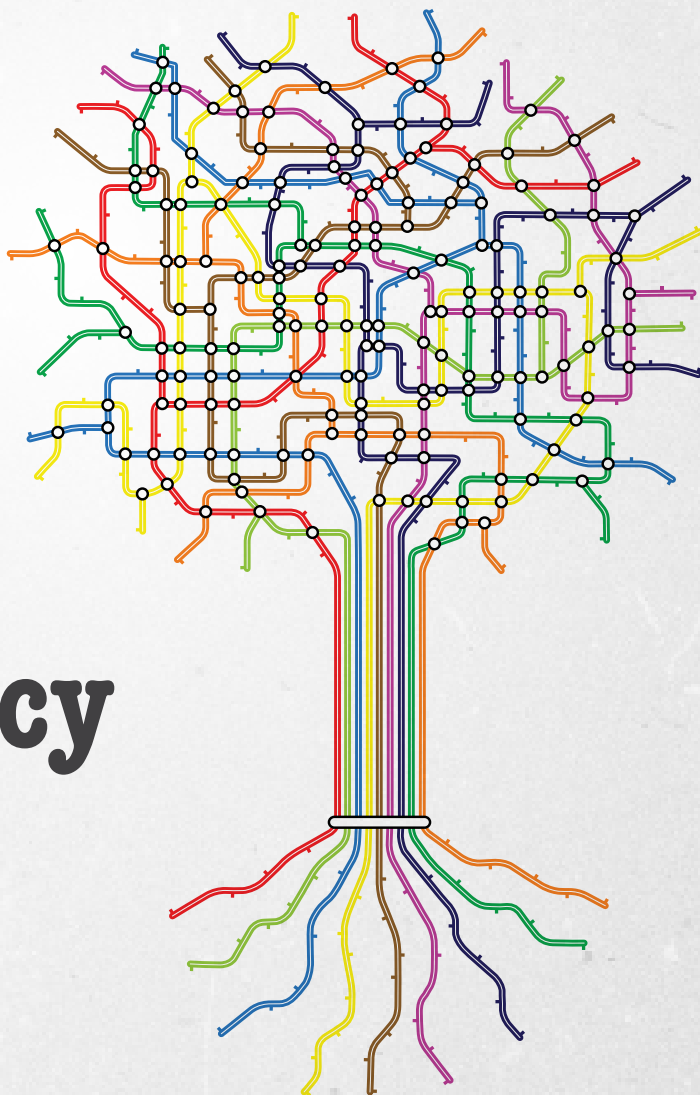




VANCOUVER
PUBLIC SPACE
NETWORK

Public Policy RouteMap 2012-2014



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2012-2014 VPSN Public Space Policy RouteMap

Vancouver's public space – the streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, libraries, civic spaces and broader urban environment – form a ubiquitous and critical part of the city as a whole. Regardless of who you are or where you live in the city, chances are you make use of public space, in one form or another, every day.

On November 19, 2011, residents of Vancouver selected their choice for Mayor, City Council, Park Board and School Board. Decisions made on Election Day will now shape how public space gets designed, maintained and funded over the next three years and beyond.

The Public Space RouteMap is intended as a means to give our elected officials, local political parties, grassroots organizations, voters and residents-at-large a sense of the critical issues for the city's public realm and larger urban environment. The RouteMap is a collaborative effort, produced by the Vancouver Public Space Network with broad input from our membership and in consultation with various experts in urban issues.

This is the second Policy programme that we've produced. Our first, the 2008 Public Space Manifesto, continues to be a reference document and guidebook for public space policy related activities. Material from that edition has, in many cases, been updated to reflect changes that have occurred over the last few years.

How to read the RouteMap

The 2011 RouteMap refines the format of the 2008 Manifesto in a number of ways. We've scaled back the number of different themes and attempted to be more consistent in our presentation of goals, strategies and suggested ways to make them happen.

Each theme component starts with a summary – a character sketch – of a type of public space in Vancouver, or an attribute associated with public space. Each section then advances a goal which in turn helps to frame a series of specific strategies that we think our new City Council and Park Board should consider. We conclude with some suggested mechanisms – far from an exhaustive list, we realize – as to how the proposed strategies might become reality. We think that, with a little creativity, we can improve the city's public realm – the public spaces and amenities in the city that we all share – in ways that are neither unattainable, nor unreasonably costly.

Over to You

One of the reasons we decided to produce the RouteMap is because people – politicians, planners, artists, urbanists, city-lovers and residents of all stripes – often ask for ideas on how to improve the public realm. In presenting an open response to this broad question we offer the contents of the RouteMap as a compilation of our thinking about successful public spaces in this city and elsewhere. We offer the document and the recommendations in it as a contribution to broader discussions on city-building, but also as a means to help others think through decisions on the commonwealth of our urban spaces. Good public space is a key element of the sustainability and livability of the city as a whole.

What sorts of public space related issues should Vancouver's Council and Park Board be working on? We've clustered our response to this question around six key themes – and have itemized these (among with their associated goals actions) over the following pages. Each theme is connected with a type of space, or a quality associated with the way that people use public space. Combined, we feel that these six themes offer the best way for City Council to improve Vancouver's public realm between 2011 and 2014.

ROUTEMAP

Six Themes & High Level Goals

Good Spaces to Congregate

A legible network of plazas and gathering places, of varying shapes and sizes, distributed across each of Vancouver's 22 neighbourhoods. The downtown should have a formal 'heart' – a grand gathering place in which a range of activities can take place year round. At a neighbourhood scale, there should be a series of smaller gathering spaces that reflect the character and needs of each area.

Strong Pathways & Connections

A strong application of a "complete streets" philosophy, that supports all modes of transportation, and ensures an emphasis on the three pillars of sustainable mobility: (1) a pedestrian-first focus on improving the city's pathways (streets, sidewalks, footpaths) to promote walkability and pedestrian safety for all ages and abilities; (2) a continued strengthening of the city's bike lane network along with outreach and education; and, (3) a continued push for improvements to the city's transit network – particularly in areas with high demand and strained capacity.

Abundant Green & Natural Spaces

A network of greenspaces that provides equitable access to nature for all residents, and fulfils a wide range of social, ecological and cultural functions.

○ **Healthy, Safe & Liveable Spaces**

Public spaces that support health and well-being, including various forms of active transportation, opportunities for social interactions and access to local food. Spaces should be safe and feel safe for everyone.

○ **Vibrant Places for a Range of Activities**

Planning and programming of public spaces that allows them to be flexible enough to support a wide range of activities – from artistic performance to cultural production, from local business to community markets, from the exchange of ideas to the trace of hopscotch and the scribble of sidewalk chalk.

○ **Democratic Spaces for an Engaged Vancouver**

Civic spaces and civic processes that invite deliberation and public expression, and support the notion of urban democracy.





01 GOOD SPACES TO CONGREGATE

Ensuring more and better places to gather



Gathering spaces act as a vital component of the public realm, at both the neighbourhood level, and in the city core. When designed to be flexible, such spaces allow for a variety of activities: markets, performance, rallies, and the everyday pleasure of meeting friends and people-watching. Vancouver's network of parks, while not evenly distributed across the city, go some way towards meeting this need. But a separate system of core and neighbourhood plazas and squares – “hard-scaped” surfaces (e.g. paved or stone), accessible design, compelling landscaping, opportunities for modest programming and amenities that support public life – would strengthen the city's overall liveability and quality of life, and enhance local identity.



Goal

A legible network of plazas and gathering places, of varying shapes and sizes, distributed across each of Vancouver's 22 neighbourhoods. The downtown should have a formal 'heart' – a grand gathering place in which a range of activities can take place year round. At a neighbourhood scale, there should be a series of smaller gathering spaces that reflect the character and needs of each area.

Strategies

- 01 Embolden Downtown Vancouver with the creation of new and renewed public gathering places** on the street level of the 800-block of Robson (an expanded Robson Square), the north side of the Art Gallery (also known as Centennial Square), and on part of the former site of Larwill Park (currently the Easy Park parking lot at Georgia and Cambie). The Robson Square 'complex' (including street level and sub- and above-ground areas) is especially well positioned, and ideally proportioned, to fulfil a prominent role as the People's plaza the urban heart of the city.
- 02 Ensure a well-defined system of neighbourhood-scale gathering spaces**, by enhancing existing plazas and squares and planning for the creation of new spaces. These should include more than the temporary gathering areas created through the reallocation of road space during the summer months. Rather, they should be permanent, well-designed, and vehicle-free... and should function as natural places for the community to come together.
- 03 Don't let the riot get in the way of public gatherings.** The events of the June 2011 Stanley Cup riot were terrible on many levels. But it is important not to use this event – extremely rare among the many large public gatherings that take place in the city each year – as an excuse to clamp down on big events. Learn from these and other events, develop a layered approach to big gatherings that features additional programming that will occupy crowds, and plan for a measured response to the security needs that may be present. Possible lessons learned? Olympics: a little too much security. Stanley Cup street party: a little more needed.





How To Get There

ACTIVATE EXISTING CAPACITY

Not all gathering spaces need to be created anew. Vancouver already has many under-utilized spaces, privately-owned plazas, and property assets that could be used more effectively. Consider modest improvements, a call for community involvement, new strategic partnerships with property owners, and an invitation to develop programming and events to support renewed community spaces.

Where appropriate, plan for capital acquisition. Funding is tight, but this doesn't mean that dollars should not be invested in building our public space assets now.

INSCRIBE AND ENACT

Ensure that relevant civic policy initiatives – such as the Transportation 2040 Plan update (to be completed in 2012), the Downtown Public Space Plan (timeline TBD), and community planning activities (ongoing) – reflect the goal of enhancing gathering spaces. Specific projects, such as the proposed relocation or refurbishment of the Vancouver Art Gallery, should also reference and support this goal and be viewed through a public space lens.



CROWD-SOURCE

The Where's the Square Ideas Competition resulted in a number of ideas for a 'grand gathering place'. Consider sourcing ideas for neighbourhood spaces from neighbourhood residents. Take it to the next level – empower residents as part of the place-making process in areas such as funding, construction, and some general maintenance.

EXPAND THE CREATION OF 'TEMPORARY' PUBLIC SPACES

Expand the creation of 'temporary' public spaces - The City's Summer Spaces (Open Streets/Viva Vancouver!) program has provided the opportunity to experiment with a variety of new public space interventions. This program, currently funded on an interim basis, should be made permanent.



02 **STRONG PATHWAYS & CONNECTION**

Facilitating better, more active and sustainable ways for people to move around the city

Roughly one third of the city's land base is dedicated to the network of roads, sidewalks and laneways. Combined, these provide several thousand kilometres of infrastructure dedicated to the movement of people, jogging, biking, walking dogs, delivering goods, collecting waste, and every now and then, engaging in a good parade or street party. As Vancouver grows and diversifies, basic service levels will need to be maintained, but the shift in personal transportation activities, away from cars and onto other modes, will need to be accelerated and made inclusive and inviting for residents and visitors alike.

Goal

A strong application of a “complete streets” philosophy, that supports all modes of transportation, and ensures an emphasis on the three pillars of sustainable mobility: (1) a pedestrian-first focus on improving the city's pathways (streets, sidewalks, footpaths) to promote walkability and pedestrian safety for all ages and abilities; (2) a continued strengthening of the city's bike lane network along with outreach and education; and, (3) a continued push for improvements to the city's transit network – particularly in areas with high demand and strained capacity.

Strategies

- 01 Make Vancouver's pedestrian environment even better.** Where sidewalks are too narrow for pedestrian volumes, make them wider. Where the condition of sidewalks has deteriorated, fix them up – for safety's sake. Where we can make streets more lively and interesting – with art, greenery and interpretive signage – let's do it. We need to encourage more people to walk for health, wellness and to meet their everyday needs.
- 02 Build on the positive aspects of the Dunsmuir, Hornby and Burrard Bridge separated bike lanes by further developing connections throughout the downtown** (and into the larger Metro Core area – bounded by 16th, Clark and Burrard). Develop a suite of engagement options to allow for different opinions to be registered on routing considerations. Ensure that driver and cyclist education programs are tied to any new infrastructure development. Offer ongoing education to children and adults to foster generations of skilled, safe cyclists... regardless of infrastructure investments.
- 03 Intensify municipal lobbying efforts with TransLink and the provincial government to ensure timely progress on the UBC rapid transit line planning.** Resolving the huge demand on the Broadway corridor should be the transit priority for the next term of Council. This requires careful planning in collaboration with TransLink as well as advocacy and encouragement directed toward the Province and a range of other stakeholders. A range of options have been considered along this route. Given the intense strain on the current B-Line bus system, nothing less than high-capacity options are acceptable. Let's make this happen with a planning and engagement process that works for everyone.
- 04 Build on the tremendous popularity of the streetcar line** during the Olympics by re-energizing plans for a stop-by-stop expansion of the line through to Science World, as the initial phase of a project to restore streetcar service to the downtown core. In order to ensure that the proposal is financially sound, the initial focus of this project has to involve research into the feasibility of alternative financing options (including debentures, development charges, partnerships, tolls. Vancouver grew up as a streetcar city before they were short-sightedly torn-up. With appropriate infrastructure like dedicated rights-of-way, streetcars remain one of the best ways of moving people through cities. They could be a viable part of Vancouver's transportation future.

Strategies

- 05 Georgia & Dunsmuir viaducts** – The City has been investigating the possibility of revamping the viaducts almost since they were first constructed. More recently, efforts have been ramped up (no pun intended) with a staff report outlining various options for removing the viaducts... and a design ideas competition focused on generating concepts for the future of this area. With all this in mind, let's carry on with this recent work. There are fantastic opportunities present to do a better job of improving linkages between Strathcona, the False Creek Flats and the downtown. The creation of stronger neighbourhood connections and the development of new public spaces and better sustainable transportation options could be part of this, but the options and their potential impacts need to be carefully considered. Carry on carefully – so we can be sure to get it right!
- 06 Develop (or refine) plans to transform Georgia Street and Broadway from “okay” streets into Great Streets.** Think of Georgia Street (from Stanley Park to False Creek) and Broadway as two of the city's pre-eminent corridors. For over 100 years, Georgia has been conceived of as Vancouver's ceremonial route – but its “wholeness” has been compromised by successive generations of development, each of which has produced a piecemeal response to the street. The result is a jumbled design that underperforms as a premier public space in the city. Meanwhile, Broadway functions as the key cross-town artery in the Central Core area and also supports an area known as Vancouver's “second downtown.” However, it lacks inspiration even though there are many great opportunities to improve the streetscape. Both Georgia Street and Broadway deserve holistic urban design programs to transform them into magnificent corridors.
- 07 Ensure the city's pathways are amenity-rich and comfortable: Increase the distribution of street furniture, water foundation and public bathrooms** – In order to promote walking, biking and other forms of sustainable transit for all ages and abilities, Vancouver's pathways, particularly its high streets and gathering areas, need to see the increased presence of seats and perches (ideally dual purpose infrastructure used as bike racks and planters that provide something to sit on), water fountains, garbage cans, bike racks and access to public washrooms. Ensure that our public spaces are comfortable at all times of the year, any time of day or night and for all ages and abilities. Amenities and infrastructure components should be designed, constructed and maintained to last and be used – a lot. How much more do we need? There are standards used in other cities that can serve to provide guidance, assisting with the needs-assessment, rationale and roll-out.

How To Get There

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Look to achieve transit improvements by partnering with infrastructure providers such as TransLink, in such a way that it doesn't compromise the 'publicness' of the venture.

COMMEMORATIVE FUNDRAISING

Build on the Park Board's successful commemorative program (wherein benches and other amenities are funded by community members) and solicit individual or community group contributions for amenities such as benches, bike parking and street trees, etc. Avoid corporate contributions, advertising and sponsorships that may inadvertently privatize or 'brand' the public realm.

REPRIORITIZE CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN ROADS

Vancouver's streets are in decent shape compared to other cities in the world. Consider reallocating a portion of street repair dollars into infrastructure specifically focused on active transportation and for improving the pedestrian realm.

DIVERSIFIED FINANCING FOR MAJOR TRANSIT INVESTMENTS

This is a tough one. Public transit requires significant investments, both for infrastructure development and on-going maintenance and operation. The absence of a more robust provincial funding program – and the complete absence of a federal transit strategy – disadvantage Canadian cities in this regard. Under the circumstances, one of the keys to moving forward will be to develop as diverse a means of funding transit investments as possible, including taxes, levies, partnerships and more. This will spread the impact of these costs over a number of areas and also ensure a more resilient and stable means of funding.





03 ABUNDANT GREEN & NATURAL SPACES

For habitat, heritage and recreation



Green spaces, which we use loosely as a blanket term to refer to the city's parks, boulevards, greenways, forests, beaches, rivers and other more natural areas, represent a critical component in the overall public space system. Not only do these spaces provide ample opportunities for play and recreation, but they also fulfil important environmental and ecological functions. As defining features of the landscape they further provide an anchor for cultural practices of many different forms.



Goal

A network of greenspaces that provides equitable access to nature for all residents, and fulfils a wide range of social, ecological and cultural functions.

Strategies

01

Initiate a program to identify new ways to achieve greenspace or open space in park-deprived areas. The Park Board operates with a planning target wherein each neighbourhood is ideally meant to have a minimum of 2.75 hectares of park space per 1000 people. Some neighbourhoods achieve or exceed this amount. Others have been considered park-deprived for some time. Given the challenges in finding funding for parkland acquisition, and the scarce availability land for parks, a program needs to be developed that looks at other ways that open space might be created. Answering the question 'How To Make New Parks?' could lead to some interesting possibilities, including leasing existing plazas, closing off a selection of flanking streets (side streets) and laneways, and opening up fenced-off school fields on weeknights and weekends. Still other opportunities exist to enhance greenspace with better street design – such as through the use of permeable pavers and bio-swales – to better allow storm-water to go directly back into the ground, rather than into storm drains.

02

Put special focus on the Fraser River, Vancouver's southern waterfront – Vancouver sits at the mouth of one of North America's most important river systems: the Fraser River and its watershed. Unfortunately, much of the city has its back to this critical piece of our natural heritage. Vancouver's False Creek and Burrard Inlet have been the focus of park planning activities over the years, with tremendous results. Now it's time to bring this sort of rigorous focus and attention to the south side of the city, and to advance a long-range greenspace program for the Fraser River that will showcase the area's cultural, agricultural, industrial and environmental history. The parks that are part of the Fraser River Trail are a good start, but are still too disconnected. Waterfront park space acquisition is still a Park Board priority, which is good. A bold long-term vision is needed, however, that the entire city can contribute to and get excited about. Momentum from major development projects such as East Fraserlands (in the east) and Marine Gateway (at the foot of Cambie Street) can play a part here, but the vision – and ownership for it – must be embedded in a city-wide initiative.

03

Create a program to mark (or further mark) the routes of buried streams and 'lost' waterways. Plan for one new daylighting project before 2014. Vancouver's network of buried rivers continues to fascinate residents, but unless people do considerable research, it's hard to tell where buried streams and lost waterways are located. Develop a program to 'mark' the routes through signage and other landscaping treatment. Take it a step further. Daylighting streams is a significant capital undertaking, but interest in this process is high in many communities. Explore opportunities to do this work with communities rather than for them.

Strategies

- 04 Develop an Urban Forest Master Plan for Vancouver** – Vancouver is unique in the world, as it sits in and on the edge of a vast area of coastal temperate rainforest that stretches all the way up the BC coast and into Alaska. Moreover, the city, through geography, the environment, and economics, has always been intimately connected to forests – publicly marked by the presence of a great rainforest on the edge of downtown – Stanley Park. The Greenest City initiative proposed the development of an urban forestry strategy for the city. This idea has a great deal of merit and is long overdue in Vancouver. When doing so, ensure that the master plan recognizes and builds on a variety of principles associated with good urban forestry – the link to good public health, the role of trees in providing habitat and ecological services that boost air and water quality, storm-water runoff and climate change, as well as the cultural and heritage values associated with trees.
- 05 Explore new ways to protect natural heritage features that cross property lines.** In 2010 a decision was made that could lead to the removal of a massive Tulip tree in the city’s West End because its roots crossed multiple property lines, and because one of those properties was slated for redevelopment. It was a complicated matter, but what it boiled down to is this: current City processes don’t always have a good means of protecting (or providing an incentive for the protection of) important landscape features within the legal framework afforded by private property. Looking at alternatives poses a challenge – particularly given the primacy of property rights – but it’s a subject that deserves careful attention and could draw upon work in other areas of environmental law.

How To Get There

IDEAS COMPETITION AND OTHER COMMUNITY-GENERATED IDEAS

There are countless talents in the community – design, construction, fundraising, communications, etc. – that could be tapped for creating new greenspaces around the city, a vision for the Fraser River, or for tackling the tough questions that come with creating new projects and policies.

CONTINUED CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CURRENT PARKLAND ACQUISITION

The Park Board has seen a number of budget cuts over the years. It is important that investments continue to be made in urban forestry, as well as parkland acquisition priorities (focusing on waterfront land and green space in park deprived areas).



SOLICIT VOLUNTEER SUPPORT FOR SMALL STEWARDSHIP TASKS

With limited budget dollars, now is the time to explore ways to maximize the use of paid Park staff on the critical issues – design, development, maintenance. Other aspects of stewardship, such as tending to flower beds or minor landscaping work might reasonably be done in collaboration with local neighbourhood groups.





04 **HEALTHY, SAFE & LIVEABLE SPACES**

Spaces that are healthy, safe and welcoming



In order to be widely used, public spaces need to feel safe for everyone.

And in order to strengthen the health and well-being of the population, public spaces need to support a variety of beneficial health-related outcomes, which can be accomplished through the provision of recreational opportunities, the enabling of food security and wellness opportunities, and the fostering of social interaction and community connections. While safety has always been part of the responsibility of municipal governments, it is only recently that the public and population health lens is being reapplied to city activities. This work comes not a moment too soon. The focus on safe spaces, healthy built environments, active transportation and other aspects of healthy planning all benefit from this perspective. The increased presence of a health and safety lens will only improve the performance of the city's public realm.



Goal

Public spaces that support health and well-being, including various forms of active transportation, opportunities for social interactions and access to local food. Spaces should be safe and feel safe for everyone.

Strategies

01

Emphasize opportunities for active transportation and healthy living –

Compared with many other cities, Vancouver is already very active. Let's build on that trend by ensuring that residents and visitors alike can utilize our public spaces for active forms of getting around and other aspects of healthy living. This means ensuring the network of public pathways is systematically improved and connected for convenient use and trip planning (e.g. more connected bike lanes, wider walkways for foot, scooter and stroller traffic). It can also mean programmatic activities, such as more community centre courses to encourage people to get outside to use public spaces for recreations. Lastly, it can mean smaller, neighbourhood-scale investments, such as a revitalization of playing fields or the installation of fixed exercise equipment (i.e., pull up bars, rock-climbing bouldering walls) in our parks.

02

Continue to develop a proactive policy for community gardens –

Urban gardens provide residents access to healthy foods and an opportunity to interact with people in their neighbourhood – two aspects that are supportive of health! The City's Greenest City program called for the creation of more community gardens and orchards across the City. Continue with this push and look to incorporate urban agriculture opportunities. Develop a more proactive communications strategy to counter the myths surrounding community gardens (i.e. that they privatize public space or poses a negative impact on property values).

03

Initiate an aggressive clamp-down on motorized vehicles that violate the vehicle noise bylaw –

Excessive noise (both constant and spontaneous) has negative health implications. Read the letters-to-the-editor page in summertime and you'll hear it loud and clear: modified tailpipes on cars and motor-bikes have to be reigned in. The brain-numbing, conversation-destroying noise they produce is not only a major irritant, but it poses a health risk to people by literally hammering the eardrums and nervous system simultaneously. Let's not confuse the issue: some noise (e.g. celebrations, festivals, conviviality) is an acceptable by-product of urban living. Excess vehicle noise, however, is just plain obnoxious.

Strategies

04

Lighting and safety – Lighting is very important on pedestrian and bike routes. Proper lighting offers a sense of personal safety plus it allows obstructions (including people) and other injury risks to be avoided. Many residential bike routes are inadequately lit at night and this should be attended to in a way that won't keep the neighbours up. Conduct an audit of key pedestrian corridors and designated bike routes to determine lighting improvements needs. Where necessary, plan for good, pedestrian-scale lighting fixtures.

05

More community policing offices and community police, fewer cameras – The City's investment in community policing is barely \$1 million a year, which gets spread out over 10 offices (roughly 1 for every two of the City's 22 neighbourhoods). Compare this to the total 200 million dollar operational budget for the Vancouver Police Department and you begin to get a sense for policing priorities. Community policing offers 'real' eyes on the street and a sense of connection to the neighbourhood's residents (plus, police are accountable to the public in a way that private security firms are not). The continued pursuit of technological solutions (e.g. surveillance technology) offers a poor alternative. Our mantra? Invest in community police, not cameras.

How To Get There

STRATEGIC EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH VANCOUVER COASTAL HEALTH, PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT HEALTH AGENCIES, AND HEALTH RESEARCHERS

Establish partnerships with VCH and other government agencies to guide municipal policies, projects and programs that have an impact on health and well-being of residents. Seek partnerships with health researchers to evaluate the health related outcomes of these policies, projects and programs.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

City staff have been tasked with developing a supportive and consistent approach to urban agriculture. When complete, this should provide clear and coherent guidance both across City departments and for the public.

STRATEGIC REALLOCATION OF BUDGETARY DOLLARS FOR HEALTH, SPECIFICALLY, ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Realign capital investments in road infrastructure to support the creation of a better pedestrian and cycling environment as well as access to amenities, such as street furniture, water fountains and bathrooms. If you built it... they will come and use it and the city will be all the better for it.

BYLAW ENFORCEMENT

Develop a penalty system that can be attached to traffic bylaw violations – or the businesses that enable them – that can help to fund enforcement efforts.



MODEST INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Park Board has a roster of park-upgrades that get completed each year. As part of the design and planning that goes along with this, build more infrastructure, such as fixed exercise equipment to encourage physical fitness. The City's Engineering Department should continue to receive funding through the capital budget in order to fund water hook-ups to community gardens.

STRATEGIC REALLOCATION OF BUDGETARY DOLLARS FOR COMMUNITY POLICING OFFICES

A greater proportion of the existing policing budget targeted to support community policing centres.





05 **VIBRANT SPACES**

For a range of activities such as culture, economy, learning and play

- **Public spaces serve a variety of purposes.** In addition to serving as places to meet, or move through on the way from Point A to Point B, they also provide an important tableau for arts and economy, education and more. In so doing, they invite people out into the streets in order to enjoy the city's shared and public spaces – which in turn leads to a layered and vibrant public life. The more uses attached or adjacent to a public space, the richer the tapestry of social activity that is connected with it.

- **Goal**
Planning and programming of public spaces that allows them to be flexible enough to support a wide range of activities – from artistic performance to cultural production, from local business to community markets, from the exchange of ideas to the trace of hopscotch and the scribble of sidewalk chalk.

Strategies

- 01 Legalise neighbourhood play** – Sidewalk chalk drawings, tire swings tied to street trees and driveway lemonade stands. Believe it or not, these are among the many things that are currently disallowed because of the sweeping ‘catch-all’ language of different City bylaws. People aren’t necessarily being charged with infractions as a result of these things, but it seems time for the City to relax a bit and to revisit the rule book, to reign in Officer Buzzkill. Initiate a review of relevant City bylaws with a view to supporting a more vibrant public life.
- 02 Reduce zoning and licensing restrictions on neighbourhood pubs, restaurants and entertainment spaces** – This is meant to: (1) allow these sorts of spaces to exist in areas other than neighbourhood high streets; and (2) allow the neighbourhood venues that do exist to do so with less restrictions. One of the great characteristics of cities such as Portland and Seattle is that their zoning regulations and licensing systems allow neighbourhood-scale nooks of retail and food-service businesses to exist within largely residential areas. In Vancouver this sort of activity has mostly been ‘zoned out’ of the allowable uses in many parts of the city – except along the obvious commercial corridors and downtown... and even there obtaining a liquor primary license can be next to impossible. In the interests of enhancing neighbourhood character, walkability and shoring up the local economy, it’s time to revisit this.
- 03 Support the creation of workshop spaces for creative production** – In many parts of the city – particularly areas with a large proportion of high density rental or condominium units – the availability of workroom and workshop space in which to tinker on creative projects is scarce to non-existent. Not only are artists studios in high demand, but spaces for everyday people to be creative are at a premium. Community Centres, School Board facilities and other public or semi-public spaces should be made more accessible so that residents can make use of workshops, tool sharing libraries and other facilities within these spaces.
- 04 As part of the creation of a new or re-imagined public space in the city, create a purpose-built market space** – In other cities around the world, the tradition of a market square is popular – a space that can be used for art one day, farmers another, bookselling, and more. Such spaces incubate small-scale businesses while proving popular with residents and tourists alike. Consider supporting the opportunity to support the transformation of an existing downtown space – perhaps an alley or underutilized plaza – into a market area. Support this transformation with investment in appropriate weather-proofing and utilities infrastructure.

Strategies

05

Make laneways and alleys more liveable! Vancouver has an abundance of under-utilized spaces in its network of secondary laneways of alleys. Develop a “laneways and alleys” strategy that examines this resource, identifies opportunities and transforms these into more-usable public spaces. Foster a spirit of creative thinking by creating mechanisms for local business and community groups to utilize these spaces for patios, retail outlets, markets and more. Balance, of course, would be the key – because it’s important not to forget the critical role that these spaces also play in goods movement, waste disposal and the location of utilities.

06

Expand the city’s capacity for creativity – Vancouver has taken good steps forward in supporting art in public spaces – from events like Viva Vancouver! to the larger policy themes in the new Cultural Infrastructure Plan. It’s important to maintain energies here, but also to recognize culture in all its forms. Vancouver and other cities benefit not only from formal arts and cultural activities, but also from small-scale, grassroots events that engage the community in public spaces (think capoeira at Woodward’s, or breakdancing at Robson Square). Let’s start to look for ways – neither bureaucratic nor regulatory in nature – to enable more grassroots, spontaneous and ephemeral performance, programming and installations.

How To Get There

REDUCED LICENSING FEES AND INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

In 2010, Council introduced a \$100 permit fee for neighbourhood events. Completing this licensing process also often requires liability insurance. This means that events as simple as a block party can cost up to \$400 even before spending anything on the party itself.

BYLAW REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS

The Zoning and Development Bylaw, the Street and Traffic Bylaw and the Park Bylaw are among many forms of regulation that introduce unreasonable restrictions on aspects of public life... like, say, not being allowed to be in a City Park after 10 pm. These need to be stricken from the record.

ACTIVATE EXISTING CAPACITY

Vancouver has untapped capacity in its existing public space inventory, particularly in its lanes or ancillary spaces, that could be significantly enhanced through investments in programming. Creating good public space doesn’t have to be about significant capital costs. Developing mechanisms for community-driven activities could empower local organizations to partner and assist in reducing demands on City funding.





06 DEMOCRATIC SPACES

For an engaged Vancouver

- **The democratic health of a city is intrinsically linked to the health and well-being of its public realm.** Not only are public spaces a vital ingredient for public expression and the healthy exchange of ideas of all kinds (even the ones that we don't agree with), but the specific 'spaces' created through dialogue enable residents to share valuable input into the future of their city. When these spaces are inaccessible, when they appear privatized, or when they are impacted by an excess of regulation or bureaucracy, this becomes problematic.

- **Goal**

Civic spaces and civic processes that invite deliberation and public expression, and support the notion of urban democracy.

Strategies

- 01 Expand civic representation at the neighbourhood level** – In July 2011, City Council passed a motion to designate Council representatives to the nine CityPlan neighbourhoods (neighbourhoods that had been part of the 1996-2010 CityPlan Neighbourhood Visions planning process). This comes on top of the Council-created Mayor's West End Advisory Committee. We propose going a step further – and assigning Council representation to each of the City's 22 Local Areas. We may not have wards in Vancouver, but this would go part way to achieving some of the benefits that are associated with neighbourhood representation – ensuring that each neighbourhood has a designated point of contact with an elected official.
- 02 Enable better two-way conversations between the City and residents** – We refer to the current mixed messages around public involvement as the "Engagement Two-Step." In the last three years some great strides taken in gathering ideas and input for city processes. The Greenest City initiative was a good example, and recent Transportation Plan work is another. But the various new tools and techniques that are being employed to gather ideas are hampered on two fronts: Council and Park Board meeting processes that require people to take time off work, or schedules key discussions at inaccessible times; and restricted scheduling in the release of key staff reports, whereby reports are released for public review with little more than one week time (and sometimes a lot less) for public review. These two areas represent key concerns that must be addressed.
- 03 Allow more and better spaces for 'writing on the city'** – Currently there are only 200 or so poster cylinders – metal bands that wrap utility poles and provide space for event notices – located throughout the city. It is unlawful to post fliers elsewhere and private notice boards are few and far between. In fact, there are more unlawful billboards than there are officially designated places for the sharing the sort of everyday information – such as lost cat notices, block party invites, or leaflets on a planned rally against salmon farming – that make our city lively and interesting. We suggest: (1) placing more poster cylinders on high streets and commercial areas; (2) amending the Street and Traffic Bylaw to allow neighbourhood notices (but no, not posters for GM Place rock concerts) (3) experimenting with other types of sanctioned notice and information space.

Strategies

- 04 Facilitate, rather than hamper, public and political expression** - In April 2011, the City passed an amendment to the Street and Traffic Bylaw that significantly limits opportunities for political expression, and formalized the requirement that residents seeking to engage in many types of political expression must require a permit to do so. These requirements are unlikely to stand up to legal challenge (on constitutional grounds) and should be stricken from the bylaw. Instead, the City should be looking for ways to encourage civic engagement in a variety of issues, facilitating expression and ensuring that permits and regulations do not stand in the way of peoples' democratic right to civic assembly and free speech.
- 05 Eliminate non-compliant billboard advertising and other corporate signage** – Signs are an important way to convey information – but in order to prevent the proliferation of the sort of advertising and branding 'noise' you find in other cities, the City has, over the years, developed a strong Sign Bylaw. Unfortunately, despite the good steps forward, there are a large number of non-compliant billboards, signs and guerrilla marketing efforts that are turning parts of our public space into marketing canvases. Stronger bylaw enforcement is needed in this area.

How To Get There

EXPAND COUNCIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

to ensure that each neighbourhood has a committee that meets 4 to 6 times a year and can act as a 'town hall' forum with a Council designate. Committee composition should be representative of the Local Area in question – ethnocultural, intergenerational – should be transparent in its processes, and should feature a scope of activity (Terms of Reference) consistent with one another.

CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN NEW TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Social media, on-line engagement and modelling and visualization tools should be components of all new and expanded public involvement processes. Continue to experiment with these and ensure that they are utilized in a consistent (but modifiable) fashion across a range of civic activities.

RESCHEDULE STANDING COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

Standing Committees of Council meetings should be scheduled in the evening to allow more people to attend, and to enable the public more opportunity to present on motions and/or reports. The current 9:30am and 2:00pm time slots require many members of the public to take time off work in order to make delegations.

AMEND CIVIC PROCESSES TO FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNCIL REPORTS AND COUNCIL MEETINGS

We suggest, at a minimum, a doubling of the current 1-week pre-Council meeting release time for Council reports, and doing so through a resolution that the minimum should be two to three weeks unless exceptional circumstances apply.



BYLAW AMENDMENTS

Neighbourhood notices and other opportunities for political expression should be allowed on utility poles and possibly other civic infrastructure. This can be done through formal amendments to the Street and Traffic Bylaw. These amendments would require approval by City Council and should be done with input from the public.

BYLAW ENFORCEMENT

Creating a robust penalty structure for non-compliant 3rd party advertising could assist the City in financing additional staff resources for enforcement.

MODEST INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Poster cylinders and information kiosks would represent a nominal investment in City infrastructure. Funding could be linked to areas of streetscape improvement, the development process, or the license fee attached to commercial bill posters.



