

The following is an analysis and of the May 13th 2008 version of the Ecodensity Charter and Initial action items. The Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN) has compared the May 2008 charter and action items with previous versions and how well the newest Ecodensity documents respond to the observations and recommendations presented in the *VPSN EcoDensity, Liveability & the Future of Vancouver's Public Realm* report. This report was based on the information gathered from the February 18, 2008 Community Workshop. In summary, the report had 10 key recommendations for revisions to the ECOdensity charter and action items;

1) Affordable Housing. Acknowledging that liveability is greatly enhanced by the availability of quality, affordable housing, ensure that EcoDensity results in the maximum range of housing types.

2) Mobility & Transportation. Clearly articulate the City's commitment to integrating mobility and transportation considerations into all EcoDensity planning.

3) Proximity. Ensure that the ecology of density in Vancouver allows people to be close to the important things in their lives, including community amenities, greenspaces, jobs, retail and cultural activities.

4) Neighbourhood Scale. Promote a "Liveable Scale" for the City and its Local Areas, while strengthening neighbourhood identity and cohesion.

5) Community Amenities and Supports. Ensure a sufficient capacity of appropriate, well-designed amenities and supports for the community to meet the needs of increased density.

6) Equity, Basic Needs, Safety. Provide an explicit commitment to ensuring that the goals and attributes of a liveable city are accessible to all.

7) Economic Accessibility & Participation. Champion the fact that the City can play a role in promoting affordability, assist in the maintenance of a vital local economy, and provide good value for money with its liveability-promoting 'assets.'

8) Public Spaces and the Public Realm. Ensure that density does not inhibit the provision of a diversity of welcoming spaces and experiences (events, artistic installations, points of distinction) to meet the needs of different ages, ethnicities, and lifestyles - as well as to provide them with opportunities to encounter one another.

9) EcoDensity Coordination. Ensure that the inter-departmental nature of the EcoDensity Project is enhanced, so that initiatives and expertise in all relevant City departments are appropriately resourced to strengthen the City's liveability.

10) EcoDensity Communication. Ensure that EcoDensity communications materials are presented in a clear, focussed fashion - free from excess planning jargon, and reflecting the precise commitments of the City.

Observations on the May 13th 2008 Ecodensity charter and action items

The VPSN review of the latest draft documents has found that generally, the sentiment of the documents relay a sense of listening to concerns that have been expressed to City Planners. This is demonstrated with much preamble and discussion for each action item. However, what was recorded as feedback was not necessarily reflected in the wording of the action items.

The charter and action items recognize that there is much more work to be done in understanding where the city is now in respect to affordability, amenities, etc. and how to achieve the ecodensity goals.

There will be much more work for staff to come up with a wide range of new strategies, plans and polices that span the subjects from; green buildings, amenities, affordability, rezoning, development of city land, housing types and densities, to a new city wide plan. How long do you study and strategize for and to what extent?

There are some positive additions to the Ecodensity documents. These include;

- The charter has a new section that looks to the community for input and help in meeting the commitments within the Ecodensity charter. It also speaks about respecting the voices of neighbourhoods and the future un-represented voices.
- The charter identifies the need for more meaningful public involvement in the process and collaboration in developing strategies and plans. *“Engage, educate, and learn from the public at city-wide and neighbourhood scales, in all steps of this work, to promote neighbourhood voice and ownership in keeping with the Charter.Form solutions that balance neighbourhood ownership with neighbourhood responsibility toward the city-wide goals of EcoDensity.”*
- The charter recognizes the need for flexible and adaptable spaces for community gathering within each neighbourhood. **This will be increasingly apparent as neighbourhoods densify and demands and needs will change over time.**
- The charter recognizes that affordability and liveability are critical to the viability of Vancouver.
- Identifies that natural processes must be enhanced and integrated into redevelopment.

The revised documents are weak in several areas;

The charter recognises that there will be more people moving to Vancouver in the future and suggests that increasing density is the solution. The new Ecodensity documents do not indicate how these dense neighbourhoods encourage neighbourliness. Will the dense form and land use encourage social engagement and a change to meet your neighbours?

The documents also fail to communicate how the proposed actions are to be implemented within a neighbourhood and relate at the neighbourhood scale. Too many of the action items specifically correspond to buildings and not enough on creating green, walkable neighbourhoods where services and amenities are locally accessible to all who live there.

How do any of the proposed actions reduce car use?

The green building and design strategies need to link green with affordability. For example, limit parking requirements so that housing units don't include the cost to develop parking stalls.

- More needed on affordability - look to a type of housing that offers affordability by setting a resale value below market value.
- While the original charter and action items (May 2007) offered solutions, there are none here to address affordability, transportation, local food production.
- Food security and food systems are not mentioned in the new document. How does ecodensity improve liveability and the current affordability issues? Making healthily food more accessible to everyone is one strategy to improve affordability.
- The quality and quantity of public open space and public realm must meet the needs and demands of a dense and diverse population. The public spaces of an Ecodense Vancouver must be adaptable and flexible to change with increased use, demand and variety of programming.