



**Chair: Mike Harcourt**

January 12, 2011

Mayor Gregor Robertson  
Vancouver City Councillors  
City of Vancouver  
453 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Robertson and Councillors:

**Re January 20, 2011 Council Meeting on the Historic Area Height Review Update.**

It appears that the search for higher buildings in the historic area has been motivated primarily to locate sites where increases in floor space could be achieved on redevelopment, thereby increasing the value of those sites. The Council that initiated the study had anticipated that the uplift in value would be shared between the developer and the City, providing resources for the City to achieve some public amenities, including low income housing, while at the same time seeing new development and improvement to the DTES.

Initially, it appeared that the city thought there could be many potential high-rise sites where significantly higher densities could be achieved. However, after much staff and many consultant studies, and subsequent community consultation, council determined not to pursue additional high-rise towers and to limit the additional heights up to 120 ft. and a few sites that would be restricted to a maximum height of approximately 150 ft.

The staff report now before council recommends some increases in height and identifies seven specific sites which may go 150 ft. but does not describe what additional amounts or types of floor space would be achieved beyond what is permitted in existing zoning, nor does it describe what amount of anticipated public benefit will be achieved by the additional height (or density).

We believe that this long debate about higher buildings, (and especially the unmentioned higher densities), is incomplete without an analysis of the impacts of such densities and the associated population shifts on the overall social, economic and environmental circumstances of the Downtown Eastside. It is well known that this is a uniquely sensitive area of the city. Shifts in its populations brought on by inadequately considered rezoning could be extremely harmful to the affected communities. Unforeseen displacements, deficiencies in services and amenities, and disruption of community assets may well result.

We question why there is priority for this "height-only" study when there is a serious lack of overall social, economic and environmental planning for the DTES? The Strathcona Revitalization Committee and the Carnegie Community Action Project have drawn up their own plans and Council has yet to respond to them.

In a similar vein, the City has launched a participatory engagement process with the low income community to create a locally-based Social Impact Assessment framework to "assess the effect on the existing low-income community of new developments in the historic area and where opportunities for enhanced affordability and live-ability may be achieved." There is no explanation as to how this initiative and the Height Study relate or how both mesh with the future of the DTES.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Because of the major social, economic and environmental issues at stake here, the BCS recommends that no rezoning should be entertained until a local area planning committee has been established and has begun the process of analysis that establishes the priorities of planning and development opportunities for the well being of the Downtown Eastside community as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Harcourt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Harcourt  
Chair