based on a principle of independent neighbourhood participation. Most neighbourhoods in Portland have their own independent neighbourhood association, supported and funded by the City that is consulted regarding developments in housing, transportation, parks and planning. City officials actively cooperate with the associations, and provide them with early notification of major projects. Larger advisory groups tackle specific issues such as urban design, and a Design Review Commission enforces downtown design guidelines.

Portland's design guidelines, the *Central City Fundamental Design Checklist*, are concerned with context and the public realm, and are divided into three topics: personality (contribution to the urban design framework), pedestrian environment, and project design and character. While objectives of the guidelines are clear, they eschew detail and technical language (Punter 1999).

## Conclusion

Portland is considered to be one of the most liveable cities in North America. It has achieved this with one of the best design policies in North America. It has demonstrated that a number of factors are critical to



*illustrating a possible design vision*  
-source: city of new westminster graphics database

Excerpt from the City of Richmond's  
*Development Permit Guidelines*

#### 9.2.5 BUILDING SCALE & FORM

The intent is to ensure that buildings are appropriate to their context and contribute to the overall quality of the streetscape. Building design should be compatible with the surrounding physical environment, land use, and the character, scale, and form of buildings on the same site and on neighbouring sites. The exterior design and finish of buildings and structures should also be compatible with existing heritage buildings on the same site or neighbouring sites.

##### 9.2.5.A Form of Development

- a) Street-fronting development that creates an edge to the street is encouraged to help define streets and public spaces;
  - b) In mixed-use areas adjacent to retail/restaurant/community uses and adjacent to town squares, the preferred building height at street edge is no more than four storeys. Setbacks as identified in zoning regulations or area plans should be designed as extensions of the public realm;
  - c) In high-density residential areas, a building height of no more than four storeys is recommended at the street edge.
- Setbacks should be landscaped to provide semi-private and transition areas to the residential development. Where gaps between buildings or street-fronting courtyards occur, the buildings shall be joined visually by "bridging" elements e.g. gateways, decorative fencing, terraces, pergolas, etc.

design quality. Primarily, this includes a highly participatory planning process with strong neighbourhood involvement, a commitment to quality architecture, landscape and planning, and comprehensive yet clear, simple, and well-thought out design guidelines.

(source: Punter 1999)

#### *CITY OF RICHMOND DEVELOPMENT PERMIT GUIDELINES*

Richmond's *Development Permit Guidelines* supports the objectives of the *Official Community Plan* by identifying basic development standards to be applied across the entire community. It also identifies measures appropriate to specific land uses.

##### Principles

The principles behind Richmond's guidelines are to preserve and enhance the elements of the community that have been identified by residents as valuable and successful. It does not require literal translation, in whole or in part, but must be taken into account in all Development Permit applications.

##### Conclusion/Relevance

Richmond's *Guidelines* are based on a general criteria regarding views, landscaping, scale and form, materials, etc., yet does not attempt to be overly prescriptive. Guidance is given in the area of general guidelines, multiple-family guidelines, and heritage guidelines among others. The reasoning and spirit behind the development guidelines are as important as the specifics.

(source: City of Richmond 1999)

#### *SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPES: SITE DESIGN MANUAL FOR BC COMMUNITIES*

The *Sustainable Urban Landscapes Site Design Manual* is the outcome of several efforts to create alternative development and engineering standards for the design of new, and the retrofitting of old communities in British Columbia. The manual distills the outcomes, processes, and lessons learned from the *Sustainable Urban Landscapes* project and creates a toolkit for urban design. The focus for the *Site Design Manual* is sustainable communities, but it can serve as a model framework for urban design in general. It is a joint



effort of multiple-level government representatives, citizens, and public interest groups interested in designing more sustainable communities.

The manual is divided into three sections. Part One discusses four projects (including several discussed below) where design charrettes were used to vision and plan a new community according to specific principles, namely sustainable development principles. Part Two documents the methodology for developing design guidelines. Featured in Part Three are six Overarching Principles for community design that draw directly from the design charrettes. These flow directly into the Design Guidelines for a sustainable community, which are also featured in Part Three. The complete manual is an action framework for moving towards more liveable, affordable, and ecologically sound communities.

#### Principles

Unlike traditional design and engineering manuals whose treatment of site development, environmental protection, and drainage guidelines are presented separately and in language that excludes much of their audience, this manual tries to present all the pieces of the urban puzzle together, in a language that can be understood. It attempts to balance economy, equity, and ecology.

#### Conclusion/Relevance

The approach undertaken in this manual demonstrates clearly that participatory design can successfully inform public policy. The principles and guidelines that form the toolkit for the *Sustainable Urban Landscapes Site Manual* are derived from rules and strategies that were the outcome of a series of design charrettes. Each principle and guideline, furthermore, is firmly grounded in a charrette proposal.

(source: Condon et al. 2003)

### **IV. Design Charrettes**

#### *CITY OF SURREY DESIGN CHARRETTE*

The Surrey Design Charrette, part of the *Sustainable Urban Landscapes* project, was a five day intensive workshop where four design teams competed against each other to develop different design solutions for a new community in Surrey. The design brief for the charrette laid out the specific goal to, literally and figuratively, “illustrate a vision of what our communities could be like if they were designed to conform to emerging... policies for sustainable development” (p.9).



**drawing at a design charrette**  
**-source: city of new westminster graphics database**

The design teams in the Surrey Design Charrette were each led by two professional architects and two professional landscape architects, and consisted of a mix of architecture and landscape architecture students from UBC.

#### Principles behind design charrette

A set of principles laid the foundation for the approach each team took to the design

1. Support the goal and policy directive for more sustainable neighbourhoods and communities;
2. Design the community as a *complete community*
  - a. Provide for local employment;
  - b. Develop a compact community;
  - c. Provide services and transit within walking distance;
3. Preserve and enhance the ecological function of the immediate and surrounding landscape.

#### Conclusion/Relevance

The charrette produced a series of design proposals that allowed community stakeholders groups, city officials, and developers to evaluate existing policy. Through the act of drawing pictures of what a sustainable urban landscape could be like, it was discovered that participants were able to make more informed decisions than is often the case. By going through the design process, the contradictions embedded in the policies used to guide decisions were revealed and resolved. It also gave these groups the ability to envision alternative future scenarios for the site.

The charrette also allowed for the presentation and discussion of options and solutions that were visual and easy to understand. Design may not have found the *best* solution to a problem, but it could offer a number of *very good* solutions. And by creating a space that allows for options to be discussed, decisions became informed.

The most relevant conclusion that applies to New Westminster is that citizens and officials can use these proposals as policy tools to guide subsequent planning decisions. It is through the process that leads to design where the designer/planner/specialist is able to take a policy and create a more specific objective. It is an iterative process where the decision to undertake a design requires moving from policy or vision to objectives to the creation of guidelines for design, through to design itself.

(source: Condon and Proft 1999)

### *EAST CLAYTON DESIGN CHARRETTE*

The East Clayton Charrette was an implementation charrette, designed to achieve institutional and regulatory changes in the development process. The design charrette was set in motion when Surrey City Council directed their planning department to use sustainable community principles and to open up the planning process to involve designers and a diverse group of stakeholders. Design professionals facilitated but did not lead the charrette.

The East Clayton Charrette was integral to the creation of the East Clayton Neighbourhood Concept Plan (NCP), which was developed over a 1.5 year period. The NCP was created through a consultative design process that involved 150 people from 14 different constituency groups in a process that featured workshops, public open houses, and this charrette.

#### Principles behind charrette

The relevant principles that directed this charrette were

1. Involve early on those people, agencies and organizations that can influence planning policy and development standards;
2. Share information equally;
3. Build confidence in the process, in plan policies, and in alternative development standards;
4. Ensure the direct involvement of municipal staff;
5. Gain access to the necessary technical expertise.

#### Conclusion

What emerged from this charrette were clear and practical ideas for making communities more sustainable. Implementation charrettes have the advantage of involving all appropriate parties in determining the future design of a community. They also deal with opposition to a project as part of the design process, not afterwards when it may be too late. The results were more conservative than is typical for a visioning charrette, however, due to the inevitable compromises that occur as part of the design process.

(source: Condon et al. 2003)

## V. Design Review

### CITY OF SEATTLE'S DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

The following outlines Seattle's design review process.

#### 1. Presubmittal Conference

-project applicants receive a copy of the design guidelines and learn about the design review process;

-site, context and development program is also discussed.

#### 2. Application for Early Design Guidance

#### 3. Early Design Guidance Design Review Board Meeting

-DPD staff set up an evening public meeting with the Design Review Board, general public, and project proponents;

-The project proponents present information about the site, surrounding context, development objectives and alternative design concepts;

-Design Review Board members identify key design guidelines, and incorporate relevant public comments in their design guidance;

#### 4. DPD staff summarize and circulate the early design guidance.

continued...

The City of Seattle's Design Review Process requires that new commercial, mixed use, and multifamily projects above a certain threshold undergo a discretionary review of their siting and design characteristics, based on a set of citywide design guidelines. This review is undertaken by a Design Review Board consisting of Seattle residents, providing a forum through which neighbourhoods, City staff, developers and architects work together to ensure developments contribute positively to Seattle's neighbourhoods. The Board takes its direction from both city-wide and neighbourhood-level guidelines.

#### Process and Principles

Seattle's design review process examines developments within both a city-wide and neighbourhood context. It has three principal objectives:

1. To encourage better design and site planning that enhances the character of the City and ensures that new development sensitively fits into the neighbourhoods;
2. To provide flexibility in the application of development standards;
3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbours and the City early in the design and siting of new development.

There are two important stages in the design review process that each development must undertake, *Early Design Guidance* and the *Design Review Board Recommendation Meeting*.

In the *Early Design Guidance Design Review Board Meeting*, staff set up an evening public meeting with the Design Review Board, general public, and project proponents. At the meeting, the project proponents present information about the site, surrounding context, development objectives and alternative design concepts. The Design Review Board members then identify key design guidelines, and incorporate relevant public comments in their design guidance to the proponent. The proponent must then incorporate these comments into the revision of the project design.

At the *Design Review Board Recommendation Meeting*, the Board reconvenes to consider the revised project design. After a presentation of the design by the proponent, followed by the recommendations of City staff, the public has an opportunity to comment. The Board then offers its official recommendation to the Director

of the Department of Planning and Development (DPD). Once the review process is complete, the Director makes the final decision whether to allow the development to proceed.

The City of Seattle is divided into seven areas, each with its own five-member board. The five volunteer members represent the following constituencies:

- Three at-large members representing
  - Design professions;
  - Development interests;
  - General community interests.
- Two locally-nominated members representing
  - Residential interests;
  - Business interests.

In addition there is one At-Large Board comprised of three members who may review projects throughout the City, and may substitute on other Design Review Boards when quorum is needed. The Design Review Board is administered by the DPD.

(source: Punter 1999, City of Seattle Department of Planning And Development 2003)

### *CITY OF PORTLAND DESIGN COMMISSION*

The Portland Design Commission is an eight member review body composed of citizen representatives, generally from the private sector whose responsibility is in enforcing the Downtown's design guidelines. Specifically, the purpose of the Design Review Commission is to "provide guidance and expertise on urban design and architecture and maintain and enhance Portland's historical and architectural heritage" (City of Portland 2005, website). The Commission consists of a member of the Planning Commission, a representative of the Regional Arts and Culture Council, one person representing the public at large, and five members experienced in either design, engineering, financing, construction, or building management.

#### Principles and Process

The selection of members is the responsibility of several different bodies. The Planning Commission member is chosen by the Planning Commission chair. The Regional Arts and Council chair selects a

Seattle's design review process, continued:

#### 5. Project Design

-Project proponents and architects respond to the early design guidance in their design.

#### 6. Master Use Permit Application

#### 7. Design Review Board Recommendation Meeting

-Design Review Board reconvenes to consider the revised project design;

-After a presentation of the design, recommendations by City staff and an opportunity for public comment, the Board offers its official recommendation to the DPD.

#### 8. Directors Decision

-The final decision on the design review component is made by the Director of the DPD;

-If the Design Review Board's recommendation was offered by at least four members, the Director may not override it unless s/he believe the Board has erred, exceeded its authority, or has required changes that contravene legal requirements.

member from their council, who must be approved by the Mayor. The other members are appointed by the Mayor and approved by council. No more than two members may be appointed from any one of the areas of private-sector expertise (e.g. engineering).

The Commission is responsible for

- A formal regulatory review of major design review applications, and minor design review applications that are appealed;
- Providing a response to design advice requests;
- Participation in the development of design regulations, including the specific approval of design guidelines; and,
- Providing advice on other design matters in the public's interest.

### Conclusion

Portland's Design Commission is smaller and more manageable in size than Seattle's, albeit more bureaucratic. The commission operates within understandable rules in terms of its area of focus and its mandate, with strong technical support and expertise. That expertise, however, has a system of checks that do not allow one particular to voice dominate the process (in many design review bodies, architects are the dominant voice). The consensus among the design and resident community is that the procedures have so far proven capable of implementing the community's vision.

(source: Punter 1999, City of Portland Bureau of Development Services 2005)

## 4.0 An Analysis of Participatory Design in New Westminster

This chapter presents an analysis of the issues related to participatory urban design in New Westminster. The City of New Westminster is not alone in wanting to review and refine public involvement in urban design. There are many areas of governance, public participation, and interdepartmental cooperation that require improvement, particularly in response to the increasing expectation of the public to have their opinions listened to and respected. And like many other places, the City of New Westminster also has some excellent examples of participation and involvement in decision-making, examples that can be drawn from and built upon.

The intent of this chapter is to illustrate and analyze those areas that need greater and more meaningful involvement in participatory urban design, in order to make recommendations for improvements in the following chapter. The issues presented in this chapter include the need to

- Improve public participation in the visioning process;
- Establish a public voice in urban design review;
- Address the urban design vision through design guidelines; and
- Maintain a connection to the urban design vision.

### *I. The Need to Improve Public Participation in the Visioning Process*

#### *BACKGROUND*

The City of New Westminster's most recent *Official Community Plan* was the result of a planning process initiated in 1994. As part of this process Council directed City staff to undergo broad-based consultation to incorporate the visions and values of the community.

To guide the process, a Steering Committee of staff representatives from City departments was established that would direct the different aspects of the development of the *Official Community Plan*. This included a public process entitled "Envision New Westminster". The process involved three public events: a series of Issues Forums; a Community Planning Workshop; and a series of Design Charrettes for each neighbourhood. The purpose of the process was to "formulate a community vision and a prioritized list of actions which would be necessary to achieve the vision" (City of New Westminster 2004, p.6) and would form the basis of the *Official Community Plan*.

There were a total of seven Issues Forums in the OCP process addressing the following concerns:

1. Sustainability;
2. Complete Communities;
3. Seniors;
4. Traffic, Transportation and Infrastructure;
5. Economy and Employment;
6. Heritage, Culture and the Arts;
7. Population, Housing and Urban Design.



*illustrating the future*  
*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*

The Issues Forums were general information sessions that introduced a variety of issues for comment and discussion. In the Community Planning Workshop, participants were divided into focus groups to discuss the topics from the Issues Forums. The outcome of the workshop was the identification of general community goals, and the options and actions necessary to achieve them. Finally, Community Design Charrettes were held throughout the City in each of the larger neighbourhood areas to address their unique design features and requirements. The charrettes provided a forum for the identification of neighbourhood visions, and the assistance of local architects allowed for these visions to be graphically illustrated. The input gathered from these workshops, forums and reports provided the framework for the creation of the *Official Community Plan*.

In 1993, City staff also initiated a review of the *Official Community Plan* for Queensborough, a geographically distinct New Westminster neighbourhood located across the Fraser River. Information gathered through consultation was used in the creation of the Queensborough plan. Public consultation took many forms. Initial contact was made at a community open house that identified many community concerns, which became the basis of the plan review and the consultant's terms of reference. Efforts were made to reach out to a broad segment of the community, including presentations about planning to elementary and secondary students in Queensborough.

Consultation continued at a second public meeting where the consultants were introduced to Queensborough community members, and ideas regarding the built form were presented. This was followed by a series of individual meetings with residents, and culminated in a design workshop sponsored by the City and the Queensborough Residents Association. In the design workshop, groups of residents and developers produced community plans that were presented to Queensborough residents for feedback. The residents were asked to prioritize the elements in the plans.

The outcomes of the workshop as well as the priorities identified by the community were used to form the basis of the draft Queensborough community plan. These outcomes included a series of objectives directing, among other things, the incorporation of a mix of uses and forms that create a sense of unity and diversity, with the intended character being that of a riverfront village. Development permits issued in Queensborough are intended to be in accordance with these objectives. After presentation to Council for amendments and revisions, and to the community for further feedback, the Queensborough *Official Community Plan* was adopted in 1995. Much of the plan has yet to be implemented.

#### ANALYSIS

Public participation in the community visioning stage is essential. And as Forester (1999) points out, it must be more than just good intentions. The City has acted with good intentions in its public process, particularly



with the laudable *Official Community Plan* visioning process in Queensborough. The efforts in that public process, however, have lead to little in the way of action. And in comparison, the New Westminster *Official Community Plan* process took a step backwards, “informing” the public rather than involving them. Both processes were gestures that Arnstein would describe as inadequate forms of participation, rather than participatory exercises that offered true citizen power (Arnstein 1969).

One of the first hurdles to overcome in designing an effective participatory process is the identification of all the parties likely to hold an interest in the outcome. Planners must ask how we can avoid the exclusion of timid, less vocal speakers who are in danger of being overrun by dominant voices. The planner’s role is not to listen to the loudest voice in the community, but to ensure that all the affected voices have a chance to speak. The structure of the Queensborough *Official Community Plan* allowed for the more effective inclusion of the voices that are often excluded from participatory processes, such as the large segment of the Queensborough population that is not comfortable with English, particularly in group settings. This was accomplished by meeting with and seeking ideas from approximately 30 residents in their homes.

This approach was not adopted for the creation of the city-wide *Official Community Plan*. Rather, consultation with the community took place on a larger scale, involving participants selected by the Steering Committee (a body consisting entirely of city staff), in a process chosen and designed by the same committee. There appears to have been a reasonably extensive level of involvement through much of the process, allowing for interaction between the public and planners at a variety of levels and stages. However, residents had little opportunity to be involved in creating the goals and vision behind the process. Rather, that task was undertaken by the Steering Committee who “directed the public participation process and reviewed the development of the *Official Community Plan* document” (City of New Westminster 2004, p. 6), resulting in a process that was by definition consultation, but not participation.

A further criticism is that the public process was constrained by time. If a public process is determined by a strict deadline, it limits the possibility for good ideas to come up late in the process. It also does not account for how the understanding of ideas can change over a period of time, as the knowledge of participants grows. The consequence of such a timeline is that ideas not introduced at the public forums may have come too late to be included. While this may not necessarily have been the case, there is no way to know what ideas remained off the table. An inherent flexibility in the process will allow those involved to accept good ideas as they come, and deal with the evolution of older ideas that inevitably occurs.

The intent of a participatory process should be to go beyond building “marketplaces for exchange” but to encourage democratic public spheres where meeting, arguing, venting, listening and learning allows for participants to formulate solutions and reexamine their own perceptions. To do so requires that the participatory process move beyond mere consultation, and more towards something resembling a partnership. The public consultation process as it exists in New Westminster, specifically concerning urban



**consultation in new westminster**  
**-source: city of new westminster graphics database**

design, does not allow for such discussion in the public sphere, but rather becomes a venue for uncompromising exchange.

## *II. A Need for a Public Voice in Urban Design Review*

### *BACKGROUND*

New Westminster's design review process:

1. Applicant approaches New Westminster Development Services with a development application;
2. Planner reviews it to ensure it meets the general requirements of the *Official Community Plan*;
3. Plans are sent to other departments for a technical agency review;
4. Applicant makes a presentation of the design "for information only" to the Consultative Design Committee, including a context statement. The CDC gives their wishlist, i.e. what they believe should be changed in the design of the project, and their requirements for the formal presentation (landscape plans, shadow studies, servicing plan);
5. Planner (on behalf of CDC) presents to the Advisory Planning Commission in the design review portion of the meeting (which is closed to the public), and the Development Committee; (continued...)

At present, there are limited opportunities for the public to take part in design review of development applications. There are two bodies whose specific mandate is to review the design proposals for projects in New Westminster: the Consultative Design Committee and the Design Review Panel.

In 1964, New Westminster City Council, in response to concerns about the lack of architectural input into building design, established the first Consultative Design Committee (CDC). The CDC is a subcommittee of the Advisory Planning Commission. Members consist of design professionals, including several architects and one landscape architect, but there are no citizens on this committee. Appointed by City Council, the committee reviews and makes comments on the exterior appearance of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings. The Consultative Design Committee focuses very strongly on individual buildings and their immediate context, but it does not consider the impact of a development on the city as a whole, and how it may or may not advance a larger vision for urban design.

In 1981, a similar body, the Design Review Panel (DRP), also consisting of design professionals, was established to review applications in the Downtown development permit area. It acts similar to the CDC, reviewing projects for the Downtown area of New Westminster on an individual basis and its impact on the immediate surrounding context. As in the Consultative Design Committee, there are no citizen representatives on the Design Review Panel.

The other relevant design review body is the Advisory Planning Commission (APC), which is an appointed, political body of Council. The APC is a public body, appointed by Council and composed of up to nine citizen representatives for terms of up to three-years. The mandate of the APC is to advise Council on matters relating to land use and rezoning, as well as design for all areas outside the downtown. The commission is assisted in this latter capacity by the Consultative Design Committee. The design and site treatment of all new major buildings outside the downtown plan area must be approved by the APC prior to the issuance of a building permit. Rezoning in the downtown are also reviewed by the APC, in meetings that are held every month. While the rezoning portion of the meeting is open to the public, it is important to note that the design review portion of each APC meeting is closed to the public.

## ANALYSIS

Ideally, the purpose of design review is to ensure proposals fit with an urban design vision specifically developed for the place. Despite the existence of the advisory bodies, there is minimal opportunity for New Westminster citizens to be involved in vetting the design of development projects. The public does not have an opportunity to provide input into designs until very late in the process, officially at the point when the design review is complete and the process is opened to the public for a land use review. The Consultative Design Committee and the Design Review Panel, furthermore, consist entirely of architects and landscape architects. While it is beyond dispute that these design professionals are well qualified and suited to comment on the design merits of the projects, it is not in their mandate nor is it necessarily their responsibility to review designs based on how they advance New Westminster's urban design vision, the will of the community, or the overall public interest.

While the times of all CDC and DRP meetings are publicly posted, there is no active encouragement to get members of the public to participate. Nor is there, in the structure of the meetings, an opportunity for members of the public to comment on the design. Often, DRP meetings are not held at City Hall, but moved to locations that are more convenient for the members of the panel, such as downtown Vancouver. Though this does make sense from a logistical point of view, as the timing of the DRP meetings do conflict with the schedules of the design professionals on the panel and thus may jeopardize the quality of the review, it does not allow for an open, participatory design review process.

As part of the development process, an applicant is encouraged to make informal presentations to the Residents' Association active in the neighbourhood where the project is proposed. Comments from the Associations are received by the developer, and some form of communication must be presented to the City providing evidence that the Residents' Association was consulted. While this does allow for comment by the constituency representing residents directly impacted by the project, it does not allow for comment regarding the contribution of the project to the overall design vision and public good of New Westminster.

There are serious flaws with this method when it is considered on its merits as a participatory design process. While the APC holds open meetings every month, only the land use portion of the meetings are open to the public for hearing and comment. Discussions regarding designs are closed to the public. While there are citizens on the commission, furthermore, their ability is limited in that they are unable to comment on the design of projects within the downtown. Their review is also late in the process, when many of the other requirements have been met and steps in the development process have already been taken. At this point, their comments are reactions to a project far along in its process, rather than creative suggestions early in the process that can contribute to its overall design. The general public, meanwhile, is even more limited in their opportunity to participate. And although membership in the APC is open to any New Westminster citizen, certain neighbourhoods are typically over-represented (Queen's Park), while other neighbourhoods

New Westminster's design review process, continued....

6. APC comments go back to the developer, who revises plan;
7. Applicant carries out round of meetings with other departments to address their comments;
8. Applicant presents more specific and updated plans to the CDC for design approval, who will comment and again forward comments to APC through the Planner;
9. Consultation begins. Applicant speaks to resident associations and adjacent neighbours;
10. Design review process ends. Development Permit goes to council along with comments from APC. At this point, APC begins a land use review to determine if a rezoning is acceptable (which is open to the public).



-source: city of new westminster 2004b

are under-represented (Queensborough). This runs the risk of design review becoming self-centred, not public-centred.

A further concern is that the process for approving projects is redundant and not vertically integrated. First, the CDC and DRP do not both need to exist, as they serve similar purposes. Second, developers do not seek the approval of one body with one perspective, but rather several different perspectives from different groups with different approaches, particularly the technical agencies. Interdepartmental goals are not aligned, furthermore, such that the practical application of technical criteria often defeats the performance-based standards of another. This is demonstrated by decisions regarding road widths, and the location, even presence, of street trees which are often sacrificed from original, approved design plans for technical considerations.

The process as laid out above means that different city departments (planners, engineers) comment at different points of the review process, and the developer tries to satisfy several requirements in isolation of each other. As they are presented at different times, there is no guarantee that their requirements are consistent; in some cases, they may be directly contradictory. And if the developer is forced to satisfy the requirements of one department in isolation of the others, initial agreements on the design may be forsaken, such that the design recommendations of the planning department and review panel may be set aside to meet the requirements of the technical committees rather than attempting to satisfy the intent of both. On a practical level, the requirement to seek out so many agency approvals can slow down the pace of development.

### *III. A Need to Translate the Urban Design Vision into Design Guidelines*

#### *BACKGROUND*

The City of New Westminster has established a vision for urban design. The *Official Community Plan* is strong on land use, indicating a clear vision for how New Westminster should develop over the long-term. The City's unique, graphically illustrated neighbourhood specific Zoning Bylaw is a positive step towards indicating a preferred form of development, particularly in single family neighbourhoods. And New Westminster has defined what has the potential to be a strong urban design vision in the *Official Community Plan*, one that refers to the traditional form of development, again particularly in New Westminster's single family neighbourhoods. This vision is partially detailed in the voluntary guidelines that exist specifically for the historic Queen's Park residential area, and the Twelfth Street commercial district.

This vision, however, has not been translated into clear and concise design principles or guidelines that represent the will of the community and, most importantly, can direct the form of development across all of New Westminster, not only the single family neighbourhoods. Kelbaugh points out that consistent guidelines are essential in building successful places, and for getting developers and communities to work together. Both the *Queensborough* and city-wide *Official Community Plans* propose the creation of design guidelines to guide the form of development, but to date clear guidelines that express the vision have yet to be developed.

## ANALYSIS

Consistent, well-defined design guidelines that address the urban design vision are not present in New Westminster, at either the city-wide or neighbourhood level. There exists no framework with which to measure or monitor the design of a development project in New Westminster. The *Queensborough Official Community Plan* does address a vision for urban design, one that identifies a "Riverfront Village" theme, and the city-wide plan refers to the need to reflect "the character of the existing neighbourhood". However, these principles are not clearly defined. The implementation section of the plan recommends that urban design guidelines be adopted, suggesting an acceptance for the measure in the community. Yet these guidelines remain to be implemented. The design guidelines as written in the city-wide *Official Community Plan* are closer to design objectives and lack the detail with which to implement the vision.

Without design guidelines, design and design review becomes arbitrary. Strong design guidelines will ensure that future development reinforces the look and feel of New Westminster, and clarify the city's interest regarding the impact of development, with a focus on protecting streetscapes and seamlessly integrating new development with the existing fabric. Without these guidelines, there is nothing to assist architects, professional planners or developers to make more informed decisions when submitting or reviewing site plans or re-zoning applications. Without stated design principles, designers and developers will not understand why guidelines are in place. There is nothing, furthermore, to assist the residents of New Westminster interested in establishing a context within which to assess development activity in their neighbourhood.

While some may argue that the current system has been successful in allowing development to proceed in a manner that reflects the historic form of New Westminster, the feeling of many in the community is that development in the contemporary era has not responded to the historic context of New Westminster. Regardless, there still remains no tool to consistently measure and judge development proposals against the community's urban design vision.

#### IV. *The Need to Maintain a Connection to the Urban Design Vision*

##### BACKGROUND



*the new westminster waterfront from  
above*  
*-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database*

Conflict is a common feature of the development process. A case in point is the development of New Westminster's waterfront to the east of Westminster Public Market. The vision for this area, developed with public input and codified in the *Downtown Plan* and *Official Community Plan*, is for higher density on the waterfront with public waterfront amenities and vehicle and pedestrian connections to the Columbia Street Historic District. Yet despite the level of participation involved in the *Official Community Plan* process, the effects of time, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation of the vision have resulted in conflicts over the proposed use.

This example is indicative of the situations where there have been problems maintaining the connection to the urban design vision. When such conflict occurs, there is a very real threat to the successful realization of the vision as defined in the *Official Community Plan*. In part, this is a failure of getting people to understand how the vision will translate into reality.

Conflict is also an inevitable part of the evolution of the community, as new residents move to New Westminster, residents who were never part of the visioning process and may be unfamiliar with the goals of the existing community. What is required is an ongoing partnership that is based on participation and education, one that maintains that connection between the residents of New Westminster and the urban design vision of the City.

##### ANALYSIS

The primary critique is that a connection between an urban design vision and actual development is not embedded in the City's planning framework. Development fails to maintain a connection to the urban design vision of New Westminster when the public forgets or misunderstands the purpose of the vision. The public did not, for example, necessarily envision the manner in which a proposed high-rise development on the New Westminster waterfront will proceed. Yet the proposed development achieves what the words of the *Official Community Plan* envision. Perhaps a visual representation, or detailed guidelines, would have presented the potential options earlier in the process. Will this eliminate conflict? Not necessarily, but it does provide a vehicle for discussion, understanding, and a touchstone to the past that allows for the maintenance of a consistent vision.

Development also fails to maintain a connection to the urban design vision of New Westminster as development proposals pass between departments for review. While interdepartmental conflict is low at the City of New Westminster, the development process as organized is not integrated. The process begins in the planning department and initial reactions are received from the Consultative Design Committee and Design Review Panel. From this stage, the development proposal cycles from department to department as each details their requirements or makes their recommendations. The danger of such a disjointed process is that it can put greater emphasis on the technical aspects of a development rather than its performance, to the detriment of its form and its response to the urban design vision.

Eventually, a proposal that may have worked well from a design point of view is altered, perhaps sanitized, losing its sense of character and identity. Without a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach, good design can suffer a death from a thousand cuts. Instead of working together for a well-designed development that meets the requirements of all fields (planning, engineering, police, building), the segregated approach results in a project that meets the minimum standards of all departments but achieves greatness in none.

The final criticism of the existing design review process is that the APC is not bound by the *Official Community Plan*. This is highly problematic, as the body that acts as the final review of all projects before it is presented to City Council is not bound to the vision found within the *Official Community Plan*. Instead, the APC is bound solely to the community. And while this may allow for the APC to be representative of the community's wishes, it provides the body no framework within which to make its recommendations and decisions. This allows for swings in APC decisions that do not remain true to design vision of the *Official Community Plan*.

## conclusion

There is a need and an opportunity for the City of New Westminster to improve the level and quality of participation in urban design, from visioning through to implementation and ongoing citizen involvement. Public participation efforts in New Westminster's design visioning process have attempted to involve many voices. However, the level of involvement has rarely moved beyond gestures of tokenism (as defined by Arnstein, 1969), certainly not to an extent that has resulted in a sense of ownership of a design vision. As such, a strong urban design vision has not been created. This token involvement of the public is demonstrated to an even greater extent in the design review process. While there is an appearance of accessibility in the process, the reality is that there is a very limited opportunity for the public to be involved beyond being informed. The design review process as it is currently structured does not therefore allow



**an aerial view of new westminster**  
**-source: city of new westminster graphics**  
**database**



residents to participate in the dialogue concerning the extent to which developments achieve the vision for New Westminster.

Without a structure that lays out actions to achieve that vision, furthermore, it is difficult for developers to strive to meet that vision, and it offers no context with which to assess how well a development responds to the vision. Finally, there exists no framework and no process within City agencies or planning policies to evaluate the response of development to the urban design vision in order to ensure the connection between the two is maintained. The following chapter responds to these issues and offers recommendations to improve participation in urban design, and to ensure that levels of participation remain high through the visioning stage through to the implementation and maintenance of that vision.



## 5.0 Recommendations

This chapter presents recommendations for improving the participatory design process in New Westminster, from visioning through implementation to the perpetual involvement of citizens and ongoing renewal of the process. The recommendations found in this section are not reinventions of the wheel. Rather, they are applications of practices that have been found to work in similar situations, tailored to fit the needs of the City of New Westminster. They are drawn from the theory and case studies presented in chapters 2 and 3.

The key recommendations are as follows:

- Improve participation in the creation of an urban design vision;
- Translate the vision into regulations and guidelines;
- Create an integrated Design Review Board;
- Maintain public involvement beyond implementation.

This chapter is organized into three sections, as the recommendations are approached at different scales. The first section deals with the initial stage of the participatory design process, **creating the urban design vision**. The second section deals with the more practical aspects of the participatory design process, **implementing the urban design vision**. The final section looks forward and is therefore concerned with **maintaining the urban design vision**.

The different approaches are modeled loosely on the *Official Community Plan* process. The **visioning** stage is dealt with on a community-wide basis, with broader principles. The **implementation** stage, much like the approach to the neighbourhood plans that evolved from the city-wide *Official Community Plan*, focuses more specifically on the individual neighbourhoods. **Maintaining** the vision once again requires a community-wide effort.

Before further examination of the recommendations, however, comes this caveat. Any participatory process, while essential, is not perfect nor is it an end in itself. There is always a role for specialists in the urban design field, and in many cases they must be allowed to act out their role and sometimes make decisions that override the desires of the public on technical grounds. Participation, furthermore, is carried out not with guarantees of a specific result, but as a matter of effort and direction. Participation is a dialogue, not a poll. It will not necessarily satisfy the expectations of the majority. It will, however, enable different views to be presented and discussed. With this understanding in mind, the four key recommendations are presented in greater detail in the following three sections.



***mixing old and new in downtown new  
westminster***  
***-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database***

## creating the urban design vision; recommendations

The objective of this aspect of the participatory design process, creating the urban design vision, is broad in its scope. Much like the *Official Community Plan* process, it is dealing with the broad principles that shape the future development of the entire community. The development of such a vision therefore requires the participation of a wide section of the community in order to be representative. It must therefore be undertaken at a city-wide scale.

### *1. Improve Participation in the Creation of an Urban Design Vision*

#### *WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT*

The value of public participation and the relevance of creating an urban design vision were discussed in chapter 2. Kevin Lynch perhaps states it best when he argues that there is intimate connection between the forms of places and the values and needs of their users (1960). For reasons such as this, participation in urban design is very valuable.

As an aspect of such participation, it is essential to broaden the visioning process to reach out to new and different groups that have previously been excluded, by accident or by design, from public processes. The City can recruit these participants using multiple approaches, including the internet, school presentations, neighbourhood planning offices, and a variety of public forums. Particular effort should be made to recruit residents of the community and neighbourhood who have typically not been involved in civic activities because of age, language barriers, or because their economic needs compromise the flexibility that is required of participatory democracy. Many may continue to have minimal involvement due to a lack of time or resources. It is important nevertheless to keep them informed and offer them an avenue by which to respond if an issue captures their attention.

The City of New Westminster has stated a commitment to public participation, both in words and in practice. The visioning process has some strengths as demonstrated in both the Mainland and Queensborough *Official Community Plans*. The public process behind the Mainland's *Official Community Plan* involved a series of three public events, including an Issues Forum, a Community Planning Workshop, and a Design Charrette. The purpose of these events was to formulate a community vision and a list of actions. The Queensborough *Official Community Plan* process attempted to reach out to a broad segment



**involving children in design**  
-source: the co-design group 2005

of the community through presentations, public meetings and a design workshop. The input received was used to create a framework for the *Official Community Plan*.

This is not to say, though, that the process cannot be improved upon. The following is a series of recommendations to improve the quality of public participation in creating an urban design vision.

Both the University of British Columbia's *University Boulevard Public Space Workshop* series and the process behind the development of Seattle's *Comprehensive Plan* serve as precedents for comprehensive public participation in a planning process.

### *SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS*

**1. Establish a Steering Committee under the direction of the Planning Division, whose sole purpose is to organize, coordinate and oversee the visioning process:**

- Involve community members as well as City staff not only in the creation of the plan, but also the planning process that leads to the plan;
- Create a terms of reference for the Committee to act as the monitor of the visioning process;
- Develop an outline for the visioning process;
- Invite participants from the community, including residents, business owners, and interest groups;
- Coordinate outreach and process logistics;
- Best practice examples: University Boulevard Public Space Workshop, Maple Ridge Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative;
- Techniques: user group, visioning workshop.

**2. Reach out to a broad range of constituents to be involved in the creation of the design vision:**

- Personally invite and contact members of the community through as many avenues as possible (see techniques below);
- Provide drop-in centres where community members and groups can learn of upcoming planning processes;



***residents involved in a planning process  
-source: city of kamloops 2004***

- Best practice examples: City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Downtown New Westminster Action Plan;
- Techniques: newspaper supplement, open house, architecture centre, neighbourhood planning office, community internet site.

3. Help residents visualize what they have in their community and what they want their community to become:

- Organize workshop series to enhance residents with a background knowledge of their community;
- Using graphic and visualization tools, have residents visualize what they like about their community and other communities;
- Tour the community as a group to document its physical form and inventory its strengths and weaknesses;
- Educate community members about planning options;
- Provide options for different planning outcomes;
- Describe and visually portray the positive and negative consequences of particular planning choices;
- Best practice example: East Clayton Design Charrette;
- Techniques: briefing workshop, visioning workshop, community planning forum, community profile, elevation montage, three-dimensional modeling, visual preference surveys, choice catalogues, KEEPs, design charrettes, feeling maps, R/UDATs.



*illustrating possibilities*

*-source: city of new westminster graphics database*

4. Record and illustrate the community's vision for urban design:

- Capture the will and desires, the vision, of the community in written form;
- Translate that vision into both written and visual forms;
- Clearly portray the positive and negative consequences of the vision;
- Produce an illustrated draft *urban design vision statement* as the product of the visualization process and present it to the community for feedback;

- Incorporate the feedback in a finalized version of the *urban design vision statement*;
- Broadly distribute the *urban design vision statement* throughout the community;
- Best practice examples: City of Surrey Design Charrette, East Clayton Design Charrette, Lower Twelfth Area Plan;
- Techniques: three-dimensional modeling, KEEPs, review sessions.

**5. Establish a body to act as the steward of the urban design vision:**

- Introduce a new Design Review Board;
- Develop a strong mandate to guide the Review Board;
- Charge them with the mandate to apply the design guidelines and principle during the design review process in order to uphold the *vision statement*
- Best practice examples: Maple Ridge Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative, City of Seattle's Design Review Process, City of Portland Central City Design Guidelines;
- Technique: user groups.

**6. Adopt the urban design vision as legally binding:**

- Circulate the *vision statement* broadly throughout the community;
- Entrench the vision within the *Official Community Plan*;
- Ensure all project applications to the Planning Division meet the requirements of the *urban design vision statement* before proceeding to subsequent stages of the development process;
- Best practice examples: City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan, City of Portland Central City Design Guidelines.

## *ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES*

The Planning Division of the Development Services Department will take the lead role in coordinating the visualization process. The role of planning departments in general has been to develop the principles on which future development is based. The Planning Division is also a critical actor in the preliminary stage of the development process; currently, potential applicants approach Planning Division staff to determine whether their proposal will meet the requirements of the *Official Community Plan* before progressing through the development process to design review. Staff will need to expand that responsibility to ensure that potential applicants also meet the requirements of the urban design vision before allowing the application to proceed.

Other actors in the process include members of the community, particularly those involved in the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has a significant leadership role as an oversight committee in organizing and monitoring the process that leads to the creation of the design vision. Council also plays an important role, as it is their responsibility to entrench the vision as defined, thus shaping future development in the City. Council must also take an active part in defending that vision if it is to remain relevant.

## *TROUBLESHOOTING*

A potential risk to the visioning exercise can be the failure to maintain a connection to the vision. Failure would not necessarily be the fault of the City. Often, the connection to the vision is lost within the community. Community members who were not part of the visioning process may not support the vision. Some community members who accepted the vision in theory may not support implementation because they did not fully understand the implications. There are two consequences to this outcome: either the vision is lost, or there is conflict that results in community division, both of which have been witnessed in the City of New Westminster.

There are solutions to these concerns. In order to address those who did not take part in the visioning process yet reject its outcome, an attempt must be made to bring them into the process from the beginning. Identifying “dissidents” at the outset and inviting them into the process will not subvert them but capture their input. This strategy will not succeed alone, however. The next step is to widely and repeatedly circulate information about the visioning exercise. Once the process is complete, again circulate the outcome widely. At the very least, the process as recommended above will be clearly defensible in the face of opposition.

The participatory process should not be closed-ended. Leaving avenues of involvement open throughout an ongoing consultation process ensures the voices of New Westminster residents always have a place to be heard, helping to maintain a connection to the vision.

The *Smart Growth on the Ground* initiative in Maple Ridge, BC, can act as an excellent case study in this regard. The initiative included the voices of previously excluded constituents. The primary tool was a “Project Committee” of citizens, Maple Ridge District staff and organizational representatives (as well as a number of resource people) that acted as the “keeper” of the participatory process, ensuring it respected its integrity throughout. In other words, they acted as stewards of the vision.

The best approach in order to deal with the second problem, where those who accept the vision will not support it in its built form (as they may have had a different interpretation), is illustration. The Planning Division should therefore ensure that the visioning process is graphically-oriented. Using photographs, modeling, and drawings to illustrate the outcome of the vision can ideally prevent conflict in the future because the consequences are clearly understood. The City of Surrey Design Charrette provides a case study for this illustrated approach to planning.

Another concern that must be addressed is what happens when the members of a community put forth a vision that is contrary to the principles associated with good planning. In order to prevent such situations, it is the responsibility of Planning staff to educate the community residents beforehand. If this approach fails, the only recourse is to present the possible consequences of their vision so an informed decision can be made. This is one of the risks associated with participation, and takes repeated effort and education to overcome it when necessary.

More techniques aimed at preserving the continuity of the design vision will be presented later in this chapter.

Finally, it is important to note that it is impossible to satisfy everyone. Participation never guarantees (nor is it ever intended to guarantee) that the majority will be satisfied, nor should it allow that the loudest voice will be the one voice that is heard. It does, however, result in a process that has credibility and integrity, and is therefore defensible in the face of opposition.

## implementing the urban design vision; recommendations

Creating an urban design vision is only the start. Implementing the vision is the next important step. The participatory planning process can be frustrating if results are not apparent, and can be tantamount to setting up the public for failure. In order for a vision to be successfully implemented, it requires a strategy for action incorporating two elements. The first is a set of principles or guidelines which specify how to meet the vision. The second is the creation of an advisory body to act as the steward of the vision and monitor how development projects respect the vision.

This aspect of the participatory process is much narrower in its scope. Much like the process of developing the neighbourhood plans that arose from the *Official Community Plan*, this aspect of the participatory design process will put greater emphasis on the neighbourhood scale.

## *II. Translate the Vision into Regulations and Guidelines*

### *WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT*

The importance of translating the urban design vision into practical principles and guidelines was illustrated in chapter 2. Good urban design requires a vision. As Kelbaugh and other design theorists explain, however, successful urban design requires not only a strong vision. Successful design also requires a framework consisting of principles and guidelines that are entrenched, quantifiable, and accepted by the community. Design principles and guidelines go hand in hand. They are intended as tools with which to achieve urban design excellence. Principles are meant to articulate and clarify the public's intent in site design and built form, and guidelines are intended to detail the steps to achieve the public's intent. The City of Richmond's Development Permit Guidelines provides a good example without being over-prescriptive.

Design principles and guidelines can also serve as useful tools in the review of planning applications. Good design principles and guidelines are not arbitrary nor are they vague. Rather, they are detailed and unambiguous, yet flexible enough to allow for creativity. Both the cities of Portland and Seattle serve as examples of how design guidelines can achieve the vision of a comprehensive, long-range plan, and Portland in particular provides a best case example of providing flexible guidelines, doing so through an



iterative process where the public has input into their development. Thus, principles and guidelines can help to avoid conflict in the development process.

The City of New Westminster has developed voluntary guidelines for some areas such as the historic Queen's Park residential area and the Twelfth Street commercial district. An outcome of the *Official Community Plan* process was what were meant to be design guidelines but are really a series of indistinct design objectives that apply to the various development areas of the City. New Westminster's graphically illustrated neighbourhood specific zoning bylaw is a positive step towards indicating a preferred form of development in single family neighbourhoods. More can be accomplished, however, in order to provide design principles and guidelines that graphically illustrate a clear agenda and set of development policies that are attractive to both residents and developers.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Develop design principles and guidelines:

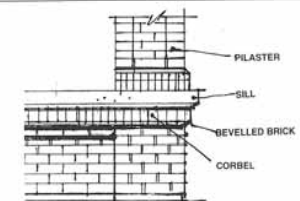
- Direct planning staff, in consultation with the development community and the Steering Committee, to translate the urban design vision into design principles and guidelines;
- Develop guidelines that are clear on the intent and objectives, yet eschew technical language and allow for flexibility in the creative details;
- Identify city-wide guidelines as broader guidelines;
- Develop neighbourhood design guidelines that are more detailed and specific;
- Best practice examples: City of Richmond Development Permit Guidelines, City of Portland Design Guidelines, Site Design Manual for BC Communities.

### 2. Educate the community on the design guidelines:

- Utilize outreach methods similar to those adopted for the visioning process to reach out to members of the community;
- Provide open houses in each neighbourhood where community members can review design guidelines;

#### 3.9.3 BRICK:

<b>PERMITTED:</b>
• Common brick in traditional sizes and colours
• Highly textured brick surfaces, employing such masonry devices as: corbeling, inset panels w/ half & full brick, rusticated "clinker brick", sandblasted brick facade sculpture
• Modern brick forms and sizes in traditional colours
<b>NOT PERMITTED:</b>
• Artificial brick facing: e.g. Z-BRICK™, embossed "brick" paneling, etc.
• Pastel coloured modern brick



CREATIVE USE OF BOLD TEXTURE

**example of an illustrated design guideline**

**-source: city of Kamloops (no date)**

- Best practice examples: City of Portland Design Guidelines, City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan;
- Techniques: newspaper supplement, open houses, presentations, architecture centres, neighbourhood planning offices, community internet sites.

### 3. Illustrate how the design guidelines will translate into actual design:

- Graphically illustrate possible design scenarios to demonstrate how design guidelines will affect actual developments;
- Best practice example: City of Surrey Design Charrette;
- Techniques: design charrette, urban design studio, R/UDAT, review sessions.

### 4. Ensure design guidelines are legally binding:

- Entrench design guidelines into the *OCP* and neighbourhood plans;
- Best practice examples: City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan, City of Richmond Development Permit Guidelines.

## *ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES*

City planning staff is responsible for translating the urban design vision into design guidelines. This will potentially involve hiring consultants, possibly university students, to provide graphic design expertise that may not be available in-house. It will also involve some coordination and cooperation with the development community.

The design review committee will be involved later in the process in reviewing projects against Design Guidelines. Planning and Building staff will be involved in enforcing the guidelines. City Council also plays a role as the final decision makers on design issues of the design guidelines, as they are the final decision makers on *Official Community Plan* issues as well.

## *TROUBLESHOOTING*

If the guidelines are not enforced, the urban design vision risks being lost. The solution involves creating a body that will act as the steward of the vision and the design guidelines, such as a design review board. It may also be necessary to dedicate a member of staff within the Planning Division to the task of assessing a project's merits against the design guidelines, much as staff currently do with the Zoning Bylaw.

Guidelines can also become too restrictive, stifling creativity. There should be some flexibility in how the guidelines are enforced, and they should be open for review and modification if the will of the community changes or the guidelines are having a negative impact on the creation of interesting buildings and places. Guidelines should dictate how a building fits into its context, but should not prescribe how it should look, focusing on performance rather than technical details. Both Portland and Richmond are successful examples guidelines that eschew excessive technical detail.

### *III. Create an Integrated Design Review Board*

#### *WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT*

The relevance of the citizen's advisory and review board has been supported in the literature concerning participatory urban design (as discussed in Chapter 2), and demonstrated in case studies of Seattle and Portland. Review boards act as a resource for planning departments and City Councils when evaluating the merits of a development project, but more importantly they can act, when used properly, as stewards of a community vision for urban design.

As part of a process of ongoing participation, New Westminster's advisory review boards should become an element of truly participatory design review. Their structure should change so that they are more representative of the community, consisting of some professionals and some citizens. Representation should be both place- and interest-based.

Establishing an Integrated Design Advisory Committee that deals with technical and design issues simultaneously can also streamline the approvals process by avoiding redundancies and shortening review times. The City's technical departments (Engineering, Building, and Planning) should therefore be part of

the design advisory committee. Including the technical development committee as part of the design review process, underscored by the urban design vision, principles and guidelines will ensure all departments, board members, and citizens have the same information, bringing everyone into the design process so that the decisions that are made meet everyone's objectives.

The City of New Westminster has a number of advisory boards and technical committees that meet regularly to discuss design and land use issues throughout the development approvals process. There is, therefore, an existing level of coordination. By combining these roles into one board, the development process can be streamlined.

### *SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS*

#### **1. Introduce a new design review board to act as a steward of the urban design vision:**

- Establish an Integrated Design Review Board (IDRB) with a clear mandate and framework of responsibilities;
- Combine the roles of the Advisory Planning Commission, Consultative Design Committee, and Design Review Panel into the sole Integrated Design Review Board;
- Charge it with a mandate to be the sole review board for land use and design issues in New Westminster;
- Create a permanent staff position in the Planning Division of Development Services to assist and liaise with the IDRB;
- Include the City's technical committee (Engineering, Building, Planning) as well as citizen representatives;
- Best practice examples: Maple Ridge Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative, City of Seattle's Design Review Process;
- Technique: user group.

#### **2. Clearly define the mandate, procedures and duties of the Integrated Design Review Board:**

- Develop a mission statement that specifies the purpose of the IDRB;
- Provide training sessions for new IDRB members upon appointment to the board;

The purpose of Portland's Design Review Commission is to "provide guidance and expertise on urban design and architecture and maintain and enhance Portland's historical and architectural heritage."

- Educate board members on the mandate, tasks and responsibilities of the IDRB;
- Prepare board members on the design review issues they will encounter (scale, siting, etc.);
- Require the IDRB to review design and land use within the context of the *Official Community Plan*;
- Best practice examples: City of Seattle's Design Review Process, City of Portland Design Commission;
- Techniques: briefing workshop, visioning workshop, review session, community planning forum.

### 3. Diversify the role and membership of the Integrated Design Review Board:

- Structure a minimum ten-member board;
- Develop new criteria for the selection of IDRB members, who are to be chosen by council;
- Include a mix of city staff, professionals, and citizens;
- Include a mix of perspectives;
- Introduce interest-based professional representation:
  - Landscape architect, architect, land use planner, engineer, developer;
- Introduce place-based, geographically citizen representation:
  - Minimum of one representative from each area of the City;
- Provide staff support, including a planning staff member (facilitator) and a clerk (note-taker), as non-voting members of the IDRB;
- Best practice example: City of Seattle's Design Review Process, City of Portland Design Commission;
- Technique: user group.

Steps in Seattle's Design Review Process:

-Department of Planning and Development sets up a public meeting with the Design Review Board, general public, and project proponents;

-The project proponents present information about the site, surrounding context, development objectives and alternative design concepts;

-Design Review Board members identify key design guidelines, and incorporate relevant public comments in their design guidance;

-DPD staff summarizes and circulates the design guidance;

-Project proponent incorporates recommendations into the design;

-Design Review Board reconvenes to consider the revised project design;

-After a presentation of the design, recommendations by City staff and an opportunity for public comment, the Board offers its official recommendation to the DPD;

-The final decision on the design review component is made by the Director of the DPD.

**4. Open Integrated Design Review Board meetings to the public:**

- Inform community members of meeting times and agendas in advance;
- Clarify the role of the public as delegates vs. the role of the IDRB as representatives;
- Best practice examples: Maple Ridge Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative, City of Seattle's Design Review Process;
- Techniques: newspaper supplement, community internet site.

**5. Improve communication and participation among developers, neighbours and the City in the design of new projects:**

- Set up public meetings early in the project application process with the IDRB, general public, and project applicant where the applicant presents their objectives and design concepts;
- IDRB members identify key design guidelines and incorporate relevant public comments into their design guidance;
- Applicant incorporates comments and presents revised design to the IDRB, followed by comments by City staff and community members;
- Best practice example: City of Seattle's Design Review Process.

**6. Entrench the authority of the Integrated Design Review Board's recommendations:**

- Authorize IDRB to make recommendations to Council through Development Services;
- Structure the review process such that if the Review Board's recommendation is offered by a majority of members, the Director may override it only if s/he believes the Board has
  - Erred;
  - Exceeded its authority; or
  - Required changes that contravene legal requirements (such as Building Code issues).
- Best practice example: City of Seattle's Design Review Process.

## *ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES*

The current approach to design and land use review falls under the responsibility of the Planning Division of Development Services. It is proposed that the new design review process remain the responsibility of Planning, as the initial stages of the development and project approval process are part of its mandate. The planner will continue to screen developments in the preliminary stages of the development process to ensure compatibility with the *Official Community Plan* and the urban design vision before allowing it to proceed. Planning staff will also continue in their role as staff supporters of the design review process. The planner's role will increase, however, as they will also be required to manage the participation of other departments in the design review process.

The responsibilities of the other departments should not change drastically. They will, however, be required to adopt new methods of coordination and cooperation with other departments and citizens. It is the role of the community member that will increase dramatically. More citizens will be involved, and as stewards of the urban design vision they must take on a greater role in the design review process.

Council will retain responsibility for approving the members of the IDRb, but it is recommended that the selection process change slightly. Development Services should take responsibility for the vetting process, in consultation with other departments, particularly engineering. Those candidates who wish to be IDRb members should apply to Development Services. Names of recommended candidates will then be forwarded to Council for approval.

## *TROUBLESHOOTING*

Problems may arise in creating an effective Integrated Design Review Board. First of all, there is a risk that staff, Council, or developers will not pay attention to the comments of the IDRb. Another risk may be that the IDRb makes recommendations outside of its mandate to base comments on the design vision and guidelines. A frequent criticism of design review boards is that design review often becomes self-centred, not public-centred (a risk in any public process), particularly if the review board has political leanings. Architects and other design professionals are often concerned that design review is being carried out by board members who do have design expertise, but are granted the authority to overrule those who have that expertise. This speaks to the basic question of who has the best understanding of the design needs of a community: professionals or community members. The truth lies somewhere in the middle.

One solution is to develop a clearly defined framework and mandate for the IDRb to follow. Included in this framework, aside from details regarding the tasks and responsibilities of the IDRb, are the design vision and

guidelines from which the Board will respond to projects. A right of appeal to the Director of Development Services, similar to that used by the City of Seattle, gives recourse to developers and ensures a level of accountability on the part of the IDRB.

Establishing longer terms for board members, as well as staggering their appointments so at least 2 members are appointed or reappointed every year, will provide an opportunity to revisit the IDRB's mandate on an annual basis. This and other recommendations to maintain the connection with the urban design vision will be introduced in greater detail in the next section.

A final problem is that the design process may become unmanageable, bogged down with too much public comment. This is one of the chief criticisms and main obstacles of implementing a successful participatory process, and it is a legitimate argument. An advantage of improving the public's access to the design review process, however, is that it provides a forum for people to voice their concerns. The benefit of such a forum is that if it is properly facilitated, it allows for a debate that is structured yet transparent.



## **maintaining the urban design vision; recommendations**

Implementing principles and guidelines is an important step to maintaining the urban design vision. The design principles and guidelines provide a measure with which the performance of the participatory design process can be measured, and serve as a standard with which to monitor the City's progress towards realizing an urban vision. In order to guarantee the urban design vision's continuity and viability over the long-term, it will be necessary to undertake strategies that will develop a broad, community-wide understanding of that vision, and establish a Steering Committee to oversee that process.

### ***IV. Ensure the Continuity of the Design Vision***

#### ***WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT***

Ensuring the continuity of the design vision is the best way to guarantee it is successfully implemented, particularly in the face of conflict. Conflict is a common feature of the development process, often a result of the failure to maintain a connection to the vision. An analysis of situations in New Westminster where development projects that achieved the objectives of the urban design vision faced significant public opposition highlights this fact. This section presents techniques that will contribute to the continuity of the urban design vision, clearly illustrate its intent and consequence, make certain there is an understanding of the vision throughout the community, and ensure that potential developers are addressing the vision in every project that comes to the City of New Westminster.

Preparing the stewards of the urban design vision is a key element to preserving that connection and continuity. The Seattle Design Review Evaluation Report (2002) comments on the importance of adequately preparing design review board members in a variety of areas, including board mandate, tasks and responsibilities, design review issues, meeting facilitation, teamwork, and public involvement.

## *SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS*



***a vision can be portrayed through models***

***-source: city of Vancouver 2004***

### **1. Present the urban design vision back to the community:**

- Graphically portray the outcomes and consequences of the vision and report it back to the community;
- Ensure the vision is accessible for review through various sources;
- Best case examples: Lower Twelfth Area Plan, City of Surrey Design Charrette, East Clayton Design Charrette;
- Techniques: newspaper supplement, open house, architecture centre, neighbourhood planning office, community internet site, three-dimensional modeling, KEEPs, review session.

### **2. Develop and cultivate a collective memory and understanding of the urban design vision:**

- Maintain awareness and ensure continuity of the urban design vision through annual workshops;
- Create local ownership of the participatory urban design process;
- Retain the Steering Committee as an oversight committee responsible for reviewing and updating the visioning process
- Ensure the visioning process and vision statement remain living documents;
- Connect the visioning process to the *Official Community Plan* review so that it is revised every 5 years to meet the current needs of the City;
- Best practice example: Maple Ridge Smart Growth on the Ground Initiative;
- Techniques: review session, community internet site, newspaper supplement, briefing workshop, visioning workshop.

### **3. Provide training for Integrated Design Review Board members:**

- Appoint members at an annual workshop that provides an opportunity to restate the urban design vision, review past projects, and discuss in what ways projects met or did not meet the vision;

- Organize workshops for new members, existing members, and members of the public, to be organized by the Steering Committee and planning staff;
- Provide training sessions for new IDRB members upon appointment to the board;
- Educate board members on the mandate, tasks and responsibilities of the IDRB, and in meeting facilitation, teamwork, and public involvement;
- Best practice example: City of Seattle's Design Review Process;
- Techniques: briefing workshop, visioning workshop, review session, community planning forum.

#### 4. Stagger citizen appointments to the Integrated Design Review Board:

- Each board member (aside from City Staff) serves 3-year terms;
- Appoint at least two new or reappoint two serving board members every year.

### *ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES*

As steward of the urban design vision, the Integrated Design Review Board takes on a significant role in maintaining the connection to the urban design vision. Its principle role is to assess development proposals in relation to the urban design vision, using the design guidelines as a measure. While the IDRB is not solely responsible for representing the vision, it is the voice of the community in the design process.

Planning staff also have an important role. The Planning Division is not only responsible for capturing and implementing the community's vision; it also manages the interaction between the intentions of the development community and the wishes of the community. Finally, the Planning Division is responsible for the management of the Integrated Design Review Board, providing it with the necessary resources and coordinating the members' selection and training process. The Steering Committee will oversee this final responsibility. The Committee also oversees the review of the visioning process.

Council has an even more critical role in ensuring the continuity of the urban design vision. Final approval for most development projects is under their authority. In the end, therefore, it is their decision whether or not to uphold the urban design vision.

## *TROUBLESHOOTING*

Strategies concerned with ensuring the community understands the intentions and consequences of the urban design vision were mentioned previously. The recommendations in this section are concerned with keeping the vision current and at the forefront of the development approvals process.

The purpose of developing a process to maintain a connection to and ensure the continuity of the urban design vision is to prevent the vision being sacrificed when conflict enters the development process. Often, in New Westminster and elsewhere, community members who may have agreed with the urban design vision at the visioning stage no longer support it at implementation.

The danger is that it may therefore become more expedient to approve projects that do not conform to the urban design vision. While this may have short-term benefits, there will be negative impacts for the City in the long-term if the urban design vision becomes irrelevant. It must instead become the most relevant measure in assessing the suitability of proposed development projects in New Westminster.

Fostering a collective understanding of the urban design vision and revisiting it on a regular basis provides City staff with a means to keep community members, members of the design review board, City Council and the development community familiar with the criteria for which development projects will be judged in New Westminster.

## **conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to present a series of recommendations with the goal of improving the participatory design process in New Westminster. It recommends approaches that move beyond the “listening” characteristic of earlier public design exercises, and moves towards participation in realizing an urban design vision, a vision that leads to action and implementation.

These are not new ideas. Rather, they are examples of techniques and approaches that have been found to work in other situations where public participation was warranted. This chapter, furthermore, is just a beginning. More work is needed to expand upon and work out the details of how these approaches should be implemented in the City of New Westminster.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Redevelopment is occurring at a rapid pace in the City of New Westminster, and many residents, both new and old, hope to see the City capitalize on the boom that has characterized development in the Lower Mainland for the past several decades. Yet there is also an inherent resistance to change within much of the community, as many are concerned that development is altering the present form of the City without a vision for the future. This concern has been reflected in conflicts and community division over the form of development in the City.

The purpose of this project has been to present techniques of participatory urban design that will develop a strong urban design vision that resonates throughout the New Westminster community. Developing an urban design vision that community members accept and feel they have taken a role in creating will help alleviate much of this conflict and division. This project therefore offers a recommendation for a process to engage the residents and professionals of New Westminster in the development of an urban design vision, suggests the creation of design principles and guidelines to address the vision at the project-level, and proposes a structure for a new Design Review Board to act as the steward of this vision.

The fundamental theoretical assumption of this work is that the best way to build confidence amongst the citizenry is to show that developers, planners and designers are ready to listen to the concerns, goals and ideas of community members, and are willing to involve the members of the community to achieve those goals.

As the City of New Westminster is about to review the composition and mandate of its advisory bodies, as well as update its *Official Community Plan*, this project is well-timed to contribute insights and direction to that review. This work is only the beginning, however. To suggest that the techniques put forth in this work are ready to be implemented would be premature. A more complex and nuanced strategy, considering in greater detail the implications and costs of the techniques, is required in order for the recommendations found in Chapter 5 to be realistically implemented. The development of this strategy will be undertaken in the near future as a follow up to this research.

Nevertheless, the City of New Westminster has a mandate for change. With that comes a terrific opportunity to involve its citizens in a participatory process that will offer them an equal role in designing the future of their community.



***the trapp block, downtown new  
westminster circa 1970's  
-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database***



***the trapp block, downtown new  
westminster today  
-source: city of new westminster graphics  
database***



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