

**Meeting summaries for the Citizens' Assembly on the
Grandview-Woodland Community Plan**

September 2014 to May 2015

Meeting #1, September 20, 2014:

The Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly convenes for its first day and orientation session

There was a little electricity at the Croatian Cultural Centre on Saturday, September 20, as the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan convened for the first time. "This is brand new territory," Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson told the members in her welcome.

Magnusson talked about the origins of the project, which marries community planning with a commitment to a more deliberative form of citizen democracy. While the process relies on the City of Vancouver for advice, she said, it is being conducted by an independent team that has been commissioned by the city to ensure that the process is impartial and arm's length. She stressed its independence: "We are running it and ultimately, we're each accountable for the results."

Although the Assembly's deliberations will dovetail with City-led public workshops to gain input from the community on area-specific issues (such as density and height at Broadway and Commercial), Magnusson emphasized that the Assembly members will collectively write their own recommendations to the City. The members, who will formally meet 10 times as a group and three times with the community in the next eight months, will outline by June 2015 what should be included in the City's draft plan. Magnusson added that there are many other community-based consultation processes going on in Grandview-Woodland that relate to the City of Vancouver's effort to renew the 30-year-old community plan. "We want to bring in as much of that work as possible."

Magnusson emphasized that the 48 Assembly members are there to listen to speakers and panels, to reach out and listen to people in their community, and to listen carefully to each other in order to ensure "a really good result that is going to reflect the community at large. You're not just here for yourself. You are here for other people. That means you have to be really good listeners." The idea of building consensus is critical in citizens' assemblies, most notable in B.C. for the 2004 Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

After Magnusson's opening remarks, the Assembly members introduced themselves and their various passions in the community. Social and economic diversity were a predominant theme:

“I like the socio-economic diversity of the neighbourhood.”
“I moved away a couple of times, but I kept coming back. I felt connected.”
“It seems like an authentic neighbourhood with different kinds of people.”
“It feels like home to me, and home is both comfortable and challenging.”
“There’s a mutual respect, a recognition that everybody belongs, and that’s something I want to keep.”
“I love the diversity — of small business, industry and housing.”
“It’s a very welcoming and accepting community.”
Others talked about more fine-grained aspects of the community’s geography and people:

“I love the life of Garden Park.”
“There is this awesome jazz band that practises right across the street.”
“I like that kids can knock on my neighbour’s door.”
“The thing I love most is the artwork on Commercial, the unique storefronts.”
“I love food.”
“I like being within walking distance of cheap fresh fruit.”
“I don’t need a car to do most of the things I need to do.”
“The view of the bay has been kept relatively clear.”
“Along the water there are all these little micro-parks.”
“It wasn’t until I walked up Commercial Drive that I truly fell in love with the place.”
“The neighbourhood grew on me like a pair of shoes.”
“I love the history of this neighbourhood. I’m nervous about change.”
“It feels safe because it’s a community.”

Still others talked about citizenship, and the mysteries of planning and how it can shape our future, for better or worse:

“Why did I volunteer? So the politicians don’t screw up the neighbourhood.”
“This seems like a small, reasonable way to give something back.”
“I’ve pined to see behind the curtain of how planning works.”
“Good neighbourhoods around the world change well over time, and in a thoughtful way.”
“Grandview-Woodland has a large aboriginal population, and by attending to the systemic issues that affect them the community plan can “sustain our children into the future.”
“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Later in the day, there was thoughtful planning advice and some cautions from two key speakers — architect Bruce Haden and SFU urban studies professor Meg Holden.

“Lots of people see Vancouver as a global model,” Haden told the Assembly. “That creates profound responsibility.” He said when it comes to density, Vancouver is

beginning to face the real challenge. “Density was being put in the easy places, without neighbours.”

Then Haden went on to talk about the importance of mixed communities, and his choice to live in Strathcona, where he can meet people who are not like him. “I want my children to be exposed to all sorts of people.”

The architect said we design things today around the protection and control of privacy. Haden, whose Koo’s Corner multi-family townhouse-style development in Strathcona has separate strata residences but a shared common area and a single barbeque, wants us to think creatively about the way we relate to our neighbours. And he wants this in both single-family areas and apartment buildings big and small, where he argues something as simple as a window in a shared hallway can create the opportunity to build connection.

Innovation, however, is not always easy. Development has to be financially achievable, and won’t arise from wishful thinking. “We live in a market economy,” Haden said. “If it does not make economic sense, it will not get built.”

Then he offered another opinion he figured the assembly might not want to hear. “I believe height is less important than you think,” he said. “It’s a shorthand for other things that are profoundly more important.”

He was on less contentious ground when he said that public engagement can stop profoundly bad things from happening, and noted that his Strathcona neighbourhood exists because citizens stood up to stop the City from building a freeway that would have razed the community. He also took a swing at the conventions of planning, noting that a previous incarnation of the company he works for designed Granville Island, where there’s an art school next to a cement factory in a commercial district with no sidewalks. Haden’s point was that success and failure in planning can be hard to predict, and the process requires both a “certain modesty” and attention to unexpected truths, such as the fact that Los Angeles is actually denser per square mile than New York.

What’s required to succeed, he suggested, is a real dialogue between planners and community that results in thoughtful policy. “What you bring is an absolute knowledge of the fine grain of your neighbourhood.” Planners, he said, have global knowledge, and these two things need to be brought together in mutual respect.

He also called for planning that creates opportunity for innovation. “You never want to set up a situation where the imagination of people in the future is not respected.”

Then he offered his one radical policy idea: “I would eliminate the requirement for private garages.” Haden argued eliminating the huge cost of parking improves affordability. He added that when we assess the real cost of a building we need to look at the cost of the whole package of living that it creates.

Meg Holden’s talk was a more cerebral look at density on a global scale. She talked about carbon dioxide output around the world, mindful of its potentially disastrous consequences. For those afraid of change, she argued that “stasis would also be hard if we ever had a chance to experience it.”

Holden said neighbourhoods define us, because they are the places where our social memories are fixed. She also said that Grandview-Woodland is a particularly vibrant community: “All sorts of solutions are out there on the ground that need to be encouraged.”

However, she cautioned that while dialogue is the most interesting component of the Assembly’s work, decision-making is the most critical, and the key is to strengthen the links between the two.

The City of Vancouver was also well represented at the event. Seven councillors from all three parties currently on council were there for the opening remarks. Councillor Andrea Reimer spoke on behalf of council, and Brian Jackson, general manager of planning and development, welcomed the Assembly.

After lunch, senior planner Andrew Pask walked everyone through the history of planning in Vancouver, and the recent process in Grandview-Woodland. Pask acknowledged the mistakes in the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan: Goals, Directions, and Emerging Policies document, which was released in June 2013, but also argued that a great deal of effective community consultation has been done, and that many of the principals and policies proposed in the document have garnered little opposition. The challenge, he said, lies in perhaps nine or 10 sticky issues.

The complex context is also a challenge for the Assembly. Just as Magnusson talked early in the day about the ways in which the Assembly’s recommendations must consider overarching City policies, Pask cautioned that the City must operate within a framework created by senior governments — in particular the provincial charter that defines the City of Vancouver’s role and powers. “We’ve got layers and layers of policy that we’ve got to stitch together,” Pask said.

At the end of a long afternoon, Assembly members gathered at a local pub, to talk and learn and make new acquaintances. The conversation echoed a day of beginnings, including Musqueam elder Shane Pointe’s remarks in the morning, when he invited

everyone to hold hands. Pointe talked about the five creeks that once flowed through what's now Grandview-Woodland. Today they are diverted and hidden. Once they teemed with salmon; now they no longer return. Point said we need to communicate, as we have in the past, in order to care for the area and determine "how it can best be utilized for all its common citizens." Strength, Point said, comes from an open heart, an objective mind and our connection to each other.

Meeting #2, October 4, 2014:

Second Assembly meeting explores policies, values and community concerns

The second meeting of the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan took place Saturday, October 4. Many Assembly members were itching to go and wondering where they would end up.

Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson opened the proceedings at the Croatian Cultural Centre by speaking directly to their concerns. "There's some worry," she said. " 'Am I wasting my time?' " Magnusson pointed to the City of Vancouver's financial investment in the Assembly process and the presence at the first Assembly meeting of seven city councillors from three parties as evidence of the city's intent to follow through on the Assembly's work.

However, Magnusson said, her confidence runs far deeper than that. "The main reason I have a lot of hope and faith in this process is you guys," she said. "You've already brought a lot of seriousness and interest and insight to this process."

Magnusson also reiterated messages from the first day, that different people on the Assembly will play different roles, and members should accept that each role is valuable. She also added that it's important for those who are assertive to make room in conversation for those who are not.

Then the Assembly took the floor. They asked about diversity and representation, and about trust, which was damaged when the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan: Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies document was released in June 2013. "This whole process is about trust," one Assembly member said, before asking about Magnusson's request that people show discretion on social media in discussing the Assembly proceedings. If the issue is trust, then transparency — including transparency through social media — really matters, the member said.

Magnusson reiterated her message from the first day that if people go on social media to criticize their peers on the Assembly, or say something inflammatory about the process early on, that could make it harder to build trust within the Assembly itself.

Another member asked what steps would be taken to address diversity issues in the Assembly membership.

While seven of the 48 Assembly members self-identify as Aboriginal, some other minorities — particularly recent immigrants — are not well represented. The criteria

applied during the selection process focused mainly on age, sex, area of residence, and owner/renter status. By the afternoon's end, an informal working group was planning to meet to develop an Assembly outreach strategy.

City sets out regional context

Much of the day, though — as is natural early in the Assembly process — was short on deliberation and long on presentation. Regional planning context and housing policy were key themes. And 10 community groups presented their concerns.

The first speaker, City of Vancouver deputy director of planning Jane Pickering, explained some of the peculiarities of planning in the city, which operates under the Vancouver Charter, while other municipalities are governed by different legislation. She said Vancouver is not required to have an Official Community Plan, which results in multiple layers of policy. Pickering argued this creates complexity but also allows for diversity.

Pickering said the regional growth strategy, *Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future*, requires a Regional Context Statement, and that in Vancouver this is adopted as an Official Development Plan. The document includes goals such as creating compact, sustainable, complete communities with transportation systems that will help address climate change. Pickering added that rapid transit commitments should be preceded by local planning work. "We prefer our communities to do their planning first and not be forced into it."

Pickering said current projections for the city show the number of dwellings increasing to 362,000 in 2041, from a 2006 total of 254,000. During the same period, population is projected to increase to 765,000 from 601,000 and employment to 505,000 from 393,000. "Zoning is a tool to get you where you want to go," Pickering said. "You've got to decide where you want to go."

Key housing goals, policies defined

Abi Bond, the city's director of housing, then outlined the city's key housing policies: to end street homelessness by 2015 and to increase affordable housing choices for all citizens. Bond said housing targets are specific goals that are monitored, and they are subject to an annual report card.

Bond said affordability is commonly defined as 30 per cent of income spent on housing, and noted that the owner's median annual income is \$66,000 while the renter's median income is just \$34,000. Bond said that if the city doesn't protect rental housing stock

14,000 units or 21 per cent of all purpose-built rental housing is at risk by 2019. She added that preventing displacement is an important issue for the city, and cited the rate-of-change regulations as a key tool in controlling this.

Bond was asked if zoning land for rental drives the land value down, potentially making housing more affordable. She said it does but it can restrict redevelopment, and Bond noted that where sites [covered by rate-of-change] with more than six rental units are redeveloped the new project must replace all rental units.

Diverse housing strategies outlined

A panel of five people working in the housing field also presented key concerns to the Assembly.

James Roy, a policy analyst with the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, said there are 60,000 social housing units in the province, and a third of them are in the City of Vancouver. The biggest single group served by this housing type consists of independent seniors. “The key problem is the lack of federal funding,” Roy said, asserting that federal support is projected to fall to zero in 2040, from \$1.7 billion in 2006. “What’s most at risk are the small operators, who provide the majority of units.”

Thom Armstrong, executive director of the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C., talked about similar pressure on co-op housing due to the elimination of subsidies for low-income members. “Co-ops provide a critical supply of affordable rental housing,” Armstrong said, but he also argued it’s at risk because of disappearing funding programs. He added that there are more than 400 co-op units in Grandview-Woodland, and another 200 just outside the neighbourhood boundaries. He said about 3,000 low-income co-op housing units will lose subsidies by 2020, affecting perhaps 300 households in Grandview-Woodland.

Armstrong said both the buildings and the residents are aging. “Our most immediate priority is keeping the housing we have now affordable.” He believes co-ops can mobilize hundreds of millions for renewal of co-ops, but that capital investment doesn’t help them discount member rents.

Developer James Evans, an area resident whose most prominent Grandview-Woodland project involved restoring the historic Jeffs residence as a small townhouse project, talked about the challenges of a job he’s not sure he’d undertake again.

These included vocal community opposition and building code requirements that “aren’t compatible with heritage retention.” Without subdivision to fund the Jeffs residence

restoration, Evans said, it's likely "the owner would have held onto it until the building fell down." He noted that the framing labour to restore the old home was greater than the cost of framing all the surrounding townhouses.

James said the redevelopment displaced people living in low-cost rental but increased the site's population to 50 from 17, and created 17 homes. The existing zoning, he said, would have allowed five duplexes.

Nick Sully, an architect with the firm Shape, talked about the opportunity for creative redevelopment that increases density and preserves existing character buildings in duplex-zoned areas. "If you look at where our work clusters — which is really grassroots development — it's east of Main Street." However, he added that "densification and affordability need to be addressed in all districts of the city."

It would be beneficial, Sully argued, if there could be zoning created "with a specific requirement that affordability be addressed."

Sully uses density transfers and infill housing (as opposed to laneway housing that is permitted outright in much of the city) to create multi-family strata dwellings on small residential lots. He said that while there was neighbourhood opposition to one project he showcased, it created cheaper home ownership opportunities, vastly improved energy consumption, revitalized the lane, and created community. "The spaces between the houses become a very interesting opportunity for social exchange."

Later in the day, City of Vancouver planner Andrew Pask outlined the city housing policies and proposals affecting Grandview-Woodland, and community feedback. He said the city frequently heard that residents want to know what exactly is meant by "affordable". Finding ways to maintain existing rental stock, he told the Assembly, "is one of the fundamental tasks that you will have to wrestle with."

These included improving affordability by reducing parking requirements near transit ,and improving opportunity for more secondary rental by expanding opportunities for laneway houses and "lock-off rental".

Community groups outline needs and goals

In the afternoon, 10 community groups were available to meet with small groups of Assembly members, in a conversational format that many found energizing. There was also concern that time was in short supply for these important conversations, and as such we're only able to report on conversations that took place with six groups.

Sherman Chan, director of family and settlement services with of the immigrant program organization MOSAIC, a long-time fixture on Commercial Drive, identified a few key issues. He said “newcomers like the ownership aspect of housing” but noted that visible minorities are moving out of the neighbourhood. He said the neighbourhood remains home to important immigrant services, such as the Kinbrace Community Society’s refugee housing. He also observed that transit overcrowding is a concern for people his organization serves, and that immigrants are often reluctant to participate in planning processes.

Jak King, representing Our Community, Our Plan — a group that formed in response to the city of Vancouver’s Grandview-Woodland planning process — was blunt. “We don’t need a new plan. We’d like to see this plan scrapped.” King, who has argued that Grandview-Woodland is an incredibly successful neighbourhood that doesn’t need big planning interventions, said the area should be left to evolve on its own.

King also challenged the Assembly model, noting that more than 500 people expressed a desire to participate as Assembly members in response to the city’s request. “We believe the Assembly should be 400 or 500 people.”

He also expressed concern about the fate of existing apartment housing, and noted that the land-use map indicates no change in the apartment zone west of Commercial Drive. “It’s almost as if they’re designing it to be a renoviction zone.”

Creating connectivity is key

Madeline Boscoe, executive director of the REACH Community Health Centre, talked about the social determinants of health. She said health “comes from access to community processes that you and I take for granted” and that “poverty affects everyone”.

She said those who can’t afford the commercial luxuries of the neighbourhood have limited options. “The only place a poor person can go to hang out is the library.” She said seniors will use their doctor for social interaction unless we create alternatives. Kids, too, aren’t given simple means for social interaction. “We took away the water fountain. We’ve got to figure out how to put it back.”

The loss of community connectivity is partly one of social change, she argued. “It used to be that women did it for free. They helped systems run.” Now, she said, “everybody’s at work”.

Boscoe also argued that community amenity contributions (CACs) — through which developers fund social-service infrastructure in return for increased density — place an undue burden on East Vancouver. Poverty and social isolation, she argued, are problems for the whole city. Neighbourhoods such as Grandview-Woodland shouldn't have to disproportionately fund, through increased density, the services required to address these challenges.

Duplex zoning displaces renters

The Grandview Heritage Group made a plea for more careful consideration of the historic housing in one of Vancouver's oldest neighbourhoods. The group's Bruce McDonald provided a few statistics as context: the 2006 census showed the area bounded by East First, Venables, Nanaimo and Commercial Drive consisted of 70 percent rented dwellings, compared to 35 percent of dwellings in the city overall. He argues that the recent population decline in Grandview-Woodland is connected to the loss of suites in many old homes.

Of particular concern for the group is the impact of RT5 duplex zoning in the Grandview area east of Commercial, which can result in the demolition of historic homes that accommodate many renters in favour of unaffordable duplexes that have no rental, no basement, no attic, storage in the garage, and cars parked on the street.

The heritage group's handout argued that "RT5 zoning does not adequately protect the diversity of living accommodation in Grandview and the resulting diverse demographic" that is so important to many area residents.

The group said the City of Vancouver needs to create a new heritage building code that "recognizes the unique features of heritage homes" and makes heritage home renovation less onerous. The city should work with the homeowners who want to retain their homes rather than "developers who are tearing down heritage homes and building spec houses".

The handout stated: "The greenest building is one that already exists."

McDonald said that to protect both existing houses and create rental in new buildings, the city should draw on other zoning models that allow for increased density in return for retaining housing character and social diversity. He said the city has given single-family RS1 zones much more flexibility, and that duplex-zoned lots in Grandview-Woodland need special consideration.

Impact assessment, consultation tools requested

Nancy McRitchie, executive director of Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, said affordability is a key issue for the citizens her facility serves in north Grandview-Woodland. “Our families and our seniors are leaving,” she said. “They are leaving because of the cost.”

McRitchie said aboriginal families are particularly affected. (Recent census analysis by the city suggests a sharp decline in the neighbourhood’s aboriginal population — possibly as much as 20 per cent between 2006 and 2011.) She said development on East Hastings (which extends into the Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhood) is displacing people. “The two little apartments above the old Greek restaurant — they’re gone.”

The impact of new development on low-income residents needs to be carefully examined, McRitchie said, as took place with the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood plan. “We want a social impact assessment for the north Grandview-Woodland neighbourhood.”

The Grandview-Woodland Area Council (GWAC) was also represented at the meeting, along with the groups Under One Umbrella, WISH, and the Britannia Community Services Centre. GWAC called for more innovative zoning and stronger consultation mechanisms. “We would like to see the city fund neighbourhood associations so we can be the conduit for consultation,” said council president Steve Anderson.

The group called as well for neighbourhood pilot projects, such as using lanes in non-traditional ways, and argued that diversity and liveability are key neighbourhood values.

Assembly members refine values

After the community groups made their presentations, the Assembly members reported out on their conversations about the values that should inform the neighbourhood planning recommendations they will develop. These are among the members’ observations, which often ranged into specific policy concerns.

- Consider 30 percent of income the key threshold for housing affordability
- Ensure change is gradual, so that the community has a chance to adjust
- Ensure community approval for large projects
- Retain the character of Commercial Drive, with attention to walkability, transportation and safety
- Work to ensure community engagement
- Don’t ignore connections to all the surrounding neighbourhoods
- Embrace new development just as we embrace the old

- Protect the community's fiery independent spirit and energy, put people before profits, promote mutual support and outreach, show courage instead of fear, and provide for local control
- Widen the sidewalks along Commercial Drive north of East First
- Maintain the character of housing, people, parks and shops
- Don't exceed the capacity of strained transportation systems
- Protect community health by keeping social equity in mind
- Carefully conserve the homes and living culture of the community
- Be inclusive, and attend to the needs of children and seniors
- Build on the community's social capital
- Maintain social connectedness by attending to diversity (age, culture, economics), sustainability, social justice, and the environment

It was, as should be evident by now, a very busy day. The Assembly next meets on October 25, at the Vancouver Opera rehearsal facility on McLean Drive.

Meeting #3, October 25, 2014:

Values defined, bike lanes debated, 'independent' economy discussed at the third Assembly meeting

The Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview Woodland Community Plan has been moving, in more ways than one. The third assembly meeting took place Saturday, October 25, at the rehearsal space of the Vancouver Opera, at McLean Drive and Third Avenue, after two meetings at the Croatian Cultural Centre. The opera space is not *exactly* your neighbour's living room, but there's a lovely kitchen, artwork on the walls, and a congenial intimacy to a rehearsal room that's just the right size of the group.

The day's work began with a few reports and remarks from Assembly members. A representative of the outreach working group reported that they have met twice to plan ways to extend a hand to "faces we don't see around the table here". She said they're drawing up questions, connecting with representative groups, and that the city is helping with translation services.

As the scope of the job becomes more and more apparent, some are in a hurry to get to the business of decision-making, others are worried about the time frame. "Can we ask for an extension?" said one. For those worried about deadlines, the day's work refining the Assembly's guiding principles might seem an unnecessary luxury, but it's an important stage and central to the work of any assembly. Once people have created a rapport by discussing shared values, it's much easier to have respectful conversations about more difficult specific issues.

Assembly Chair Rachel Magnusson outlined how the final report will be structured. It will begin with an explanation of the process and an introduction to the recommendations. The priorities and recommendations drafted by the Assembly members will form the core of the report. That will be accompanied by a land-use map. A minority report outlining any areas of disagreement will ensure that everyone's views are represented.

Magnusson said that through focus, building on previous work, and collective capacity (allowing working groups to work on specific issues and report to the whole group), the Assembly will be able to meet the challenge of producing the report. She also said that Assembly staff welcome input from members (individually or through group discussion) on the program, and urged members to connect with the community and bring the perspectives they encounter to the Assembly tables.

Then she reiterated the predominant themes of the Assembly's values discussions from the previous meeting. In terms of increased density, these included appropriate development, gradual change and local control. "A lot of tables mentioned in one way or another the theme of social connectedness," Magnusson said. "Every table mentioned diversity."

BIA's discuss bike lanes, streetscapes, industrial land

Patricia Barnes, executive director, of the Hastings North Business Improvement Association, and Nick Pogor, executive director of the Commercial Drive Business Society, were the day's first presenters.

For Pogor, whose association represents businesses from Adanac Street south to East 13th Avenue, the owner-operated, single-location nature of business on the Drive is critical to its success. Protecting that character is a key objective. He outlined the Drive society's other roles and concerns: safety and security, keeping streets clean and free of graffiti, controlling taxes and rents, managing busking and street vending, and supporting and producing street festivals.

Pogor said Drive businesses generally have less revenue on car-free days. He added that parking affects both local shoppers and destination visitors, and is a key need that shouldn't be trumped by the appetite for expanded bike lanes. "It's a contentious issue," he said. "We really do support alternative modes of transportation, [but] if we are going to remove parking from the streets, where will those cars go?" He said more outreach and consultation is required, as is more discussion among the business association membership. "The BIA and its members ask that you look closely and deeply at the issue of bike lanes."

Barnes, whose association represents retail businesses from Hastings Sunrise down toward Commercial and into the surrounding industrial zones, also emphasized the importance of the independent nature of East Hastings Street businesses. She said property speculation and the resulting rise in taxes and rents are a threat to the small operators that are part of the area's growing appeal.

Current zoning for commercial use at street level and three storeys of residential above already creates pressure, because the value of land is based substantially on its potential use. "What happens to a business that is one storey of commercial when they are upzoned? We're worried about losing our small independents.... We need to protect the unique character of our neighbourhoods," she said, arguing that to make them attractive to residents and tourists it's critical to maintain their differences.

Barnes also said the fate of light industrial land “is one of our major concerns”, and that proposed zoning that would allow 15-, 12- and eight-storey buildings along Hastings has created real apprehension. “What happens when you put residential next to light industrial? We don’t want to create conflict.” Barnes said she’s concerned that employment-generating business could be lost to other municipalities.

Barnes added that a greenway and bike route along Powell Street, a congested and busy truck route, is not good policy. (The June 2013 *Emerging Directions* document proposed allowing up to 15 storeys at Hastings and Clark Drive, a major entry and exit point for Port Metro Vancouver truck traffic.)

Barnes acknowledged that everyone is wrestling with the mix of uses, and that we don’t necessarily need to reinvent the wheel. “We always look to Portland as a success story.”

Good design can create good health

Claire Gram, a policy analyst with Vancouver Coastal Health, offered a big-picture view of the role that urban design plays in community health. She said good health and well-being are determined far more by where we live, how we live and what we eat than by health services. Gram said evidence shows that we need to prioritize new development within or adjoining existing communities, and that we need to look beyond health services to cope with concerning health trends related to diet and exercise. “This may be the first generation that won’t outlive its parents,” she said.

She distributed the *Shaping Active, Healthy Communities* “toolkit,” which outlined issues and solutions. One is to design streets and living environments in ways that make the most basic physical activity easy and attractive. Another is to ensure a mix of employment and residential uses. Increasing density, improving transportation infrastructure, and delivering services close to home are other key strategies.

City of Vancouver senior transportation engineer Lisa Leblanc recounted Einstein’s dictum that if he had an hour to solve a problem, he’d spend 55 minutes defining it. It’s good advice in city planning, where there is no shortage of evidence of misdirected energy and unintended consequences.

However, Leblanc also showed how good planning can achieve remarkable results. She said that population in downtown Vancouver grew by 75 per cent between 1997 and 2012, while the number of jobs increased by 26 percent. Yet during the same period, car traffic declined by 20 percent.

Leblanc said city-wide the objective is that by 2040 two-thirds of traffic will be by walking, cycling or transit. “Recent data shows that we are clearly on track.” Another “lofty” goal, she said, is zero traffic fatalities, noting that safety arises by shifting modes, but she showed that trends are moving markedly in the right direction. However, she said, Grandview-Woodland is also home to some of the city’s top accident locations.

Regarding bike routes, Leblanc said planning should create opportunity for the reticent, and for all ages. On parking, she said planners must employ updated data on who parks when and where, to understand what our real needs are. In Grandview-Woodland, she added, attention to goods movement and port concerns are also an issue. (Clark Drive is a key corridor, as is Stewart Street on the port lands, and Powell/Dundas, McGill, Hastings, and Nanaimo streets are among others used to varying degrees.)

Planning so far: proposals and feedback

Andrew Pask, the lead planner for Grandview-Woodland, then looked at the transportation and business components of the planning work done to date. On transportation, key objectives included:

- maintain and enhance a well-developed pedestrian network
- improve and expand the existing cycling network
- work with TransLink to enhance transit service
- promote the safe and efficient use of the road network, and gradually reduce car dependence

These goals were, for the most part, supported during the community feedback process, Pask, said. Opinions differed regarding bike plans on the Drive, there were calls for more traffic calming, modes of transit at Broadway and Commercial were at issue, and there were concerns about a rapid bus on the Drive and a shuttle on East First Avenue, he said. The effect of density on Broadway and Commercial congestion is also a concern, as is potential loss of parking.

Of course, the city wishes to foster a robust, resilient economy. Pask said issues ranged from protecting industrial land to maintaining retail character.

Objectives included the following:

- Support for Grandview-Woodland’s high streets, along with allowing opportunity for growth at key locations.
- Enhancing and expanding small nodes of commercial activity

- Maintaining the fine-grained commercial opportunities in residential areas
- Ensure long-term availability of industrial land and associated jobs
- Recognizing role of industrial land in the cultural and food economies
- Supporting the port's role in the economy

Feedback included:

- Concerns about controlling rents and leases (which Pask noted is a challenge given limited city powers).
- Support for the independent character of neighbourhood businesses, fear of change and concern about chain stores
- Mixed opinions on new density and population growth's impact on businesses
- Ideas about improving the look and feel of commercial and industrial areas
- Concern about building height and form, mostly at Commercial and Venables, Broadway and Commercial, and the eastern portion of Hastings Street
- Concern about residential and industrial conflict (Pask said buffering is intended to address these concerns)

Pask was asked about the potential for access to the water, and said he knows it's a community interest and it's been discussed with the Port Metro Vancouver, but it's outside the city's jurisdiction and the port has controlled its land very tightly since 9/11.

Lisa Leblanc was asked about the effect of separated bike lanes on business. She said it's often hard to get meaningful data, but that studies have suggested both benefits and neutral outcomes.

An activist's perspective: this process is important

Then it was Matt Hern's turn to open a window on some of the contradictions of change. The longtime Commercial Drive activist, author and teacher — a key figure in creating Car Free Days in the city, beginning a decade ago on the Drive — began by saying that the assembly's work is "a potentially historic planning exercise for the city of Vancouver."

He urged the assembly not to fear density "We should actively seek density," he said, not just for transportation and ecological reasons but for cultural reasons as well. The question for the assembly, he said, is "what kind of density."

Hern cautioned the assembly to be careful when it talks about affordability, to be clear on who it's for and in what context. He also urged care on using the word *we*. What is community? Is it a gated community? "If we are talking about *us*, there necessarily has to be a *them*." Hearn said the best of what we've got is about permeability, about difference, about "people who are not like you."

"I would encourage you to think about displacement, and about dispossession," he said. He talked about gentrification in Northeast Portland, around Alberta and Mississippi streets, where the neighbourhood was once 75 per cent African-American and is now 25 per cent African-American. He said the city lost its one neighbourhood where the minority was a majority.

(Grandview-Woodland, which has a declining overall population, according to federal census numbers, has also seen a marked decline in its aboriginal population, to eight percent of the total from 10 between 2006 and 2011.)

Hern recalled someone saying that they knew the black community was screwed when they saw the bike lanes, and noted that his own Car Free Days is a gentrifying influence. "Have I contributed to the pricing out of my friends and neighbours?" he said. "We need to think carefully about the implications."

He talked also about rising real estate values as common wealth. "That money is a social achievement," he said. "What we have normalized is the idea of differential access to those benefits." It's undermining our communities, and our relationship to our neighbours, he said, and argued that when we improve our neighbourhoods we make them more sellable.

Hern said he's not arguing that he should have kicked out a few windows, but that we should plan in ways that employ what we've got to benefit those who have less. "A housing cooperative cannot be bought and sold," he said.

Community round tables, round two

Once again, several community groups came for small group discussions, in response to the assembly members' appetite for more of them. Heather Redfern, executive director of the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, said we need more density and greater affordability. She also urged the assembly to think of the community not just as residents and commercial businesses but as a collection of non-profit organizations and industrial employers. In the past, she's argued that the community needs to create

mechanisms to include these critical groups in ongoing conversations about community development.

Redfern also stumped for attention to the role of art in Grandview-Woodland's life. "This is the entertainment district — you don't have to fake one downtown" But she said artists with families can no longer afford to live here, and the artists that her three theatres (the Cultch, the Culture Lab, and the York) employ don't have a place to stay in the community. "I need a hotel."

She also made a case that density transfers create benefits for the community, noting that the historic York Theatre's restoration was funded by \$15 million from the Wall Group, which received \$13 million in density to be used on projects elsewhere in Vancouver as a result.

Streets for Everyone also made a case for more crosswalks, shorter crossings, better transit shelters, landscaping, and of course separated bike lanes on the southern half of Commercial Drive. "Over 50 per cent of residents in Grandview-Woodland get around not by car," said the group's Sarah Fiorito. "They are an afterthought." She argued that "every single piece of business research" shows that businesses benefit from bike lanes.

"You shouldn't have to be brave to use a sustainable, affordable form of transportation," Fiorito said.

The Public Space Network talked about ways to involve the community in enhancing public spaces. "You're making a Christmas tree, but you're making a tree, not the decorations," said Stewart Burgess. Ian Marcuse of the Britannia Community Services Centre's food security program, talked about various initiatives to promote small-scale food production, distribution, and healthy eating. For Marcuse, access at all times for people of all incomes to safe, nutritious food is key, as is bringing food production closer to home. The Grandview-Woodland Community Policing Centre's Adrian Archambault also spoke about the ways in which planning and neighbourhood infrastructure can make the community safer.

The day concluded with more group work by assembly members to refine the community values that will underpin future work. These values will also be discussed when assembly members participate in a public meeting with the community on Wednesday, November 26, at the Maritime Labour Centre. The assembly itself next meets on Saturday, November 22, at the Vancouver Opera building on McLean Drive.

Meeting #4, November 22, 2014:

Assembly seeks input on values, turns attention to policy

One of the tasks for members of the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan is to connect with others in the community, so they can better represent the whole community. At the beginning of the Assembly's fourth meeting, some of the members talked about what they'd heard.

One was told about the big concern among industrial land users that small industrial buildings not be converted to residences. Another heard from a Commercial Drive coffee bar owner that while Vancouver's controversial smoking ban implemented a decade ago initially hurt business, it came back once the ban was equally applied across the region. Members also heard concern about new density, and one was told a story about someone in the development community referring to East Hastings as a "second downtown".

They also heard concerns about the potential impact of bike lanes among traditional Drive businesses, and the relief of one cyclist who was once afraid to ride her bike around the city but feels safer because of bike lanes.

These reports led into discussion of the Assembly's upcoming Citizens' Assembly Public Roundtable, on November 26 at the Maritime Labour Centre. "The point of the roundtable is to have conversations with the community at large," said Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson. "You want to be a good host and a good listener." It's an opportunity, she said, to share the values the Assembly has developed and get input on what key issues need to be addressed in the Assembly's final report.

Other upcoming events were also noted. John Atkin's Assembly walking tours, which were lauded as interesting and insightful, will be reprised as part of the sub-area workshops led by the City of Vancouver. The first of these, a tour of Cedar Cove, took place November 23, leading up to the Cedar Cove Sub-Area Workshop next Saturday, November 29 at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre, 1607 East Hastings. This will be followed on December 6 with another day-long Britannia-Woodlands Sub-Area Workshop at the O'Brian Centre for the Vancouver Opera, at 1945 McLean Drive. Please register in advance. More workshops will take place early in the new year.

"We'll be bringing that work back in stages to share with you," said City of Vancouver planner Andrew Pask, adding that the Assembly's work will be featured at the sub-area workshops.

City power, in 614 exciting sections

Pask then talked about city's management tools, for those not familiar with the nuances. "It's good to have a common starting point for what the city can do and can't do." As well, he said, it's important to understand the role of policy in relation to zoning and regulation.

The city gets its power from provincial legislation, Pask said, noting that the Vancouver Charter has no less than 614 "exciting sections". The charter, in rather exhaustive detail, outlines the city's obligations and limitations. For example, the city can't run a deficit. The city can establish bylaws and regulations, and license certain activities. It delivers a wide range of services. It has authority over property taxes.

The city also has roles that don't derive from the charter, Pask said, citing advocacy. "The city has to be able to work as an advocate with other layers of government." He pointed to transit funding as a key example and next spring's regional transit referendum as a critical issue. Social services are another area of responsibility that's not discrete, he said. (The city can create space to operate child-care services, but the provincial and federal governments are generally responsible for funding the activity.)

Land use is a critical responsibility, and zoning is a tool that defines the way that zoning can be used in a given area and regulates the size, location and style of the buildings, he said. This includes uses permitted outright, as well as conditional uses (including a higher FSR, the ratio floor area to land area) based on meeting city-specified provisions. Within each zoning category, such as duplexes or apartments, there are likely to be several variations by district, based on neighbourhood circumstances and public input. Pask added that adjacent buildings and design guidelines sometimes constrain how buildings are designed and built.

Assembly members were given examples three examples of specific zoning guidelines, a list of basic zoning definitions and a map of the current zoning in Grandview-Woodland. For the members, there were some surprises. "I was surprised that Nanaimo is a single-family zone," said one. Added another: "Beautiful homes west of Commercial are zoned for apartments." Pask explained that some of these zones date back to the first residential zoning in the area, in 1927.

Others expressed surprise that there is residential zoning close to heavy industrial activity, that there are sometimes more dwellings in a building than the zoning allows, and that current zoning limits height on the Safeway site to just nine metres (in the C3A

zone the director of planning or the development permit board may relax the height limitation if a number of conditions are met).

Pask explained that zoning is tweaked to reflect evolving uses. He said the duplex zone that covers much of Grandview was created in the 1970s. "It used to be single family." Pask said adjusting zoning to reflect new uses is a key element in the planning process, and that the so-called Emerging Directions (*Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies*) document released in June 2013 was an effort to put forward a set of possibilities for the community's consideration.

Pask said land use often differs from zoning, because of historic use or market economics. He pointed to townhouse development along East First Avenue in an apartment zone, because the market for townhouses appears to be stronger right now. Conversely, he noted that strata apartment buildings, many of which are located near the Broadway and Commercial SkyTrain stations, are not likely to be redeveloped because of the challenge of getting all owners to agree to sell.

Pask also said the change from an existing zone to a custom CD1 zone means a lot of negotiation and design review.

The city has two tools to derive revenue to create the new infrastructure that increased density often requires. One is development cost levies (DACs), used by other B.C. municipalities, which are governed by separate provincial legislation. Vancouver also uses community amenity contributions, or CACs. While DACs are generally fixed, CACs are negotiated to provide specific community benefits, such as social housing, parks and daycare space.

When an Assembly member asked how dependent the city is on development levies, Pask guessed that it's in the order of 20 percent of the capital budget, and later confirmed it's in the range between 20 and 30 percent. (Most public infrastructure in Vancouver is created or renewed through capital cost borrowing, which is almost always approved during civic elections and is repaid through property taxes.)

An Assembly member also asked if the city can be its own developer, and Pask said that has been the case in the past. Another asked how whole blocks can be cleared and redeveloped at once, and Pask explained that this is generally a result of land assembly by a developer, who acquires adjoining properties in a variety of ways.

Three different looks and the meaning of density

The Assembly then heard three varying perspectives on development from Paul Cheng, a city planner, Michael Kluckner, a veteran heritage advocate, and Stu Lyon, a principal of GBL Architects.

Cheng, who lived in a newer duplex near Grandview-Woodland's Garden Park for eight years, explored the density created by various housing types. "Some typologies require small land assemblies, while others require large land assemblies," he said. He cited the front-and-back duplex as a successful design type that requires heritage-style design. He also talked about laneway houses that can be built on most lots in the city. Typically, a main residence, a suite and a laneway house are allowed, but they must be maintained under one owner. Infill, he said, usually requires a 50-foot lot and individual residences can be sold to multiple owners.

Then he looked at other forms that modestly increase density: "duplex courtyard" projects; townhouses; courtyard row houses (which are possible on generally deep Vancouver lots); triplex and fourplex developments that are emerging forms in the Norquay neighbourhood, and stacked townhouses, such as those on Cedar Cottage's Commercial Street.

Michael Kluckner offered a more general look at development and change. He began by questioning "the word NIMBY that is often lobbed at neighbourhoods that are resistant to change." People defend their turf, he said, and words such as "progress" and lately "sustainability" are used to argue against them. "Follow the money and you'll get a really good idea of what's going on in cities."

Kluckner said defining people as units of density creates problems, and urged us to evaluate neighbourhoods based on whether there is a mix of incomes, ages and tenancies, as well as a mix of transportation modes that includes pedestrians, bicycles, transit and cars. Is it realistic for people to do their shopping on foot? He cautioned against change for change's sake. "There is a desire on the part of a lot of people in society to fix things that aren't broken."

When urban renewal threatened Strathcona decades ago, he said, the community resisted the march of apartments and highrises and instead focused on keeping people in existing buildings. Change can be healthy, he said, arguing that the generational turnover in Grandview-Woodland is reversing a decline in young children. However, the neighbourhood is gentrifying because it is desirable, regardless of zoning. The challenge is to maintain diversity — and the existing rental housing.

Kluckner, who believes the new front-and-back duplex is not creating affordable housing, encouraged planners to build villages in areas that are car captive and look at buildings that can be adapted. "You don't build affordable housing, you retain

affordable housing,” he said. “The 100-year-old houses have gone through more adaptation than is possible with the new building forms.” The greenest building, he argued, is one that’s already been built.

The city could do more to encourage people to build smaller, he said. He added after the meeting that the city should modify codes and zoning to make less expensive housing possible.

Stu Lyon, whose work in Grandview-Woodland includes the Boheme building currently under construction on East Hastings and the proposed redevelopment of the Astorino’s site at Commercial and Venables as a mix of market housing with social housing and services delivered by the Kettle Friendship Society, began by talking about the imperative for developers to maximize allowable density. Or, as one Assembly member put it, “profit.”

Lyon allowed that profit is one way to describe it, but argued that value is another. He said development would be less contentious if density were fixed rather than negotiable.

Mainly, however, Lyon explored the density created by different projects he’s been involved in. Boheme, with setbacks, achieves an FSR of 2.5 in a four-storey zone. (Most single-family and duplex lots are 0.6 to 0.75 FSR.) Similar density at slightly greater height was achieved in one of GBL’s new Cambie corridor apartments. He cited a six-storey building on Eight Avenue near Main that achieves an FSR of 3, with artist studios on the alley.

GBL’s Strathcona Village, a mix of social and market housing just west of Grandview Woodland on East Hastings, has an FSR of 6.1. which is five to 11 storeys at the Hastings Street grade, with two full storeys below, also includes a commercial component that allows for very light industry.)

Does density equal affordability?

Following the presentations, the Assembly members discussed what they’d heard. At one table, the discussion returned to a familiar theme. “The biggest conundrum of this whole Assembly is how do you keep the neighbourhood’s economic diversity.... I’m not convinced that density makes it more affordable.” Regarding Boheme, another said: “Is it a step down from a Mazda dealership, or a step up? I think it’s a step up.”

Yet another cited previous Assembly speaker Matt Hern's warning that neighbourhood improvement that may on one level be desirable also makes a community less affordable. Then she acknowledged the irony that, as the owner of a newer duplex, she's part of the gentrification problem.

The Assembly and the speakers then talked about some of the underlying issues: land has become so valuable that the pressure to maximize square footage is huge; speculation is skewing property values; city policies don't adequately encourage smaller scale development; a key challenge is to create value separate and apart from land. One person called for city policies (such as grants) that "level the playing field", to encourage smaller-scale development and protect existing community assets that don't maximize buildable square footage.

Cheng defended the duplex as housing he could afford to buy, and said renovation of existing houses is common. Kluckner acknowledged that there needs to be more diversity in housing types, so that older people can downsize and remain in their neighbourhood, noting the Dunbar scenario where seniors could not downsize and stay in their neighbourhood.

Lyon was asked why towers should be considered. "A tower is the only thing that's going to take you above 3.5 FSR," he said, noting that the Olympic Village averages 3.5 with midrise buildings up to 12 storeys, and that Downtown South averages 5 FSR. (Others contend that six storeys, but without much in the way of setbacks and other features to enhance the surroundings, can achieve 3.5 FSR; it's also possible that Downtown South may now exceed 5 FSR.)

Another member asked how the city decides how much growth to accommodate. "Through conversations like this," Cheng said. He argued that it's natural to focus some density near transit and arterials, and argued against the often-cited example of urban Paris, where almost everything is six storeys. Lyon said if you locate new density on just a few sites in an existing neighbourhood, you have to go higher to achieve significant growth.

And on that note, the Assembly broke for lunch.

How can lessons be distilled?

After the break, Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson recapped the Assembly process so far: 16 speakers, 13 community groups, seven walking tours and a boat ride around the

port. She said two key themes emerge for her when she tries to distil the input the Assembly has received, and the resulting conversations,.

The first is neighbourhood growth and density. Magnusson noted the City of Vancouver's commitment to the Metro Vancouver region to accommodate growth, and the potential for density to create more dynamic neighbourhoods. But she said the assembly has heard that there are tipping points where development can create harm — to existing residents and to job-creating industrial and port uses. Assembly speakers have shown that how density relates to affordability is “a really knotty issue”: the argument that supply increases affordability and new development can provide social housing must be weighed against the potential disruption to the relatively low cost of some existing housing.

Where can new housing be located in a manner that minimizes disruption? What forms are most appropriate to this community? What are the implications of displacement, and of property speculation? Magnusson said speakers have shown that affordability and growth have a complex relationship.

The second key issue Magnusson identified is how people move. Presentations have shown us that our health depends on an active life, she said, and that cycling routes contribute to a shift away from cars and toward healthier options. But the Assembly has also heard that such a shift affects existing uses and businesses. What happens when cycling conflicts with, say, truck transportation? What happens when traffic is slowed? What happens when parking is limited? “There are so many layers to unpack,” Magnusson said. Then she asked the Assembly to talk about their key insights based on the process so far.

Layers include big and little issues

The responses were varied and thoughtful. One person talked about how we define ownership. “There's people who own land, and there's people who own the community because they built it.”

Another wondered about the impact of transit. “How do transportation changes affect affordability?” If Broadway and Commercial is congested right now because of transit, she wondered, will increased density cause people to revert to using their cars, to avoid a new form of congestion. One gentleman asked how the city plans to manage increased traffic on the transportation corridors running through the neighbourhood.

Another person asked about the underlying issue of how decisions are made. “What could be done to make planning, not just here but in other neighbourhoods, more transparent?”

There was a call for both Mayor Gregor Robertson and Brian Jackson, the director of planning and development services, to speak to the Assembly. “It’s important to understand how what’s expected of Grandview-Woodland relates to the rest of the city.”

The Assembly then did some group work at individual tables identifying key issues and objectives in the individual sub-areas. The unfettered and very wide-ranging conversations at a couple of tables, distilled here into a series of questions, gives us this result.

Britannia Woodland, Cedar Cove and East Hastings:

- How to manage conflicts between industrial and residential uses, including pressure to extend residential development, parking spill-over, and the impact on port transportation?
- How to manage noise impact on residences near Clark Drive?
- Do we need more breweries and fewer chicken factories (but where will the chicken wings come from?)
- What’s the impact on local traffic of removing the Georgia viaducts into downtown?
- Is East Hastings at risk of becoming a “new downtown”?
- Is soil contamination an issue along Hastings?
- Will new commercial space be too costly?

Grandview and Nanaimo:

- Is Nanaimo a prime area for new density?
- How can commercial activity be fostered?
- What are the implications of Nanaimo’s role as a secondary truck route?
- Would a boulevard or other interventions moderate the width of the street?
- How can traffic flow be better managed, particularly on Victoria Drive?
- What policies would best maintain Grandview’s existing character?

Commercial Drive and Broadway:

- How can the Assembly say no to towers?
- How best should bike lanes be accommodated?
- Can congestion on sidewalks be mitigated?
- Does the city have tools to encourage the use of empty commercial space?
- What are the implications of gentrification?
- How can those with mental health needs be better served?

The range of issues is considerable. Magnusson outlined the tasks, as the first, values oriented phase of the Assembly's work winds down with Wednesday's public roundtable. Stage 2, she said, will highlight neighbourhood-wide issues, such as traffic and arts and culture. Work at the city-led sub-area workshops will also feed into the Assembly's stage 2 proceedings, which will conclude with another public meeting. Stage 3 will use all this input to create recommendations, which will also be taken to the community at large. The Assembly's last meeting will refine that work as final recommendations.

Assembly members want more insight

Magnusson then asked the Assembly members to work as small groups to identify their key issues, and pick the top three. Assembling a list was easy. Distilling it was harder.

At one table, the conversation illustrated the complexity of the challenge, and even the facts at hand. "I still don't know how to tackle affordability." "I don't buy this whole sell that we need density." "It's already happening." "We're losing population." "Density makes transit possible."

Still, at the end of the conversation, three key issues emerged: 1) Gentrification (affordability and diversity); 2) Densification; and 3) Congestion (traffic, transportation, walkability).

When other tables reported to the Assembly on their work, those themes predominated in various forms, but different issues emerged as well. These included: built form and character; encouraging business, and protecting small business; affordability for long-term residents, including artists; homelessness; range of housing types; protecting neighbourhood form and identity; and the need to create a public space at Broadway and Commercial.

Asked Magnusson, what more do we need to know to tackle these issues? While she said the Assembly has limited blocks of time for formal presentations, she suggested the Assembly can invite individuals who can help — architects, planners, community leaders

— to sit at group tables and add to the discussion. She requested that the groups set out five key issues they'd like to learn more about on their paper scrolls, so that they could be shared with others during the break and become a basis for future discussion.

The conversation at one table began with what tools the city has to curb profiteering and restrict land assembly. "What are they? We need to know all of them." Another called for a debate involving UBC planning professor Patrick Condon and real estate marketing specialist Bob Rennie. One wanted TransLink to speak to the Assembly.

Another said it's time for the Assembly to hear from an aboriginal leader. "If [aboriginals] are losing their opportunity to live here ... that's not good."

Humbling complexity, collective capacity

The Assembly's final task of the day was to reform in new groups to discuss an individual theme, drawing on the *Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies* document released June 2013. The themes ranged from housing, transportation and climate change to arts and culture, heritage and business. Groups were given the city's policy proposals, as well as a summary of the community feedback on those proposals.

Assembly members were asked to identify key issues, and examine how the city's policy proposals dealt with the issue. As a homework follow-up assignment, Assembly members were asked to review the recommendations, leave those they agree with blank, highlight sections where they need more information in pink, and identify problematic recommendations in yellow, to prepare for the next meeting.

The need for more information was a common concern. At the arts and culture table, members wanted a clearer understanding of how cultural spaces are zoned and the degree of protection that zoning affords. "There's just so much of this, and I don't have the depth of understanding about it."

The exercise was for some a humbling end to a day full of smart questions and analysis of complex issues. The Assembly members individually may not know all they need to know about every given subject, but as a group their capacity can be impressive. In stage two, they will draw on their collective capacity, and the knowledge of the broader community, to meet the challenge.

Public roundtable #1, November 26, 2014:

First public meeting emphasizes trust, transparency and ongoing engagement

The Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan held its first roundtable with the public on Wednesday, November 26, and the evening was marked by congenial small-group discussions and some pointed questions from area residents.

After Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson and lead facilitator Susanna Haas Lyons welcomed the 150 attendees, Assembly member Larissa Ardis talked directly about the matter on the minds of many: "Is this a legitimate process?"

Ardis first addressed the claim made by some that the Assembly was "hand-picked." She explained that the selection process, run by an independent firm that specializes in running "deliberative democracy" panels, was designed to ensure the assembly is demographically representative, by sex, area of residence, owner or renter, and other factors. "We care about this community, and we want to do a better job than was done before," she said, alluding to controversy after the June 2013 draft proposals included towers and provoked widespread opposition in the community.

"None of us are actually trained seals barking for government, or sheep lining up to be indoctrinated," she added, explaining that the Assembly wants ideas from the community. "We depend on your expertise, activism and continued support."

Then came the pointed questions. The first related to the allegation that some proposals and zoning maps prepared by the planning department were suppressed. "Can the community get access to the map that was prepared before the plan was released?" said one area resident. "If it met all our collective values, it seems to me it would be a useful shortcut."

There was some debate about whether "iterations" was the right word to describe the map or maps that preceded the release of the 2013 *Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies* map, which created real community controversy. Veteran City of Vancouver area planner Andrew Pask said there are several prior iterations, in various stages of completion, and that he'd look into the possibility of releasing them.

There were other questions that reflected public skepticism about the process. One resident said trust has been broken by the city. Given that trust is generally an issue, why weren't the Assembly's draft values sent out in advance? "The Citizens' Assembly

has to demonstrate transparency.” Another asked about transparency regarding the input of big developers. “Is their input going to be made public?”

Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson said she would work to make material available in a more timely manner. Later in the meeting, Andrew Pask addressed concern that developers have a privileged position in the process.

Although Haas Lyons quoted from the Assembly’s terms of reference, that its recommendations “will significantly inform the next iteration of the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan,” many in the audience expressed concern that city council and the planning department will ignore community input on key issues.

Values refined, issues debated

Three Assembly members then talked about the ‘Draft Values for Grandview-Woodland’ that were developed at the Assembly’s first four meetings. Hilda Castillo, Heather Williams and Asher deGroot took turns reading them out, and Castillo explained that the values are a guide and provide a basis for the Assembly’s recommendations. Group discussion then followed at the 18 tables, each of which generally included a couple of Assembly members, as well as a facilitator to record the public input, which will be reported back to the Assembly at its next meeting.

At Ardis’s table, scale was identified as a key element in the community that is not being valued. “Our neighbourhood is already denser than 70 percent of the city,” said one. Conversely, the community “has thrived by welcoming people,” and no one spoke against that. Scale was viewed as a key consideration in creating a walkable community with viable businesses, but there was debate about whether that scale should, at key locations, be limited to four, six or 10 storeys.

The diversity of housing types that comfortably coexist was seen as a valuable asset by one person, who argued this is the case because the development has taken place slowly. The notion that the city is planning a “top-down” introduction of substantial new density was seen as contrary to the community’s more organic development history.

Other key qualities were also identified, with walkability, diversity, affordability and friendliness high among them. One said long-time residents and their families need to have a future in the community, but it’s not looking likely.

Scale and height were important issues, particularly in key locations, including Commercial Drive at Broadway and at Venables, and along Hastings. One expressed

concern that a single tall building will create a precedent. Another said a variety of effects may ripple through the surrounding blocks.

Conversely, one person argued that if there is going to be density, it will have to be “pretty high” to make it affordable. Another argued creating more housing where people already live is more in keeping with the community, rather than someone building something large before they “take off.”

Some issues discussed were fairly fine-grained, such as how strata councils banning rentals affects the availability of rental housing, or how new development will affect view corridors, or how requiring better building materials might improve building quality.

One person, who said the Assembly process could be “a model for ... other parts of the city,” suggested that specific zoning and height changes need to be on the table sooner rather than later. “I would encourage the Assembly *not* to make the map the last thing, because people are going to go crazy.”

Another said it’s critical that the Assembly address the issue of process: “The process by which change will happen is just as important as the substance of the change.”

Scale, diversity, cost and process dominate

The tables were then asked to distil and report out on three key concerns. While there was an effort at the meeting to separate feedback on neighbourhood values and issues, they often overlapped. Housing, diversity, and increased density (and its relationship to the street) was the report from the first table, and it was a typical response, along with a strong call for attention to affordability, for both residents and businesses.

Other values and issues raised in the reporting out included “meaningful involvement of the aboriginal community” and opening up the industrial area to more arts uses, including potential production-related retail uses, particularly along Venables. Arts was cited as being absent from the values statement, and there was a call for more emphasis on the local economy.

Many felt the planning process hasn’t shown enough attention to what’s at risk in the community. One person called for evidence of “an appreciation of what exists now.”

Process was also a key theme — it emerged early and often. “I think we’re still questioning this process,” said one person, who asked how we can “make sure this process has an impact and that it will be listened to at city hall?” Said another: “Trust is

the most important issue,” adding that the public has no assurance that the city will listen. Said yet another: “What’s most important is the continuing participation of citizens.”

When planner Andrew Pask spoke toward the end of the meeting, he argued that there are reasons for confidence, and they begin with what happened in the summer of 2013, when the city first released its controversial ideas. “There was a very strong signal sent [to the city’s] senior management by you guys,” he said, explaining that as a result towers proposed around Broadway and Commercial were taken off the table. He added that city council also initiated the Citizens’ Assembly process.

Pask also said he values and considers developers’ input as much as anyone else’s. He made the case that developers shape and build this city, and their input isn’t can be valuable. “Some of them are your neighbours.” However, he said “there is no privileged place for developers in this process.”

Many attendees, of course, will wait to see what the Assembly proposes, and how the city responds. In the meantime, definitions will be discussed. What’s a tower? What’s affordable? And what does it mean to say that the Assembly’s report will “significantly inform” the next iteration of the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan?

Meeting #5, December 13, 2014:

Trust remains a key issues as Assembly turns from values to policy

The Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community shifted its focus on Saturday, December 13, as it moved from establishing values to considering specific policies. The meeting at the Vancouver Opera rehearsal space heard two speakers talk about the challenge of creating affordable housing and received reports on two sub-area workshops on low-income residential/industrial areas. Once again, central concerns are affordability, displacement, and the pace and scale of change.

Yet as the Assembly did this, the issue of trust was again raised.

Early in the day, as Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson conducted a morning check-in, one Assembly member questioned the City of Vancouver's commitment process. "I know you want this to be effective, and I believe you are acting in good faith," he added. But he said Assembly members want information from the city — mainly draft documents on proposed land use that were sidelined in the spring of 2013 when the number and height of towers around Commercial and Broadway was dramatically increased — and he believes the city's reluctance to make such material available sends the wrong message. (The city is now currently considering a request for related material through provincial freedom of information legislation, with a January deadline.)

(Update: These materials have since been released and are at www.vancouver.ca/gw)

How can the Assembly make sure what it recommends is acted upon, the Assembly member said later. "Lots of people would like to see what we do disappear into the dark."

"Is it worth all this work?" said another member. "Will the city take this work into account?"

Magnusson said the Assembly leadership is "not trying to dictate at all" what topics or conversations take place. She also noted that the Assembly makes its recommendations not to the planning department but to city council.

As well, one Assembly member expressed concern that that the City of Vancouver's recent sub-area workshops on Cedar Cove and Britannia-Woodland subtly encouraged redevelopment, and that the results of the workshops don't accurately reflect community views.

City of Vancouver area planner Andrew Pask said he was disheartened by the reactions. He said the feedback forms from the sub-area workshops were generally very positive, but city staff would take all concerns into account in planning upcoming workshops. Pask also addressed the apprehension that the city won't listen to the Assembly's recommendations. "We're here right now because [the community was] upset," he said. "You have way more agency and power than you give yourselves credit for."

One Assembly member reiterated that it would be an important gesture for the city to be transparent and release relevant documents. "And they're not doing that." Another said it's not the map itself that's important. "I don't care about an old map. I just want to know that it's not going to happen again."

Many Assembly members worked together informally during the day to develop a request that the city release the material for the Assembly's use.

However, while the trust issue was central to the day's opening, and looms over the assembly's work in a manner that some find distracting, much of the day's work involved refining the wording of this value or that policy, to serve the neighbourhood better, building by building and street by street.

The Assembly's first task was to use input from the Assembly's November 26 meeting with the public to refine the Assembly's values. That work resulted in a new value. "We value a process that fosters community ownership and agency and creates ongoing organizational capacity," it read, adding that "genuine democracy, transparency and engagement" will allow Grandview-Woodland residents to "feel like they have a voice that is listened to and acted upon."

Turning goals into policies

Revisions to existing values were mostly minor, and when the exercise concluded Magnusson explained that the Assembly will come back to the values in the last couple of meetings to finalize the wording. She also explained the process for phase two of the Assembly's work. It begins with approving, rejecting or refining the existing planning recommendations, as well as developing new ideas — for presentation to a public meeting in the new year. Phase three of the assembly's work will use that public input to finalize the report.

Most of the day involved group work where Assembly members reviewed the 2013 Grandview Woodland Community Plan: Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies [<http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/gw-emerging-directions-booklet.pdf>] document, theme

by theme. The agenda also included some discussion of the sub-area workshops, presentations from two people working in the affordable housing field, and comments from a relatively large contingent of residents who came to listen to the housing presentations and express their concerns to the assembly.

Although the bulk of the sub-area workshop input won't be dealt with until Assembly meetings seven and eight, Andrew Pask provided a brief overview of the first two workshops, beginning with the format. Past planning proposals and public feedback were presented. Then small groups discussed community priorities and looked at "policy geography" – areas where community members felt change of one sort or another was appropriate. Then they were asked to locate cards showing various uses, amenities and building types on the map in areas where they felt change was appropriate. Finally, the work of the various tables was layered onto one large map by city staff, as the groups reported on their key issues.

Pask said the central concern in Cedar Cove was "absolutely and fundamentally" affordability. Pace of change and displacement of existing residents were related concerns. Pask said Dundas and Nanaimo were identified as streets where change might be beneficial, but that new development needs to create affordability. He said one new element that emerged in this meeting was the willingness of some to consider greater density on Wall Street. On height in general, he said there was a wide variance. Some wanted no change or to limit apartment development to four or six storeys; others saw 10 or 12 storeys near the intersection of Dundas and Wall streets as a reasonable way to create new density and turn the location into a neighbourhood hub.

At the Britannia-Woodland event, the pace and scale of change was also a key issue, Pask said. There were mixed opinions on whether to allow denser new development, but there was agreement that development should be tied to affordability. There was debate about how much density to allow around Woodland Park, with many favouring four-storey apartments, which are currently allowed.

He noted there was interest in bringing new life to alleys, particularly west of Commercial Drive, and in creating more activity around the Grandview elementary school next to the Grandview Cut. There was also some interest in relaxing the industrial zoning along Venables, developing east-west bike routes, and in improving the interface of residential and industrial areas.

Assembly members also spoke about their sub-area workshop experiences. One noted strong support of affordable housing, especially for the vulnerable, and retaining existing housing stock. She said there were mixed opinions on more diverse use of industrial zones, support for creating social nodes along greenways, interest in

protecting views, and a desire to make it easier to adapt existing housing for multi-family use.

Then some members of the public gallery spoke about their concerns regarding the sub-area workshops. One expressed concern that she received conflicting information from city staff about its ability to maintain rental stock as rental. She added that she felt encouraged to “supersize” potential redevelopment. “People were slapping building images down as if they were playing Monopoly.”

Another expressed concern that at one sub-area table none of the three citizens present lived in the neighbourhood. She also said that if Grandview-Woodland residents were given clear direction from the city on how many people they’re expected to accommodate, they’d do a good job.

Yet another argued that one resident’s call for more diversity around Grandview elementary was really a call for gentrification that would make the school more appealing to his family. The speaker called instead for rules that encourage the development of more rental, especially bachelor suites, in the duplex-zoned areas of Grandview. “The new development we’re seeing is entirely for sale.”

“We’ve been critical of the process,” said another, “but we certainly respect the people.” He said in Vancouver we’re good at knocking down buildings but not so good at building affordability. “The definition of what is affordable is an incredibly slippery fish.” We’re kicking low-income people out of the neighbourhood right now, he said, adding that he prefers “dinginess to displacement.” He said in the absence of meaningful incentives to maintain affordability, “the only position you give me to take is ‘No,’” and he urged the Assembly to “make a really sharp U-turn on the road to an elite city.”

Partnerships key to creating affordability

Two presenters then spoke about the tools used to create affordable housing. The first, Alice Sundberg, is a housing and community development consultant who worked beginning in 1981 to develop co-ops. “What’s affordable?” She said it’s relative — that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines it as spending 30 percent of your income on housing, and a third of Vancouverites pay more than that.

Then she talked about housing’s complex cost inputs, noting that social and non-profit housing receive subsidies in one form or another. She explained that supply programs underwrite the development of new housing whereas demand programs put subsidies in the hands of consumers. Sundberg said studies suggest that, long-term, the demand

approach is more expensive. She also said requirements for underground parking can cost as much as \$55,000 per stall, and are often relaxed in social housing developments.

Sundberg explained that the CMHC model of the past has been supplanted by multiple funding mechanisms, ranging from low-cost financing from BC Housing to one-time subsidies from senior governments. Partnerships, she said, are now key, and involve private sector developers and faith groups with land to contribute. Revenue from private development often offset costs for other housing, she explained. "If there's a rezoning and there's a non-profit involved, please come out and support that," she said.

Penny Gurstein, a professor with the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning, began by questioning some assumptions. She said density does not necessarily create affordability, especially in a property market like Vancouver's. "This has become a mantra that we need to be looking at very, very carefully."

Gurstein said Vancouver has advantages, such as a sympathetic lender in Vancity and a robust non-profit housing sector. But she noted that the key tool in Vancouver is the community amenity contribution. These are public benefits negotiated by the City of Vancouver and the developer of new projects, usually in return for increased density. Gurstein said these are often used for other benefits [such as daycares and arts venues], and that a study by the Housing Justice project at UBC suggests that from 2010 to 2012 only a couple hundred units of affordable housing were created in this manner.

The municipality of Whistler, she said, has used its housing authority effectively to develop housing geared toward those who work in the resort, and there are other international models. Vancouver's own move earlier this year to create a housing authority, she added, may improve the municipality's performance.

The real issue, she said, is high land costs, noting that the City of Vancouver holds a lot of land that it sometimes rents for a nominal value. Gurstein pointed also to the community land trust model, where escalating land values are essentially taken out of the equation in developing new housing.

When asked if enough attention is paid to small-scale affordable rental available in private residences, Gurstein said such landlords sometimes see themselves as social service providers, and that the federal government has at times provided tax incentives to create such rental housing, but they generally aren't treated as others are in the provision of rental housing. Andrew Pask added that about three-quarters of Grandview-Woodland's rental stock was purpose built, and 20 to 25 percent is available as secondary suites or condominiums that are being rented.

Sound policies depend on good tools

The balance of the day was spent looking at the city's existing proposals, most of which take the form of principals rather than specific zoning policies. What policies exist now, what has been proposed and what gaps exist?

At one of the housing tables, the difficulty of relaxing parking restrictions was discussed. "It's a tool that has to be used judiciously," said a member who noted that many people still depend heavily on cars.

There was a broader question, however, regarding the nature of the tools that will be used to advance a principal. "What are the tools? We could ask that question about every one of these [policies]." Sometimes the issue with a policy was loose wording; for example, what is the exact meaning of "new development."

The discussion, as was the case at many tables, was more formative than conclusive. When the groups reported out, there was general support for much of what has been proposed, with concerns tending toward fairly fine-grained issues. On transportation, that involved truck traffic on Nanaimo, the implications of demolishing the viaducts on traffic through the neighbourhood, and the plan for addressing pedestrian congestion at Broadway and Commercial.

On health, the Assembly members said the language could be more specific regarding who's at risk, and at the same time more open to who might be at risk in the future. On housing, members wanted clearer language and to address missing elements. On climate change, the group wanted language that spoke to the environmental benefits of protecting existing buildings. The local economy group wanted to avoid locating new housing near the port, and wondered about the impact of land speculation. The arts table wanted a call for "controversial" art.

The heritage table said the language balancing the rights of owners and heritage protection is "woolly", and called for a definition of heritage that includes gardens, neighbourhood retail and even affordability. If there's any doubt that affordability is an overarching theme for the Assembly, its appearance as a potential heritage value should put that to rest.

Meeting #6, January 24, 2015:

Assembly begins drafting recommendations

Einstein solved a puzzle or two. “If I had an hour to solve a problem,” he said, “I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.” Chair Rachel Magnusson opened with that often-cited quote, as the Citizens’ Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan began its sixth meeting, on Saturday, January 24, at the Vancouver Opera’s McLean Drive rehearsal space.

It’s taken some patience on the part of the 48-member Assembly to spend five meetings hearing from community groups, planners and planning critics without defining its own solutions to the neighbourhood’s challenges. The work of writing recommendations took its first tentative steps on Saturday, with some themed small-group work.

Tables built on work they’d begun at past meetings, where they reviewed the June 2013 City of Vancouver document *Grandview-Woodland Community Plan: Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies*. Groups had identified policy directions they supported, those that needed work, and areas where new directions are required. The day’s work mainly involved developing early drafts of new recommendations to complement those that the Assembly supports. The group work will be reviewed by the whole Assembly, and after the recommendations are refined input will be sought from the community. This will take place in part through a public meeting on Thursday, March 5.

Yet while developing recommendations was the day’s most important work, there was also a lively conversation featuring two very different visions of the neighbourhood’s future, and it included some discussion of the controversial plans around Broadway that first galvanized community opposition to the city’s draft proposals for Grandview-Woodland.

Early in January, the City of Vancouver released draft maps and drawings, mainly of the Broadway area, in response to a freedom-of-information request and calls from both the community and the Assembly members. The documents are available under the heading “Maps and drawings”, reached through the Documents tab on the city’s website.

The documents show a range of preliminary plans, including one that included 22 towers around Broadway and Commercial, as well as an earlier staff plan that included just two towers — of 22 and 28 storeys — on the Safeway site next to the SkyTrain

station. The *Goals, Directions and Emerging Policies* plan included about 11 tower sites at maximum heights ranging from 18 to 36 storeys.

Some of these images were shown during the panel discussion, which featured UBC urban design professor Patrick Condon, SFU city program director Gordon Price, and Lon LaClaire, the City of Vancouver's manager of strategic transportation planning.

Transit hub is city's busiest

LaClaire began by describing the city's transportation challenges, and made his case for the importance of increased transit funding. He noted that the Broadway SkyTrain station is the busiest point on the Expo line, and added that the Broadway bus line is, as best the city can determine, the busiest bus line in North America. He said that other extremely busy bus routes, the Millennium Line through Burnaby, and its upcoming integration with the Evergreen Line to Port Moody, make the area an extremely challenging transit hub.

LaClaire said the Broadway corridor is one of the top regional travel destinations, particularly the area around Vancouver General Hospital, and that half of the people bound for UBC and Broadway come from outside Vancouver. He said extending rapid transit toward UBC, initially to Arbutus, will not only benefit the corridor as a whole but reduce street congestion at Commercial Drive by allowing transfers to take place within the station.

LaClaire also said that while the expenditure for Broadway rapid transit is huge, the high capacity means it has a lower cost per boarding, and that alternatives don't have the same potential for capacity growth.

However, LeClaire acknowledged in response to a question that beyond increasing station capacity and access, the city doesn't have "a really good plan" to deal with traffic the Evergreen Line will generate, beginning in 2016. Rapid transit along Broadway, of course, is contingent on the referendum result.

Transit, of course, is a key driver of how cities are planned.

Patrick Condon has been an outspoken critic of Vancouver planning, and an advocate for what he calls a "streetcar city." Yet he acknowledged during his presentation that on rapid transit "the train has left the station," and his belief in focusing big capital expenditures on a less rapid, more pervasive transit system has been overtaken by events. That said, he still argues it's possible and beneficial to substantially increase

population less through high-density nodes focused around rapid transit and more through increased density throughout the city served by an adequate street-level transit network.

Gordon Price, conversely, sees high-density development around transit hubs as an escape valve that spares existing neighbourhoods from redevelopment, and spares the city planners and politicians from divisive debate and intractable neighbourhood opposition.

Double density without towers?

Condon — who noted that he’s a colleague and friend of Scot Hein, a former Vancouver planner who worked on elements of the initial Grandview-Woodland proposals and has criticized the introduction of additional towers at Broadway and Commercial — argued that the City of Vancouver’s senior managers believed that without towers it would be harder to make the public case for a Broadway subway.

Condon showed some of the maps and computer drawings released by the city. He said the city’s insistence on introducing a large number of towers into the plan around Broadway and Commercial has set back planning by years. “I hope you can overcome it,” he said to the Assembly.

However, Condon also argued in favour of a huge increase in the density of the city, by allowing new multi-family and infill building forms, subdivision and strata-titling, and increased low-rise density along arterials. “I’m a believer in doubling the density of the city,” he said, arguing greater livability and affordability are the potential benefits. He said that over several decades the use of cars could decline enormously, and we should plan with that in mind. “If you reduce the use of automobiles by 80 percent, that frees up a heck of a lot of road space.”

However, Condon argued that unique aspects of Vancouver planning make the process of accommodating growth unduly difficult. In the past, he’s pointed to division created by community amenity contributions, such as social housing, which are negotiated with developers during rezonings of certain sites. In his brief presentation to the Assembly, he also cited the lack of a city-wide master plan, a quirk of the Vancouver Charter that governs the city’s operation. Other municipalities, which operate under different provincial legislation, are required to renew their city-wide plans every five years.

Condon later acknowledged that such master plans aren’t perfect, but they provide a context for local decisions. Otherwise, he said, “every neighbourhood ends up just like

your neighbourhood: 'Why us?' " In fact, one of the questions frequently asked of city officials by Grandview-Woodland residents regards the city's population goal for the community. The city says it has no specific local goal but wants to use good planning principals to locate growth in the most appropriate locations. Some residents, who say they want to accept a reasonable share of growth but would like a guideline regarding what that share might be, remain uncomfortable with the uncertainty.

Condon and Hein's planning and architecture students at UBC, where Hein now works full-time, developed a city-wide plan for a Vancouver of 1.2 million residents [2011 population was 603,000]. ***A Convenience Truth: A Sustainable Vancouver by 2050*** is available online.

Condon and Hein's introduction succinctly outlines the dilemma — for Grandview-Woodland and Vancouver as a whole. We've succeeded by developing mainly on industrial land, but that supply is exhausted, and new density must come to existing neighbourhoods. "How can we become a more equitable, more social, more efficient, and more affordable city? Virtually every citizen in the city agrees that these are worthy goals. Where it gets tricky is when you ask 'How can we reach these goals?' It becomes even trickier when you ask 'Where can we reach these goals?' "

The introduction argues that greener streets, naturalized recreation networks, and more abundant services will create a "convenient city" that "can and should be financed by the gradual growth, conversion and re-conversion of the city itself."

Because the tricky questions are contentious, transparency in planning is another central concern for Condon, who said a city-wide master plan should spell out how the city sees future population being distributed. "You should really show people what's going to happen, with every building," he said. As such, chapter six of ***A Convenience Truth*** provides detailed maps and illustrations of a city of 1.2 million.

Save neighbourhoods with towers?

Price, who was for many years an NPA city councillor, began his presentation by talking about the challenge planners and civic politicians face. "The longer I'm out of office, the more people are nice to me," he began. He said change is driven by external factors, and cities have to respond, but it's not easy. "We never, or rarely, go into a community and say 'How would you like to change your community — we're here to help.'"

Then there's the issue of cost. "Everyone wants affordability, but they do not accept or expect that it will lower existing [property] values," he said, arguing that as such all new housing must be seen as expensive.

Price said that neighbourhoods can effectively bring change to a halt, as occurred in the West End in 1989, where he lived at the time. "In communities like the West End, the tolerance for change is practically zero."

As for Grandview-Woodland, Price has friends who live on East Eighth near Commercial. "You're not changing the scale of their community," he said, arguing that the neighbourhood developed as a suburb, and that the suburban model still underpins our culture. "It's who we are."

The political cost of trying to change that culture is high, and so planners choose to leave existing residential streets largely untouched and focus new density more intensely on the areas of least resistance.

"What's your relief mechanism?" Price asked the Assembly. The West End, he said, was spared from change by such development east of Burrard along False Creek. In the case of Grandview-Woodland, he sees relief in major redevelopment of key locations such as Broadway and Commercial, from which the City of Vancouver can extract community benefits, including public spaces, community services and social housing.

'No program' for low- and middle-income earners

On the question of affordability, there were also no easy answers. Price said that externalities such as immigration and interest rates are driving up the price of housing. He added that while you can subsidize the creation of social housing, low- and middle-income earners are left out. "There is no program for that." He said solutions lie in good design that allows people to live well in less space.

Condon said that the federal government's exit from its housing programs means housing can only be subsidized by tapping money from development, but that this in turn requires trade-offs between community services and affordable housing.

Condon also argued that global factors have skewed the local market: "I don't believe the laws of supply and demand are in operation here anymore." He argues that part of the solution is smaller, denser parcels, and believes this will happen legally or illegally, pointing to the past proliferation of secondary suites, where zoning arrived after the fact to legitimize change that the city did not plan.

“When I came into office in 1986,” Price said of the secondary suites issue, “it was untouchable.” People didn’t want to grant permission for their neighbourhood to change, even though they might have a suite themselves.

Today, the emotional heart of our planning questions isn’t really much different. What kind of change would existing neighbourhoods accept? What circumstances will best foster complex conversations about change?

Would a city-wide plan make it easier, or harder?

Condon argued that in Burnaby, major towers are under development without major controversy. “The politicians were able to say this has been in the plan for 25 years,” and as such they were able to have constructive conversations about the details.

Price said it’s not worth spending political capital on a city-wide plan, and that it’s better spent having neighbourhood-based conversations like the ones now taking place in Vancouver. He argued that the quality of Vancouver’s urban landscape is a result of our way of doing things.

Of course, there are some who reject both Price and Condon’s visions of a much denser city. Others would argue that it’s not either-or but both — and to a more limited extent. How great are the externalities? How inevitable is change? Much of what the Assembly has heard suggests it’s pretty hard to avoid, in an increasingly global world where climate change affects us all and pressure on regional industrial and agricultural land constrains our city.

So the question becomes partly one of process. In managing growth, what system fosters an open conversation that encourages trust as we all try to understand each others’ challenges? Returning to Einstein’s words, how can we best use our time to understand the problem — as politicians, planners and citizens — so that we arrive at the best solutions?

Assembly balances big context, small details

After a conversation that effectively outlined the Assembly’s key dilemmas, the members spent much of the rest of the day considering much more fine-grained policies and proposals. Magnusson, who reviewed the likely structure of the report and the meeting schedule early in the day, explained that the afternoon would focus on creating the rough drafts of new recommendations that are neighbourhood-wide, and that sub-area recommendations and mapping would take place during subsequent meetings.

Two sub-area workshops seeking community input were held in January, and three more (on Commercial Drive, Broadway and Commercial, and East Hasting Street) will be held in the coming weeks. Summaries of the results of the workshops will be provided to the Assembly. One Assembly member asked about concern that the Assembly might pre-empt community input, and Magnusson noted that draft recommendations will be taken to the community for their feedback at two public meetings before the report is finalized. Neighbourhood-wide recommendations will be considered at the first meeting, and sub-area recommendations at the second.

Other questions at the beginning of the meeting were also about process. Is the demographic mix of the 48-member Assembly being maintained in the face of three withdrawals and absences due to sickness and other unavoidable factors? Is the Assembly adequately considering impacts on areas just outside Grandview-Woodland's boundaries? A possible extra meeting to allow time for the Assembly report to be refined was discussed; the idea received some of support, and Magnusson said she'd survey the members.

Then Andrew Pask gave a brief outline of the maps and illustrations the city has released. "There's some interesting stuff that focuses not on how much but on structure." That includes material focusing on arterials as key areas for density and public realm improvements.

"What we've been doing in the sub-area workshops is revisit the idea of neighbourhood structure," he said, adding that the city has tried to build on feedback from the early Grandview-Woodland workshops and make sure that the community is shaping the results. He said the city is working to finalize some documents for the assembly, and loosely summarized some of the results of the Grandview and Nanaimo workshops as follows:

Grandview

- Maintain and even modestly increase commercial activity on Victoria Drive, consider it as a potential bike route, better control the traffic, but acknowledge there are no alleys behind its housing so parking is an issue.
- Consider some change on East First, although there was some discomfort with four storeys and much discussion around form.
- Consider additional strata-titling options, and extending the duplex zone into the single-family zone to the east.
- Activate the laneways.
- Improve parks, such as McSpadden and Salsbury.

Nanaimo

- Taming traffic and improving on its broad and unwelcoming expanse was a universal goal, but solutions varied.
- New density on Nanaimo, generally at three storeys, was acceptable but with careful attention to transitions, alley locations, and topography.
- There was a lot of concern about the types of housing that would be allowed around the greenspace “fingers” west of Nanaimo.
- Four key commercial nodes should be enhanced, with comfort at varying heights. At Broadway, some wanted up to four, others up to eight. Comfort was generally around six at Hastings and at four storeys at First and at Charles Street.

From the global to the local

Then the Assembly waded into two sessions, morning and afternoon, where they began the messy business of synthesizing what they’ve learned. Sometimes conversations turned to representation and process. “Renters put real money into the neighbourhood, as well as social capital,” observed one Assembly member, who said that they weren’t adequately represented at the sub-area workshops. Sometimes they turned to the practical desires of existing residents. “The one thing we don’t want is to have existing parking reduced,” said another, adding that people have this great idea that they can get by without a car and then they have a kid.

At the end of the first session, a wild card table was created on issues that don’t fit. Youth was one, the impact of a Grandview-Woodland plan on other communities was another, improvements to public schools was a third. First Nations relationships, ongoing community engagement, and monitoring the execution of the neighbourhood plan were among the rest. “We’re trying to create an independent republic,” said one member, perhaps only partly in jest. “How can we take control?”

The elements of an effective recommendation were discussed. “The absolute key is that the intent of your recommendation is clearly communicated to city council,” Magnusson told the Assembly, adding that they can’t be overly general or excessively proscriptive.

When conversations began at the Transportation table, some members were refining their understanding of the terms they had been hearing for months. Are greenways appropriate on Venables and Powell Street but without bikes? What’s the difference

between a greenway and a bike route, and how do they overlap? Options for bike lanes on Commercial Drive were vigorously debated, and sometimes criticized.

How much of a say does the community really have on new local transit options? “The tool that the city has,” said Pask, “is being an advocate on behalf of the community.”

In the afternoon, members sometimes struggled to find homes for the new ideas — a district energy system at the Broadway Safeway site, a call for a ward system — that they wanted to integrate into existing proposals.

At the end of the afternoon, Peter MacLeod, whose consultancy is working with the City of Vancouver to support the Assembly, introduced himself and said he thought the group was doing great work. “It can feel really messy,” he said. “It can feel like you’re working at cross purposes.”

But MacLeod, who has overseen a wide range of citizens’ assemblies and reference panels across Canada, said he’s very impressed by the group’s work so far. “It gives me every confidence that you’re going to land this in an incredible way.”

Meeting #7, February 28, 2015:

Assembly prepares for public meeting on neighbourhood-wide recommendations

How specific should a recommendation be? This was the key question, in theory and practice, as the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan met Saturday, February 28, at the Vancouver Opera rehearsal hall to refine its proposals for an upcoming public meeting.

Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson began the meeting by looking some of the 35 recommendations drafted at the previous meeting. Clear and concise is good, she said. "You want to find the sweet spot between not too general and not too specific," she added. The Assembly needs, Magnusson said, to provide a balance between a fine-grained review of the existing city recommendations in the June 2013 *Emerging Directions* document and some of the big-picture creative thinking the Assembly has heard and discussed during its first six meetings.

And then there was the longhouse idea. In the middle of a working day devoted mainly to drafting recommendations, the Assembly heard from Scott Clark, executive director of ALIVE (the Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement Society), and Reconciliation Canada's Marissa Lawrence.

During a heartfelt discussion of reconciliation and social justice issues, Clark — who was a member of the Assembly until other work obliged him to bow out — talked about the importance of the longhouse to First Nations as a centre of culture and governance. While in Victoria recently, he saw the importance of longhouses that serve all aboriginal communities. "Why don't we have one of those in Vancouver?" he said.

While there are traditional and contemporary examples at UBC, and others that serve specific bands around the Lower Mainland, there isn't one in the city itself run by and mainly for the broad range of First Nations communities that now call Vancouver home.

Emerging Directions recommends that the City of Vancouver "continue to work with non-profit organizations that are contemplating redevelopment (expansion and enhancement) of their existing facilities", "work with the local Aboriginal Community to identify bylaw restrictions that limit the opportunity to undertake traditional food-preparation, medicine and health practices (e.g. smokehouses)", and "encourage a

greater proportion of urban Aboriginal art ... into Grandview-Woodland's parks and public spaces".

All of which is good, and might even include a longhouse. But a single thing we can all easily visualize — to animate our ambitions for the community — can have a lot more power than a generality, however thoughtful, well crafted and inclusive it may be. Conversely, a specific idea may tie the city and the community to an idea that may not, on close examination, be ideal or achievable. But without something specific, no one has an inspiring goal to shoot for. The community doesn't have a galvanizing idea, and planners don't have a clear target.

A common longhouse, in a city with so many churches, says Clark, is a facility that would bring health and reconciliation to communities that sorely need it. And it would acknowledge the key place of Aboriginals in Grandview-Woodland, where First Nations make up close to one tenth of the population. By the end of the afternoon, the word *longhouse* showed up in at least two recommendations being developed by the various working groups.

Clark and Lawrence also talked about the obvious challenges for the aboriginal community, and paired people off to talk about what reconciliation means to them. "Let reconciliation assist you in your recommendations to the city," Lawrence said.

Clark noted that 70 percent of indigenous students are pushed out of the school system before they graduate, that 60 percent of survival sex workers are aboriginal, and that 40 percent of those workers have a child in some form of foster care. "We all own it," he said. "It's not an aboriginal issue." One of the key challenges, Clark said, is that such numbers have become normalized. He wants the Assembly to keep in mind that "services are important for all vulnerable populations."

Disagreement on cycling is cited

Both before and after lunch, there was some reporting out to the Assembly on group work. By day's end there were more than 80 draft neighbourhood-wide recommendations, which will be discussed at a Public Roundtable on Thursday, March 5, at the Croatian Cultural Centre.

The Transportation group came first to the sticky issue of cycling.

Emerging Directions says this: "Improve and expand the existing cycling network with low-stress, high quality routes to support safe and convenient cycling for people of all

ages and abilities. Provide direct and intuitive connections to meaningful destinations and the broader region.” Specific routes follow: Commercial Drive between 10th and Gravely, then north along Salsbury to Adanac; Victoria Drive, Charles or William street, Powell Street, Pandora Street, East Eighth Avenue, and others, possibly including Nanaimo.

However, while this is a reasonable representation of what many want, bike lanes and routes continue to be a contentious issue, and the unresolved finer points of the City of Vancouver’s existing proposals are also a source of friction. So the group suggested something like this: “Expedite the creation of a multi-stakeholder task force that reviews objective, transparent research to resolve locations of proposed cycling routes.”

“Nobody at our table,” one Assembly member declared in the final reporting out, “agreed on anything with regards to cycling.”

On transit, agreement was easier. “We want transit to be nice and warm and fuzzy. And work,” said one member, reflecting a general recommendation that was more precise but less entertaining. The group emphasized its interest in a community shuttle, which is mentioned in *Emerging Directions* in the context of East First Avenue transit service (or lack thereof).

Controlling truck and commuter traffic, the impact of changes to the viaducts into downtown, and transportation of hazardous goods were among the other concerns. The reintroduction of street parking on East First to turn it “into a local street” was among the more daring ideas.

The Local Economy group wants more people to be able to work in the neighbourhood, noting that just 11 percent do so now, but observed that building new commercial space is less profitable than residential space. “We’re prepared to allow a little more density to get job space.”

In the final reporting out, the group keyed on creating more diverse opportunity for economic activity. It wanted to maintain industrial zoning, increase office space near transit, limit business frontages to restrict large chain businesses, and encourage reform of assessment and taxation rules to prevent businesses from being taxed on the potential use of their land.

Existing private housing a key concern

The Housing group talked about the challenge of renewing older rental stock through renovation. “The renoviction thing, whatever you want to call it, that’s really important.” As such, the group suggested creating a funding mechanism to assist in the maintenance of existing housing stock, as long as rents are protected.

Support for alternative housing programs informed many recommendations, and the controversial Community Amenity Contribution was deemed acceptable as a tool to create non-market housing “pending support from the local community”. The draft ideas recommended requiring significant family-oriented housing in new development and fostering small and low-cost suites for rent in almost all contexts.

On many issues, the Housing group wants community input on issues it wants to address, including tenant relocation, preventing displacement because of gentrification, restricting land assembly, reducing setbacks, lowering building costs, and creating greater transparency at the City of Vancouver on housing and development issues.

The Energy and Climate Change/ Community Well-being and Health group said it mostly agreed with Emerging Directions recommendations, with “a few tweaks”. These included support for the REACH clinic’s efforts to maintain and even expand its services, and encouragement for more health and social service groups to locate in Grandview-Woodland. The need to improve childcare, particularly culturally appropriate childcare, was a focus.

Access to sunlight was an issue. A clear policy regarding disclosure of smell and noise issues to both renters and property purchasers was recommended. Safety was a concern, along more prosaic issues like access to garbage cans. Both the creation of and more particularly the *protection of safe, affordable housing* were recommended. The group also cited several issues it wants to address, including encouraging “developers to incorporate design elements to encourage social connection in new buildings”.

Working with other governments and agencies to improve energy retrofit and demand management programs were other areas where existing language was refined. New was a call to make reducing the use of resources a higher educational priority than recycling.

The Public Realm group proposed altered wording on new development to encourage the creation of new park space, and wanted better control of rats to improve the greenspaces that do exist. The group wants pools at both Templeton and Britannia. And, of course, a longhouse.

The Heritage/Arts and Culture group refined and reinforced many Emerging Directions recommendations, wanted a broader definition of heritage, and asked that the put particular emphasis on preserving and reflecting the social and cultural diversity of the

neighbourhood. One recommendation wrestled with how to create a better forum for conversations about neighbourhood heritage preservation when redevelopment occurs.

On Arts and Culture, protecting and increasing affordable space was key, and creating hotel accommodation for artists and audiences was deemed important. The draft recommendations also encourage new opportunity for community-based art and strengthening the neighbourhood's festival tradition (particularly First Nations events).

The Wild Card table got a round of applause when it called for a city-wide plan for growth that would fairly distribute density, resources and amenities. There was also a call for the city to better facilitate conversations regarding how Grandview-Woodland schools can become a stronger resource for the community.

At the end of the meeting, there was some debate regarding the group's recommendation for a community advocate to ensure planning proposals are properly implemented. One member said elections are our accountability mechanism; another said there's more to democracy than elections; a third talked about employing a community report card on implementation.

Once again, the tension between the general and the specific made itself evident. Everybody agreed that performance and accountability were the goals. It's the mechanism that was debated. As always, and in more ways than one, the devil is in the details.

Public roundtable #2, March 5, 2015:

Assembly's 'Draft Neighbourhood-wide Recommendations' vetted by community at second public roundtable

The Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan took its draft neighbourhood-wide recommendations to the community on Thursday, March 5, as it enters the final phase of its nine-month process.

"They are still drafts," Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson told the crowd of about 130 at the Croatian Cultural Centre, explaining that the recommendations are the Assembly's first kick at the can. "They want your help," she said. "That's why we're here tonight."

Magnusson also emphasized that there is pretty much no bad time for the community to offer input. "If you're like me, you'll wake up at two in the morning and say 'Oh my gosh, I wanted to say this, and I totally forgot.'" So send us an email, she said.

Magnusson also talked about the virtues of collective wisdom. "We all know that no one person in this room has all the right answers," she said, particularly when something has as many moving parts as a community plan. "These are really complicated questions. But together, we can do a lot better."

Those present also had to deal with the absence of recommendations on some of the most contentious issues. Sub-area recommendations, including those on building form and height, won't be considered until the last public roundtable, which will take place in late April. At that meeting, revised neighbourhood recommendations will also be reviewed.

Draft recommendations were posted in the walls; themed tables discussed them, and proposed additional ideas. At the Wild Card table, some people were looking for a moratorium on spot rezonings during the flux created by the implementation of a new plan.

At the Local Economy table, the importance of local, community-minded ownership of commercial buildings was discussed. Creating a planning policy that encourages and rewards that, however, is not easy. On Commercial Drive, people talked about the relative merits of restricting land assembly and design guidelines as tools to protect the small, independent businesses that give the street its character: The community wants small frontages, but even independent grocers need larger spaces.

At the Health and Community Well-being table, one person said Grandview-Woodland is a walking neighbourhood while the planning conversation focuses mainly on bike routes. "Walking routes are just thrown in." There was also concern about the lack of recommendations on services for youth.

At one of the Housing tables, zoning for townhouses and apartments around parks was discussed, and one resident half a block away from a park objected to the way new density would isolate him visually from that neighbourhood resource. The issue of equity in land value changes as a result of rezoning was raised.

The assumption that building new housing will increase affordability in Vancouver's "twisted" real estate market was questioned. "Don't let the Assembly get lulled into the idea that increasing density will create more affordable housing," said one, reflecting the common belief that social housing and market condominiums can't adequately compensate for the potential loss of the neighbourhood's significant stock of affordable, privately owned rental housing.

Said another: "You've got to have variety across the board in the neighbourhood and you're not going to get that from 30-storey towers." One participant offered this counterpoint: towers allows the city to require the creation of public greenspace on what would otherwise be private land, and concentrating new residents near transit will do a better job than "gentle" block-by-block densification of getting people out of their cars.

All these arguments are now pretty familiar to Assembly members, and most can generally agree on the problems. Specific alternatives to the Assembly's recommendations, however, were sometimes in short supply.

Housing dominated community concerns

When reporting out on discussion highlights took place, five housing tables dominated. The first stated that while conversations about building height and built form need to be considered on a site-specific basis, community amenity contributions (the public benefits that the city negotiates with developers on large projects), do not. The group called for fixed-rate CACs, which are more in line with the development cost levies that are charged against a much broader range of new developments.

The second Housing group called for the city to zone for diversity of housing types within the built forms that already exist in the community. The third group called for a 10-year moratorium on spot rezonings once the plan is approved. The fourth said that

while it is happy to allow increased density, it doesn't want wholesale change, and to support that goal would recommend no spot zoning and a limit on property assembly of two lots. The fifth Housing table suggested requiring a rental component in new residential development.

On Health, the group called for more attention on the delivery of specific services. The Local Economy group's primary takeaway was that the city should protect industrial land, but that better planning for industrial use is required. "We're more interested in finding out how industrial lands can be reenergized."

The Public Realm group reported that it was disappointed with the draft recommendations. "We felt they were timid and missed the mark." The Energy and Climate Change table said that language requiring developers to identify opportunities for energy conservation needed to be stronger.

The Arts and Culture group waded into the controversial issue of relaxing industrial zoning with a call to use arts and culture to revitalize the Venables corridor. On Heritage, the group wanted careful consideration of the impact of spot rezonings on heritage and particularly more careful attention to how existing bylaws and building codes affect heritage buildings.

One of the two omnibus tables said it wanted to extend duplex and laneway housing opportunities, establish a six-storey maximum height in the community, introduce a foreign investor tax, create mechanisms for better ongoing community engagement (possibly including an Assembly-like council, or an ombudsperson, or a ward system), and deliver civic election campaign finance reform. The other called for more support for live-work studios, laneway houses, and independent businesses.

The first Transportation table called for vigorous city advocacy to improve the Victoria Drive/Downtown bus service, and a bus route along East First. The second table spoke more broadly, beginning with the assertion that everyone has a preferred mode of transportation — the one they use. The common denominator is speed, and the group called for traffic of all types to be slowed.

The meeting ended with Magnusson's call for continued community engagement, at the last sub-area workshop on Commercial Drive, the March 28 Assembly meeting's public observation session, and by email. As usual, Assembly member Larissa Ardis, one of about 30 Assembly members present at the meeting, led the call for community members to talk to Assembly members, and offered to meet one-on-one with any resident who wants to speak about the community's issues.

If there's a solution the community wants to see among the Assembly's neighbourhood-wide recommendations, now is the time to refine and propose it.

Meeting #8, March 28, 2015:

Assembly looks at Boffo-Kettle plan, considers detailed public input

It was all business at Assembly's eighth meeting, at the Vancouver Opera rehearsal hall on Saturday, March 27. Equipped with feedback from the public, information from the City of Vancouver, and diligent research by many Assembly members, the eight working groups made big strides in identifying and shaping potential recommendations for its final public meeting — on Tuesday, May 5, at the Croatian Cultural Centre.

"This is a real transition day," said Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson, at the beginning of the meeting. She noted that the midday show-and-tell by the Kettle Friendship Society — on its proposal for mental-health housing and services in a mixed-use condominium development — is likely the last formal presentation the Assembly will hear. "After this, it's all up to you." She said the Assembly's goal of the day was to familiarize itself with detailed public input summaries from the seven sub-area meetings (all of which are posted online at the City of Vancouver Grandview-Woodland Community Plan web page) and carefully consider the implications of what the Assembly might propose.

Magnusson said some recommendations will be workable, and some will be challenging for the city. She added that Grandview-Woodland planner Andrew Pask was available to help them understand that context. "That way, if you choose to push the city on some issues, you know that you're pushing."

Pask began by thanking the Assembly for its work, on behalf of himself and his planning colleagues. Then he talked about context. At sub-area and Assembly meetings, some have proposed making East First Avenue a local street, and eliminating Prior and Venables streets as thoroughfares. Not likely, Pask said, given the implications for city-wide traffic infrastructure. Conversely, he said, there is always the opportunity when you're making local planning decisions to scale them up so they have broader import.

Pask also talked about the complexity of funding mechanisms generally, and suggested the Assembly should be mindful of financial limitations. "There is a bucket out there, and there is a limited amount of money in it." The Assembly should hold some space at the end to consider the implications of what it proposes, he suggested.

Pask added that a phrase like "meet the demand for" can create an impossible challenge, and in the spirit of strengthening the recommendations he suggested the Assembly choose its words carefully. Some discussion followed about the implications of

the city's decision to loosen the definition of social housing, and how capital funds and community amenity contributions are allocated.

Then the Assembly turned its hand to the first group work of the day: updating the neighbourhood-wide recommendations, based on feedback from the public roundtable meeting at the Croatian Cultural Centre on March 5.

Magnusson introduced the work by asking the Assembly to “imagine what other people need, people other than yourselves,” including those who are not yet born. She noted that the public roundtable feedback came predominantly from 35- to 75-year-olds. “You are not hearing from the very young and the very old,” she said, suggesting the Assembly imagine for them. She said that while 60 percent of the area residents are renters, they comprised just 20 percent of those at the public meeting. “Imagine for them.”

When the groups completed their refinement process, Transportation began by saying its safe cycling recommendation had been broadened to include all forms of motorized transportation, Heritage said it had taken public objection to its proposal to prioritize social character over built form to heart, and the Community Health/Energy and Climate Change group said it had developed a recommendation regarding improved emergency preparedness.

The Local Economy group had used some business community outreach to refine its proposals for planning in the industrial zones. The Wild Card group said it had modified its recommendation for funding a Grandview-Woodland advocate to focus on the key role of the Grandview Woodland Area Council. The Housing group said it worked on a proposal for increasing development cost levies on higher-priced new residential development to fund low-income housing.

First look at controversial Kettle project

Then the Kettle Friendship Society and Boffo Properties presented their draft plan for the site at Commercial Drive and Venables, where they propose to build a four- to 12-storey project that could create about 30 “supported” homes for the mental-health service organization's clients, which would be subsidized mainly by a community amenity contribution from about 150 market condominiums. They said Kettle facilities would occupy a third of the total space, which would also include retail.

The presentation included various massing options, which were being made available to the public for the first time. These led up to their preferred option: locating most of the

density on the northern portion of the triangular site, opposite the 14-storey Lions Den seniors housing facility, which is set back from the street and surrounded by trees.

The massing was abstracted and shown from above in a way that didn't give a clear sense of the project's height as it would be experienced from the street, but the key drawing suggested five storeys for the Kettle building right on Venables, stepping back and up to seven storeys, with market housing on the top two floors. The condominium portion to the north was shown at 11 and 12 storeys, hugging the Diversion, with four storeys between the two buildings. A small public plaza was located mid-block facing west across the side street to Uprising Bakery.

Kettle executive director Nancy Keough said the society has been planning for renewal at its portion of the site, which it owns, since 2005. "We are bursting at the seams," she said, adding that waiting lists for the type of housing that would be created are five to 10 years. Astorino's, a drycleaner and a city-owned parking lot are the other elements in the block that would be redeveloped.

Tom Bell of Vancouver's GBL Architects and Kirsten Murray of the Seattle-based Olson Kundig Architects said they would put small-scale retail on the Drive. The plan also proposed a public plaza on the side street — actually an orphaned stub of Commercial Drive — between the Kettle development and Uprising.

One Assembly member wondered if the scale and character of the building were appropriate, separate and apart from the height issue. Another asked about the potential for a more diverse mix of housing units — not just 80 percent market and 20 percent social housing, but something that includes lower cost private housing in the co-op housing tradition. Keough said they looked for opportunities there, but no option came forward.

Another person asked what elements of the project are set in stone. "What's set in stone is the Kettle's need," said project developer Daniel Boffo.

Sub-area input summarized and shared

After lunch, Andrew Pask spoke briefly about the handout summaries of public feedback on Grandview-Woodland's seven sub-areas, all of which are located online at the city's Grandview Woodland plan website.

"We tried to make a judgment call on where there was convergence [of opinion] and where there was divergence," Pask said. "We think we got it right," he added. "It may

not be perfect. He asked the Assembly members, many of whom attended some or all of the sub-area workshops, to let city staff know if they missed the mark, and if so where.

Pask said raw notes from the meetings and various maps that expressed the range of views are also available. (They will be posted online as supplementary material.) Pask noted that because the Broadway and Commercial sub-area was the subject of two workshops, including one in 2013, the format was a little different. Pask said it's important to consider all the pieces in relation to each other.

Magnusson then said the task for the day was to review the maps, public feedback and other material but not to write final recommendations. Instead, she asked the groups to identify the big issues and the areas requiring recommendations, and come up with some "signature" ideas. She added that the Assembly's goal is not simply stop the city from doing inappropriate things but also to bring inspiring ideas to bear.

The work was preliminary, and the reporting out was of the "express" variety, so groups had more time to work. Sometimes they converged on key ideas, and sometimes they diverged. The Commercial Drive group's key issues were the Kettle development, bike lanes and height, but the positions were hard to summarize. "The point is, we have no consensus, so we can't say more."

Grandview said it focused mainly on parking, bike lanes and change of use, particularly the process attending to that. The Hastings group liked the high-street vibrancy of Hastings from Kamloops to Victoria. Between Victoria and Clark, they talked about the area as a space for "makers," and as an area for rental-only housing and social services.

The Nanaimo group talked about pedestrian safety and traffic speed on Nanaimo Street, and discussed retail business and housing issues, particularly the type and height. Cedar Cove discussed the challenge created by North Vancouver commuters along Nanaimo and Dundas, wrestled with discontinuous bike paths, and looked toward slightly bigger mixed-use development at the northern end of the neighbourhood. As well, they discussed the idea that the industrial area would be improved by bringing more people to the streets.

Britannia-Woodland discussed the idea of stopping excessive lot consolidation, ways to increase the FSR without necessarily increasing height, the issue of ensuring the aboriginal community continues to be welcome, and ways to improve the perception of and community connection to neighbourhood schools. The idea of locating a longhouse in Woodland Park was discussed, as was the possibility of a bicycle underpass through the Cut at Clark Drive to avoid running a bike route through a busy, challenging intersection.

The Commercial and Broadway group indicated a high level of support for areas of convergence in the sub-area workshop. Beyond that, they discussed better integrating the areas to the south, north and east, a clearer sense of the negotiation that would be involved in redeveloping the Safeway site, and the implications for retaining rental of zoning changes. One participant also mentioned the idea of a market.

Some brief conversation followed. The Drive group said it had “major divergence on the divergence” issues. Another participant said, “I think it’s absolutely on the table not to have *any* towers.” The facilitator at the Housing table said it felt sub-areas should individually consider the land assembly issue, but if they don’t the Housing group wants to consider neighbourhood-wide ideas. Yet another member chipped in with “neighbourhood wide, no spot zoning.”

Then Rachel Magnusson wrapped up the day’s proceedings. She announced three Assembly mid-rise walking tours (Kitsilano on April 7, the Olympic Village on April 9, and Commercial Street after the next Assembly meeting on April 11). She noted that the day’s work was the last at the congenial, comfortable Vancouver Opera rehearsal space, which has been the Assembly’s home base for six months. She suggested that each Assembly member assign themselves some reading-and-review work. And she asked that members go to the key sites in their sub-area and consider them from that perspective.

There is, in planning, no substitute for being there.

Meeting #9, April 11, 2015:

Assembly tackles sub area issues as public roundtable approaches

As the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan works through its many draft recommendations, the trade-offs often involved become more prominent. When meeting number nine began at the Croatian Cultural Centre on Saturday, April 11, Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson asked members what they'd learned and thought about in the two weeks since the previous meeting.

Trade-offs was the first word to arise. "What do you really want to see," said one Assembly member, explaining her view of the issue. "What would you be prepared to give up to get that?"

Compromise was another word that came up. One member said he'd talked to his barber about separated bike lanes on Commercial Drive south of East First Avenue. He said the barber had been skeptical, but was more accepting when he understood that there had been compromise in proposals for Commercial Drive bike lanes.

Another member talked about assumptions, in particular the assumption that the new community plan will result in significant population growth. She added that she'd talked to one Commercial Drive business owner whose message was to maintain current zoning — and no towers.

Others talked about more specific concerns. One said she'd recently biked to Confederation Park in North Burnaby, and wanted to see more contiguous bike lanes in the Cedar Cove area of Grandview-Woodland. Another said she'd talked to a lifetime resident of the community who shared her view that "we need to do more for the youth in the neighbourhood."

Magnusson then outlined the task for the day: to discuss and refine sub-area recommendations and mapping as small working groups, post the ideas for feedback from all Assembly members, and then discuss and refine them some more. The form for the day was simple; the content was complicated.

Magnusson framed the discussion by returning to the Assembly's mandate from council. "City council wants to know from you what is appropriate neighbourhood growth," she said, adding that this includes direction on sticky issues such as Broadway and Commercial. She said the work will continue at the next meeting, which also includes revisiting neighbourhood-wide recommendations, in preparation for the Assembly's May 5 meeting with the public to garner feedback.

“We know that we have some different opinions in this room,” she said, on issues ranging from height to bike lanes. But she said the Assembly has established shared values, and she encouraged the working groups to ground their discussion in those values. You could battle all day long, she said, about four storeys versus eight in a particular area. She asked people to think about their underlying concerns and ambitions, and said agreement will come through that. “When you dig down, you’ll find that you do agree about more than you think.”

Magnusson also reminded people that they are not just making decisions for themselves, but for the whole community, and the recommendations will be tested in the community. “It’s not just you who is making this decision.” She also reminded people that they must balance pros and cons. “There is no perfect recommendation.”

Where, how much and how fast?

Grandview-Woodland lead planner Andrew Pask then provided some reminders about the planning context, including connections between communities and civic objectives such as addressing affordability, auto dependence, health and demographic concerns. The neighbourhood is walkable, he said, but planning can build on that principle.

Pask also showed a chart that demonstrated, except for a brief period in the early 1980s, Vancouver’s population has grown steadily, and he suggested the trend is not likely to change. “Grandview-Woodland has the distinction of actually having a population decrease,” he said, based on federal census figures. The decline of children and youth was a key factor, and the static number of seniors suggests some people are not able to age in place.

Pask also noted that heights deemed acceptable by the community for the Safeway site have come down repeatedly through the current planning process. Data from two Broadway and Commercial public workshops in 2014 and 2015 suggests a consensus upper limit between 22 and 28 storeys at the first meeting and about 16 storeys at the second. He wondered if that trend would continue or reverse.

Pask cited the debate between Gordon Price and Patrick Condon, where Price argued for nodes of density and Condon for distributing density throughout the neighbourhoods, as exemplifying a key question for the Assembly. Where does the community want redevelopment?

One factor to keep in mind, he said, is that various impediments mean strata apartments and social housing buildings are not likely candidates for change. Pask

showed two maps of such sites, and they indicated concentrations around Woodland Park and in the triangle of land between Broadway and the Grandview Cut.

Pask also argued that, historically, redevelopment takes place at a pace of about one percent per year. He said the city's experience suggests that about 40 percent of potential redevelopment will take place during the 30-year life of the new community plan.

Drawing on this information and on community input on what redevelopment might be acceptable, Pask said a scenario with new density on Dundas, portions of blocks on Nanaimo where housing and alleys don't run east-west, and 16 storeys at the Safeway site would likely add about 11,250 people to the community over the next 30 years, at an average of 375 per year. Grandview-Woodland's population in 2011 was 27,297, down from 29,085 in 2001. The number 375 would involve a townhouse, one or two apartments and one or two mixed-use buildings a year, he said.

One Assembly member noted that change has been quite rapid in some parts of the city. Concern about land speculation and pace of change are central concerns for many residents, and brief discussion followed regarding the tools that might control this, such as limits on the number of permits issued in a given year, and whether constraining redevelopment in one area can force rapid change on others.

Another member noted that demographics in the area are changing quickly, with more families and children, and asked if the city has tools beyond the census to measure trends. Pask said those tools are limited, but school statistics provide some indications, and he noted that Grandview-Woodland schools operate at about 70 percent of building capacity.

Yet another member wondered how the city monitors rental accommodation that's not purpose-built. "The city does not have the resources to run an ongoing database of everyone who has a suite in a house," he said. Pask also noted that in the single-family and duplex zones perhaps 25 percent of households consist of renters. (City-wide more than half are renters, and the percentage is increasing.)

Pask was asked how much growth could be accommodated with existing zoning. He said such figures can be misleading, because build-out doesn't always occur: three storeys generally won't be demolished to create four, and there are less than 20 laneway homes in Grandview-Woodland, despite broad opportunity to build them. Existing zoning, he added, might push a lot of new development into areas like Commercial Drive, because there's a lot of unused capacity there.

And with that extra layer of complexity, Magnusson turned the process over to the Assembly members: draft some recommendations, draw them on a map, and post them on the wall for others to review.

Lots of work, some agreement

Many Assembly members worked through lunch, and by mid-afternoon most groups were ready to report out to the room.

First up was Britannia-Woodland, which said it discussed prioritizing the retention of existing housing and maintaining the RM-4 zone as it is. Draft recommendations the group posted for feedback aimed to protect the significant number of affordable rental and co-op units, and maintain their ratio in the community as new development occurs. The group also wanted the city to consider in its long-term planning the feasibility of a tunnel under East First Avenue from Clark Drive to Victoria Drive to return the thoroughfare to the community as a neighbourhood street.

An improved Mosaic greenway and better bike-route linkages, greater safety where Grandview Highway meets Woodland Drive, transit on East First, consultation on the Georgia Viaduct removal proposals, and additional side-street sidewalks were the focus of other recommendations. They also said they wanted to encourage the Grandview group to increase allowable height at the south end of its zone.

The Grandview table said it generally considers four storeys of townhouses or apartments suitable on East First, with a portion of units reserved for rental, and attention to shadowing issues north of East First. The group wanted to spread other new density throughout the neighbourhood, through infill and secondary suites. On Victoria Drive, the group wanted a 30-kilometre speed limit, other traffic-calming measures and safer crossings, including some for new east-west bike routes.

Parks were also a key focus, and the group wanted improved drainage, native plantings, public art, fitness infrastructure, and lighting and garbage disposal in existing parks, as well as new micro-parks in the parks-deficient neighbourhood.

Cedar Cove's table wanted to improve the bike routes in the Powell/Dundas area, extend transit down to Powell Street, continue attention to mitigating industrial odour issues, improve the public realm in industrial areas, provide historic information and public art (including art on the port lands modelled on the Granville Island concrete plant silos), work long-term toward public access to the waterfront, and study traffic patterns to improve safety from Wall Street east to Nanaimo.

On Hastings, the group wanted attention to transitions from heavy to light industry and then to “makers” spaces in the let-go industrial land along Hastings. On density, they were prepared to consider 15 storeys on Hastings, scaled down to much lower residential buildings at Nanaimo. They said they wanted the proposed plaza at Hastings and Commercial to have an aboriginal focus and possibly a longhouse.

When the Commercial Drive group reported out, they said they had difficulty reaching consensus. “Instead of tackling the can of worms, we just cut all the worms in half, so now there’s more of them.” That said, there was some agreement around design guidelines to maintain the sawtooth character of the Drive’s building setbacks and stepping height back where it’s allowed above four storeys. As well, there was support for increasing the amount of office space above the ground floor, and allowing more height south of East Sixth Avenue.

On the Kettle Friendship Society project, one member said there’s concern that the project might become a precedent used to lever density elsewhere on the Drive and that connecting the height of any development to benefits provided to Kettle and its clients is problematic. There was some discussion about whether the project would better connect the Drive to Hastings — the wish of many residents — or create a break.

The Nanaimo group reported that it favoured more four-storey mixed-use development than had been proposed, with offices on the second storey as traffic (and particularly truck route) noise would have less impact than it would on residential development. The group wanted to model Nanaimo development along the lines of Commercial Drive. Restricting lot assembly was suggested. Six storeys with community amenities at key nodes was proposed.

The group wanted to calm the street, and make its off-kilter street grid safer for pedestrians, particularly near schools and parks. It also wanted to connect with the Cedar Cove group’s planning. And it proposed setbacks from the street, prompting a discussion about whether on a very wide street such setbacks were appropriate. Some planners argue that in certain circumstances bringing development closer to the street, while still widening sidewalks, can make streets more pedestrian-friendly and slow traffic.

The Commercial and Broadway group was the last to report, and it allowed that some of its ideas were “subject to evolution.” One discussion involved creating a number of 10-storey nodes of development, surrounding a plaza open to Broadway at the Safeway site. Suggested sites included the northeast corners of East 12th and Commercial and Broadway and Clark, and the southeast corner of Broadway and Nanaimo.

Promoting the development of office space near the SkyTrain was another theme, as was six-storey development along Broadway. The group wanted to limit development on other arterials to four storeys and promote retention and development of rental stock. If rapid transit does not proceed west along Broadway as proposed (it's expected to contain more traffic within the station), the group wants action to better manage pedestrian congestion.

The day ended with some discussion about the trade-offs involved in considering the Kettle project at Commercial and Venables, which was one subject in an informal survey conducted by an Assembly member. One member described the objections in the survey as "sad." Another member felt that characterization was inappropriate.

"We need to try and listen and see where others are coming from," said Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson, as she wrapped up a constructive day of wrestling with planning's trade-offs. The most contentious occur where density, affordability and community services intersect — and that's where the Assembly's hardest work remains.

The day concluded, for some members, with a walking tour of nearby low-rise and infill density created in Kensington–Cedar Cottage, in the Commercial Street area and west to Knight Street, where the community plan is more than a decade into its life cycle. Some were of the courtyard townhouse variety. Others were infill projects (some with lot consolidation, and some without).

All of them were considered on a beautiful April afternoon. It was a thought-provoking and peaceful end to a day of complex deliberation.

Meeting #10, April 25, 2015:

Assembly agrees to disagree on Kettle plan, drafts ideas for final meeting with public

Collaboration and hard work were the order of the day at the Croatian Cultural Centre as the Citizens' Assembly refined proposed recommendations for a public forum at the centre on May 5. The Assembly built on work from the previous meeting to draft recommendations for the community's seven sub areas, and some members also worked to revise neighbourhood-wide recommendations.

The day began with a general discussion of one of the most contentious issues: the Kettle Friendship Society's plan to partner with Boffo Properties to build social housing, mental health services and market condominiums, possibly including a tower of about a dozen storeys, at Commercial Drive and Venables Street.

Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson began the discussion with a simple declaration: "I set you up for an impossible task." Members have been deeply divided on the concept. Almost all of them support the Kettle's goals to expand on the site, but the use of a community amenity contribution from the developer in return for increased density is the sticking point. It's a common situation with the so-called CACs, the city's often-controversial tool to create social housing, daycares, cultural facilities and other benefits as part of new developments.

On the Kettle plan, the previous meeting's discussions led most to believe that consensus is simply out of reach. "We could have had an Assembly on this alone," Magnusson said. "My recommendation to you is that you move on." The City of Vancouver itself must do more consultation, she said, and while it would like direction from the Assembly, it would not be the final word on a proposal that is not yet fully formed.

"Set out what you *do* agree on," Magnusson said, citing the Kettle's mental health work, a potential public gathering space, and new retail storefronts on the Drive as areas where consensus might be achieved. "Set out where the disagreement lies," she added, and "think about what's appropriate for the site."

For some members, setting aside key elements of the issue was a big problem. "The height of that building is one of the main reasons I'm here," said one. "Our purpose will be watered down." He suggested a vote.

Magnusson said votes divide people, and the Assembly model is based on achieving a generally supported result based on consensus.

And the consensus of the Assembly appeared to support Magnusson's suggestions. One member opposed to a tall building on the site said "if we could just talk about the site, it would be a more constructive conversation." Another said most members are participating to develop a long-term vision for the whole neighbourhood. "If we get bogged down on this, we will miss other opportunities."

One member still inclined to vote said he'd like to know if support for the Kettle/Boffo plan is 50/50 or 60/40 or 90/10. Another responded by suggesting the Assembly would be better served by returning to its values to establish points of agreement and difference.

Magnusson said it would be hard to decide what exactly the Assembly might vote on, given that there are so many issues and caveats involved.

Area planner Andrew Pask said in creating a long-term community plan, it can be problematic to get lost in the weeds of a particular project. He suggested the Assembly focus on the site as a key and very interesting transitional location.

The member who first called for a vote noted that his issue with the Commercial and Venables site is the impact of building height.

Key issues: displacement, scale, character

And with that, the Assembly turned to drafting ideas for public comment. Magnusson said the day would begin with the seven sub-area groups sharing ideas with each other in small group discussions. "The point is to put more eyes and brains to work on each others' ideas." She added that later in the day graphic facilitators would help the sub-area groups with mapping height and other elements of their recommendations.

Preambles were discussed as a tool to provide context for recommendations. Later in the morning, there was a similar discussion of the benefit of a rationale within individual recommendations, to help the city and the community understand the Assembly's goals. The importance of being precise and firm, but not condescending, was also discussed.

Magnusson reiterated key objectives: provide direction to city council on what is appropriate growth and on key sticky issues. Members don't need to love every recommendation, Magnusson said, but they need to be able to live with them.

However, she added that it's important for people to find key directions they can strongly support.

As such, she asked members to identify two key priorities, and invited examples from the floor. The first was firm: "We do not accept the logic that CACs should fund social good. We do not accept the logic that density creates affordability." Others included the following:

- Aboriginal reconciliation
- Character of buildings, and a lively economy
- Character of the Drive, and affordability for businesses and residents
- Create a well of cool ideas and enliven underutilized areas
- Keep growth in line with the city's prevailing one-percent trend
- Protect existing rental housing stock and increase the percentage of rental
- Maintain affordable rental stock
- And, to dispel any doubt on the point, long-term protection of existing housing stock

The conversation wrapped up with one member's call to have some humility about the changing nature of cities. It's a theme that Pask touched on a little later in the day. "The way cities change — it's idiosyncratic," he said. Sites become available, or not. He said the plan shouldn't encourage a free-for-all in year one. At the same time, he noted that the market can have a limiting effect. "Be general, but get to the heart of the issue."

Ideas remain works in progress

At the Broadway and Commercial table, both creative thinking and humility were on display. The group had been floating ways to create density without tall buildings, and had looked at allowing some outlying 10-storey buildings with a plaza at the Safeway site. "It may not be practical," said a proponent, acknowledging the Olympic Village inspiration isn't necessarily applicable. "The Olympic Village was a clean slate and this area inherits so much."

Extending a public plaza at East 10th to the south under the SkyTrain guideway was on the group's agenda. Targeted consultation for public amenities for unmet needs of seniors, youth, aboriginals and other underserved groups was another goal.

One idea was conditional but firmly held. If in five years there is no resolution to the proposal for new rapid transit infrastructure along Broadway, which would contain

much of the bus-related sidewalk traffic within the station, the city must deal with congestion on the street.

Other presentations reflected open and productive conversations intended to create ideas worthy of public input. The Grandview table had wrestled with practical ways it could take on some additional density, and focused on improvements to the area's limited park space. During the brief reporting out at the end of the day, the group said it was considering allowing four storeys in some form on East First Avenue, wanted a cycling pump track in an area park, improved traffic safety on Victoria, and attention to biodiversity and garbage.

The Britannia Woodland group mentioned a new bike route along Charles and a bicycle underpass in the Grandview Cut at Clark. The Hastings table wanted to build a cultural corridor from the Waldorf Hotel to the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, connect Hastings to Woodland and Pandora parks with greenways, and make additional density in the area conditional on cultural benefits. The Cedar Cove group persisted in the long-term dream of access to the water, at the end of Victoria Drive, and called for bike route extensions and some nodes of mixed use, particularly at Wall and Powell streets.

The Commercial Drive group stuck mainly with existing heights and proposed limits on property assembly and business frontages. It favoured bike lanes from East 14th to Gravelly that continue north along Salisbury Drive. "We've got some possible minority reports," said one, acknowledging the group's differences of opinion.

The Nanaimo table also talked about limits on property assembly and a plan that begins with redeveloping key nodes. The group wants to address safety issues at key intersections and increase street trees. The Broadway and Commercial group looked at an eight- to 12-storey range, with six down Commercial, eight at 12th and Commercial, four storeys on 12th, and six storeys along the south side of the Grandview Cut.

All the ideas and maps, which are now posted on the Assembly website and can be found here, are subject to input from the public on May 5 and another day's work hashing out the details when the Assembly formally meets for the last time on May 9. "Nothing is done until it's done," Magnusson said as she wrapped up the day's work.

In the end, there will be broad consensus on many issues and a few marked differences of opinion. For the Assembly, though, the end is finally in sight.

Public roundtable #3, May 5, 2015:

Croatian Hall packed as community responds to Assembly's draft ideas

There was some measure of anticipation at the Croatian Cultural Centre on Tuesday, May 5, as the Citizens' Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan sought public input on its draft sub-area recommendations. How would the ideas measure up under watchful eyes of about 200 often-wary residents?

Especially given, as Assembly chair Rachel Magnusson said in her introduction, that the recommendations "are still drafts." Those drafts try and balance complex variables and reconcile differences of opinion that occasionally just can't be bridged, and sometimes they need polish. "They're still a bit messy," explained Magnusson. "They're still a bit inconsistent."

The key, she said, is that public input — which has been invaluable to the Assembly members in shaping their recommendations — may yet cause the Assembly to change course. Magnusson noted that some plans incorporated input from the seven public sub-area workshops fairly closely, while others diverged. She invited the public to propose their own ideas and feel free to tell the Assembly when they disagree.

Magnusson outlined the format, mainly two rounds of conversation at 15 generally jammed tables, including Assembly members and facilitators, to allow people to contribute to more than one sub-area conversation.

One participant asked if there would be an opportunity for a question-and-answer session for the whole room. Briefly, at the end, said Magnusson. "We're trying to keep the conversations at the tables. It's really hard to have good conversations with 200 people."

Assembly members then introduced the 27 pages of sub-area recommendations, highlighting key elements and goals:

- A more welcoming, greener Cedar Cove that respects existing housing, creates some new affordable housing opportunities, preserves sightlines, and connects better to the rest of Grandview-Woodland.
- Hastings redevelopment that appropriately enhances the high street to the east and the industrial area to the west, creates some social benefits such as social housing by allowing some height at suitable locations, improves the public realm, enhances connections to parks, builds on cultural infrastructure, and shows concern for impacts on adjoining areas.

- Limited zoning changes in Britannia-Woodland to respect the importance of affordable rental and co-op housing, combined with “active” transportation and greenway improvements.
- In Grandview, protecting the residential character while expanding rental and home ownership opportunities on East First, by allowing four storeys, and greater safety on Victoria Drive.
- On Nanaimo, attention to its challenge as a designated truck route intersected by commuter-oriented East First, so mixed use instead of row houses, a focus on new development first at key nodes, expanded development based on how that works, a limit on land assembly of three lots, and an enhanced public realm.
- On the Drive, protect and promote the existing, diverse, accepting, fine-grained character. Improve safety for everyone. Create a better pedestrian experience. Bike lanes from East 14th to Gravely Street, and then north along Salisbury Drive. Limit height to four storeys except at Grandview Highway, limit lot assembly, create design guidelines, and allow commercial activities in laneways. On the proposed redevelopment of the Kettle Friendship Society sites at Venables and Commercial, however, the Assembly couldn’t agree on parameters for extra height.
- At Broadway and Commercial, allow modest increases in height because of the location’s local and regional importance, and better integrate the area into the surrounding neighbourhood. Density specifics included a 12-storey limit at the Safeway site along with a plaza, six storeys on Broadway with setbacks after four storeys, density along the south side of the Grandview Cut, and toward 12th near Commercial to draw activity down that portion of the Drive.

More convergence than divergence

Magnusson then asked that people identify what they like and what could be improved in the recommendations. “Just a friendly reminder to be respectful in your conversations,” she said. “Dig deep,” she added, encouraging people to explain the underlying reasons for their views.

And so the conversations began, and at Hastings and Cedar Cove tables in the first round they were often familiar, sometimes surprising, and occasionally idiosyncratic. “Why is it that we’re not talking about recycling plastic bags?” said one person. Why put density near parks, said another, when it will only generate noise complaints?

More often, though, conversations found points of general agreement, in both support of and opposition to Assembly proposals. “I think the Assembly has come to a pretty good compromise on the Safeway site,” said one of a diverse group of participants at the Commercial and Broadway table, during the second round. “What concerns me is the six-storey residential and commercial along Broadway.” That concern was a key area of general consensus. Would commercial work? Was the height excessive?

One resident deeply objected to change in the area west of Commercial between Broadway and the Cut. Another suggested shifting more density onto the Safeway site to compensate for reducing proposed density increases elsewhere. Both were minority opinions.

Ways to strengthen the place of small-scale retail in the area, such as a public market, were discussed. Stronger language in support of rental housing was suggested. Commitment in the draft recommendations to services for aboriginals, youth and minorities was lauded. Loss of light and parking were concerns.

The call for a 10-year moratorium on spot rezonings, advocated by two Grandview-Woodland community groups, was heard. Limits on property assembly, to prevent the half-block developments that can change the character of a street, were discussed. The fact that rules requiring the replacement of rental don’t apply to many smaller buildings was a concern, and the value of existing homes on Broadway as sources of affordable housing stock was raised. Animation of public spaces by art and artists, to prevent them from being degraded, was suggested.

Affordable rental remains central

When groups reported out at the end of the evening, the three Commercial and Broadway tables went first, and its plans for Broadway were generally acknowledged as an area in need of rethinking.

On Hastings, one indefatigable Assembly member, speaking partly her own behalf, called for “more kids of all cultures hanging out together and becoming familiar with each other”, even if that means throwing balloons filled with paint. She also diverged a little from the agenda to thank all those who devoted time to make the Assembly process work.

The Britannia-Woodland tables reported support for its housing recommendations, encouragement for different models of home ownership, and a call for more creative

approaches to the use of industrial land near Clark, possibly including a residential component with light industrial use.

Cedar Cove emphasized the need for better connections, including transit connections, improved use of Pandora Park, creating cottage commercial opportunities, and support for affordable rental housing.

The Nanaimo groups reported varying conversations. In one session, participants objected to mixed use along the length of Nanaimo. Another wanted sub-area feedback regarding Garden Park and Nelson Elementary to be better incorporated into the Assembly recommendations. The second Nanaimo table reported that people wanted respect for the current residential area and that there was a lack of trust regarding communication about the content of previous discussions with the community.

Grandview's tables reported that four storeys was deemed to be too much height on East First. One said consensus suggested three was OK, at least on the south side, and that better process in the future needs to accompany any zoning change. The other table reported a call for protection of rental stock.

The Commercial Drive groups wrapped up the reporting, with the first affirming support for its bike lane recommendations and support for keeping the area affordable for existing businesses. Frontage limits were debated, and the Assembly plans to revisit its proposed language. The Kettle plan, the group said, wasn't discussed much as there was no consensus.

The second group, conversely, said it spent almost the entire time discussing the Commercial and Venables site. The person reporting out — a citizen but not an Assembly member — got a big cheer for a shot at “grumpy old white homeowners,” reflecting the deeply held differences of opinion on the subject. She said there is support for housing those with mental health and addiction issues in the community, but no consensus on the specifics.

The meeting closed with a look at the next steps, beginning with the Assembly's final meeting on Saturday, May 9. It won't be easy for the Assembly to balance all the competing pressures, and complex factors that influence its decisions. The results of the draft report will be refined and edited by Assembly members over the following weeks, and presented to Vancouver city council in late June. The planning department will likely be asked by council to produce a draft response in the fall, for public and Assembly member feedback, and a proposed plan will go to council in winter or spring of 2016.

One participant asked if there would be an opportunity for the public to comment on the Assembly's redrafts of its recommendations. Magnusson said no, but there would

be opportunity before council and at future public meetings to comment on the recommendations and on how they are incorporated into the city's planning documents. In the end, Magnusson said, she believes the community's effort will be reflected in the plan. "I know it's been a long, long haul, but it's going to be a good one."

Meeting #11, Saturday May 9, 2015:

Grandview-Woodland Assembly completes satisfying circle

“Here we are. We made it.” Rachel Magnusson, Chair of the Citizens’ Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan, opened the 11th and final meeting with those words. “It’s such an accomplishment.”

Yet not without the prospect of extra work. When the Assembly members arrived, two area residents handed out flyers asked them to meet once more with the community, after the Assembly’s report is completed but before it goes to council.

While some were willing to consider it, most felt the Assembly’s work needed to draw to a close. For many Assembly members, there had been other meetings as well. Three public roundtables, seven sub-area workshops, 11 walking tours, working group meetings — and at least a semester’s worth of reading.

“I’d love to keep going, but it’s not feasible,” Magnusson said. “I can’t ask you all to come to another meeting.”

Magnusson encouraged people as individuals and groups to take their Assembly work forward in various ways. “This is not the final word,” Magnusson said. “This is your report.”

The Assembly’s report was shaping up to reflect both a remarkable degree of consensus, and some key disagreements. “What happens if we can’t come to a conclusion on Venables and Commercial,” said one member, referring to differences on the Kettle Friendship Society/Boffo Properties project.

“Reflect the division in your report,” said Magnusson. “If you came here and agreed on everything I would seriously wonder if you were robot aliens.”

“We need to talk a little bit about the boundaries between sub-areas,” said another member.”

“I’m so glad you asked,” said Magnusson. “Come on over and look at these maps.” And so a busy day began in earnest — of finalizing neighbourhood-wide recommendations,

updating sub-area maps, completing preambles, and resolving as much as possible the outstanding sub-area disagreements. Other key issues included community concern about the Assembly's proposal to allow six storeys on Broadway and require mixed-use along Nanaimo.

Population projections discussed

The Assembly was told that city staff projected that the changes proposed by the Assembly might increase population by 7,000 over 30 years, an average of 230 per year. (Land use proposed the Assembly at its last public roundtable was used for the calculations.) Planner Andrew Pask said the number is relatively low — that most mid-town neighbourhoods have seen increases of 10,000 or 11,000.

Assembly members discussed whether the numbers were precisely comparable, as other neighbourhoods had vacant land, and whether Grandview-Woodland has adequate amenities. What impact will the new hospital on the False Creek Flats have, wondered one.

"Nobody is going to be happy with everything we come up with," said another.

"Welcome to the planning department," said Andrew Pask. "I actually don't know what the effect of St. Paul's will be," he added. "It's early days." And therein lies another challenge — predicting the future. When the last 30-year plan was completed, there were no rapid transit lines through Grandview-Woodland.

Members also talked about feeling squished, the risks of not allowing growth, and the limited community amenity contributions that will arise from the new density the Assembly has allowed. RM3 versus RM4 in Britannia-Woodland was discussed. One member talked about trying to emulate the benefits strategy model from the Marpole and Downtown Eastside community plans.

Then the group work began. The Hastings table refined preamble language regarding First Nations. Broadway and Commercial discussed height issues on Broadway. Britannia-Woodland went through community input from the last public meeting point by point. The Cedar Cove group went through every email on the area that was received

by the Assembly. The Commercial Drive group, in the absence of agreement on Kettle/Boffo, discussed the process that might be employed to address the issue.

The reporting out featured mostly small changes: tightened language, grey water strategies. Broadway height fell. Nanaimo declared itself stuck on a housing issue.

Tentative Council date announced

After lunch, Magnusson announced a tentative date for submitting the report to Vancouver City Council: Wednesday, June 24, during the day. A schedule and procedure for reviewing report details electronically, with the final version completed in the last week of May, was outlined. The procedure for including a minority report was delineated.

Group discussion of some sticky neighbourhood-wide issue, such as spot rezoning and implementation, then followed. The cost of housing was abhorred. One member said we are at risk of becoming a city where there is a class of people who own a home and a class of people who come here to work for someone who owns a home.

Restricting foreign ownership was discussed, starting with the suggestion that the city should maintain some basic data and report annually on its impact. Methods to manage that impact were explored.

One member argued against a moratorium on spot rezoning of more than five years, saying a longer one “assumes that we can read the future.” She said the impact of Airbnb is an example of an unexpected event.

Another said it’s time to give Grandview-Woodland an aboriginal name. It was a big and potentially contentious idea that arose too late to get any real traction. But names are fluid, and Andrew Pask noted that the planning process has helped to resurrect the name Cedar Cove, once a key historic location near the north foot of Victoria Drive.

The groups worked to eliminate redundancies and conflicts, of which there were a few. When it came time to report out, one table suggested supporting the “decolonization” of the Britannia Community Services Centre by working with the community to give it an

aboriginal name. The Housing table weighed in favour of relaxing parking requirements. Nanaimo helped break its jam by focusing on redevelopment at four key nodes.

Transition zones in several areas were discussed and decisions made. One group felt it was time to acknowledge through zoning the mixed use on three blocks of Venables west of the Drive.

Then the members were invited to divide and delegate any small remaining details. The work was done. Many could have gone on another day, or month, or year, and some will. However, the time had come for the Assembly to hand its work to the City of Vancouver and the community of Grandview-Woodland.

A circle is completed

Everyone then sat in a circle, joined by Musqueam elder Shane Point and Deputy Mayor Andrea Reimer, who had both been present on the first day. “You’ve demonstrated leadership at a very, very wonderful level,” Point said. “Your community.” He added that the work has broader implications. “It’s the stone that hits the water of the pool and radiates out.”

Point said he’d followed the Assembly’s work from afar. “You guys are way cool,” he said. “There are very few times where people have asked me to sit down with other bright lights and said ‘Change this.’ You got to do this. Not politicians. Not community planners. Not somebody in another part of the world who looks at a picture and says ‘Let’s do this.’ You did it.

“I want to honour your industry with a song,” he said, and he delivered one from his community, in his language. He thanked everyone again, as they held hands.

Then members read the report and sub-area preambles, and the same words the Assembly heard from each other the first day were still resonant: unique, affordable, diverse, accepting.

Andrea Reimer said Point had covered almost everything she wanted to say, and added that when she walked in to the meeting her first reactions was “This is a street in my

neighbourhood.” Planning questions are not technical questions, she observed. “The choice to plan is the choice to figure out how we will own the future.”

Reimer expressed frustration with the pace of bureaucratic process — “The needs are so high and things move so slowly through the political system” — but she said the assembly has already built knowledge, capacity and trust.

Andrew Pask talked about the challenge of finding the right balance between different ways of looking at the future, and thanked the Assembly for its thoughtful work.

Then everyone had a few seconds to share a last word.

“Surround yourself with good people and be more optimistic,” said one, who admitted to doubting the process at the beginning. Another said they began the process motivated by anger and distrust, and now feel the Assembly’s work is powerful and can’t be ignored.

Yet another lauded the civility of the group. And another: “Good things happen if you allow the space for them to happen.” Yet another said they were humbled by the intelligence in the room. A facilitator said this: “The differences were about alternative views on how to make this community awesome.”

Another facilitator said everyone became a facilitator. “Boy did you guys rise to the occasion.” One member said, “I had to learn better ways to communicate, better ways to listen.”

Mark Warren, a UBC professor who specializes in democratic process and is a member of the Assembly’s advisory committee, said, “Voting is a really crude way of asking people what they want. Are there smarter ways to ask people what they want?”

The members thanked each other. “This has connected me to my community in a way that I didn’t know was going to happen.” “I have loved this process.” “Thank you for all of the blessings that you have shared. Hopefully, we have the patience to watch what we have planted grow into something incredible.”

Magnusson concluded by thanking members for their perseverance and trust, especially given the huge scope and many unknowns involved. “Being a part of this project has been awesome.”

Of course, there is still a lot of practical work to be done. No plan is ever truly finished. Yet for members of the Citizens’ Assembly on the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan, the May afternoon sun was shining, and their project that felt like it had both a good ending and potential as a good beginning.