

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF NORTH VANCOUVER

Meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission
Held at City Hall, 141 West 14th Street, North Vancouver, B.C.
in Conference Room A on Wednesday, December 7th, 2011

MINUTES

Present: B. Curtis (Chair)
H. Goodland
J. Jensen
P. McCann
B. Phillips
J. Plato
M. Tasi
Councillor Bell
Councillor Buchanan

Staff: Gary Penway, Deputy Director, Community Development
S. Kimm-Jones, Committee Clerk

Guests: Francis Caouette, Director of Corporate Services

Absent: D. Olson
M. Rahbar
M. Robinson

A quorum being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6.05 p.m.

1. **Minutes of Meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission held November 9th, 2011**

It was regularly moved and seconded

THAT the minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission held November 9th, 2011 be adopted.

Carried Unanimously

2. **Business Arising**

Economic development and a report from the sub-committee on affordable housing were scheduled for discussion later on the agenda.

There was discussion on funding for the Lower Lonsdale Business Association. There have been business community discussions on ways of funding the

Association including forming a Business Improvement Area, which has been perceived by some businesses as a tax.

G. Penway welcomed the two new Council liaison members: Linda Buchanan and Don Bell, adding that two liaisons are permitted under the APC Terms of Reference.

3. CityShaping Workshop – Economic Development

Francis Caouette, Director of Corporate Services outlined the City's economic development strategy to provide the basis for a general discussion and gain a perspective on the topic for the new Official Community Plan.

The Economic Development Strategy was adopted by Council in April 2008 and is a public policy approach to looking at the local economy which identifies risks, opportunities and challenges and tries to integrate them into the decision-making process. This includes the allocation of funds, and considers the impacts the strategy might have on business. The goal is to serve the community and have a positive impact on the quality of life in the City supporting the notion of a complete community.

The City needs to understand the needs of business and translate them into capital investment programs, for example in housing and transportation. Strong local employment has a positive impact on transit. There are opportunities to improve the viability of light industrial uses on Esplanade.

The strategy is a good guideline with objectives and aspirations. There has been progress in achieving some of the objectives but more staff resources would be needed to meet the suggested timeframes. An economic development officer position remains vacant.

Tourism is an underdeveloped opportunity for the North Shore. One key action was the establishment of the North Shore Tourism Association which has been funded through a 2% hotel tax over the past five years. Hotels have a high interest in how the revenue is spent. The Association has been granted eligible entity status so will collect the money directly in the future; the City will have a seat on the Board of Directors.

Staff will be reporting on a resolution to re-establish The Economic Development Committee giving examples of organizations in other communities. The report will recommend executing a review of the Economic Development Strategy. The challenge will be finding the resources necessary for implementation.

The Lower Lonsdale Business Association tried to establish a Business Improvement Area but are now looking at what else is available. Interest has been expressed by Central Lonsdale businesses to establish a business association.

Issues and Trends include the need for rental stock, a steady growth in population, and the challenging price of housing. There has been growth in families in multi-unit buildings; despite school closures on the North Shore, there may be a demand for schools in the future which will show the viability of the local economy.

A major constraint is that the City is fully developed leading to redevelopment and intensification of development. Developers have to be encouraged to build commercial space. Businesses leave the North Shore because they cannot get the floor space they need.

Opportunities will come from growing what is already in place and setting up a framework where they can succeed e.g. home-based businesses. Cluster analysis is needed to see what we have. For example, there is a strong medical structure in Central Lonsdale because of the presence of Lions Gate Hospital.

Comments and Questions from the APC included, but were not limited to:

- What are the City's challenges to holding on to industrial land that seems to be on the edge of economic viability? A: It is highly valued. The main trend is shifting from industrial to commercial; in Burnaby the same land would be 60% of the price which puts pressure on the land; it is difficult to hold the industrial designation; we would like to see it preserved but there has been some slippage. One effort is providing commercial usage and retaining some of the industrial but it is a major challenge. The heavy industrial base is protected because it is on Port lands.
- Prince George and Williams Lake are having to rethink their whole community because of the downturn in the industry; maybe it is a matter of the type of industry to support with a smaller footprint. In Squamish there are units with commercial space on the ground floor, warehouse space at the back and two stories of residential, live-work options. Staff: How do we create intensity of industrial use; are there policy barriers? For example, rents on the 200-300 block of East Esplanade are reasonably low due to the age of the buildings.
- The critical issue is there have not been any resources allocated to implementing the Strategy. It is amazing what has been achieved already. The City should be looking at it as a revenue centre not a cost centre; perhaps an independent group staffed by professionals versed in economic development. A critical issue is leadership and having a professionally run entity to drive economic development. Financial income should be a metric for its success.
- Why is the price of industrial land increasing? Is there high demand, speculation? A: The least impact is the residential conversion rationale, industrial demand is a big aspect. Residential prices have an impact on commercial and industrial land categories.
- The City has an opportunity attract small scale creative web design, digital media, green companies to Lower Lonsdale; Gastown is filled with such businesses. Web designers are drawn to places with natural beauty.
- The City needs a good choice of Class A office space.
- Luckily we are the urban core surrounded by wealthy communities that have needs of services that the City can provide in an urban setting.
- The definition in the discussion paper talks about commercial centre; it could be light industrial/commercial. We need to look at all the successful industries including, but not limited to, the film industry.
- There should be an analysis of what makes Esplanade work and whether it can be replicated in other areas and other businesses.
- I would encourage more innovative measurements of what we would see as economic success e.g. revenue per taxes paid, to measure if we make it

successful to do business. What would help drive the bottom line in attracting people here?

- I do not understand the trend on the North Shore between education levels and trade. Should we be driving jobs that fit the profile of people who live here? A: The initiatives are not very direct. It is an issue of metrics; how are we going to measure what we are doing and how effective it is? Economic development programs come and go in municipalities. From a policy perspective, how do we ensure an appropriate level is sustained? We have no ability to directly influence job growth. We need cluster analysis to match jobs to residents.
- It is great to see that the hotel association is working on attracting tourists; when resources are applied to the strategy, you get results. The City should focus on activities where there is already some infrastructure. A new committee will need enough to do. Otherwise, avoid a committee.
- Large start up costs for small business can be a barrier. There are limited options to get more space on the North Shore. We need to think about it in the context of land use and building design to set aside space for businesses to grow.
- Staff: The property tax review was important. Concurrent with the development of the Economic Development Strategy, businesses expressed concern on the growth of their tax load. The goal is to try to flatten out peaks and valleys and close the gap between residential and other tax classes. There is such growth in residential values it has been difficult to get the ratio down. Ontario has mandated tax multiples.
- It is difficult to meter the individual connections to LEC; there is a conflict between commercial and residential strata users with regard to LEC costs. Businesses may need incentives to be part of the LEC. The City needs to cost share a study with agreeable stratas to justify the cost savings on LEC.
- Staff: LEC is important for economic development. Extra pipes are being laid with the LEC pipes for future needs e.g. Coquitlam owns QNet.
- Is the demand there for industrial land, is it being held up by property owners? A: It can be difficult to define the cause. People may be holding off hoping to redevelop at a greater value. There are not a lot of "for rent" signs on the Lonsdale corridor. If values are increasing sometimes property outperforms its class.
- I have concerns about provincial government intervention in tax rates e.g. ports. A: The question was whether the tax rate inhibited industry growth. Hopefully we are on the cusp of a renewed waterfront; shipbuilding will have a significant impact over the next 10-20 years. There are also rail noise complaints; we need ways to reduce whistling etc. The cost to improve crossings is \$400,000. There was a partnership review to identify all the crossings, and a Letter of Understanding for funding with monies from different levels of government is in process. There will be increased conflict with the rail with densification in Lower Lonsdale.
- Economic success is not just about job growth. Most businesses on Lonsdale are small businesses. We seem to have some success with small scale business. Some businesses have been there for 10-20 years and should be included.
- 80% of tourists want an aboriginal experience; the City should connect with local bands, perhaps on the waterfront. West 1st and Lonsdale are very well done with public art and urban design, which should be continued up Lonsdale. We should be showcasing environmental technology.
- The City has suggested that N.S. Tourism do more with hotel tax revenue.

- From the Lower Lonsdale Business Association perspective, the association is grateful for the long term support from the City although there is some concern that taking government money affects the independence of the Association with regard to speaking out on issues such as parking.
- When APC reviewed the Brooksbank projects it was clear that the property owners had been through a difficult time securing industrial tenants. Could they have been rezoned to make them more viable and stay light industrial?
- Little businesses will not be able to afford rents in redeveloped buildings.
- Staff: We now have the Metro Vancouver Regional Plan with more land use categories than before. This includes "industrial" and "mixed employment". It will not be possible to take either and turn it to residential. Through rezoning the City has created blended commercial/industrial zones that provide for more intensity of use with more than single floor industrial.
- Transportation, land use and liveability are all part of this. Businesses want better connections to City Hall; getting the City more directly connected to the business community might be more effective than a separate economic development office.
- Harbourside sat for many years as a blank site, now it is taking on a residential component based on economics. Why was it not designated industrial only? It seems to be a mixed bag. A: The Port had decades to buy it as industrial. The decision was made to make it a job-based development with commercial/industrial. There is probably more employment now than if it had been all industrial. The City wants to take advantage of the waterfront interface with residential and develop tourism potential to make it a more diverse and active place as part of the waterfront vision.

*There was a short break at 7:40 pm
The meeting reconvened at 7:50 pm*

4. Bicycle Master Plan Update

G. Penway reviewed the Bicycle Master Plan Update Report which was reviewed at the November 7th Council Meeting and sent back to Advisory Bodies for their comments. Members were asked to contact staff if they had questions.

The creation of the Integrated Transportation Committee was endorsed by Council.

Comments and Questions from the APC included, but were not limited to:

- I like the increased use of green trails.
- There seems to be a lack of representation from other transportation mode users e.g. transit, single vehicle drivers. How are other voices heard? Staff: All stakeholders should be included in the Integrated Transportation Committee.

5. Affordable Housing Sub-Committee Feedback

Helen Goodland, APC member, reviewed the results of the November 26th meeting of the Affordable Housing Sub-Committee. Their report was distributed and is attached to these minutes. They wanted to think about the topic outside the box and came up with very diverse ideas. They were surprised at the number of alternatives.

The ideas were very much private sector ideas. The group made the following points:

- Land costs are too high and ideas to make better use of the available land included: build over strip malls (which keep operating while flats are built), live-work retail, build over bus loops and transit stations.
- Zoning should be more flexible and operate at a finer grain of detail e.g. quasi-agricultural systems for example beehives, solar panels. While density is a tool to encourage developers, it does not necessarily foster a full range of housing types; mainly one bed condo suites are being built.
- Leasing building components has not been embraced but there are ways to take components off the books e.g. elevators, heating systems, carpeting etc.
- Reduce the cost of ownership. There is a rental challenge and access to ownership challenge.
- There is a lack of diversity of housing formats and tenureship. The private sector is not yet engaged but the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) structure can offer property ownership in the form of shares, rent to own etc. e.g. London's First Steps program.
- In Switzerland 80% of the population rent. The buildings are managed very well with the long term in mind; REIT can also help with reducing operating costs. There are big pension funds invested in the building. In Canada owning and managing rental housing is not an appealing proposition.
- Transit is important but the City has limited influence.
- Seaspan with the creation of 1800 new jobs, is a once in a lifetime opportunity to inject diversity into the City's housing stock. The workers will not live on the North Shore unless housing is affordable. Seaspan should be able to build rental buildings just for the workers on industrial lands.
- Encourage other types of housing such as modular, moveable housing. Encourage investment in local prefab companies to show off BC wood technologies. The housing could be laneway compatible so that people could rent them and put them on their property for pre-determined periods.
- Target building types for resident demographics and interests e.g. co-housing.
- Reduce operational costs by metering and billing individual rental suites.
- Next steps could include a think tank connecting with experts on different financial models including rental REIT, partial home ownership program. Research modular housing formats to ensure housing available in time for Seaspan workers. Establish a relationship with Seaspan regarding projected worker housing needs.

Comments from the APC included, but were not limited to:

- A lot of good ideas. Capilano Business Park is owned by a pension fund.
- The government can facilitate connections. It makes sense from an economic perspective. We should work with Seaspan. Modular housing is an industry education process.
- Did you meet with the North Shore Housing Coalition? Twelve surplus school board properties will be available in the future.
- The City will have to develop a Housing Action Plan in addition to the OCP.

Councillor Buchanan will forward a housing document to APC for their information.

Staff thanked the group for the diverse range of ideas which will be folded into the CityShaping process.

6. Staff Update

Urban Futures Survey III: At the November 14th meeting, Council approved a grant of \$5,000 to support this survey which was first conducted in 1973. A delegation spoke to Council on being given funds to re-do a 20 year survey looking at public attitude towards the region. The surveys contain good information. Council were very keen.

Blue Communities Project: A presentation was made at the November 14th Council meeting expressing the view that water is a basic right and should be publicly owned. The presentation also called for a ban on bottled water. This was referred to staff for a response. The project stresses the importance of water and conservation. There was a question on water meters.

Integrated Transportation Committee: the terms of reference for the ITC were endorsed at the November 28th Council meeting. It is anticipated that the Committee will be operational by February/March of 2012. The Low Level Road will be coming back to the City for review.

The Ontario Government has a new building code for 2012 with an ASHRAE 2010 standard which will be the best in the country.

H. Goodland mentioned that there is public consultation on the new BC building code and encouraged members to write letters in support of higher energy standards.

7. Other

It was regularly moved and seconded

That the Advisory Planning Commission members thank Mary Tasi for her six years of service to the Planning Commission.

Carried Unanimously

M. Tasi expressed her thanks and noted how the Commission had grown and evolved during her time on it.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the Advisory Planning Commission will be held on Wednesday, January 11th, 2012.

Chair

