



Vancouver Public Space Network

Whitecaps / Central Waterfront Backgrounder

Remember the Whitecaps Stadium proposal from last year? There's a new proposal up for discussion, and along with it an opportunity to comment on the revamped plan. The proposal has grown in size - and the City's public review on the stadium has now been appended to a larger consultation about the central waterfront area of Downtown.

The Vancouver Public Space Network has prepared the following backgrounder based following brief opinion is from viewing the open house materials from the City's March Open Houses as well as reviewing relevant staff reports on the proposal.

Context:

From the City's website: "On February 1st 2007 Council approved terms of reference for an 18 month planning program to create an Urban Design and Transportation Plan for the Central Waterfront Hub area around Waterfront Station.

The main objectives of the Central Waterfront Hub program are to:

- Create a transportation hub which better integrates the many transit modes which converge in this area - Skytrain, Canada Line, West Coast Express, Seabus, Helijet and numerous bus lines.
- Establish planning and urban design guidelines for the various development sites which exist in the area.
- Introduce measures to enhance the public realm - streets and open spaces - in this important location.

The early stages of the Hub program will also involve a review of the proposal by the Vancouver Whitecaps to build a 15-30,000 seat soccer stadium on the site of the existing Seabus terminal..."

At First Glance - Improved Proposal with Added Methodological Concern:

As with the previous Whitecaps proposal, the present submission has a number of positive and negative aspects that need to be considered. While improvements have been made to the quality of the stadium proposal, the VPSN is wary about the lumping together of aggregating the transit hub improvements with the stadium proposal in one review process. There are advantages and disadvantages to this methodology. (The aggregation of stadium and general waterfront (and transit) considerations was something that the City recommended and The Whitecaps contributed over \$100,000 towards). The VPSN believes that while a "holistic" approach is useful for design, there is also the need to ensure that the individual components of the various design

features are looked at - and decided upon - separately. (For example, the VPSN believes that the need to improve the area's transit hub and waterfront area components exist independent of the stadium proposal).

That being said, the public consultation represents a good opportunity for residents of Vancouver to review a key proposal. There are a number of public space related items that also make this a key opportunity to advocate for improvements to the public-realm in the Downtown area.

History:

Last year the Whitecaps proposed developing a new stadium on the waterfront - a move from their present Burnaby location. The initial proposal sought to build the stadium over the railway tracks. Critical feedback on this feature, as well as concern from Gastown business and residents, were among the reasons that the proposal was sent back for review.

In their review of the initial Whitecaps proposal the City raised five key issues: (1) the need for the provision of an adequate street network; (2) the resolution of the risks and liability associated with dangerous goods in the rail lands; (3) the reconfiguration of the stadium structure and site to ensure a better "fit" with Gastown; (4) resolution of impacts on the liveability of residential uses in areas south of the rail lands; (5) resolution of impacts on future Port Lands development.

The New Proposal:

The redesigned Whitecaps proposal will see the stadium take over the land now occupied by the sea bus terminal. In other words, they no longer want to build the stadium over the tracks but are now hoping to lower the stadium over the water of Coal Harbour. Full details on the design features are available on the City's website listed at the end of this document.

On the plus side, there are provisions to include a new 5,000+ public gathering space outside the stadium at street level off Cordova (this is in addition to another area public space: Granville Square). As well, no new parking is proposed - which in theory is a plus, except that it is not clear whether or not there is sufficient capacity to (a) support the out-of-town fans who drive, or (b) ensure that out-of-towners have a decent incentive (other than the ghostly image of Al Gore) to take transit. (Naturally, we would advocate for any strategy that encourages the move to public transit!). Also on the 'con' side, there is still significant community concern around the well-being of the neighbourhood that needs to be addressed. These points are summarized in the next section.

Some of the reasons that the City now thinks that this is a better proposal are:

- "The opportunity to create an adequate road and public space system to enable access to the stadium and ensure better crowd marshalling and dispersal.
- Relocation of the stadium away from the rail yards could mitigate the risks / liability associated with dangerous goods on the tracks.
- Relocation of the stadium away from Gastown enables a better urban design

'fit' with this heritage area and mitigation of impacts on the liveability of residential units.

- The opportunity to draw people and activity to the waterfront, including the extension of a public walkway from the west.”

The VPSN's Assessment of Positive aspects to the Whitecaps / Waterfront Proposal:

1. Stadium would be very accessible by Westcoast express, Skytrain, Seabus and bus transit.
2. Allowance for potential improvements to Sea Bus terminal (closer to Cordova and other modes of transit). Also the possibility of more public washrooms.
3. Potential for new public square, plaza in front of stadium. Potentially big enough for 5000+ people to gather.
4. Economic benefits - some short term (construction) and long term jobs. Potential to benefit local service industries.
5. No new public parking is proposed. Some staff parking is proposed.
6. Potential to improve pedestrian access to transit and waters edge.
7. Funding for the stadium and other development components will come from private sources - the Whitecaps owner (though there is a need to ensure that the public realm improvements are deeded to the City).
8. A new venue can bring new events to the city - including sporting, entertainment, festivals, and so on.

Among the VPSN's Points of Concern with the New Proposal:

1. Bringing up to 30,000 people per event to Gastown and trying to disburse them. Crowds, noise, garbage and the potential for additional policing and security all need to be considered.
2. Potential environmentally invasive development (the stadium is proposed to be built over Coal Harbour/Burrard inlet and will result in increased noise, light pollution, garbage, etc. It remains to be seen if this is this type of development appropriate in relation to the existing land uses (port land, rail yard, offices, residential). (This is not necessarily a negative point but rather something that needs to be thought through).
3. The new proposal seems to conflict with current Gastown Area revitalization plans the area. Resident and business-owner concerns need to be addressed.
4. The Design of the stadium will create a curtain effect - promoting the additional interruption to views of North shore and blocking natural light. Also, it is not clear from the current proposal how the stadium development will address the rest of the waterfront (including public access, how it meets the

- water, etc.). The City needs to clearly ascertain whether the proposal will act as a bridge or barrier to the waterfront.
5. Potential contribution to traffic problems downtown. Not everyone will take transit to the new stadium. Crowds will inevitably block local roads when leaving events.
 6. Methodology - as mentioned earlier, the City lumped or cloaked this stadium proposal into a "transit Hub improvements" proposal.
 7. Depending on the design of the stadium, the SeaBus terminal could potentially be located even further away making it more difficult to access, decreasing the efficacy of public transit in the area.
 8. Architecture - there aren't any guarantees that the design of the building will be "green" - which should be a requirement of any new facility such as this.
 9. It is not clear what other uses, commercial, community, etc. will be included in the development - and as identified above, there is the need to ensure that the components identified as being "public realm" do indeed get approved as such - and are not just part of the "sales pitch."
 10. Unintended consequences of the stadium development may include increased real estate values in an area that is already struggling with gentrification and displacement of low-income individuals. Any development proposal in this area should include a strategy to prevent additional loss of affordable rental units.

More Information:

- The City reports are available on-line at <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/currentplanning/whitecaps/index.htm> and additional materials have also been posted at the www.whitecapsnewstadium.com website.
- The VPSN's Urban reDesign working group can be reached by email at info@vancouverpublicspace.ca.

About the Vancouver Public Space Network

- The VPSN is a grassroots organization that engages in advocacy, education and outreach concerning public spaces and the public realm in Vancouver and its environs.