

Received October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014:

### Twenty Questions

When the city was consulting and developing the Emerging Directions document, I was, for part of the time, in Spain. While there, I thought about the planning process and asked myself why I would put up with the expense and the discomfort to travel to a city as dense as say, Barcelona or Madrid. Since then I've visited Paris and Amsterdam and the same question has continued to puzzle me: what is it about those largely low-rise but dense cities that makes me (and many others) want to go there? (Hint: it's not just the old buildings.) Since I like to walk, I've usually stayed in an apartment in a walkable neighbourhood, with easy access to transit for exploring the rest of the city. In those respects, the attractions are similar to those of Grandview.

In the CA Sept 25 newsletter, two recurrent themes struck me as I read the CA members comments about the neighbourhood: one was valuing diversity and respect, and the other was about walkability. There were other comments as well, but many of them could be seen, at least in part, as a subset of those two. For example, someone commented on their enjoyment of the artwork on Commercial Drive. That artwork could be an expression of the diversity in the neighbourhood, and the commenter's enjoyment of it a factor in what makes walking a pleasant way to get around.

These perspectives have led me to pose 'twenty questions' (more or less). Where I've started to form tentative conclusions I've included them, but I'm not asking for agreement or a formal response. I'm submitting them simply as something you may want to think about as you walk about the neighbourhood, and the city at large.

**1. What are the factors and influences that the make Grandview the vibrant, accepting and diverse neighbourhood that it is now?**

The factors that come to my mind follow. What are yours?

- Walkability, so that we are thrown into proximity with, and get to know, neighbours of different income groups, backgrounds, and ages;
- a mixture of rental and owned housing, available at different 'price points', so that people of all income levels can afford to live here;
- Transit;
- Independent shops and artist space so that people can work and create in the neighbourhood, and enhance the vibrant feel of the neighbourhood.

**2. Can the evolution of the neighbourhood be guided so that development and any density increases add to the features that we like about Grandview and want to reinforce? (And, conversely, avoid development that would weaken the features we like and want?)**

Some subordinate questions that follow from this;

- If there is to be an increase in density, should it be linear along transit corridors (e.g. along Commercial Drive) or nodal (e.g. say West of Commercial Drive between Broadway and First Ave, and between Hastings and Venables)?
- Does the street-front width and homogeneity of a building affect the attractiveness of the street to pedestrians?
- Now that laneway housing is established, could and should we enhance lanes even further so that they become pedestrian and bike friendly as well as just utility corridors?
- Can new buildings include street level live-work space, to ensure that artists and craftspeople aren't displaced from the neighbourhood?
- Can private space and public space be clarified to reduce feelings of alienation for low-income residents (as, for instance, when there are street level walkways and green spaces that are gated, as they are for example near the Van Horne building in Gastown)?
- Why do small new apartment and condominium buildings require side set-backs? Could this space be amalgamated and 'traded' for public space such as plazas or small parks?
- Can the business rules and 'zoning' be modified to make it easier for independent businesses to compete with chains? Should they be modified?
- Are there ways to make the perceived height/scale of the building less apparent? For example, should there be a 'stepping down' in the height of buildings so that a apartment/condo tower isn't across the lane from a row of single-family dwellings? (For example, if there is a six story apartment tower facing between the lane and Hastings St, then would a row of low-rise townhouses that face Pender mitigate the feeling of being 'overshadowed' by the apartment?)
- How can we improve accessibility – getting around and through the neighbourhood?
- How does the scale of new buildings affect factors such as housing affordability, diversity, and transportation modes such as walking and cycling?

**3. Is there an optimal level of density or an optimal pace of densification? If so how can we figure out what that pace or level is?**

- How does the scale and pace of re-development affect the availability of affordable housing and business space for residents, artists and independent businesses?
- How can affordable housing and business space be maintained for those who might be displaced by the replacement of older rental units by new market housing, condominiums or townhouses?

My apologies if I've added to the burden of material I expect you will have assimilating over the next several weeks. I simply hope that you may keep some of these questions in mind as you reflect on your own experiences, and I thank you for taking the time to read this.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

**Received September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014:**

Hi, my ideas concern the businesses along Hastings St, and other retail areas.

**Issue 1: Vacant retail space along Hastings St.**

The main "format" of new buildings along Hastings St. is retail on the ground floor and 2-3 floors of residential units above. In many buildings constructed since 2005 the retail space is only 75% or less occupied, and in some buildings it is only 10% occupied. Why?

-Cost. Regardless if the unit is 450 sq ft or 1000 sq ft, the cost of infrastructure is around \$70,000.00. This includes a washroom, basic wiring and lighting, a floor, a ceiling, basic security, and may include basic demising walls. The heaviest cost is the washroom, which is a necessity. The builder/developer currently WILL NOT provide any-rough in plumbing or wiring. Can the C.O.V. "get" the developer to provide a basic washroom and basic lighting? Failing that, can the C.O.V. "get" the developer to provide rough-in plumbing? During the planning and construction phases, the cost of this work is very cheap.

-"kick in the crotch" New business units are sold at around \$300,000 and property taxes are calculated at this price. Yet the owner must put in \$75,000.00 worth of infrastructure before any business can be conducted--this does not include the price of fixtures/chattels, or inventory, just infrastructure. So now comes the "kick in the crotch", because the value of the property has increased, so does the property taxes. According to the East Village B.I.A. property taxes for businesses are 420% higher than residential. That's 420% . For my 900 sq ft business in the 2200 block of E. Hastings I am paying \$4,400 per year.

From my description above, you can see why smaller retail units are not being sold or occupied. The cost of upgrading the infrastructure and the obscene property taxes does not make this attractive. How much business can a 500-900 sq ft unit generate?

**Business Parking**

As the density along Hastings increases, and more businesses are being built and business licenses being issued--there has been no increase in business parking. New buildings are being constructed with a **deficit of parking stalls**--that is to say, there are more retail and residential units then there are parking stalls

available within that building. Thus, owners and residents are forced to park on the street which in turn puts stress on available street parking for the businesses.

It costs the C.O.V. to demand a minimum of one parking stall per unit before issuing a building permit to developers. Please do so.

### **"Medicinal Marijuana Clinics"**

Currently there is one such clinic on the 2300 block of Hastings that just opened up. Officially the C.O.V. does not and will not issue business licenses to sell or distribute marijuana. The clinic in question applied for a clothing store business license, the premises were inspected and determined that no clothing would be sold, but that marijuana would be sold. C.O.V. did not issue any license, dusted off their hands and walked away. The clinic operates--as many such clinics do--illegally.

-My issue with all of this is that no business license means no business insurance. Should any fire or accident happen in such an illegal clinic and neighboring businesses are affected (smoke/fire or water damage), these businesses will be denied insurance coverage because the accident happened in an illegal business. The only option would be to sue the landlord, and this is very risky and expensive.

Thank you for your time, I hope that you have read this.

**Received on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2014:**

## How to retain and create affordable green suites and affordable green houses in Grandview

A renter in Grandview made the observation that a number of local heritage advocates live in million-dollar heritage houses and seem to form an elite self-interested group. This may be true in the part of Vancouver that is mostly single families living in single-family dwellings. However in Grandview most old homes have one or more rental suites, and most homeowners in Grandview having a number of renters living with them. This different situation has resulted in a different type of neighborhood. Grandview is known for its diversity and its tolerance and celebration of diversity. It has a diversity of people of all ages, with a diversity of economic backgrounds, and especially a diversity of young and single people. It has an abundance of single person households and artistically inclined people, in part because of the availability of diverse and affordable housing in heritage buildings.

### Many residents of Grandview have expressed the following desires for their neighbourhood:

- Retaining affordable housing for renters
- Retaining affordable houses for local buyers
- Retaining our green heritage houses
- Retaining the character of our Edwardian village
- Retaining and building on the resiliency of our neighbourhood
- Creating more affordable housing for renters
- Creating more affordable houses for local buyers
- Sustaining the unique demographics of the neighbourhood
  - e.g. providing accommodation for single renters of all ages, including seniors
  - e.g. providing accommodation for single artistically inclined people
- Opposing increasing uniformity of land use, supporting retention of diversity of land use
- Opposing high rises for Grandview, supporting more uniform density across the city
- Opposing multi-billion dollar Skytrain lines, supporting improving transit more uniformly across the city

### There is a way to support all of this in a new Grandview Community Plan

Simply changing the zoning for Grandview's housing can attain the above desires. For example, the RT-5 area east of Commercial Drive is full of homes with rental suites but is zoned RT-5 to "encourage and maintain a family emphasis." As a result, these green rental suites that are full of a diversity of single people and families in affordable housing are being replaced by expensive half-duplexes for sale to more well off people.

Grandview's zoning for houses should be changed to encourage the following, similar to what was done in Kitsilano when they moved to protect heritage homes with RT-8 zoning that permits:

- More square footage if a heritage home is retained
- Less square footage if a heritage home is demolished
- Multiple Family Conversions on 4 floors to 4 and more rental units

### The above desires of Grandview residents can be enjoyed with the following:

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|---|---|
| Retaining affordable housing for renters                                  | Retaining heritage homes with rentals through incentives  |
| Retaining affordable houses for local buyers                              | Retaining heritage homes with rentals and live-in landlords through incentives                      |
| Retaining our green heritage houses                                       | Discouraging demolition through disincentives, e.g. RT-8 style zoning                               |
| Retaining the character of our Edwardian village                          | Encouraging the retention of heritage commercial buildings and a diversity of land use              |
| Retaining and building on the resiliency of our neighbourhood             | Retaining heritage homes with multiple rentals allows long-term accommodation for renters & owners  |
| Creating more affordable housing for renters                              | Allowing new small suites (cost ~ \$200 sq ft) on 4 floors in heritage homes                        |
| Creating more affordable houses for local buyers                          | Allowing new small suites (cost ~ \$200 sq ft) on 4 floors in heritage homes with live-in landlords |
| Sustaining the unique demographics of the neighbourhood                   | Encouraging retention of heritage homes and suites  |
| Providing accommodation for single renters of all ages                    | Allowing for affordable small suites and for shared accommodation                                   |
| Providing accommodation for single artistically inclined people           | Allowing for affordable unique suites or rooms in heritage homes                                    |
| Opposing increasing uniformity of land use (such as RT-5 zoning)          | Supporting diversity of land use with improved zoning   |
| Opposing high rises for Grandview (concrete building costs ~ \$500 sq ft) | Supporting more uniform density across the city   |
| Opposing multi-billion dollar Skytrain lines                              | Supporting having transit and urban villages more uniformly across the city                         |

For a more narrative description of the situation in Grandview, please read the supporting document, "Saving Grandview's Character & Its Affordable Suites & Green Heritage Homes."

## Received on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014:

I'm a relative newcomer to grandview woodland, having lived here for almost a year and a half now. What I would like to see in the neighbourhood are some bike routes that are suitable for children. I love cycling myself, but I don't see many good options where I will be able to ride with my not quite 3 year old son when he gets older.

I live on 3rd avenue, between commercial and victoria, and the N-S options for cycling are not good. Commercial and Victoria have good grades, but too much traffic for kids. The hills to get up to Semliln and Lakewood are a significant obstacles. Woodland has a very steep hill just north of 1st and the intersection at Woodland and North Grandview highway can be tricky to negotiate safely. Salsbury seems quite good, but it only works from Gravelly northwards.

I would like to see a AAA bike route with seperated bike lanes on either commercial or Victoria, possibly connecting to Salsbury from gravelly north to Powell St. The route should go at least as far south as the trout lake community centre. The central valley greenway E of victoria drive is great, and I would like to see more cycling facilities of this caliber in the neighbourhood.

As for my own local street, east 3rd avenue between commercial and victoria, it's also a poor street for kids on bikes because there's too much traffic travelling too fast. Most of the traffic during afternoon rush hour seems to be coming up from clark drive and continuing east on 3rd past victoria, or turning left on victoria to rejoin 1st east of commercial drive. The street does not have enough room for 2 cars to pass when going in opposite directions, and some cars are going up to 50km/h. It just doesn't feel that safe to me. West of commercial, east 3rd is quite wide with much more room for cars to see and manoeuvre around bikes. On weekends parking on 3rd is scarce but the traffic is slower and a lot less busy. I don't have any problem with vehicles looking for parking on the street. Perhaps the capacity of the intersection at 1st and commercial could be increased by limiting turns, as I think that congestion at this intersection is the driving force behind the traffic spilling onto local streets.

I think the best way to calm traffic on my block would be to install right in right out diverters at 3rd and commercial or 3rd and victoria. Even if diverters were installed at both ends of the block, I don't feel that access to my street for residents would be limited, because we usually have the choice of turning on the street from either commercial drive or victoria drive. With right in right out diverters we would simply use commercial when coming in from the south, and victoria when coming in from the north.

**Received November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014:**

Dear Citizens:

I have great respect for the time and effort that you 46 Citizens have committed to serve on this Assembly.

I attended your "open session" 10:45-12:15 on Sat, Oct 25th, and wish to share my view briefly [space/time preclude a comprehensive essay]:

-- your COV-based website is inadequate, indeed even the email address was inoperative on the previous Thursday;

-- before the meeting, I was incensed to be informed by staff that to speak to you, I must "jump through unspecified hurdles". After witnessing your process, I wonder if it is worth the time and effort;

-- it was a "dog-and-pony-show", ably crafted by your staff;

-- the two BIA speakers spoke self-servingly; much of their content was irrelevant and duplicated;

-- the two COV speakers, while professional, avoided giving direct answers to the few simple, meaningful, questions permitted [eg when will we have public transit on 1st Ave ??]. Your process seems to dis-allow follow-up questioning;

-- I spoke afterwards with Andrew Pask, and as previously, I find that he has no answer to two basic questions:

1. Why does the COV pre-suppose "GROWTH" while world scientists [Suzuki et al] question such "conventional wisdom"?

2. Even if sanctioned, why would GROWTH precede expansion of TRANSPORTATION, when Skytrain Commercial-Downtown, AND 99-BUS Commercial-ARBUTUS-AND-BEYOND, are BOTH FAR beneath even the most basic requirements [to mention only TWO of perhaps a dozen transit routes through the area]. Incidentally, I am certain that there are many partial solutions to these transportation problems that COV/Translink routinely ignores.

I could continue at length, but these "non-trivial problems" divert me from my MAJOR concern -- that of the lack of ANY DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS following your deliberations. [apparently your report, influenced by flawed process, will be subject to routine manipulation by staff before decision by Council, after the customary discussions in "smoky-back-rooms

As a longtime resident, and longtime Direct Democracy Advocate [see Addenda], I am convinced that the very existence of the Citizens' Assembly is political maneuvering, which clouds the basic issues. [as was the B.C. Provincial Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform]

So:

I suggest that you investigate DD and include the following statement in your Final Report:

"The recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly MUST go to BINDING

public referendum of the citizens of Grandview-Woodland"

**Received, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014:**

**Walkability, Diversity, Affordability, Liveliness**

Something as complex issue as a neighbourhood plan requires deciding which perspectives offer the clearest way to the heart of the matter. Drawing from the Citizens' Assembly members' initial published comments, I think they identified two particularly helpful perspectives: walkability and diversity. Two other separate but related elements are affordability and 'liveliness'. All four of these are interrelated and reflect much that is good about Grandview Woodlands. Strengthening these elements can make the neighbourhood better. Weakening them, not so much.

To begin, consider briefly why walkable neighbourhoods are good. Much has been written on this and neighbourhoods are now given 'walkability scores'. The health benefits are widely known. Also, walking is a highly democratic way to get around; if I can walk, I can get around my neighbourhood unassisted and it's free. Because walking is accessible for most (especially if one extends the term to include those on mobility scooters) the neighbourhood is that much more inclusive. Further, people walking are more likely to meet and interact with other residents and, because walking requires little in the way of equipment (such as a car), there is less to identify residents as rich or poor. So, in a way, in addition to its benefits in its own right, a walkable neighbourhood also supports diversity.

So it follows that, for a neighborhood plan, it is important to look at the factors that support a walkable neighbourhood. Proximity is a key element – shops and services have to be close enough to one another and to homes to make walking practical. Separation from the noise and danger of high traffic volumes is also important.

I noted above that diversity had already been identified as a key perspective, and discussed how walkability supports diversity. However, walkability is not the only condition required to support diversity. To overcome economic divisions, affordability is a key component. To the extent that newcomers to Canada face economic hurdles, then affordability is important for them to be able to live in the neighbourhood, as well as young singles and families, and artists - none of whom may be 'wealthy'. So looking at how future growth will affect affordability is an important element of a neighbourhood plan.

Walkability and diversity support each other, and together they help to create a vibrant neighbourhood. It's important for a diverse, affordable, walkable neighbourhood to also be interesting and lively. For residents to actually want to walk to shop, to go to the library, to go to medical appointments, or for other aspects of their daily lives, it is



important that walking be an attractive and engaging option. This means the landscape should be interesting rather than monotonous, and there should be the expectation that one might 'bump into' friends and neighbours.

However, these elements shouldn't be adopted uncritically. For one example, the attractions of walkability are now so well known and accepted that developers can charge a premium for homes in neighbourhoods with a high 'walk score'. However, consider developments that make the street more monotonous; that separate residents too much from the street; that create walkways and green space that is inaccessible to everyone except those who live in the building; these things draw on existing benefits of a walkable neighbourhood and dilute them rather than adding to them. So when considering options for the neighbourhood's future evolution, it is important to look not only at proximity, but to consider how the options will support or erode those other important elements: other aspects of walkability, as well as diversity, affordability, and liveliness.

The impact of growth options on other key elements should also be assessed critically. To use affordability as an example, building more units may or may not make the neighbourhood more affordable, depending on the extent to which new housing is more expensive than the existing housing it replaces.