

**SUMMARY**

***Building Community Through Affordable Housing***

**A Blue Print for Sustainable Urban Development in the Downtown  
Eastside**

**September 2007**

**The Downtown Eastside Community Land Use Principles Project. Sponsored by the  
Community Arts Council of Vancouver with the financial support of the Real Estate  
Foundation of B.C. and the Vancouver Foundation.**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Blueprint is to contribute to the renewal of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for the benefit of those who presently live and work in the area. It recognizes the Downtown Eastside as an area of historic and contemporary importance to Vancouver, composed of distinct neighbourhoods and communities of rich cultures and traditions.

## **A Plan for the Downtown Eastside**

At present there is no overall plan for the Downtown Eastside covering the area from Richards Street to Clarke Drive, and from the Waterfront to Terminal Avenue, encompassing the neighbourhoods of Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona, Hastings Street and north of Hastings.

## **A Comprehensive Approach**

Dramatic change is underway in land use in the Downtown Eastside. Special measures are required if these changes are to benefit current residents. This Blueprint focuses on housing and land use as keys to community renewal. It also emphasizes support for the health and social, arts and cultural dimensions of community life. It is the outline for a Downtown Eastside Community plan based on principles of social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability.

## **A Unique Partnership**

This Blueprint is designed on the basis of a unique partnership among community and business individuals and organizations that are committed to the renewal of the Downtown Eastside for the benefit of its current residents.

## **Non-Market and Market Affordable Housing**

Housing in this Blueprint extends from supportive and non-market housing to rental and ownership housing that is affordable for people with low to moderate incomes.

## **Principles**

1. Those who live and work in the Downtown Eastside are involved in planning for the area as a whole and in decision-making that affects housing and land use.
2. Government has the primary responsibility, through funding and policy, to generate affordable housing that cannot be obtained through the market.
3. The community invests time, knowledge and skills in recommending decisions regarding land use and housing to the City in partnership with public, private, and non-profit developers.
4. The existing SRO housing stock in the area will be replaced on a 1 for 1 basis as it ages
5. Housing and land use decisions will ensure that 2/3rds of the housing is for the benefit of people with low to moderate incomes as stated in the 2005 City Housing Plan for the Downtown Eastside.
6. People and non-profit organizations are provided with incentives and opportunities to develop their own ownership and equity in housing so as to improve their future financial assets.
7. Citizens of Vancouver, businesses and philanthropic agencies are given opportunities to contribute to community renewal in housing and social development through social investment markets and charitable contributions as a means of complementing but not replacing public funds.
8. Housing decisions incorporate training, low-threshold and full-time employment opportunities, social enterprises and other initiatives that people can voluntarily enter into that support local skills and capacity-building and development of the local economy.

9. Public accountability is present in all decision-making involving all parties in housing and land use decisions through regular reporting and social and financial audits.
10. The provision of local arts and cultural programs, health, education and social services is integral to creating a healthy community for all residents.

### **Blueprint Features:**

**Downtown Eastside Special Development Zone:** It is proposed that the City declare this area to be a special development zone for the next 15 years:

- a) permit greater density to support non-market housing
- b) stipulate the size of development parcels to encourage variable building design to accommodate the density; i.e. makes the streetscapes interesting, reinforcing a community scale reflective of the mixed-building character of the area.
- c) encourage mixing of non-market and market housing within developments
- d) encourage developments which support commercial retail activities at street level
- e) utilize bonusing for social housing and other social amenities
- f) maintain and support the current industrial and business activities in the area as sources of local employment
- g) foster in buildings and public spaces principles of environmental sustainability

**Special Development Levy Trust Fund:** It is proposed that the City establish a 15 year Downtown Eastside Social Investment Fund. This fund would replace existing City development levies. A percentage charge on market residential and commercial properties would go into this fund to support arts and culture, health, social and education development for community residents, both programs and services and facilities. The fund would be a federally registered charity, able to receive financial donations by individuals, philanthropic organizations and businesses.

**Community Development Corporation:** The CDC will provide the local leadership that coordinates housing and land-use, social, economic and environmental planning and decision-making. Its job is to make things happen. It would work in concert with existing organizations such as Building Opportunities for Business (BOB) and the Vancouver Agreement. CDC decisions for housing and land use involving the community, the development industry and local government would be based on the statement of principles.

#### CDC Housing and Land Use

CDC's housing and land use decisions will be based on the Blueprint's principles and the requirements of the special development zone. Decisions require agreement among community and business representatives in consultation with local government.

#### **Key features:**

- Community owned – able to take an equity position in housing and to make strategic interventions in property acquisition and development
- Brings public, market and non-market investors and developers together to develop proposals
- Establishes specific community benefits in proposals
- Acts as a hub between business and community and between community and City Hall
- Provides an accelerated development approval process with the support of City Hall

**Financing:** It is fundamental that senior governments be prepared to invest a substantial amount of money in the community development corporation for it to be able to influence the direction of housing and land use in the area. Such public investment leverages private investment. This said, the CDC can orchestrate a mix of private and public investment arrangements:

- Opportunities for individuals and organizations to buy ethical investment funds with an established financial institution (e.g. Vancity Credit Union) which can go into affordable housing
- Special first mortgage arrangements which enable people with few assets but reliable rental and financial histories to be eligible for financing (e.g. Vancity Credit Union)
- Arrangements with financial institutions to provide loans/mortgages to non-profit agencies to acquire housing properties and expand their equity base.
- Philanthropic institutions (foundations) individually or collectively can pool their own grants programs or investments to support non-market housing, backed by the CDC in arrangements with the BC Housing Corporation.
- Work with Builders Without Borders to invite the assistance of the trades in keeping construction and renovations costs down.

Where possible the CDC will utilize its partnership with the City and the various bonusing and zoning incentives to acquire property wholesale as distinct from more costly retail purchases.

#### CDC and Community Economic Development:

The CDC will orchestrate the linkages between housing and land use decisions and BOB's role in education, training, employment and local business and social enterprise development.

#### CDC and Arts and Culture, Health and Social Supports:

The CDC will support local agencies in strengthening the social development infrastructure for a healthy community including:

- An alternative community health resource centre for the Downtown Eastside with a strong preventive and healthy life-style maintenance program that reduces utilization of costly and often inappropriate hospital services – to be developed in consultation with existing public and non-profit organizations
- A system of cooperative, collaborative planning among non-profit health and social support agencies that generates more funding and coordination and builds on the proven experience of people on the front-lines.
- The Downtown Eastside Community Arts Network (CAN) and its principles and programs for individual and community development through the arts.

#### **Complementary Public Policies for Income Support and Employment**

The majority of homeless people (55%) do not receive income from any public or other secure source. Without income people cannot pay rent to live in non-market housing. The non-market housing organization needs this income to meet its operating costs. The development of additional non-market housing similarly requires assurance that mortgages and operating costs can be financed by people's ability to pay rent even at non-market rates.

For non-market housing to work complementary public policies are needed:

- Access to income support (welfare programs)

- Welfare rates whose shelter allowances are sufficient to enable non-market housing to meet its operating costs
- Welfare rates whose non-shelter portion is sufficient to meet daily living costs and costs associated with readiness for work
- Positive welfare incentives that encourage people who are able to work to retain a portion of their earnings with income support declining as earnings increase.

For a similar reason – to get at the issues that contribute to homelessness and poverty and unemployment – expanded public investment and programs are needed with respect to addictions and mental health care.

**About the Project Sponsor:**

The Community Arts Council of Vancouver (1946) has a long history of contributing to dialogue and practice around land use and urban development in the city including the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, the Orpheum Theatre and the Vancouver Art Gallery and Law Courts at Robson Square. Its stated goal includes a commitment to creating opportunities for citizens to “to improve the quality of life in the city.”

The project is chaired by Milton Wong.

**For Further Information** about the Downtown Eastside Community Land Use Principles project, please contact Michael Clague at 880-9464 or [mclague@telus.net](mailto:mclague@telus.net).