



Chair: Mike Harcourt

January 19, 2011

Councillor Andrea Reimer
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Andrea,

Historic Area Height Review

Thank you for seeking further explanations about the letter that we sent to the Mayor and City Council on this subject dated January 12th, 2011.

We believe the DTES is one of the most important issues to be resolved in the city. We are primarily concerned that Council appears to be proceeding without the benefit of a proper process of planning for this unique and complex community. Yet, unlike many other areas, lacks the benefit of the city's normal and what many would believe is the proper and sensible way to plan for the future of an area. This would mean setting up a citizen-driven planning process that would, in brief, first consider the social, economic and environmental conditions of the whole area. It would then find out what changes can be anticipated to occur and then determine what the community would like it to become, followed by the production of a comprehensive policy plan that sets out those intentions. This would occur with full public involvement through a transparent process and led by local people. Out of such local area planning, Council would enact the overall zoning for the area. Any rezoning, including site specific rezonings or development proposals would then be considered in the context of the policies contained in the comprehensive Local Area Plan.

Regarding your specific questions, we have set out our response by inserting them in a copy of your letter as set out in italics below.

"One part I didn't understand is whether you are against the recommendations in the staff report or whether you are against rezoning."

We believe the council's consideration of these recommendations is premature until you have considered the social and economic impacts of the proposals being made by staff, as they will affect the whole DTES. To date, you have only reviewed the impacts on the physical and aesthetic built form of the changes proposed for what you have titled the Historic area. We do not believe council, nor the communities affected, have sufficient information to determine whether these height and density provisions help or harm Council's primary goal for the DTES "To achieve revitalization without displacement". You need to know what will happen to the stock of housing and the socio-economic characteristics of those who live there now, and those who will live in the new housing that will occur. You also need to know what services those people will need and how and where they will be located. It is important to find out these things in discussion with the community as a whole.

"As you likely know, the report doesn't propose any rezonings (which as you may remember would be a matter for public hearing and decided on the merits of specific proposals)".

In fact the report does recommend that proposed rezonings for the HA-1 and HA-1A proceed to public hearing. See Recommendation B. We appreciate that the situation for Chinatown is another level of complexity, which needs special consideration.

"If you are against the recommendations and not just any future rezonings, it would be helpful to get a better sense of why. The studies that you reference are ongoing and staff are very aware that council would expect them to be complete before any rezonings came forward. Similarly, issues such as what the additional floor space would be for are dealt with at the individual rezoning phase, as you may remember, and I don't see anything in the staff recommendations re: the rezoning policy that precludes the types of things you've referenced, and in fact there is plenty of existing city policy to support the idea that those sorts of things would come forward in a specific rezoning".

Our position is a straightforward one. Council should not be proceeding with rezoning policy direction on heights of buildings before it has undertaken a local area planning process, as briefly summarized above, in consultation with the whole community of the DTES. We also recognize that this will be a complex task that will need significant organization and resolute leadership by Council.

"At the same time, my understanding of these things is likely not as complete as yours so if you feel the recommendations have policy deficiencies, it would be very helpful to know."

Our primary issue is as set out above.

"Or if you were speaking specifically to opposition to specific rezonings being considered that might come after the policy is passed but before the studies are completed and don't include significant affordable housing components, that would be helpful to know too."

In sum, it is our view that a coherent, ordered and clearly understood approach needs to be taken by the City to shape the future of the Downtown Eastside as a whole. We do not see that happening now. It is important that all groups and neighbourhoods in the area understand where they fit into the picture. People need to have information and opportunities for informed discussion not only about proposed changes in their particular neighbourhood but how such changes may affect other areas of the DTES. A framework for planning and decision-making is needed within and across neighbourhoods and the guiding priority question ought to be; **will these proposals be of benefit to people living on low income and people most at risk, as well as other residents?**

We appreciate your questions and we would like to assist wherever we can.

Because of the importance of your questions we are copying our reply to the people we sent our original letter.

Sincerely,

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

Mike Harcourt
Chair

Cc: Mayor Gregor Robertson, City Councillors
BCS Mailing List