

These are excerpts from an email exchange between L. Ardis and Patrick Condon Nov. 21-23, 2014.

LA:

1/ There are claims out there that Vancouver already has enough zoned capacity to absorb projected population increases ([example here](#)). Is this true?

PC: Its probably true. Most arterials with commercial zones are zoned for four storey mixed use and this is not at all used up. Also all of RS-1 areas are now allowed to have two units of rental on a "single family" home site, which is a tripling of allowed density. Most of that is not used up. Our regional growth statement accepts 140,000 new residents as the target. I think thats too low myself but it can probably be accommodated with existing. I am not saying thats a good idea. Existing zoning might be wrong.

LA: Why would this not be a good idea? And what do you mean by (below) 'existing zoning might be wrong'??

PC: Well, for example, we dont have zoning specifically for townhouse zones. Maybe we should.

LA:

2/ Do you see any problems with the way the City of Vancouver calculates / projects population and density increases?

PC: I dont think they actually even have a method. As mentioned above they assume 140,000 new population growth in the regional growth strategies, but then the very next year project over 100,000 growth just on the broadway corridor in the KPMG report over the same period - in the interests of justifying the subway. Thats 80 percent of the growth on one corridor comprising about 10 percent of the land. The KPMG report has no discernable methodology and no information on method.

[LA note: PC is likely referring to [this report](#)]

LA:

3/ Do you think Vancouver needs to be rezoning for additional capacity?

PC: I think the zoning may be right or may be wrong but we need a city wide plan to figure that out.

LA: In your view, should that [a city-wide plan] come before or after neighbourhood planning exercises (like the Citizens' Assembly, other neighbourhood plan processes)? How can a city-wide plan be done without trumping the efforts of neighbourhood-level planning exercises?

PC: Well, how can neighbourhood efforts be conducted when we have no idea of where we are going as a city and how much new population to expect? That's what happened with City Plan. Neighbourhood plans (except for Cedar Cottage I am told) foundered when neighbourhoods felt singled out for density absent an agreed to city wide plan. But I have always thought you do both at the same time actually. Set city wide goals and objectives, come up with a framework plan that might look like this: http://www.urbanstudio.sala.ubc.ca/2010/111125_chapter5.pdf. Then work with that framework in a series of neighbourhood workshops/charrettes to come up with something that looks like this: <http://www.urbanstudio.sala.ubc.ca/2010/northwest.pdf>

PC: I think the existing zoning is mostly ok with perhaps adding capacity on the arterials and key intersections of arterials to encourage a wider distribution of new investment and housing choice. It's just that they keep spot zoning unanticipated changes that do not conform to any plan making neighbourhood furious and perverting the principles of good planning. But those who say you will never get big numbers of additional housing with existing zoning do have evidence of that.

LA: Like who? What kind of evidence?

PC: Well...like your own. No growth in GW and very little growth in Kits, for example. A lot of that capacity is not being taken up. The "brain damage" of small projects is too severe they say.

LA: Sorry I don't get the term 'brain damage'. Are you saying that projects smaller than 100,000 is just not economic/feasible for the private sector to make acceptable profit levels? What about the public sector?

PC: This should be discussed and if it's true we should fix it. I am leaning to the view that 100,000 square foot projects (maximum) might not be so bad. I have been told that this is the sweet spot for low brain damage and high economies of scale. The Rize for comparison is 350,000.

LA:

4/ Should Grandview-Woodlands be planning / zoning for additional capacity, or can -- as some vocal activists in this community argue -- all projected population increases be adequately absorbed by existing zoning, new laneway homes, and changes to building codes so that older buildings can be affordably remodeled to include more suites?

PC: There is real substance to that argument. If every lane in the city had ten lane houses that would be equal to hundreds of towers. Those who disagree say you can never get housing fast enough that way. Maybe. I think Kits has been growing steadily. But along Broadway and Commercial I think new buildings would be a good thing if they are mid rise. I am thinking maybe of the London Drugs building at Broadway and Vine for example. Or even some like the Rise (not the Rize) at Cambie and 8th.

LA: Given the vocal opposition to laneway homes in places like Kits, Dunbar, is that level of laneway housing likely to be politically acceptable in GW? And assuming it doesn't come in fast enough, wouldn't the lack of new housing eventually drive rents around here sky-high? My understanding is that laneway housing doesn't really create new affordable housing... do you think it can?

PC: It might not be likely. I had not heard of opposition in kits. The zoning in Kits is different. It allows for three strata units per lot, one is usually the lane house. Although there has been precious little new construction of this form lately and i dont know why.

LA:

5/ I was interested to read your [comments](#) on the Price Tags blog: "*And yes, and very clearly, for the record, in certain places like the Safeway parking lot site at Broadway and Commercial high rises are appropriate? Its likely the only feasible way to phase in the density on this site anyway. In fact the original plan, never tabled, for Grandview Woodlands had exactly that: high rises in the parking lot, until certain folks at city hall got it in their heads to turn the district into Yaletown south.*" Is removing **all of the towers from the GW plan feasible from the point of view of accommodating a reasonable level of density in coming years? Why or why not?**

PC: I have issues with high rises that are well known. Energy, earthquakes, and they way they are deployed as investment products rather than housing. I think they are a bad long term investment for the city outside of downtown and a few key intersections. But having said that, this would be one of the places that they work. I agree with Scot Hein. Slender towers in the context of a plan that sort of wraps around the skytrain station and includes Commercial Drive frontages would be a good thing. I think the high rises unlock the capital necessary to transition that site into something better.

LA:

6/ If, having removed the towers, GW needs to plan for more density, where in GW would you see as the best candidates for achieving that?

PC: Maybe that site could be Barcelona scale mid rise. An 7 to 9 storey courtyard building, of which we have, as yet, no good examples.

http://savouringtheworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/DSC_0088-Barcelona-building-style-Web.jpg

[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-liu-](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-liu-Efwg1k8/UduMQODJe8I/AAAAAABQZE/dybdjBoMpxQ/s1600/Aerial+View+of+Eixample+-+Barcelona+(1).jpg)

[Efwg1k8/UduMQODJe8I/AAAAAABQZE/dybdjBoMpxQ/s1600/Aerial+View+of+Eixample+-+Barcelona+\(1\).jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-liu-Efwg1k8/UduMQODJe8I/AAAAAABQZE/dybdjBoMpxQ/s1600/Aerial+View+of+Eixample+-+Barcelona+(1).jpg)

LA: ... By 'that site', did you mean Broadway/Commercial/Safeway site? Is 6-8 storeys the max. height you think could be there, and still achieve sufficient density?

PC: Yes. And courtyard houses like in Barcelona can get you over 100 dwelling units per acre, which is high rise density.

LA:

7/ I started crunching some publicly available data (see the attached spreadsheet), and my preliminary conclusions suggest that Grandview Woodlands has, from 1971 to 2011, absorbed significantly less density / population than every other Vancouver neighbourhood save Shaunessy (a significant outlier in that its density actually went *down* by some 17%!). If my calculations are correct, GW's density increased by only about 1.99% between 1971 and 2011... and at least some of that increase, according to a note here, is attributable to a new census practice in 1996 of counting permanent residents.... while other Vancouver neighbourhoods' density increased, on *average*, by somewhere between 17% and 23%. This was quite surprising to me.... am I missing something? Does this square with your understanding of how the City is changing?

PC: Yes. Many people are dismayed that GW has not grown at all despite all this skytrain investment. I cant think of a single new building except the skytrain station, can you? Scot Hein had penned a plan that would have at least doubled the density around the station area walking circle (500 meter radius) but with only towers at Safeway site. The rest would be mid rise along the arterials and gradual transition of detached structures to attached structures in nearby blocks. Of course that plan blew up when "senior staff" as scot puts it forced him to drawn in twenty towers (then they got scared and dialed it back to ten) into the plan in various places.

LA: Would 'gradual transition of detached structures to attached structures in nearby blocks' require rezoning in GW? Would that be achieved by laneway houses, modifications to building codes?

PC: You should get Scot to show you that map. I think he might be willing. But it shows detached structures becoming attached over time allowing party wall construction for town houses or modest scale apartment buildings on many blocks near the intersection of Commercial and Broadway.

LA:

8/ Lastly, what is your opinion of the [Streets for Everyone proposal](#) for a Commercial Drive redesign?

PC: I think it would be cheap and easy to give it a try. Start off with just paint like they did in Times Square. Lets see if carmageddon happens. I think going from four lanes to two might be fine if you have turning bays at all intersections. But their design does not show it that way. To work without turn bays you would have to prohibit right turns methinks.

...

PC: I would be happy to come to the assembly at some point...

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[REGARDING PATRICK'S PROPOSAL FOR A STREETCAR CITY VS. CITY HALL'S PLAN FOR A BROADWAY SUBWAY:]

PC: And on the streetcar thing.... Its not about getting from the suburb. Its about complete communities.

... in short, we need a GHG zero transit system. Our transit system is now primarily buses. Most trips are either exclusively bus or include a bus segment in a two or three seat ride. Buses are mostly diesel and pollute the air, and are almost as bad as cars per passenger mile wrt GHG. It wont save the planet if we all ride buses, just slow down its death.

We need to get 75 percent of all trips to zero GHG walking biking and transit to really be a "greenest city". That is what Copenhagen, Berlin and Amsterdam have. We are close enough that this is practical. The only way to do it, it seems, is to build a higher density but familiar mid rise city with distributed but readily available zero GHG transit. To build subways that only connect tower districts and nothing else wont work. The other cities that are hitting this target (like Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Berlin) of the world make this obvious.

I call such a city a streetcar city.

Its not the streetcar, its the city that i am after. You can do it with trolley buses if you love rubber tires, you can even do it with subways if you love being underground, although thats insanely expensive.

This research of mine has yet to be disputed with regard to comparisons between trams, subways, buses, trolleys, and, of course, cars:

http://www.sxd.sala.ubc.ca/8_research/sxd_FRB07Transport.pdf

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