



Blueprint for greening: Toderian's EcoDensity plan revealed

Vancouver's planning department, under new head city planner Brent Toderian, has come out with its draft version of an EcoDensity charter, which gives a little more shape to a term that many people have found so broad it's hard to get hold of. There's still a lot of discussion ahead before it's finalized, but initial reactions are mixed. NPA Coun. Suzanne Anton, part of the political team championing it, says it provides some interesting new directions, while fitting in with the work already done in past decades through CityPlan. She likes the new stan-

dards for green buildings, the demonstration projects for new kinds of housing projects, and the fact that it will map the city to show where facilities and park space are needed in denser neighbourhoods. But opposition's Vision Vancouver Coun. Heather Deal says her first take is that there's a lot of focus on density and not as much on affordability or on the amenities needed for those dense neighbourhoods. And, she says, the standard for green building — LEED Silver — is not that bold. "It's yesterday's standard."



Vancouver city planner Brent Toderian

Greener buildings

Up the eco standards for buildings rising four storeys or more.

Greener malls

When the owners or developers of existing shopping malls (CD-1 zoning) ask for changes, give them more than they're permitted now if they set a good green example.

Bonus for green features

Give multi-family builders extra floor space if they are using green design and technology.

Encourage examples

Fast-track projects that show "an exceptional level" of green innovation and are in lower density areas of

the city.

Civic leadership

On city-owned land, create one or more eco demonstration projects with things like "deep green design, renewable energy sources, alternative parking standards, affordable housing, and urban agriculture."

Ultra-fast pace for ultra-green

Give application priority to post-2010 "ultra-green" projects.

More suites

Allow, encourage or even require houses, duplexes and even apartments to include secondary suites.

The backyard option

Add "lane-oriented infill" housing to existing 33-foot lots, while keeping the houses already on them.

Higher, denser

At points close to shops, services, and transit, building higher than the current four-storey model.

Energy savings

Look at district energy systems.

Consensus

Push ahead with planning and public consultation.

— Frances Bula, Vancouver Sun

See the full report at vancouversun.com

NPA has radical suggestions for its EcoDensity charter

BY FRANCES BULA
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver's ruling party has decided it wants to push the EcoDensity concept as far as it can.

So Non-Partisan Association Coun. Suzanne Anton will come to council today with radical new suggestions that the city's own planning department didn't include as part of its just-released draft EcoDensity charter, suggesting that the city:

- Allow extra height and density for buildings on key sites in the city's heritage neighbourhoods of Gastown, Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside.

- Allow developers extra height on any building if they are willing to help provide some public benefits.

- Allow builders more floor

space than the regular zoning permits for single-family houses if they build "green" houses.

Anton said Mayor Sam Sullivan and the NPA caucus agreed to put these sure-to-be-debated ideas out to the public because the EcoDensity initiative is an important one to them and they want to ensure all ideas are considered.

As well, she said, the city needs to find ways to pay for the public services needed for the dense city it is creating.

"If we gave extra density, that would pay for some major public benefits. The aquatic centre needs to be revamped, for example — this would help finance that. Or a new city hall."

EcoDensity is the name that Sullivan gave an initiative he launched at the World Urban Forum in 2006, aimed at reduc-

ing the environmental impact of urban growth by encouraging dense city development.

The city's planning department, under new head city planner Brent Toderian, has spent the last year working out what that would mean in terms of standards for green building, what kind of density would be encouraged where, what sorts of services a denser city would need, and how to measure "green" development.

The charter it came out with last week made 16 recommendations, ranging from setting new environmental standards for all buildings to allowing coach-houses in laneways and new kinds of demonstration projects.

Anton said the planning department did a good job but had to work within certain limits. "These are political deci-

sions that we are proposing now," she said.

Anton's motions, which are being made after considerable discussion among the NPA caucus, have started her political opponents.

"Why is this coming at the last minute?" said Vision Vancouver Coun. Tim Stevenson. "I find it amazing that this is being done this way. And this is not tinkering. This is a major shift."

All of the recommendations, both from staff and the NPA councillors, along with any others that get thrown in this week, will go out for discussion at public meetings between now and February.

Staff will come back with recommendations and spend several months working out how to implement the changes.

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Condos pose threat to commercial space

BY FRANCES BULA
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver is planning to tighten the rules in yet another central-city neighbourhood to prevent too much condo development, while at the same time offering new incentives for builders to create job space.

Burrard Slopes, the industrial-commercial area that faces downtown between Granville Island and Burrard Street, is the latest subject of the planning department's efforts to preserve retail and office space in a market where condos have increas-

ingly been trumping other uses. Planner Phil Nolan said a few recent projects had "raised some alarm bells."

One project put only a minimal amount of retail at the street level underneath a larger condo development. Another developer worked out a deal with the city that allowed a two-lot development to put all its condos on one lot and all the commercial space on another. That broke the normal rule for that area, which required all buildings to have commercial space at the street level.

"It was the same amount of

space [as would normally be allowed for residential] but it looks different visually," Nolan said.

If council approves the planning department's recommendations Thursday, the city will require that, in any new development in the area, there be as much space built for commercial uses as for residential uses.

As well, the new zoning will allow the city to give a developer more space than is normally permitted in the area if that developer is building commercial space.

Burrard Slopes has about 1.1

million square feet of commercial space and 110,000 square feet of residential space, including all new projects in the pipeline, said Nolan.

The planning department has been clamping down on residential development in commercial areas for three years, after analysis showed almost all the development outside the central business district downtown was going to residential. A second study suggested that the city ran the risk of running out of job space in its central areas if that pattern continued.

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Children and youth report delivered among the usual Victoria circus

VICTORIA

Politicians, government staffers and reporters were on hand Monday afternoon as a legislature committee convened to hear a much-anticipated presentation.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, the independent representative for children and youth, was scheduled to deliver her first, critical assessment on implementation of "the Hughes report."

The Ted Hughes report. Former judge, deputy attorney-general, conflict commissioner. Appointed two years ago to sort out deeply troubled child protection system.

Came back with a report that roasted the government from Premier Gordon Campbell ("he was wrong") on down for underfunding, mismanagement and neglect.

Hughes produced 62 recommendations, the most important of which called for the establishment of the very watchdog position now occupied by Turpel-Lafond.

She took on the job a year ago in part because she was impressed by Hughes's vision for the office, in part because the government promised to implement every one of his recommendations.

Now, 18 months after the Hughes report, she was about to release her assessment of how the government had lived up to its promise. "Not nearly well enough," she was expected to say.

But first... the members of the legislature's committee on children and youth had to slog through more than an hour of other business.

The service plan and mandate for Turpel-Lafond's office. Her need for a 50-per-cent increase in staffing. She talked at length. Members of the committee had plenty to say, as well. New Democrat Maurine Karagianis fired off five questions without a break, several of them multi-part.

B.C. Liberal Mary Polak unloaded the contents of "all my little sticky notes" as she put it. "How shall I phrase this?" she asked at one point. Try "directly," advised committee chair Ron Cantelon, a Liberal.

Deadlines loomed, not least the scheduled 4:30 adjournment of the committee. Twice the proceedings were halted so members could go into the legislature chamber for votes. Would Turpel-Lafond get a chance to deliver the news of the day?

Finally the agenda cleared and the committee moved on to the "update on the Hughes report."

With a surprise late entry from the government side.

As committee staff distributed copies of Turpel-Lafond's 50-page assessment, Cantelon announced that they were also getting a "letter of reply" from Minister for Children and Family Development Tom Christensen.

The letter took issue with several of Turpel-Lafond's more pointed criticisms, all the while insisting "I am confident we are all working toward the same end."

A swipe at the report before the committee had even had a chance



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COLUMNIST

to read the report?

Nicholas Simons, a member of the Opposition minority on the committee, protested the irregularity. Wasted on the government majority.

Turpel-Lafond reacted with dignity to the Christensen letter. "I would have liked to have seen it before the committee saw it," was all she said.

She'd shared her report with the minister and his staff last Thursday before going public. He had not repaid the courtesy.

Once she got to presenting her assessment, one soon understood why the ministry would go out of its way to try to discredit it.

Some progress, to be sure. Her office, other legislative and oversight measures, underway. Other ministries, particularly education, doing their part. And a concession from her that maybe the government hadn't reported every detail of its progress to her office.

But with that out of the way, she went on to declare that the key ministry, Christensen's ministry, has fallen well short of implementing many of the measures. "Too many of these recommendations have yet to receive the attention they deserve," she said. "Over the last 18 months, we have lost valuable time."

Also bad blood between the ministry and her office. She'd wanted to make a joint progress report to the committee. "That was my first position... The offer was there to do a joint report and it was not taken."

It sounded like a direct attack on senior management at the ministry, particularly Leslie du Toit, the deputy minister brought in from South Africa.

Meeting with reporters after her presentation to the committee, Turpel-Lafond didn't leave much doubt. She praised line staff in the ministry. They worked hard and deserved support.

But there had been a "failure of leadership," she said. "Leadership within the ministry, particularly senior management."

The Liberals on the committee pushed through a motion to summon Du Toit and her team to the next meeting to tell their side of the story. Turpel-Lafond is invited as well, for purposes of rebuttal.

Maybe they should book a referee, too.

But a more productive response would be for the government to get on with what it promised to do 18 months ago, and implement all of the Hughes recommendations.

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