HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DESIGN IN DOWNTOWN SOUTH, VANCOUVER: A POLICY ANALYSIS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at how the City of Vancouver is dealing with urban design issues in the emerging high density residential community of Downtown South. Specifically, the thesis asks if land use policies, zoning and design guidelines for the new community encourage two basic principles of successful high density communities; pedestrian-orientation and diversity. These two elements were chosen from a literature review which points to pedestrian-orientation and diversity as two essential design elements in such communities. To investigate this question Downtown South’s land use policies, zoning and design guidelines are reviewed and analyzed. Also, two recently constructed buildings are observed to see if these design elements are promoted. In addition interviews conducted with city planners, architects and developers are presented to aid in evaluation of the policies and their resultant landscape. It is found that the land use policies, zoning and design guidelines for Downtown South envision pedestrian-orientated design and physical, as well as social, diversity for the community. This is illustrated by the policies requiring a constant low-rise street wall with ground-oriented units, a detailed streetscape design with a profusion of landscaping, a mix of land uses in the community, encouragement of social housing and heritage building retention. The policies were also found to be generally appropriate for the creation of a vibrant high density residential community by both architects and developers involved with projects in the area. Weaknesses of the policies are also identified, such as the issues of security and noise pollution not being adequately addressed. Also it is found that the intended building and streetscape design in the design guidelines does not always translate into built form. One of the buildings analyzed adheres to the vision of Downtown South much more than the other, although both fully comply with all regulations in place. Implications for policy are that although the land use policies, zoning and design guidelines do include the essential characteristics of pedestrian-orientation and diversity, they must be strictly enforced, applied universally to all projects and properly address the important issues of security and noise pollution if a safe, livable neighbourhood with a strong identity and identifiable character is to emerge.
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1. Chapter One - Thesis Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction
The subject of this thesis is high density residential design. I will conduct an analysis of the redevelopment of Downtown South, an emerging high density residential neighbourhood in the City of Vancouver’s Downtown Peninsula (see Map 1).

The catalysts sparking reconsideration of this area were interest in rejuvenating Granville Street\(^1\) and a reconsideration of the City’s strategy on downtown housing. The desire by the downtown community to re-establish Granville as a major commercial street caused City Council to initiate a study of the area. At the same time, Council adopted resolutions in the Central Area Plan to create more housing in the downtown core. The planning department recommended that the only way to turn Granville Street around was to develop the area around it into residential use, providing a client-base for the street. This recommendation was adopted by Council in 1987 and started the Downtown South community planning process.

The resulting community plan outlined the creation of a predominantly residential high density neighbourhood with a component of mixed-use. In order to ensure livability in a high density setting the city adopted a plan emphasizing strong urban design principles. The community plan included a detailed set of draft design guidelines which stressed creating a three to seven storey street wall with many doors and windows facing the street, providing high density with towers,

\(^1\) Granville Street is the major north-south street in Downtown Vancouver. It serves as the main public transit corridor, with a large proportion of the city’s bus routes running along the street. There is also a portion of the street designated as a pedestrian mall in which only transit buses and taxis are permitted. This portion has not been as successful as hoped and in recent years the street has become the home of street youth, pan-handlers and pornography shops.
abundant landscaping and clear definition of public and private space. These guidelines were subsequently adopted and amended over time, while retaining their original objectives.

Map 1: Location of Downtown South in Vancouver

1.2 Problem Statement

I will evaluate whether or not the design and development policies for Downtown South will help to create a successful high density community. I will specifically be focusing on two aspects of urban design: pedestrian-orientated design and physical diversity in building design. I have chosen these two aspects after reviewing current literature on high density development and through personal observation. Repeatedly these two elements appear as essential components of healthy urban communities.

My problem statement is:

Do the Downtown South land use policies, zoning and design guidelines encourage the creation of a high density residential community that is pedestrian-
oriented and diverse consistent with the principles of designing successful high density communities?

1.3 Rationale

The need to create successful high density development in Vancouver is significant in light of the City's increasing population, concern for preservation of the natural environment, high levels of pollution and high cost of urban land. A successful high density community will make the most efficient use of resources while maintaining a high quality of livability.

Policies set out in the final report of the City of Vancouver Task Force on Atmospheric Change entitled Clouds of Change and the City of Vancouver's Central Area Plan stress an increasing awareness of sustainable, efficient development and preservation of the natural environment (City of Vancouver Task Force on Atmospheric Change, 1990 & City of Vancouver Planning Department 1991a). These documents recommend high density, socially diverse, pedestrian-oriented urban development with a mix of uses.

Outlined benefits of high density development include:

- Preservation of natural and agricultural land on the urban fringe
- Encouragement of transportation modes alternative to the automobile
- Reduction of air pollution
- Efficient use of expensive urban land
- Creating vibrant, active communities
- Enriching the quality of life for neighbourhood residents and the city as a whole
Careful consideration of urban design in high density residential areas is crucial. The design of high density areas must take many different factors into consideration. Each city, and even different areas within a city, will have a different set of circumstances to consider. These differences arise from a specific set of historical, cultural, social, environmental and economic conditions as well as future goals.

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objectives of my thesis are as follows:

- Define successful high density urban community and its relationship to urban design
- Examine the importance of pedestrian-oriented design and physical diversity in high density communities.
- Analyze land use policies, zoning and design guidelines for Downtown South and projects developed under these policies in light of findings of a literature review on the role of pedestrian-oriented design and physical diversity in high density communities
- Recommend ways in which Downtown South’s policies can be improved to help in the creation a successful high density residential area

1.5 Methodology

In order to answer the above stated research question and achieve the research objectives several different types of information gathering techniques will be utilized. First planning, architectural, sociological and environmental literature will be reviewed. Literature on what constitutes a successful high density community, urban design and the relationship between the two will be
considered. Sources of information included books, journal articles, newspaper articles, papers and conferences notes.

Next, the policies related to the redevelopment of Downtown South will be reviewed. This includes municipal documents related specifically to planning in the Downtown South neighbourhood as well as the whole downtown area and the GVRD.

Key informant interviews conducted in person and over the telephone with persons involved with Downtown South from both the public and private sectors will be presented next. Interviewees included City of Vancouver planners and policy makers and professional architects, developers and planners who have been involved with Downtown South. These three categories were chosen in order see if there are any differences in opinion from each of these perspectives on the effectiveness of the policies and design guidelines in their ability to create pedestrian-orientation and diversity in Downtown South. Planners can offer insight into the intentions of the policies, architects can comment on designing a building guided by the policies and developers can comment on the marketability of the type of development envisioned for Downtown South.

An observation-based evaluation of two projects built in the area will also be conducted to determine their success in achieving pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse design as outlined in the literature review.

The above data gathering techniques were chosen in order to provide the most accurate answer to the stated research question. These research techniques will allow me to look at the question from three different perspectives. First, the literature review provides a general academic
perspective of successful high density development and urban design. By reviewing current literature I will define my terms of reference, identify significant issues related to this topic, and highlight theories of ‘successful’ high density communities and their relationship with urban design.

Examination of the policies, zoning and guidelines in place for Downtown South and interviews with people using these policies and those who developed them will give insight into the specifics of working with the Downtown South policies.

Finally, the evaluation of specific projects in Downtown South will provide a primary research perspective to the research question. By going out to observe projects I will make a personal assessment as to whether the city’s policies do, in fact, result in pedestrian-orientated and physically diverse design.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

Chapter One has provided a brief introduction to the topic of this thesis and has outlined how the research question will be examined. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature addressing successful high density community design and its relationship to urban design. The third chapter provides a review of policies currently in place for guiding the redevelopment of Downtown South.

Chapter Four presents findings and analysis from interviews with city planners, architects and developers. Interviewees have worked, or are currently working, on issues related to the redevelopment of Downtown South. Chapter Five will present evaluations of two completed
projects in Downtown South and provide an analysis of these projects in light of the goals set out by the City for Downtown South. Chapter Six concludes with an overview of the research findings and discusses policy implications as well as areas for future study in relation to Downtown South and successful high density residential design.
2. Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
What constitutes a successful high density area is difficult to define. Regardless, a working definition is required in order to evaluate the plan for Downtown South. This literature review will provide an overview of current thinking on the key urban design elements and other qualities essential to successful high density residential neighbourhoods. This review will then be synthesized into a working definition that will be used in the analysis of high density residential design in Downtown South.

2.2 Successful High Density Communities
The writers noted below all outline elements they believe are characteristic of successful high density communities. A variety of elements are identified, but commonalities do exist. Kevin Lynch suggests that the measure of a city's 'success' is determined by the society occupying it (Lynch, 1981). Although he concludes cultural differences prohibit a universal set of criteria, Lynch outlines five main dimensions: vitality, sense, fit, access and control, and two 'meta-criteria': efficiency and justice, necessary for measuring the success of a city. With these criteria any city, or area within a city, can make relative judgments about themselves. The significance of these criteria is evident from their inclusion in many of the definitions of urban success below.

In examining definitions of successful high density communities by different writers, there are a set of common determinants which arise. One such definition which captures all of the important elements identified is provided by Jacobs and Appleyard (1987). Essential elements of successful urban communities for them include livability, identity and control, access to opportunity, imagination and joy, authenticity and meaning, open communities and public life, self-reliance and

Appleyard and Jacobs give a set of physical characteristics required to achieve urban environments with the above characteristics. There are five main groups into which these physical qualities fall; 1) livable streets and neighbourhoods, 2) a minimum density of residential development as well as intensity of land use, 3) an integration of activities--living, working, shopping--in some reasonable proximity to each other, 4) a manmade environment that defines public space, and 5) many separate, distinct buildings with complex arrangements and relationships. (Appleyard & Jacobs, 1987, p. 117)

Jane Jacobs’ definition of urban success has many of the same elements as Appleyard and Allan Jacobs’, but she concentrates more on interdependency of relationships in the urban neighbourhood. Foremost, Jacobs feels successful communities must have an intricate and close-grained diversity of uses giving each other constant mutual support, both economically and

---

2 Lynch defines grain to as the way in which different elements of a settlement are mixed together in space. Elements may be activities, building types, persons or other features. “The grain of a mix is fine when like elements are widely dispersed among unlike elements and coarse when extensive areas of one thing are separated from extensive areas of another thing.” Further, “A grain is sharp when the transition from a cluster of like elements to its unlike neighbours is abrupt, and blurred if the transition is gradual.” (Lynch, 1981, p. 265)
socially. Successful city neighbourhoods act as catalysts, nourishing close-grained working relationships. This allows accommodation and encouragement, both economically and visually, for as much variety as possible, creating a lively public street life. Jacobs sees streets and sidewalks as the main public places of a city and, as a result, the safety and security of an area, and hence its success, depends on its streets (J. Jacobs, 1961).

Jane Jacobs outlines three main qualities of successful and safe city neighbourhoods, again very similar to Appleyard and Allan Jacobs'. First there must be a clear demarcation between public and private space. Second, there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to people living or working on the street. To facilitate this, buildings should be oriented to the street, not turn their backs to it with blank walls. Third, the sidewalk must have users on it fairly continuously (i.e. residents, shoppers, tourists, etc.), adding to the number of effective eyes on the street, encouraging people in buildings along the street to watch it and evoke a sense of inclusion for residents of the street. This allows a successful city area to protect its residents as well as strangers who wander into it (J. Jacobs, 1961, p. 35).

As with Jane Jacobs, Allan Jacobs views streets as the most important part of a city and hence a measure of success (A. Jacobs, 1993). In describing successful streets Jacobs states: “The best streets create and leave strong, lasting, positive impressions; they catch the eyes and the imagination. They are joyful places to be, and given a chance one wants to return to them. Streets are places for activity, including relaxation. The best streets continue, are long-lived.” (A. Jacobs, 1993, p. 312)
Francis defines a successful street as the 'democratic street'. The democratic street is one that reflects the history as well as the social and economic diversity of the larger neighbourhood and city. Friendly to pedestrians and livable for residents, it also reflects social justice, economic health, and ecological vitality. Safety and comfort are enjoyed while providing access to many different kinds of people, providing opportunities for discovery and challenge, and actively encouraging user manipulation, appropriation, and transformation. (Francis, 1987, p. 28)

Paumier, a professional American urban designer, approaches the definition of successful urban neighbourhoods from an economic perspective (Paumier, 1989). According to Paumier there are two requirements to a healthy, vital downtown. First is a diverse and concentrated mix of uses creating a strong, lively market. Second is a quality environment that establishes a distinctive sense of place. Downtown must have a physical setting for pedestrian activity that is comfortable, convenient, visually interesting, and secure to allow the marketplace to flourish (Paumier, 1988, p. 3). Paumier stresses that these two characteristics must be developed simultaneously to achieve success.

Paumier feels development, especially in the inner city, must be carefully designed to enhance the visual setting and sense of identity in a place (Paumier, 1989). He states that one way of helping encourage a strong public identity is to soften and humanize the hard surfaces of the urban environment. Allocating land in the intensively developed core to spaces that create visual amenities and provide for people is a tangible expression of concern for human values. Another

---

3 Architect Aldo Rossi sees history as vital to successful cites and their architecture as the concrete expression of society (Rossi, 1979). The built form of the city expresses a past which we are still experiencing; or a set of 'permanences'. Some artifacts survive and others do not. Those that survive often have been changed in some manner, this being the very thing enabling their survival. Rossi views urban success as highly dependent upon architecture's ability to convey the history of a place.
way to do this is to create spaces for social interaction, civic gatherings, informal recreation and special events. By encouraging such public spaces the vitality and life of the city become visible and invite participation and enjoyment.

Many writers cite similar key factors to urban success, including social and economic diversity, lively streets, clear definition between public and private space, physical comfort, safety and a mixture of uses. The ability of an area to make pedestrians feel comfortable through human-scaled buildings and the presence of others are also recurrent themes (see Figure 1).

These criteria conjure images of the 'urban village', a term often used to describe such areas with these elements by professionals and academics. Gurstein (1995) points out that the urban village was initially a sociological term describing North American inner-city ethnic neighbourhoods coined by Herbert Gans (1962). Currently the term has evolved to a design concept for creating compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented forms (Gurstein, 1995, p. 48).

It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail all of the elements of successful high density communities mentioned above. As a result I will be focusing my discussion of Downtown
South's policies on two of these aspects, pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity, as these are the two aspects which appear to be fundamental to healthy high density communities and help foster the other characteristics.

2.3 Urban Design

Urban design plays a significant role in successful high density residential communities. As densities increase, urban design becomes increasingly important in order to ensure livability. As well, pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity are greatly influenced by urban design. With one of the research objectives of this thesis being to define the relationship between high density residential communities and urban design, it is important to examine the role urban design plays in such communities.

2.3.1 Description of Urban Design

It is important to consider how urban design is defined in the literature in order to clarify the issues with which this discipline deals. Within the literature there is a strong consensus on the basic premise of urban design. Most definitions of urban design see it as design related to coherent visual and physical connection between buildings and the urban spaces around them. Elements of this general definition are shared by writers such as Relph (1987), Alexander (1987), Lynch (1981), Bacon (1974), Moughton (1992), Hedman (1984), Paumier (1988) and Barnett (1982).

Definitions of urban design offered by the writers listed above range from the simple to complex. Relph, who gives a very simple definition, sees it as the relationship between buildings and the space around them. He believes urban design should add visual design direction to urban growth and conservation (Relph, 1987, p. 229). Opposingly, Christopher Alexander believes city
development is guided by an array of conflicting interests. Each of these interests is concerned about its own view and there is no way to provide balance to each perspective interest. Alexander feels that it is the role of urban design to provide within every increment of construction a design to preserve wholeness of the city at all levels, from the largest level of public space, to the intermediate wholes at the scale of individual buildings, to the smallest wholes that occur in the building details (Alexander, 1987, p. 29).

Architecture is the defining element of urban design according to Edmund Bacon. He feels it is the role of the designer to “…establish volumes of space that are in scale with the needs of the present time and defined by means which are in harmony with modern technology. These volumes of space must be infused with a spirit which is generated by architectural forms.” (Bacon, 1974, p. 17) The exterior architecture of the city becomes the determinant factor in its spaces and it is the quality of a city’s architecture which controls its ability to create good places. Urban design, therefore, becomes the relationship between open space in a city and its architecture.

Moughton combines the above views, defining urban design as a combination of planning and architecture. Urban design deals with arranging many buildings so that they form a single composition and is the study of the design of the urban public realm. The public realm includes streets, boulevards, squares and public parks together with the building facades that define them (Moughton, 1992, p. 2).

2.3.2 Elements of Urban Design

In all types of development plans, high density residential included, there are a variety of different elements urban designers can use to achieve their goals. The literature suggests that the tools
available to urban designers, can be categorized into a series of scales. At the largest scale of whole cities or districts, designers must utilize contextualism\(^4\), streets, buildings, open spaces and mass transit as the primary components that shape the town centre’s urban design character (Paumier, 1989).

At a smaller scale, elements available to urban designers make up the details which can enrich urban experience. Smaller elements such as street lighting, paving, landscaping, street furniture and signs overlay the basic forms and influence a community’s image. From extensive research on public open spaces William Whyte concludes that what attracts people most is other people, but most urban spaces are designed as though the opposite were true (Whyte, 1980, p. 19). Whyte observed that certain elements are important in attracting people to urban spaces. These include places to sit, preservation of sight lines, sun, wind and weather protection. Whyte suggests that by using structures such as glass canopies or small pavilions, semi-outdoor spaces could be created that would be especially appropriate in rainy cities, such as Vancouver (Whyte, 1980, p. 46). Whyte also found that trees have the effect of providing a satisfying enclosure, protecting people as well as cooling them.

<table>
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<th><strong>Summary of Urban Design Elements</strong></th>
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<td>Street Patterns</td>
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<td>Sun, Wind &amp; Weather Protection</td>
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\(^4\) Alexander discusses the use of contextualism to create more organic cities, with every fragment fitting into the larger whole of the city (Alexander, 1987).
Table 1 summarizes all of the different elements available to urban designers discussed above. This list is not exhaustive, but does include the major factors urban designers should consider in the creation of a design concept. This list of important elements is included to provide a sense of the type of tools available to the urban designer.

2.3.3 Urban Design and Pedestrianization

Designing for the pedestrian is addressed in much of the literature referred to above. Designing to accommodate the pedestrian can help encourage a lively streetscape with a safe, comfortable, interesting and diverse atmosphere. Bacon points out that design of urban projects often takes place at the scale of a bird’s eye model and not from the viewpoint of the pedestrian who walks around in the area once it is built (Bacon, 1974, p. 29). Although more of a problem when he originally wrote about this over 20 years ago, it is still an important point which can be easily forgotten by architects, planners, politicians and community members alike.

Designing for the pedestrian is crucial for urban success and should be the primary concern of inner city community urban design. Paumier supports this view by stating: “Strategies which provide for a pleasant, diverse and interesting walking experience should receive highest priority. Although an exciting skyline, good vehicular or transit access, and convenient parking are all valuable, the quality of walking through the town centre is the fundamental measure of its success as a place.” (Paumier, 1989, p. 34) Accommodation of the pedestrian is achieved by designing convenient and easy access between shopping, employment, housing and recreational uses, and also by encouraging activity on the street and providing a variety of public spaces.
Due to designers paying more attention to the automobile than the pedestrian since the 1950s, there are many problems facing today's pedestrians. These include delay, congestion, discomfort, poor or no accessibility, poor visibility and accident danger. Pedestrians and bicyclists, unlike automobiles, cannot move easily over long distances and therefore are directly involved with the environment surrounding them. "For drivers, the road is a medium, while for pedestrians and bicyclists, the route is an experience." (Untermann, 1984, p. 15).

Encouraging pedestrians can bring many advantages to a community. Walking can increase socialization, enhance health, contribute to recreation and relaxation, and allow independence. Pedestrians can also make a neighbourhood more livable, safe and comfortable to be in by aiding the development of a sense of community or "...a common bond that ties a neighbourhood together on broader issues of need, comfort and survival." (Untermann, 1984, p. 3) With increased pedestrianization people become aware of conditions, patterns of users and the neighbourhood in general. This puts internal policing mechanisms into place resulting from natural surveillance by a community's inhabitants.

Untermann (1984) outlines the necessary steps to accommodate pedestrians in cities. Most pedestrians walk at an average of 2 to 3 miles per hour; requiring objects to be scaled to the pedestrian, be close at hand, be constructed of small pieces and be diverse. Other factors to consider include reducing travel distances, increasing land-use flexibility; eliminating pedestrian barriers and obstacles, assuring continuity of travel, providing protection from wind, rain, noise, cold and pollution, eliminating conflict and increasing character, randomness, visual diversity and amenity. The collective effect of these measures is to establish an interesting pedestrian realm.
while obscuring unpleasant aspects of a trip and making a walk more enjoyable. This has a positive effect on every inhabitant of a city, as all people are pedestrians.

2.3.4 Urban Design and Physical Diversity

Discussion of neighbourhoods oriented to pedestrians naturally leads to a discussion of diversity. Both physical and social diversity are important to help make an area more interesting and enjoyable to residents, proprietors, pedestrians, cyclists and even motorists. Neighbourhoods with a physical diversity of buildings and land uses are more likely to: 1) attract pedestrians, 2) increase legitimate reasons to use streets, enhancing social diversity among users, and 3) create a street attractive to people from a greater social range, further enriching communities.

Lynch (1981) believes the diversity or 'grain' of a community can have a significant impact. A coarse grained community is highly segregated from other kinds of people and ways of life and can cause inequities of access to resources and facilities. A community should, therefore, strive to have a grain that is fine and blurred, with an intricate mixture of uses. Similarly, Jane Jacobs views diversity as a crucial element in urban neighbourhoods. Concentrations of people in urban neighbourhoods creates a positive and desirable atmosphere. Such concentrations "...represent, in small geographic compass, a great and exuberant richness of differences and possibilities, many of these differences unique and unpredictable and all the more valuable because they are." (Jacobs, 1961, p. 220)

2.3.5 Criticisms of Urban Design Practices

One of the most obvious and common criticisms of urban design is that it takes a purely aesthetic approach to complex urban issues which often have social, economic and political components.
Relph recognizes this, noting that urban design is just one of many important elements, although a highly visible one, from which to approach planning (Relph, 1987, p.229).

Lynch sees city design as mispracticed, often being interpreted as ‘big architecture’ or ‘big engineering’, designing whole towns as a single physical object. (Lynch, 1988) Urban design must be able to allow for the continuous recasing of aims, analyses and possibilities inherent to its nature. Similarly, Gurstein states urban design must aim to create livable and responsive communities that can adapt and change with new priorities. This can be achieved through a dense built fabric, less separation of uses, less infrastructure and a reduction in commuting (Gurstein, 1995, p. 44). This view is also supported by Hedman who feels that within urban design “Strong organizing patterns are missing. Exterior spaces around buildings are weak, uneventful, and without clear form or character. The net effect at its worst is of a fractured disjointed world of divisions without connecting seams, a world offering residents no identifiable centre other than the buildings in which they live.” (Hedman, 1984, p.1) Alexander looks to urban design and the process through which urban design is developed to reestablish wholeness in modern cities. This process must link each new development to all past development and be devoted to the creation of the whole (Alexander, 1987, p. 16).

American architect Richard Fleischman believes urban design and urban architecture need better integration to grasp a clearer understanding of the context in which usable patterns of urban space can be achieved (Fleischman, 1986). One important aspect of this is maintaining the contextual character that gives cities a sense of history. Fleischman believes this will become significant as infill development becomes more popular and suburbanization decreases. Infill solutions will provide opportunity for both residential and commercial intensification, aiding in the preservation
of the natural environment and creating more efficient urban areas. The role of urban design in this process is to reinforce urban patterns strengthening visual form and value for the city. This will be important for the pedestrian, whom Fleischman calls the 'real city client'. (Fleischman, 1986, p. 11)

Current urban design practices have elicited much criticism. Urban designers must try to create positive, humane urban spaces that are integrated into their local communities and larger regions as well. This is highly important for high density residential areas where it will become more and more imperative for urban design practices to aid in creating successful communities.

2.4 Density

Cities are, by definition, dense. As urban land becomes increasingly expensive and the desire to preserve the natural environment grows, density has become a highly controversial planning issue in many cities, Vancouver included. A city's residential density is a significant factor in its form and character. Lynch supports this by stating: “...the density of housing is always a fundamental decision in city design. It sets the framework for all the other features and has far-reaching implications.” (Lynch, 1981, p. 264)

Common negative associations with high density residential development include pollution, noise and poor micro-climatic conditions. Another association often made with high density is social pathology, something Lynch feels is unfounded (Lynch, 1991). Such negative associations are often made with high density residential developments due to confusion of high density with overcrowding. Jane Jacobs points out the difference between the two is that high density is the number of dwelling units on the land, whereas overcrowding is too many people within the
individual dwellings (Jacobs, 1961). Overcrowding can create poor living conditions whereas high density, with enough people in enough dwellings, encourages diversity and unique neighbourhoods to live in.

The definition of high density is also highly relative. What are considered high density conditions in Vancouver may not be considered high density in other parts of the world. Gillis, Richard and Hagan (1986) tested the difference between cultural groups in their tolerance of high density conditions. It was found that between Asians, British and Southern Europeans, Asians are most tolerant of high density, British are least tolerant and Southern Europeans are somewhere in between. This shows that differences in density tolerance are dependent on what a specific culture considers acceptable. In Vancouver, Downtown South will provide very high density housing relative to most of the city, but it is not extremely high density compared to residential densities in places such as New York City, Tokyo or Hong Kong.

High density is also important to service provision in urban areas. A certain minimum population density is required in order for certain services to be delivered efficiently. The creation of a higher density communities in Vancouver such as Downtown South will help to improve the city's efficiency in service provision and perhaps make some services currently not offered, such as a fixed rapid transit system, feasible.

In terms of creating successful high density communities, Jacobs, Whyte and Untermann all believe that density is important to encourage pedestrianization of an area’s streets. Having a high density of people living in an area will encourage more intensive use of the streets, parks and commercial facilities of the district. Also, in high density areas people will be more likely to walk
than ride in a car because it is easier to walk (Untermann, 1984). In support of increasing density for the pedestrian’s sake, Whyte states that “Infill is what cities should be up to.” (Whyte, 1988, p. 321) Increasing urban density through infilling of vacant sites restores continuity to a street and reinforces interesting pedestrian environments.

Reurbanization is a concept which has become popular recently in planning literature as a catchphrase for increasing density. It is an attempt to label the recent phenomenon of revitalizing under-used urban land or intensification of use on developed land occurring in many large cities. Although there has been some criticism of the term ‘reurbanization’ as being too vague and having limited utility as an analytical construct (Bourne, 1993), the concept is a useful one. The growth of Canadian inner-city population since the early 1980s (Bourne, 1992) is increasing central city densities. Reurbanization, or revitalization, of under used inner-city areas is an efficient method for accommodating high density, central city population growth.

Urban design becomes an important factor contributing to livability in high density residential situations. As densities increase, higher quality urban environments become critical to achieving livability. Paumier suggests that one effective way to create high density while preserving a sense of human scale is to add taller buildings in the centre or rear of a block, increasing height gradually by terracing, visually breaking up the mass of the new structure (Paumier, 1989).

High residential density is required to create successful urban areas, providing vitality and diversity, in turn enriching the urban experience. Negative associations with this type of living will have to decrease as cities are forced to deal with finite resources and environmental pressures.
2.5 Sustainability and High Density Residential Communities

Sustainable development is an issue which has come to the forefront of urban planning in recent years. Sustainability is important to consider in the context of Downtown South, as many of the motivations for creating a successful high density residential community in Downtown South are directly linked to concepts associated with sustainable development.

In 1965 Chermayeff and Alexander stated:

"Today modern cities and other man-made elements in the physical environment are becoming shapeless for lack of an informing principle. But no such principle will be forthcoming, and no action will be taken, until the processes of design are themselves informed and controlled by the recognition of new realities." (Chermayeff and Alexander, 1965, p.34)

This holds true for the problems facing urban design and general urban development in 1996 as it did for the problems of over 30 years ago. Perhaps the most significant issue facing urban areas today is sustainability. Sustainable development is defined as a pro-active strategy to meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Roseland, 1992). The many costs associated with the post-war legacy of urban sprawl are economic, social and environmental and are cited as chief motivators towards achieving urban sustainability (Kelbaugh, 1993).

One result of the integration of sustainable development practices into the planning agenda has been a push towards higher densities. According to Rees and Roseland, sustainable urban forms “...must emphasize the efficient use of urban space, reducing consumption of material and energy resources, improving community livability, and organizing administrative and planning processes which can deal sensitively and comprehensively with the attendant socioeconomic and ecological
complexities." (Rees & Roseland, 1991, p. 17) High density, mixed-use development uses land more efficiently, can decrease dependence on the automobile and increase transit use and encourages social diversity and richness. This type of development will have to be examined and experimented with in order to find appropriate models as cities strive to improve their economic, environmental and social conditions.

2.6 Neo-Traditional Design

One of the urban design responses to criticisms of unsustainable urban development (suburban sprawl) and poor quality development has been neo-traditional design. Neo-traditionalism has become popular in planning literature due to the efforts of designers such as Duany, Katz and Calthorpe. This design philosophy incorporates the romantic notion of the traditional urban village into modern planning and urban design practices. Key elements of neo-traditional design include communities with an identifiable centre and edge that are limited in size, have a balanced mix of activities, a fine network of interconnecting streets and clearly defined public spaces (Duany, 1991). Houses are built on smaller lots than in conventional suburban development with front porches lining the streets and an emphasis on architectural elements from traditional early 20th Century homes. The aim is to create walkable communities providing residents with a variety of daily needs and services within interesting and inviting public spaces with a sense of nostalgia built into the design ethos (see Figures 2 and 3).
Economakis (1993) and Gurstein (1995) criticize Neo-Traditionalism for not being able to address contemporary social and technological issues. Gurstein states:

“This approach to community, based on past historical references to idyllic village life, negates an experiential understanding of contemporary society. It remains to be determined whether these historical principles can be applied to a vastly different socio-economic structure dependent on a two-income household, to maintain basic necessities and technological innovation such as the computer, which free people to pursue activities that transcend the limits of specific locales.” (Gurstein, 1995, p. 48)

Most neo-traditional neighbourhood design has occurred in suburban or even rural locations, but many believe its principles can and should also be applied to inner city redevelopment. Katz, one of the most vocal supporters of neo-traditional design, argues that these principles are appropriate
for both inner-city redevelopment and new suburban development, and that new development anywhere in a region should follow 'town-like principles' (Katz, 1994, p. xv).

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

This literature review has provided a sampling of recent and current thinking on the key aspects of physical urban design in high density residential neighbourhoods that successfully blend livability, sustainability and diversity. The urban design characteristics identified as necessary to create such communities include clear definition between public and private space, a variety of land uses, relatively high residential density with a comfortable pedestrian scale, a richness and variety of building design and a fine grain of development. The combination of these factors encourages activity on the street and sidewalks, in public and private spaces, and a unique and exciting juxtaposition of people, land use and activities. I will use these factors as the guidelines for my analysis of Downtown South development, focusing specifically on pedestrian-orientation and diversity in design.

Urban design plays a significant role in the pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity of urban communities. The chief task of urban design is to manage the relationship between buildings and the spaces around them in such a way as to create an interesting and comfortable setting for urban life. Good urban design is important to maintaining a city's sense of identity and integrating new development into the urban fabric. The essential elements of successful high density residential communities (pedestrian-oriented streetscapes and physical diversity) are greatly influenced by urban design, and urban design tools are instrumental in promoting them.
The recent paradigm shift in urban management from unlimited growth to sustainability has changed the approach to urban development and design. Higher density mixed use residential development, such as that promoted by neo-traditional design, is being looked at to make more efficient use of finite resources and minimize environmental impacts of urban centres.
3. Chapter Three - Downtown South Policy Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the land use policy, zoning and design guidelines currently in place for Downtown South relevant to the thesis problem statement. A review of these documents is necessary in order to establish if they contain the elements of pedestrian-orientation and diversity identified as essential for the creation of successful high density residential communities in the literature review.

3.2 Location of Downtown South

Downtown South is an area located at the south-east portion of Vancouver’s downtown peninsula, with the official planning area comprising 33.5 city blocks. The major street boundaries of the area are Robson Street to the north, Beatty and Homer Streets to the east, Pacific Boulevard to the south and Burrard Street to the west. In the context of Downtown
Vancouver, Downtown South is surrounded by the West End to the west, the central business district to the north, Yaletown to the east and Concord Pacific to the South (see Maps 2, and 3).

Map 3. Downtown South in the Downtown context. (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b)

3.3 Recent Historical Context of Downtown South

The beginnings of the current community plan for Downtown South started in the early 1980s. There were several reasons why the area was considered for review. Up to that time Downtown South was expected to be the area where the central business district would expand into from its current location. City Council started to rethink this strategy when the future of Granville Street came into question. Council wanted to change Granville Street into a busy, pedestrian-oriented corridor, acting as a main attraction and destination within the downtown.

As a result, in 1986 council established a task force on Granville Street. After much study and public and private consultation Council endorsed, in 1987, recommendations to rejuvenate
Granville Street by establishing a high density residential community around it in Downtown South. The policies of the Central Area Plan to create ‘an alive downtown’ also influenced Council’s decision. This endorsement started the process of deciding on implementation strategies for the community. In 1991 the Downtown South Community Plan was adopted, making the creation of a high density residential community in Downtown South official (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b).

3.4 Policy Context of Downtown South

The initiative by Council to create a high density residential area in Downtown South complements policies on the larger scales of the downtown, the city and the entire region. The City’s Central Area Plan sets as one of its goals the creation of ‘an alive downtown’. It states that the central area should have “...a mix of activities, with quieter neighbourhoods where people live close to more active areas where people shop and play as well as work; and where the public streets are the primary scene of public life.” (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991a) Striving towards a better balance between jobs and residents downtown, the Central Area Plan also emphasizes the development of housing in neighbourhoods that are highly livable and diverse, facilitating a wide housing choice at various scales and for different household types and income levels.

In the final report of the City of Vancouver Task Force on Atmospheric Change entitled Clouds of Change, recommendations also support the development of neighbourhoods such as Downtown South. The report recommends that the city implement transportation control measures to curb automobile use and promote alternative forms of transportation, thereby reducing the burning of fossil fuels and the associated release of carbon dioxide into the
atmosphere (City of Vancouver Task Force on Atmospheric Change, 1990). To create more energy efficient travel patterns the city should concentrate activities in specific areas and develop a mix of land uses in those areas. Objectives should be to create travel patterns that can be effectively served by more energy-efficient travel modes, such as public transit, bicycling and walking. *Clouds of Change* notes that energy-efficient land use provides a strong incentive for reurbanization--increasing the intensity of activity within present urban boundaries and ‘hardening’ the urban fringe (reducing sprawl), thereby making more effective use of existing services, reducing infrastructure costs, and relieving pressures on adjacent agricultural lands.

Redevelopment of Downtown South as a high density residential community also corresponds with policies more recently adopted by the GVRD in its *Livable Region Strategic Plan*. The GVRD is striving to create a region where human activity enhances the natural environment with a high quality built environment and appreciation of cultural and social diversity (GVRD, 1995). *The Livable Region Strategic Plan* endorses building more complete communities. Such communities would be high quality, mixed activity urban centres with a balance in jobs and residents and a diversity of housing types, tenures and costs. Combined with protecting natural areas and placing a priority on promotion of walking, cycling and public transit as alternative transportation, these policies strive to help improve and preserve the natural environment of the entire Vancouver area.

### 3.5 Goals for Downtown South

Council has adopted three main goals for Downtown South:
1. Develop new housing capacity for Vancouver in the form of a new high density, livable, safe
and environmentally conscious community, providing transportation alternatives to the
automobile, with the appropriate supportive services and amenities.

2. Encourage a neighbourhood with social diversity where existing residents can remain, and
with moderately priced housing within the means of average income.

3. Encourage the revitalization of Granville Street, and the retention of heritage buildings and
streetscapes. (City of Vancouver Planning Department 1994a, p.2)

These goals make it clear that there is a strong desire by Council to create a vibrant high density
residential community in Downtown South. This is also evident from the description of the vision
for the future of Downtown South.

3.6 Vision of Downtown South

The city envisions Downtown South as a community where up to 11,000 people will live in
approximately 8,500 units within 25 years, with development occurring incrementally (City of
Vancouver Planning Department, 1996a). The most common type of person living in Downtown
South will be interested in an urban lifestyle, being either young professional adults or people at or
near retirement age. Downtown South will provide these people with the convenience of living
close to work and close to downtown attractions such as cultural facilities, entertainment,
shopping, restaurants and hotels.

Built form in Downtown South will be varied. Land use policies encourage a variety of building
sizes with a mix of low, medium and high rises. Each complete block will not have more than
four new towers on it. Design guidelines call for many doors and windows addressing the street
from small scale apartments and townhouses. Streets are to provide pedestrians with a sense of enclosure from a continuous three storey street wall abutting the sidewalk and defining the streetscape and public spaces.

Even though many of the streets through Downtown South will continue to have large traffic volumes (especially the one way streets of Seymour, Richards, Homer, Smithe and Nelson), streets will also be busy with pedestrians. People will be walking around or lingering in the cafes along the more commercial streets. Sidewalks will be widened allowing streets to have extensive greenery provided through a double row of street trees and spaces for street furniture and planters. Residents of the area will look to the street as a significant part of their neighbourhood and it will become the focus of community life (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b).

Major commercial areas in Downtown South will be along Granville and Davie Streets. Users will be residents of Downtown South, people working in or near the community and tourists. Retail along other streets will be restricted to only small amounts to preserve a residential feel and not weaken the retail focus of Granville and Davie. Granville’s special architectural heritage will be preserved, with many of the buildings either renovated or new buildings drawing on the historical context. As well, projects which retain heritage buildings in other areas of Downtown South will be promoted.

A majority of the people in Downtown South will likely have moderate incomes. This is seen as an opportunity to provide less expensive housing in downtown relative to other new housing projects such as Concord Pacific and Coal Harbour, both of which are higher income developments given their water side locations.
Both the goals and vision for Downtown South stress a strong presence of pedestrians in the community enjoying a comfortable, diverse, safe, visually complex and interesting streetscape. These elements have been identified in the literature review as being essential for successful high density residential communities. These parallels address a component of the problem statement by showing that much of the ideology upon which Downtown South is based include characteristics identified as essential to successful high density residential communities in the literature.

3.7 Downtown South Before Redevelopment

When the community planning process for Downtown South began the area was primarily retail and commercial. The area west of Granville Street had a mix of uses. There were major office buildings, a number of residential units and some retail. Granville Street was characterized by buildings ranging from two to seven storeys with a variety of entertainment uses, bars, lounges, stores and residential hotels. East of Granville Street the area was characterized by vacant lots and commercial properties. There were many automotive sales and service shops, warehouse and office commercial buildings with scattered retail and some housing (see Figure 4).

The existing population of Downtown South was approximately 3,000. 1,000 units of market housing were

Figure 4. Typical Downtown South streetscape before redevelopment.
located mostly in the area west of Granville street in apartment buildings. The 372 non-market housing units were located throughout the whole Downtown South area. In 1991 there was also a relatively large number of low income people in Downtown South living alone in 1,100 single room occupant hotels and rooming houses (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b, p. 15).

The social composition of Downtown South before adoption of the new policies was very diverse and complex for its small size. There were many transients and people leading what may be considered by others 'unconventional' lifestyles. This includes prostitutes, street youth and persons with mental illnesses. One of the goals of Downtown South is to become a place where both existing and new residents will feel comfortable.

3.8 Physical Characteristics of Downtown South Redevelopment

3.8.1 Downtown South Sub-Areas

Downtown South has four separate planning areas; Burrard/Granville, Hornby Slopes, Granville Street and New Yaletown (see Map 4). The Burrard/Granville sub-area is designated as choice of use allowing either housing, offices, hotel or any combination of these. The Hornby Slopes sub-area is designated as mostly housing given its prime water-side location. The Granville Street sub-area requires
retail at grade and any of office, hotel or residential uses allowed above. Council endorses Granville Street to be developed to achieve a heritage image. The New Yaletown sub-area is designated as mostly housing with the number of towers limited to four per block (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1994a).

3.8.2 New Yaletown

I will be focusing my analysis on the New Yaletown sub-area. New Yaletown is the largest sub-area in Downtown South and was also the least developed part of the neighbourhood to begin with. This area also had existing building typologies and traffic patterns not common to the other sub areas of Downtown South. In addition the design guidelines for New Yaletown have the most emphasis on streetscape design. New Yaletown is the sub-area of Downtown South that I believe will be most illustrative of the type of ‘urban culture’ the city envisions for the whole of Downtown South.

Due to the lack of a large number of significant heritage buildings in New Yaletown, previous to starting redevelopment there was not a strong basis for neighbourhood character. “The character for New Yaletown must be created rather than borrowed.” (City of Vancouver, 1996, p. 2) The Planning Department has identified the use of ‘areas of focus’ and ‘consistent patterns’ as important tools to generate neighbourhood character.

3.8.3 General Physical Characteristics

Special focus areas in Downtown South will be provided by parks and the major shopping streets of Davie and Granville. Consistent patterns will be provided by the strong street edge definition of low rise street oriented development, heavily greened streets and special street furniture. These consistencies will be complimented by a variety of building forms from the retention of some
existing heritage buildings and construction of lower density, mid-rise where sites do not accommodate the highest densities or where view corridors limit height.

3.8.4 Low Rise Street Enclosure

All new development in New Yaletown, and the rest of Downtown South, is required to provide for continuous street edge definition through low-rise street enclosure buildings, a minimum of 30 feet in height, with active uses along the street frontage. Open spaces should be defined by walls, fences, pergolas, colonnades and other appropriate landscape elements.

3.8.5 Tower Design

The maximum discretionary height in Downtown South is 300 feet, which only applies to larger sites. Generally, buildings on smaller sites in Downtown South can be up to 70 feet high (see Table 2). Building height is evaluated against shadow impacts on public spaces and shopping streets, the impacts on private views and shadow impacts on semi-private and private open spaces.

3.8.6 Density

The maximum allowable residential Floor Space Ratio\(^5\) (FSR) in Downtown South is 5.0, depending on site characteristics and location. A typical Downtown South residential tower at this density would be approximately in the range of 25-30 storeys high. The City feels that, after consideration of both lower and higher densities, 5 FSR is appropriate for achieving the type of livability desired for the area, accommodating shadowing concerns, access to daylight, private views and fit with adjacent areas. The amount of additional traffic generated will be manageable on the existing street system and view corridors can generally be preserved. Most importantly, 5

\(^5\) FSR refers to the ratio of a building’s total floor space to the area of its site.
FSR will provide Downtown South with approximately 8,500 residential units at build-out. FSR is only permissible on large lots in Downtown South, with smaller lots having an FSR of 3 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Density and height of buildings in Downtown South

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FSR</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Corner Site Size</th>
<th>Interior Site Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>70 ft.</td>
<td>&lt;175 ft. (generally 1 to 6 lots**)</td>
<td>&lt;200 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>300 ft.*</td>
<td>175+ ft. (generally over 7 lots)</td>
<td>200 ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Except on sites that fall within council-adopted view cones.

**Most lots in Downtown South were originally 25 feet wide.

Source: City of Vancouver, 1991.

3.8.7 Setbacks

Front yard setbacks in New Yaletown are set at a minimum of 12 feet. While the setback does include private property it, combined with public sidewalks and grass boulevards, helps to create a generous public realm that serves the needs of pedestrians, residents and others. This helps reinforce streets as the main public spaces in Downtown South.

3.8.8 Parks

Park space will become increasingly vital to livability in Downtown South as the number of residents increase. Although people living in Downtown South will be attracted to its urban lifestyle, parks will still be important to the leisure and recreation of area residents. Standard City of Vancouver park requirements are 2.75 acres per 1,000 residents. At this ratio approximately one third of Downtown South’s total land would have to be park. Therefore, “Given the policy decision to create a high density residential area, the high cost of land and the fractured land ownership [in Downtown South], it is impossible to achieve the standard of service [in terms of
park provision] which has been achieved elsewhere.” (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b, p. 46)

Due to the inability to provide the standard amount of park space within Downtown South, the City believes park needs of residents will be met through the provision of public and private non-park open spaces (i.e. the sidewalks with minimum 12 foot setbacks will provide 5 acres of linear public open space), existing and new parks adjacent to Downtown South, as well as modest-sized new parks within the neighbourhood.

Currently the City is in the process of acquiring land for a large central community park in New Yaletown in the block bounded by Davie, Seymour, Helmcken and Richards (see Map 5). A second large community park will be acquired in the future in the northern sector of New Yaletown as the community develops.

3.8.9 Architectural Components

The most recent design guidelines for Downtown South state: “In general the intent is for Downtown South projects to continue the tradition of creative architectural ‘expressionism’ which characterizes Vancouver’s Downtown and West End.” (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1996b, p. 18)
More specifically, in relation to the concept for Downtown South, entrances to buildings should animate streets and create identity and a sense of address for buildings, dwelling units and stores. Entrances for residential units located on the ground floor should be located on the street to emphasize the residential nature of the area. Along the low rise street wall and lower floors of buildings richer materials, more intensive decorative details and lighting should be used to enhance the ‘close up’ view for the pedestrian. Incorporation of changes in materials, cornice lines and change in window patterns should also be used to achieve a comfortable pedestrian scale at lower levels. Residential units located on the ground floor should locate the main floor level approximately three feet above
grade to promote privacy for the units yet still maintain ‘eyes on the street’ from the unit (see Figures 5 & 6).

Weather protection, while not required, is encouraged where appropriate on non-retail streets and should be provided over entrances to residential and commercial uses. Continuous weather protection is required along Davie Street from either awnings or canopies.

3.8.10 Landscaping

Extensive landscaping and ‘greening of Downtown South’ is a major element of the area’s urban design concept. “The intent is to provide for a strongly public and pleasing streetscape. This is to be achieved through the integration of the public and private realm in which a double row of trees...and display gardens will result in intense landscaping spanning both public and private property.” (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1996b, p. 27) The double row of trees is intended to create a canopy over
the sidewalk, helping create a pedestrian scale (see Figure 7). The large setback of 12 feet will also provide an area for a privately-owned garden area, dedicated to display gardens and useable outdoor spaces. This is intended as a visual amenity for the street and residents and as a buffer between street activity and housing units.

Other required landscaping elements include sidewalk design and tree grates. Sidewalks will have a stamped leaf pattern and tree surrounds include bronze floral plates marking the corners (see Figure 8). These landscaping elements are an attempt to use a botanical theme to reinforce the expression of natural forms in a harsh urban environment. These will be complimented by the use of a distinctive blue-black colour for all metal surfaces in Downtown South. In addition all street furniture, including benches, refuse containers, bicycle racks, drinking fountains and newspaper vending machines, will be of a special design specific to the neighbourhood and will have small bronze flower studs to provide a ‘customized look’ (see Figure 9). The use of these elements is intended to contribute to a special identity for Downtown South.

Figure 9. Distinctive Downtown South street furniture.
3.9 Heritage in Downtown South

The are a number of buildings in Downtown South which are listed on the Vancouver Heritage Registry (see Figure 10). The design guidelines state that development of sites with heritage buildings should explore retention options and that sites adjacent to heritage structures should be sensitive to these buildings. In addition, character buildings not listed on the Vancouver Heritage Registry be 'considered for retention and/or integration into new developments' (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1996b, p. 9).

![Figure 10. Examples of heritage buildings in Downtown South.](image)

3.10 Public Consultation in Downtown South

From the beginning of Downtown South's community planning process there has been extensive public consultation. Discussions with the public on the future of Downtown South began in 1982, since which time there has been numerous meetings. Members of the public who were consulted include local residents and their associations, local business, land owners and developers.
While there was no consensus on all the details of the Downtown South Community Plan from the beginning, the City states that among the public: "...there is a general consensus that new high density residential and mixed use neighbourhoods in Downtown South are appropriate." (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1991b, p. 2) The public consultation process has continued up to the present, with the public having much input into the refinement of Downtown South's policies and guidelines as the community develops.

### 3.11 Downtown South in 1996

The number of units built to date in Downtown South stands at 4,300, which is ahead of original forecasts (see Map 6). The most current population estimate in Downtown South (1995) is 4,850 (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1996a, p. 2). This would put Downtown South development at approximately half way to the goal of 11,000 residents in 8,500 units over 25 years.

This explosive growth in Downtown South is illustrative of the amount of interest in the area from both developers and purchasers. As a result, there has been many large-scale residential projects constructed in the area in recent years and in some areas the streetscape design has started to evolve (see Figure 11).
In addition to the above projects that have already been constructed, there are also some buildings with interesting designs which are about to begin construction (see Figure 12).
3.12 Summary of Policy Review

The land use policies, zoning and design guidelines for Downtown South aim towards creating a livable high density residential community. The guidelines emphasize the creation of a interesting and inviting pedestrian realm by requiring continuous street enclosure, ground-oriented residential and commercial units and a detailed streetscape design with an emphasis on landscaping.

The policies, zoning and guidelines outlined above touch on all of the elements cited as essential for successful high density residential communities in the literature review. This shows an attempt by the City of Vancouver to provide the two elements which I am investigating in this thesis: pedestrian-orientation and diversity. The next two sections will look at how effective these policies and guidelines are in achieving their goals and how they have translated into built form.
4. Chapter Four - Informant Interviews: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of key informant interviews conducted as research into the effectiveness of the policies, zoning and design guidelines in place for Downtown South in achieving pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity. There were three categories of interviewees: 1) City Planners, 2) Architects, and 3) Developers. City Planners were interviewed to gain insight into the ideologies and theories involved in creating the policies and how they are being administered and refined over time by the city. Architects and developers were interviewed to provide a view of the policies and design guidelines for Downtown South from the perspective of those guided by them in designing, constructing and marketing projects.

All interviews were conducted in person with the exception of the three developers and one of the architects, which were conducted over the telephone. The same questions were asked of each person in each category (see Appendix A). Questions for city planners focused on the goals for Downtown South and the role of urban design, pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity in achievement of those goals. Planners were also asked about any problems or potential areas of improvement they saw within the policies, zoning and design guidelines in achieving their goals. Similar types of questions were asked of architects and developers. These questions focused on the appropriateness of a high density residential neighbourhood in Downtown South, the effectiveness of the design guidelines in achieving pedestrian-oriented streetscapes and physical diversity, and any areas they thought the guidelines were lacking in or could be improved.
4.2 City Planners

Interviews were conducted with five Vancouver City Planners (See Appendix B). All were involved with developing the policies for Downtown South or are currently involved in administering Downtown South policies.

4.2.1 Vision of Downtown South

Although the vision for Downtown South as outlined in the various policy and guidelines documents is given above (section 3.5), this section is intended to highlight aspects of the vision for the community discussed in the interviews that were not elaborated on in the documentation.

When asked about the role of pedestrian-oriented design and physical diversity in Downtown South, planners saw these as important to the plan for the community. All described Downtown South as becoming a high density, socially and physically diverse residential community with a lot of pedestrian street activity, enhanced by a cohesive streetscape design. The pedestrian-oriented low-rise street wall and extensive landscaping, provided by the double row of street trees and display gardens, were cited as important factors to a comfortable, high quality physical environment. A profusion of lush vegetation is envisioned as providing a softening effect to the hard urban surfaces, making the community more comfortable.

The creation of a special character for Downtown South through the streetscape treatment was also cited by planners as a significant part of the vision for the community. Attention to paving, tree grates, street furniture and landscaping is intended to provide a very strong identity for the neighbourhood, distinctive from others in Vancouver.
Larry Beasley\(^6\), who lead the team of planners developing the policies, described Downtown South as becoming a high density residential area with high livability\(^7\). Mr. Beasley believes livability will be achieved in Downtown South due to the attention to streetscape design, the pedestrian-oriented buildings, the large tower spacing and the provision of amenities such as retail, park, community and health facilities.

Another important aspect to the vision for Downtown South was the creation of ‘areas of tranquillity’, a concept Mr. Beasley describes as “Areas of tranquility in the downtown where it would be a little quieter, a little more domestic as compared to the rather frantic areas that are all commercial.” With Davie and Granville Streets as the ‘commercial high streets’ of Downtown South, other streets will be highly residential in nature, with many doors and windows facing the street, causing a ‘domestication of the street’.

4.2.2 Inspiration for Downtown South Physical Design Policies

When questioned about what types of examples were followed in development of the urban design concept for Downtown South, City Planners cited traditional east coast North American cases. Early Twentieth Century urban typologies, containing many of the elements identified as essential to successful high density communities in the literature review, existing in cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Boston and Savannah were examined. Specific examples of high density residential neighbourhoods were looked at in Toronto (St. Lawrence), New York City (Battery Park) and Baltimore (Rouse Harbour). These examples were considered, but the intention was not to copy what had occurred in other cities. Planners insisted that their intention was to create

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\(^6\) Larry Beasley is the Director of the Central Area Planning Division at the City of Vancouver’s Planning Department.

\(^7\) A study looking at factors important to livability at high densities was conducted in the early stages of Downtown South’s policy development, the findings of which heavily influenced the policies and guidelines (Joe Wai Architects, 1987).
a 'unique Vancouver solution' to the issues associated with high density residential livability. One of the solutions considered unique to Vancouver by Mr. Beasley is the tall, slender tower, which allows economic feasibility for developers while preserving sunlight access at the street level, view corridors and privacy in towers.

When asked about theoretical influences for the design of Downtown South, again planners stated that they really didn’t follow any specific theories too closely because they tried to create a unique Vancouver solution. Theorists referred to as having some influence were Jane Jacobs and William Whyte. Jill Davidson, Downtown South Planner from 1989 to 1991, claimed that Jane Jacobs’ idea of ‘eyes on the street’ was brought out in the street wall with ground-oriented units and a clear definition between public and private spaces. As well, William Whyte’s research into what attracted people to public open space influenced the design guidelines, causing planners to consider such factors as sun, street furniture, weather protection and sense of enclosure.

Central Area Planner Nathan Edelson stated that another important factor influencing the design guidelines was the existing community in Downtown South. On-going consultation with local residents, businesses and developers has helped planners identify issues important to the community. Some design elements identified as important to the existing community were heritage retention and landscaping.

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8 Jill Davidson is currently working as a Senior Housing Planner in the City of Vancouver’s Housing and Properties Department.
9 Nathan Edelson became involved with Downtown South after the Community Plan was adopted and dealt with plan implementation regarding issues with existing residents and businesses in the community.
4.2.3 Pedestrian-Orientation and Physical Diversity In Downtown South

All City Planners interviewed stressed the importance of attention to urban design in Downtown South. Ms. Davidson explained "...there certainly was a huge emphasis on the built form. Downtown South and some of the other downtown communities are different from the way we've planned other neighbourhoods in the city in that there was very little development there." She claims this made it necessary for the urban design guidelines for Downtown South to be very detailed and specific in order to define the physical character of the community, a community intended to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, not only the automobile.

Planners believe physical diversity in Downtown South will be provided by a mixture of building heights and densities, which depend on site size. Also, physical diversity is provided by the required streetwall podium, which planners maintain will create a variety of townhouse types along the streetscape. In addition, Mr. Edelson maintains that there will be a wide variety of housing types in New Yaletown, and the whole of Downtown South, with new developments of townhomes and towers, the retention of the single room occupancy (SRO) hotels along Granville Street, social housing and projects such as the 'mini-suite' building at the corner of Drake and Seymour.¹⁰

Social diversity was also mentioned by all city planners as a very significant part of the community. Social Planner Jeff Brooks¹¹ stated that he envisions Downtown South as an area

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¹⁰ This project is comprised of suites with very small sizes, with 64% of suites under 320 square feet (Sidjak, 1996).
¹¹ Jeff Brooks was involved with examining who the existing residents of Downtown South were before the new polices were developed and what their health and social needs were.
accommodating a wide variety of social and economic groups and that this is important in creating a unique and interesting community.

4.2.4 Challenges to Livability in Downtown South

City Planners cited quite a few challenges facing the successful evolution of Downtown South into a livable pedestrian-oriented, physically diverse high density community. The major ones identified are discussed below.

4.2.4.1 Traffic

Traffic was mentioned in several interviews as an important issue. Currently, the one-way streets of Hornby, Howe, Seymour, Richards, Homer, Nelson and Smithe act as major vehicle corridors through the downtown. With the large increase of residents and some retail destinations in Downtown South, traffic flows will increase, heightening traffic noise and potential danger for pedestrians and cyclists. The detailed streetscape design and profusion of vegetation are meant, in part, to counter the effects of high traffic volumes and make streets more tolerable for pedestrians, but some planners are still unsure about the effects increased vehicular traffic may have on the community in the future. Mr. Edelson voiced concern for this by stating: “The tough thing in Downtown South is the traffic, and that’s not going to change. Some of the trees and other things may help a bit, but there is still a lot of traffic.”

Social Planner Jeff Brooks voiced concern over the issue of parking in Downtown South. With the increase in residents and commercial destinations in Downtown South the need for parking will grow. Currently, many of the empty lots to be developed in the future act as surface parking. With the loss of these parking facilities, lack of sufficient parking will become a significant issue in Downtown South. Ms. Davidson also acknowledged the potential for a lack of parking in
Downtown South, but she reiterated that Council had directed planners not to plan Downtown South exclusively for the automobile, giving equal status to pedestrians and cyclists.

4.2.4.2 Noise

Noise was another issue raised as a potentially significant problem affecting livability in Downtown South by several City Planners. As residential density increases in Downtown South, sensitivity to sources of noise pollution will also rise. This was noted by Mr. Beasley, who believes noise is going to become one of the most important issues in urban planning in the future. Potential sensitivity to noise by residents has lead to some separation between areas of intense commercial and residential use, with most commercial retail in Downtown South concentrated on Davie and Granville. In this context ‘areas of tranquillity’, with some small areas designated strictly for residential use, act as a preventative measure to avoid conflicts over noise pollution.

4.2.4.3 Other Challenges

Another potential problem in Downtown South concerns tower massing and the floor to floor ceiling height, as discussed by Development Planner Cindy Chan Piper. The current height limit of 300 feet was intended for buildings with 5 FSR and an industry typical floor to floor ceiling height of approximately 9 feet. Originally the city expected buildings to be between 21-24 storeys, with extra height allowed under the zoning to provide for architectural freedom and to accommodate taller, slimmer towers in cases of view corridor blockage. One project in Downtown South has bulked out to the maximum allowable envelope by using a 17 foot floor to floor height to accommodate loft-style units with 16 foot ceilings. This has resulted in a 300 foot tall building which is also relatively wide. Loft units are currently very marketable, especially to

\[\text{Cindy Chan Piper initially became involved with Downtown South in 1993 as a Community Planner, but is currently involved with redrafting of the design guidelines.}\]
the young professional purchaser new projects in Downtown South have as their target market. This may jeopardize the tower design plans of Downtown South because it gives each building a 30% increase in tower volume than expected by the city. Buildings with this extra bulk could potentially block sunlight penetration to the streets and open spaces, obstruct views, create overlook problems and decrease overall livability in Downtown South. A reduction in sunlight penetration to sidewalks in Downtown South could make streets not as comfortable or attractive to pedestrians and detract from the success of the community.

Another issue that could affect livability in Downtown South, identified by Jill Davidson, is that the pace of development is very fast. She is concerned that if the current fast-paced development trend in Downtown South continues, the neighbourhood will not have an opportunity to naturally develop a sense of community.

4.3 Architects

Interviews were conducted with six architects who have designed projects in Downtown South (see Appendix B). At the time of interview, these architects were in various stages with their projects; some have been completed, some have received city approval and are beginning construction and some are in the process of receiving approval from the city.

4.3.1 Downtown South Policies, Zoning and Design Guidelines

Generally, when asked about the overall design concept for Downtown South, all architects responded positively. All supported the area developing into a high density residential district and viewed it as being one of the best spots in the city due to surrounding amenities. Amenities such as False Creek, English Bay, the Central Business District, Yaletown, Library Square, G.M. Place, B.C. Place, the Ford Centre and other theatres, restaurants and commercial facilities were referred
to (see Figure 13). All of the architects interviewed see a successful future for Downtown South, envisioning it as a lively neighbourhood with a profusion of street life.

![Figure 13. Library Square on the edge of Downtown South.](image)

The design policies and guidelines are viewed by architects as helpful to encouraging pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse streetscapes. Most believe the required street wall will provide continuity in streetscapes of Downtown South that is human-scale and pedestrian-oriented. The detailed streetscape design guidelines with the double row of street trees and distinctive street furniture were generally supported, but there were specific elements different architects disagreed with (discussed below). One architect, Graham McGarva, highly supports the amount of detail in the design guidelines for encouraging continuity in Downtown South's urban design. "I like strong guidelines that force you to design with an element of ordinariness. We lack commonality in buildings in this city." Such detailed design guidelines create streetscapes which provide a comfortable and consistent background to urban life.

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13 Graham McGarva designed the Citycrest project at the north-west corner of Homer and Davie Streets (see Figure 11). The project consists of a 131-unit residential 30-storey tower and a 3-storey podium with 5 townhouses accessed from an interior courtyard and commercial office and retail space along the street front. He was also a participant in the early planning of the Downtown South neighbourhood.
4.3.2 Critique of Downtown South Policies and Guidelines

Although there was general agreement with the principles of Downtown South’s policies, zoning and design guidelines by the architects interviewed, there were many specific aspects some found as barriers to creating a pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse community.

4.3.2.1 Security

One of the problems most frequently mentioned by architects was security in the ground-oriented units of building podiums. One of the architects refused to incorporate ground-oriented units in his project because he was designing a seniors housing project and felt that residents would not feel secure on the ground.14 Architect Frank Marino15 had originally included small fences in front of the townhomes in his design, but the city did not approve. Mr. Marino complained that “They [the ground-oriented townhouses] are marketable to a degree because they look attractive, but you basically have no fencing. You have a little display garden, so you lose your sense of privacy for the units on the ground. So not only are you located on a street like Homer or Richards, with a significant amount of traffic and pedestrians, but you lose that sense of security and ownership because you feel anybody can just walk in.”

Architect Alan Hartley16 is also concerned with the lack of attention to security for ground-

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14 Joe Wai designed the New Continental, a seniors social housing project at 1067 Seymour at the corner of Helmcken (see Figure 11). The project consists of 110 residential units in 16 storeys. Initially the ground level was designated as retail and office space, but being difficult to rent out the space was converted into the Downtown South Community Health Clinic and The Gathering Place, a community drop-in centre.
15 Frank Marino designed the Pinnacle project, 939 Homer St., south-west corner of Homer and Smithe Streets. The project consists of 312 units in a 30-storey tower and a 4-storey townhouse podium with 5 FSR. The project includes the retention of one heritage building directly on the corner of Homer and Smithe to be used as office and retail. The Pinnacle began construction in August 1996.
16 Alan Hartley designed a project at 899 Helmcken St., located at the north-east corner of Helmcken and Howe Streets. This project consists of 240 units with a mix of office and residential use in a 29-storey tower and 3-storey townhouse podium at 5 FSR. Office space is located in the first floor of the three-storey ground-oriented townhomes, with the top two levels being 1,100 sq. Ft. two bedroom units accessed from an interior courtyard. Construction of the project will begin in the spring of 1997.
oriented units in the design guidelines. He believes the display garden requirement prevented a
security-conscious design for his project by causing an unclear definition between public and
private space. Graham McGarva stated that in order for ground-oriented units to be marketable,
it is very important for residents to have the perception of security. One way Mr. McGarva
suggests to encourage this is utilizing a change in grade, elevating townhouse entrances a few feet
above the street level, something which the City has incorporated into the design guidelines. This
decreases intimidation by traffic on the street and might even encourage residents to sit out on
their stoops, observing the street activity from their personal vantage point.

4.3.2.2 Tower Design

Architects interviewed had many problems with the tower design guidelines. Generally the
concept of slim towers was accepted. Mr. McGarva voiced concern for the creation of repetitive
architecture if all towers in Downtown South are slim. He believes designers should be able to
defend slight departures from the slim tower model based on legitimate design arguments in order
to increase architectural diversity in the skyline. Mr. Marino and Mr. Hartley believe the
maximum height of 300 feet was set arbitrarily. Mr. Hartley stated that shadowing criteria
concentrates unnecessarily on shadow length and not enough on shadow width. If shadows are
slim and long they will move quickly, making shadow length, and therefore building height, not as
significant.

Regarding the recent debate over the bulk of his 'Space' project on Seymour Street, Mr.
McDonald\textsuperscript{17} defended his project by saying that the building adheres to the guidelines and the fact

\textsuperscript{17} Michael McDonald designed the 'Space' project, located at 1238 Seymour Street between Drake and Davie (see
Figure 24). The project consists of 223 residential units in a 30-storey tower and work/live ground-oriented units.
Some units in the building are loft-style with 16 foot ceilings. Construction of Space is complete and its first
tenants moved in July 1996.
that his design was approved is proof of this. He believes the Downtown South guidelines ineffectively try to reduce tower bulk through small floor plates and larger setbacks, but, if council truly wants to control tower bulk they should develop building envelope regulations for each site.

4.3.2.3 Streetscape Design

Most architects supported the overall concept of a detailed streetscape design, but many did not agree with certain elements. Two architects disagreed with the 12 foot front setback. Mr. Howard believes 12 feet is too wide and creates a 'no man's land' on the sidewalk, while Mr. McDonald believes that the wide front setback prevents proper integration of buildings with the streetscape. As previously mentioned, there was a dislike for the required display gardens, which some architects felt were an impediment to good design by not allowing the ground-oriented units to properly 'meet the street' and by creating unclear demarcation between public and private space.

The element most disliked was the leaf stamping into sidewalks. The term most often used to describe this was 'hokey'. Mr. McDonald described this as a safety hazard, with potential for people to trip on the stamps, and an aesthetic eyesore, due to debris becoming trapped in the grooves of the stamps.

Stuart Howard\(^{18}\) also raised the issue of scale along the streetscape. He believes that because the zoning by-law allows higher density on larger lots, developers will not be encouraged to develop small-scale projects. This will create many large-scale buildings with few or no small-scale

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\(^{18}\) Stuart Howard designed the Metropolis project at the north-east corner of Richards and Davie Streets (see Figure 12). The project includes the retention of the heritage Canadian Linen Art Deco building (built in 1928), which will be converted into a market place, shops and a restaurant, and 98 residential units in a 29-storey tower and townhomes with roof garden access. Some units in the building are loft-style with 16-foot ceilings. Construction will begin in the fall of 1996.
buildings among them. Small-scale projects are important in providing a diversity of building scale and type, bringing physical diversity to the streetscape.

4.3.2.4 Noise

Three architects felt that noise was an issue of concern in Downtown South. Mr. Howard and Mr. Marino shared the view that requiring ground-oriented units is not practical, with noise levels in such units making them unmarketable. Mr. McGarva felt that noise in the area overall would be an issue, especially in areas where there is restaurants, bars or cafes. Conversely, Mr. McDonald believes that people choosing to live downtown should expect a certain amount of noise as being part of the ‘downtown lifestyle’. He feels that building code noise requirements are sufficient for ensuring against intolerable noise pollution within units.

4.4 Developers

Interviews were conducted with three developers who have built or are currently building projects in Downtown South (see Appendix B). All three developers stated they wanted to be involved in projects in Downtown South because they view it as an exciting emerging area of Vancouver, due mainly to its many surrounding amenities. Mr. Lyn\(^1\) believes the area will develop into a ‘Manhattan-like’ community, offering a high-quality urban lifestyle to its residents. All projects of these developers were or are targeting a young, professional, first-time buyer, as it is believed that this client is most likely to value the urban culture of Downtown South.

All developers interviewed supported the idea of developing Downtown South as a high density residential area. They all stated that the high residential density makes development economically feasible for themselves, as well as more affordable for the purchaser.

\(^1\) William Lyn is with Lintall Properties Limited, developer of the Metropolis project at Richards and Davie.
Developers did not support the city’s insistence on ground-level townhouse units. All three stated that these are not as marketable as tower units. If the city is going to insist on such units, Mr. Kinney\(^{20}\) suggested the city should allow developers some freedom of choice for their use. Being able to put in retail, office or residential uses depending on how marketable a use is in a given location would be more practical from this developer’s perspective. In reality, such freedom for developers is not very likely or practical. Giving developers free reign on land use decisions is obviously not a solution because, although such a strategy may be more economically feasible in the short-term for the developers, from a long-term planning perspective, this has the potential of creating a land use imbalance or an incompatible mix of uses.

Regarding the streetscape design guidelines, developers gave mixed reviews. Mr. Kinney views them as too costly, something which is just passed on to the purchaser, hence decreasing affordability. Mr. Bosa\(^{21}\) views the detailed streetscape design as a necessary element to help a project maintain its value and quality over time. He stated that if the high quality streetscape, with trees, paving and lighting, were not required by the city he would put in similar features himself, as his company believes in constructing high quality projects.

### 4.5 Interview Summary and Conclusions

Interviews with City Planners illustrated the effort on behalf of the city to create a pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse community in Downtown South. Planners stressed the importance of strong urban design guidelines and physical diversification to encourage pedestrianization in

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\(^{20}\) John Kinney is with the Pacific City Land Corporation, developer of the ‘Space’ project at 1238 Seymour Street.

\(^{21}\) Colin Bosa is with the Bosa Ventures, developer of ‘819’. This is a 15-storey mixed retail residential project located at the south-west corner of Robson and Hamilton Streets (see Figure 12). Construction will start in the fall of 1996.
Downtown South. As well, theorists identified as having some influence over the policies (Jane Jacobs and William Whyte) encourage high density communities that are pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse. Interviews with Planners, therefore, confirmed the desire on behalf of the city to include these two qualities in Downtown South, as already illustrated in the examination of the policies.

Although some traditional Eastern North American urban typologies were looked to for inspiration, the city (i.e. planners, politicians and public) tried to create a unique Vancouver solutions for issues related to high density livability. Some issues identified by planners as challenging livability in Downtown South are noise, vehicular traffic volumes and parking, tower bulk and pace of development.

Interviews with architects gave insight to how the policies, zoning and guidelines are effecting building design. Architects supported the overall concept of a high density residential area in Downtown South, as the surrounding amenities of the area make it one of the most desirable locations in Vancouver. The streetscape design concept for Downtown South was supported by architects, but many saw what they considered to be weaknesses in the policies and guidelines in issues related to security for ground-oriented units, tower design, specific elements of the streetscape design and noise concerns. Most notably security and noise were raised as issues most detrimental to livability in Downtown South. These are significant to pedestrian-oriented design in the area because if people are uncomfortable in the streets due to security or noise issues, even if the physical design is pedestrian-oriented, pedestrians will not be comfortable.
Developers were also in support of a high density, pedestrian-oriented and diverse residential community in Downtown South. They spoke enthusiastically about its prime location in relation to downtown amenities and its potential for success. Developers interviewed did not support the requirement for ground-oriented residential townhouses, believing that these units are not as marketable as tower units.

The concern over marketability of ground-oriented units in the downtown is significant in that providing such units is a major factor in creating a pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse streetscape. The reluctance of developers and architects towards such units may be due in part to the fact that, currently, even though some development has occurred, Downtown South has relatively little going on inside its boundaries. As the community develops and the streetscape design is applied to more of the area, ground-oriented units are likely to become just as marketable as those in towers.

A lack of variety of building scale is another important issue raised by an architect. Almost exclusively large projects are currently being proposed and constructed in Downtown South. Zoning in Downtown South exacerbates this situation by rewarding higher density to larger lots, making smaller lots less attractive to developers. In order to encourage physical diversity within Downtown South it is important that smaller lots are developed. Not only would they provide diversity in building scale, but smaller lots create a larger number of separate buildings and therefore a greater likelihood of different building designs. This would help to encourage a fine grain of development in Downtown South.
5. Chapter Five - Project Analyses

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present an evaluation of two buildings in Downtown South designed under the current policies, zoning and design guidelines. Only two projects were chosen because there are a small number of projects in New Yaletown which are complete and the differences in the two projects selected are very useful in evaluating the area's policies, zoning and design guidelines in terms of pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity. In addition both of the projects chosen were finished very recently (1996), and will provide a current perspective. The purpose of examining these two projects is twofold:

1. Illustrate how the land use polices, zoning and design guidelines for New Yaletown, and hence Downtown South, translate into built form.

2. Determine if the current land use policies, zoning and design guidelines yield buildings and urban design in Downtown South that promote pedestrian-orientated and diverse development.

Analysis of these two projects was approached from the perspective of the average pedestrian on the street. I walked around each project and took my own observations to be representative of the average pedestrian. Evaluation of the pedestrian-orientation and physical
diversity of each project was based on the criteria as set out in the literature review for these two characteristics of successful high density communities. Criteria for pedestrian-orientation include buildings which are designed on a human-scale with doors and windows oriented to the streetfront and have a variety of detail and streetscapes which provide a comfortable environment for pedestrians through landscaping and public art, street furniture, exposure to sunlight, and protection from wind and rain.

Evaluation of the two selected projects designed and built under the current policies, zoning and design guidelines in New Yaletown will provide, in conjunction with the literature and policy reviews, a primary research perspective from which to address the thesis problem statement.

The two projects chosen for evaluation were 1188 Richards Street and ‘Space’, located at 1238 Seymour Street. The two projects are located within a block of each other in the southern section of New Yaletown (see Map 7).

5.2 Project 1 - 1188 Richards Street

1188 Richards Street is located on the north-east corner of Richards and Davie Streets and runs
half the length of the east side of the 1100 block on Richards Street (see Map 8). Completed in 1996 and designed by Hamilton Doyle Architects, the project has a 24 storey tower on a two and three-storey podium containing 162 dwelling units. The podium along Richards Street is three storeys high and has townhouses with street-level entries. Along Davie Street the podium is two storeys and is commercial retail space (see Figure 14). Quite a few of the townhouses along Richards appear to be occupied, but this is hard to decipher, as none of the occupants of these units have personalized the exterior (i.e. putting out flower pots or door decorations). Out of three retail spaces along the Davie Street side, only one is occupied as a furniture store.

The Richards Street section of the development illustrates how all the elements required by the Downtown South streetscape design guidelines look in place. The ground-oriented units have display gardens, there is a double row of street trees, the blue/black street furniture is in the Downtown South style and the sidewalk has the decorative leaf stamps. The front setback along Richards Street is twelve feet, with the required strip of grass between the road and the sidewalk (see Figure 15). The pedestrian does feel quite comfortable walking along this side of the development, with a sense of scale and rhythm being provided by the repetition of trees, windows and doors along the street. Entrances to units along Richards are slightly elevated above street level with stairs leading up to the front doors, providing a clear separation between public and private space, as well as the perception of
security for residents (see Figure 16). Currently the other side of Richards has old, poorly maintained buildings on it, but will be the future site of a community park, reinforcing a pedestrian-oriented streetscape.

The Davie Street facing side of the project is very different in appearance and feel. There is only one row of street trees (beside the road) and the twelve foot setback is all paved sidewalk with no street furniture (see Figure 17). With only one of the three retail spaces occupied, the empty windows and ‘For Lease’ signs give these units a deserted look, but this should improve as the spaces fill in. In addition, the facades of the retail spaces are all glass, making one indistinguishable from the other, offering little character to the streetscape and not appearing as pedestrian-oriented.

The inclusion of a retail element in this project does prove there is promotion of a mixture of use within the land use policies. Future development across Davie Street of a fresh food market and restaurants (in the Metropolis project) will further
increase land-use diversity in the immediate area of 1188 Richards Street and Downtown South as a whole.

The tower at 1188 Richards is, as stated previously, 24 storeys. There is detail in design of the tower, with terraces mid-way up and again at the top two floors (see Figure 18). The tower is not very tall or very slender compared to the adjacent Citycrest tower (which is unusually slim), but is definitely much slimmer than the Space project (Project II, discussed below).

The back alley of 1188 Richards is the entrance to the underground parking and appears as such. At the level of the pedestrian the project offers only blank concrete walls and a driveway into the underground garage. Pedestrians are offer some relief from the harsh surfaces of the back alley by a glimpse of the trees from the garden on top of the parking garage but it is not something which can be fully enjoyed by the pedestrian given its elevated location (see Figure 19).
5.3 Project II - Space, 1238 Seymour Street

Space is located in the middle of the 1200 block of Seymour Street between Drake and Davie Streets (see Map 9). Completed in July 1996, Space was developed by the Pacific City Land Corporation and designed by Kasian Kennedy Architects. The project is comprised of a 28-storey tower with a 5-storey podium and is strictly residential in use with the exception of the ground-level units in the podium along Seymour, which have been marketed as live/work units. The building has a total of 223 units, 80% of which were sold by completion of construction.

The streetscape in front of the building along Seymour Street, as with 1188 Richards, has all the required elements of the Downtown South streetscape design guidelines. The front setback is 12 feet wide with a double row of trees, there are leaf stamps in the sidewalks and a strip of grass between the road and sidewalk (see Figure 20). The ground-oriented units along Seymour have display gardens, but are not elevated above street level and have not incorporated any type of usable semi-private space at the front of the units. Street furniture had not yet been installed at the time of writing.

Figure 20. Streetscape in front of Space.

Figure 21. Podium at Space.
The pedestrian experience along the front of Space is quite different from 1188 Richards. One cannot easily identify the ground-level units as residential due to an absence of clearly residential architectural elements, and the scale of the podium causes one, as a pedestrian, to feel that the building is very massive (see Figure 21). The large vertical elements along the facade draw the eye upwards and do not differentiate themselves at street level. Windows along the podium are punched out of the building facade, giving a very industrial look and feel to the building, rather than a residential one. In addition, the ground-level unit entrances have relatively small doors, somewhat hidden between two large vertical posts and under large canopies (see Figure 22). These factors cause the ground-level unit entrances to seem out of scale with the rest of the building, giving little impression to the pedestrian of residential use along the streetscape.

Ground-level units at Space are being marketed by the developer as work/live units, and appear to be stressing the ‘work’ aspect more than the ‘live’. The developer did stress that a very young,
urban-oriented market was targeted for this development, which could partially explain the industrial design elements, especially apparent in the main entrance way (see Figure 23). Nonetheless, the project does provide the most pedestrian-friendly part of this section of Seymour street, due mainly to the rhythm provided by the street trees and display garden retaining walls.

The tower at Space has, as previously mentioned, been the subject of some concern, both in the community and at City Hall. Built to the maximum allowable height and width, the tower, some feel, is quite wide despite being terraced in at the eighteenth storey (see Figure 24). The building’s bulk is due to its 16 foot ceilings accommodating loft-style units, which has created a building 30% more massive than the city anticipated any tower in Downtown South being.

Designers of Space have paid special attention to the alley side of the project. They have incorporated a very modern gazebo-type structure into an elevated garden, presenting a pleasant face to the alley and
offering residents a green space off of the main lobby (see Figure 25). There is also a roof-top
garden located on top of the podium at the fifth floor which offers residents green space.

The Space project is the only new building in its immediate area. Although there are several
newer residential projects within one block (1188 Richards, Citycrest and the soon to be
constructed Metropolis), Space appears quite out of context with its adjacent buildings which are
mostly run-down two-storey buildings. As with 1188 Richards, redevelopment of the streetscape
along the opposite side of Seymour and adjacent lots will help to improve the pedestrian realm of
the immediate area.

5.4 Summary of Project Analyses

Consideration of the two case studies presented above illustrates that the land use policies, zoning
and design guidelines for Downtown South can produce different types of buildings. Although
both buildings meet the city’s criteria, one suits the city’s vision of a residential and human-scale
streetscape more than the other. The project at 1188 Richards Street does provide the street with
a comfortable, domestic and pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Comfort is provided by the human-
scale of the building design along the street. The domesticity of this project is due to orientation
of its bay windows and obviously residential doors onto the street and repetition of these elements
along Richards Street, which also creates a sense of rhythm and scale. Slight elevation of
entrances to the residential units provides a clear separation between public and private spaces,
reinforcing the pedestrian realm while providing a sense of security to residents.

The Space project on Seymour also conforms to the design guidelines, but is not as successful in
achieving a pedestrian-oriented residential streetscape. The large scale of the podium and non-
domestic character of units along the street do not produce a streetscape consistent with the city's vision for Downtown South or the outlined characteristics of successful high density communities in the literature review. Units along the street at Space have small, unpronounced doorways, not obviously residential in nature. This streetscape is not completely hostile to pedestrians with some sense of human scale and rhythm provided by the double row of trees and the clear demarcation of pedestrian space provided by the stone display garden walls.

The issue of diversity in Downtown South, in terms of physical diversity and land use is also raised from examination of these two projects. Firstly, the clear differences in design between the two buildings shows there is room for architectural diversity in Downtown South’s design guidelines, although architectural diversity should not be allowed at the cost of pedestrian-oriented design. Diversity in building size is not exemplified by the projects examined above, as both are relatively large developments. Given that Downtown South has only been up-zoned for higher residential density since 1991, it is natural for large projects to be built first. Once all large lots in the community have been developed, it is assumed by City Hall that attention will be turned to development of the smaller lots, adding to diversity of building scale and creating a finer grain of development. In addition, there are some smaller social housing projects and heritage buildings scattered throughout New Yaletown, and Downtown South, which add a variety of scale.

Land use diversity is illustrated by both of the projects examined above, in varying degrees. 1188 Richards Street is mainly residential, but also has a small retail component along its Davie Street side, as required by the land use policies. The incorporation of live/work units into Space gives this project a mix of use as well. By incorporating a variety of land uses into the community, there will be a variety of reasons for people to be on the streets, increasing pedestrian traffic and,
therefore, safety in the neighbourhood. In addition, having a variety of reasons to be on the streets can enhance social diversity of the community by bringing people from different social backgrounds into the community.
6. Chapter Six- Summary of Research Findings, Policy Implications and Thesis Conclusion

6.1 Problem Statement Revisited

With this chapter concentrating on the findings of the preceding research and policy implications of the findings, at this point it is useful to review the thesis problem statement and research objectives. The problem statement asks if Downtown South’s land use policies, zoning and design guidelines encourage the creation of a high density residential community that is pedestrian-oriented and diverse. These two characteristics of successful high density communities have been identified in the literature review as essential to a high density community’s success and the objective was to conduct an analysis focusing on these two essential elements.

6.2 Summary of Research Findings

The City of Vancouver envisions the development of a lively, diverse and mixed-use high density residential community in Downtown South. The vision stresses the presence of high volumes of pedestrian traffic along streets with an abundance of lush green landscaping and a continuous low-rise building streetwall as the main ingredients to the area’s success. Residents of Downtown South will live in widely spaced, tall and slender towers or ground-oriented townhomes. There will be a mixture of uses throughout the area as a whole, with some precincts being almost exclusively residential and commercial retail uses focused along Davie and Granville Streets. People of Downtown South will be from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, enriching the variety of the area and accentuating its clearly urban lifestyle.
Strict urban design guidelines are critical to the creation of a successful high density residential community in Downtown South. Meticulous management of relationships between built form and open spaces is especially important in such high density communities. The policies, zoning and design guidelines in place for Downtown South attempt to address this issue by placing very prescriptive rules and regulations on new development. The highly detailed streetscape design guidelines are an example of this.

Generally speaking, professional architects and developers who have worked on projects in Downtown South agree with the principle of developing a high density residential community in the area. They view Downtown South as one of the most exciting areas of Vancouver due to the many amenities immediately surrounding it. Zoning for residential densities of 5 FSR make development in Downtown South economically feasible for developers and aid in affordability for the purchaser.

Although the concept of high density residential in Downtown South is widely supported by the professional developers and architects interviewed, they noted some areas in which they believe the guidelines could be improved. These were issues such as security, noise, land use, tower design and some details of the streetscape design guidelines.

Examination of two projects recently constructed in Downtown South show that under the current policies there can be varied results. One project satisfies the streetscape vision more than the other. This finding is very significant given that both projects comply fully with the policies, zoning and design guidelines. Therefore, the policies and regulations in place for Downtown South have the intent to create pedestrian-oriented and diverse communities, but this intent is
being missed in some cases. The following policy implications of this finding outline ways in which the policies and guidelines can be improved in order to achieve their intended built form.

6.3 Policy Implications and Areas for Future Research

The fact that policies for Downtown South can be misinterpreted and result in a finished project quite different from the city’s intention for an area points to an important area for further research. If a city government is not able to have its intentions for an area translated into built form, policies are irrelevant. City planners, and urban planners in general, should investigate ways in which they can guarantee that their intentions are carried out in projects that are built. This would perhaps necessitate more involvement from architects and builders - the end-users of policies - in creation of policies. An analysis of the current method of how builders and architects use policies to guide their design processes would be valuable in understanding how design can be influenced to create results satisfying both the city and the builder. There may also be factors present in the administration of these policies which are creating results not true to the intent. These possibilities need to be investigated to discover why and where misinterpretation between policies and built form are occurring.

Perhaps one method of addressing this issue is through the creation of much more prescriptive and detailed design guidelines. This is a very debatable issue, with architects against it claiming the loss of artistic freedom and municipalities in support claiming the need to guarantee quality urban spaces. Possibilities for satisfying both ends do exist. If cities want to create successful communities I believe that they should be allowed to insist on certain physical and architectural elements if they are proven to be essential in other successful communities. Even within very strict and prescriptive design guidelines there is room for architectural and artistic freedom for
designers. In terms of Downtown South, more prescriptive guidelines could insist on certain elements typical to townhouses (specific entrance characteristics, bay windows, building proportions) which would provide a more consistent background to the community, enforcing its specific identity and pedestrian-orientation. The City could take this more prescriptive stance while still providing enough latitude for designers and architects to create varied built forms and design details. By forcing designers to concentrate more on the details of building design, pedestrian-orientation is increased through more intricate designs. This concept is exemplified in many historical examples with many of the highly praised historical urban streetscapes in European cities illustrating cohesion in design of larger elements while incorporating a great amount of diversity in detailing.

From the physical diversity perspective, currently the scale of projects being developed is almost exclusively large. In order to create a fine grain of physical development the city should research potential methods for encouraging development of some of the smaller lots in Downtown South. By having more smaller projects built at the same time as large ones, the area would be able to establish a larger range of physical diversity from the outset. In addition, smaller projects would increase the number of individual buildings in Downtown South, diversifying not only the range of building scale but also increasing the variety of building design.

Results from the research and interviews point to other weakness in the policies for Downtown South. As was mentioned by several of the architects interviewed, policies and design guidelines for any area should not be static. As an area evolves and changes, accordingly policies and design guidelines must be revised as new issues arise and old ones fade away. In addition, regulations in an area must be consistent, applying equally to all projects. Regulations for Downtown South
must be continually reassessed and evaluated in order to make them more effective in creating a pedestrian-oriented and physically diverse community. The city has recognized this to a certain degree, with the design guidelines currently undergoing their second set of amendments.

One of the most significant issues raised by architects was security for ground-oriented residential units. Architects believed that security issues for these units have not been properly addressed in the design guidelines. If people do not feel secure in their homes, the quality of life in a community is threatened (Newman, 1972). Design details, such as not allowing for security gates or fences, are preventing these units from having a perception of being secure. Even if security issues for these units may decline in importance as the community fills in, in the interim some provisions must be made.

One method for dealing with security in the ground-oriented units would be to allow for security gates or fences around the front of the units. Fences can be designed not to block the front of units, maintaining the residential character of the streets while improving residents' perception of security. Even if such fences are not impenetrable, their presence would make units appear more secure. One good example of security fences near Downtown South is at a development along Hornby Street (see Figure 26). These ground-oriented townhouses maintain the residential character of the street and have an increased perception of security due to the fences.

Figure 26. Gated townhouse entrance.
Noise pollution in Downtown South was a concern raised by both architects and planners. This issue is important to pedestrian-orientation as well as overall livability of the area. High noise levels on the streets from large traffic volumes can reduce the effectiveness of pedestrian-oriented design by making streets uncomfortable for pedestrians. Some architects voiced concern that the noise from such high traffic volumes, especially along the one-way streets, seriously diminishes the marketability of ground-oriented units which, in turn, would reduce the success of the pedestrian-oriented units. Given the high level of concern for noise in Downtown South expressed by both architects and planners, it is clear that this issue needs to be further investigated.

In terms of the streetscape design guidelines, one very important point is that they must be strictly enforced. Former Director of Planning at the City of Vancouver, Ray Spaxman, believes that in such a high density area as Downtown South it is very important for the city to maintain very strong development control (Spaxman, 1996). With this being amongst the highest residential densities in Vancouver, the creation of a cohesive and quality physical environment is of the utmost importance. If some projects are allowed to slightly stray from the design concept of Downtown South, a disjointed and incoherent streetscape will result. This is exemplified by the Space project, which does not have a clearly human-scale and residential character and therefore is not highly pedestrian-oriented.

Another method of encouraging an identifiable and unique community in Downtown South is through the use of public art. Public art is intended to address the ordinary citizen, enrich the experience of everyday life and promote an understanding of a community’s identity (Crowhurst Lennard & Lennard, 1995). There is a city-wide public art policy in effect for all major rezonings
which charges 95 cents per square foot to go into a public art fund (City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1994b, p. 2). Research should be conducted into policies further encouraging displays of public art specific to Downtown South. This would help define neighbourhood character, enrich the pedestrian environment and provide a variety of forms and perceptions in public spaces.

Park deficiency in Downtown South also has important policy implications. The city recognizes in the Downtown South Community Plan that the normal park requirement for other communities in Vancouver cannot be met in Downtown South, as this would be unrealistic financially and because of the large amount of land this would require (11 blocks). Although there will be nearby parks available to Downtown South residents upon the completion of the Concord Pacific development and other downtown parks, the city is moving quite slowly on acquisition of park space. The need for a community park is an essential element to Downtown South, as this will give an identifiable centre to the community and provide much needed relief from the harshness of the high density built environment.

6.4 Broader Relevance of Findings

These findings are relevant to all high density mixed-use residential communities by illustrating the importance of very detailed and strictly enforced land-use policies, zoning and design guidelines to promote pedestrian-orientation and physical diversity. In order for the essential characteristics of pedestrian-orientation and diversity to occur, municipal governments must endorse land-use policies, zoning and design guidelines which encourage these qualities throughout whole communities. These policies must be strictly enforced and apply equally to all projects in order to create consistent and unified urban areas. In areas where there is not an identifiable built form
character, design guidelines should strive to create consistent and high quality urban environment. In areas where a strong physical character exists, guidelines should aim at reinforcing the positive aspects of that character in order to strengthen the community’s character and uniqueness.

The importance of enforcing design guidelines encouraging pedestrian-oriented and physical diversity will likely grow as an increasing number of cities aim at making more efficient use of under-used inner city neighbourhoods similar to Downtown South. One example of where this is occurring is Metropolitan Toronto. A report undertaken to evaluate possibilities for reurbanization in Toronto stresses the role of urban design in community building (Berridge Lewinberg Greenberg Ltd., 1991). This report suggests that any large scale reurbanization proposal should have a three dimensional urban design plan to deal with issues such as the relationship with surrounding context, creation or extension of the public realm, building heights, circulation systems, distribution of land uses, the relationship between street and building, etc. Such an urban design plan is viewed as fundamental for successful coordination of the many elements involved in reurbanization projects.

6.5 Conclusion

Development of a high density residential community in the Downtown South is a positive step for the City of Vancouver consistent with the principles of successful high density residential communities. Creation of high density, mixed use areas make efficient use of urban land and facilitate walking, cycling and use of mass transit, all of which conserve energy and lower environmental pollutants. Also, by locating homes close to work and retail needs it becomes easier for people to walk to their destinations, encouraging an animated and exciting street life
and improving social conditions. People who regularly walk in their communities become familiar with patterns of use and other residents, giving a sense of community and belonging.

Reurbanization of underutilized urban land is a viable and environmentally sensitive method for creation of such communities. Reurbanization not only makes efficient use of expensive urban land, but also prevents urban sprawl on new land, thus preserving natural environments. Many cities have inner-city districts which have become neglected and run down. The adjacency of such areas to the city core makes them prime candidates for conversion into mixed-use high density residential communities. In such a context high density is not out of place and their proximity to city amenities facilitate walking, cycling or mass transit as viable transportation modes.

The City of Vancouver envisions Downtown South as becoming a lively and exciting inner-city community. The City wants to develop new housing for Vancouver in an environmentally conscious manner, providing transportation alternatives to the automobile and supportive services and amenities. Social diversity is also an important goal for Downtown South. The city would like to see the community accommodating both its existing lower-income residents as well as the new middle-income residents.

Urban design is an integral part of the successful high density community. By creating comfortable, safe and pedestrian-oriented streets and open spaces, urban design can encourage streets and squares teeming with activity. The City of Vancouver has adopted this philosophy by incorporating very strong urban design guidelines into the Downtown South regulations. The requirement for new development to construct a three to seven storey streetwall, install extensive landscaping and distinctive street furniture show genuine concern for the quality of streetscapes.
The aim of this thesis was to evaluate if the Downtown South land use policies, zoning and design guidelines will encourage the lively high density residential community envisioned by the City. It was found that there is intent in the policies, zoning and guidelines to create a successful high density residential community in Downtown South, but that this intent is not clearly articulated and codified in the design guidelines in a manner that ensures all projects will meet the policy objectives. This has led to some projects which meet the vision of Downtown South more than others. In order for the area to become successful, the guidelines must be improved to be more clear about their intent in order create a consistent pedestrian-oriented and diverse streetscape throughout the community.
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8. Appendix A

8.1 Questions for planners.

Before asking the following questions of the City Planners, it was made clear that I have read all the policies and reports pertaining to Downtown South, and would like a personal perspective from the person on the issues I am asking about.

1. What was your position in developing the policies currently in place for Downtown South?
2. What originally prompted the development of the community plan?
3. What is the vision for Downtown South’s redevelopment and future?
4. What was the theoretical framework from which the development of these policies was created? Was there any particular theory(ies) which influenced the design guidelines?
5. In the creation of Downtown South’s policies, zoning and community plan how much emphasis was placed on built form and streetscape?
6. In the community plan the creation of a socially and physically diverse community is a goal for Downtown South. How was this translated into specific urban design and/or land use policy?
7. In the community plan the creation of a mixed-use neighbourhood is a goal for Downtown South. How was this translated into specific urban design and/or land use policy?
8. In the community plan the creation of a pedestrian-oriented neighbourhood is a goal for Downtown South? How was this translated into specific urban design and/or land use policy?
9. Do you think the policies for Downtown South encourage a variety of housing forms and affordability? If yes, how? If no, why?
10. What type of public consultation was there in the creation of these policies? In what way did the public hearings alter the original concept/idea for Downtown South?
11. Were there any other communities in Vancouver that you used as an example or that influenced the design guidelines and development policies for Downtown South?

12. How would you improve on the policies that are currently in place today to: a) create more social and physical diversity in Downtown South? And, b) create streets which are more pedestrian-oriented?

8.2 Questions for Developers and Architects

1. Which project(s) have you built, or are you in the process of building, in Downtown South?

2. How many units is it?

3. What type of use is it?

4. How much are units selling/renting for?

5. What was the target market for the project(s)?

6. What were the most significant design goals/motivations for the project(s)?

7. Did you find the policies, zoning and design guidelines for Downtown South a help or hindrance in achieving a good design for the building/developing the building? --If they were helpful, how?--If they were a hindrance, how?

8. Did the design guidelines help with the marketability for the development or did they give any guidance?

9. Did policies/zoning/guidelines help your design fit into the existing built environment of Downtown South?

10. What is your vision for Downtown South in the future?

11. From your experience in working with the policies and guidelines for Downtown South do you think they are beneficial for achieving the goal of a lively high density residential neighbourhood as envisioned by the city?
12. How would you improve on the polices, zoning or design guidelines in place for Downtown South to better achieve the city's goals for the area?
9. Appendix B

9.1 Planners Interviewed

1. Larry Beasley, Director, Central Area Planning, City of Vancouver Planning Department.

2. Jeff Brooks, Director, Community Services, Social Planning Department, City of Vancouver.

3. Cindy Chan Piper, Development Planner, Land Use and Development Division, City of Vancouver Planning Department.

4. Jill Davidson, Senior Housing Planner, City of Vancouver Housing and Properties Department.

5. Nathan Edelson, Planner, Central Area Planning, City of Vancouver Planning Department.


9.2 Architects Interviewed

1. Alan Hartley, Principal, Architectura, Vancouver, B.C.

2. Stuart Howard, Principal, Stuart Howard Architects, Vancouver, B.C.

3. Michael McDonald, Kasian Kennedy Architects, Vancouver, B.C.


5. Frank Marino, Howard Bingham Hill Architects, Vancouver, B.C.

6. Joe Wai, Joe Wai Architects, Vancouver, B.C.

9.3 Developers Interviewed

1. Colin Bosa, Bosa Ventures, Vancouver, B.C.

2. John Kinney, Pacific City Land Corporation, Vancouver, B.C.

3. Will Lyn, Lintall Development Corporation, Vancouver, B.C.