EcoDensity

How density, design, and land use will contribute to environmental sustainability, affordability, and livability

Project summary
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ECODENSITY: WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Vancouver is a city with a rich legacy of progressive, and occasionally counter-intuitive, planning for our future. Decisions we have made in the past have helped to build an inclusive, highly livable, and internationally respected city connected to and worthy of its spectacular natural setting. EcoDensity, launched in 2007, is the next step in Vancouver’s planning evolution - building on past commitments and making the leap from livability to sustainability as our primary goal, and emphasizing a more resilient livability in the face of climate change and the end of cheap energy. It begins the shift in thinking of how we adapt our city and our way of life so that Vancouver’s future is more sustainable, affordable, and livable.

The EcoDensity planning program itself was broad and comprehensive - designed to foster a challenging but necessary citywide dialogue on the relationship between urban form and sustainability. The program involved extensive public engagement with the diverse citizens of our many neighbourhoods, as well as with experts, academics and industry leaders, to ensure the dialogue was informed by broad thinking and perspectives. By demonstrating how well-designed and strategic density can be a catalyst for the development of complete communities, improved transportation choices, greater housing affordability, economic vitality, and energy efficiency, EcoDensity was successful in initiating mind-set change and action on “density-done-well” outside of our city’s core.

As the name suggests, it was density that was at the heart of the EcoDensity initiative and how density can:

- create more complete communities and reduce our carbon footprint by having housing diversity within walking distance of shops and services, and accessible to transit
- take advantage of existing infrastructure and reduce development pressure on agricultural land and natural habitat
- allow for new green systems that more efficiently use energy, water and materials
- introduce urban agriculture to reduce ‘food miles’ (the distance it takes to get food to our homes) and strengthen local food security

By placing density at the forefront of the public discussion in Vancouver, EcoDensity enabled an often contentious and always interesting debate. After two years of workshops, community meetings, public forums and fairs, hundreds of participants, and seven nights of public hearings, the final products, the EcoDensity Charter and the Initial Actions, were unanimously adopted by City Council in June 2008. These documents provide the City of Vancouver with a blueprint for a greener city and a solid foundation for a sustainable future.

PAST COMMITMENTS

Vancouver’s Mission Statement
“To create a great city of communities that cares about its people, its environment, and the opportunities to live, work, and prosper.”

Vancouver’s CityPlan
“As the region grows and there is increased pressure on our environment, the City will give priority to actions that protect the environment... Residents want lower and modest income families to be able to live in the city... People will have more opportunities to live in their neighbourhoods as they pass through various ages and stages of their lives.”

Vancouver’s Climate Change Action Plan
“The most important long-range strategy for managing housing- and transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions in an urban context is land use planning for higher density, mixed-use, walkable communities - frequently referred to as smart growth.”
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has concluded that humans are causing global warming and that the repercussions will be severe - economic disruptions, drought, famine, mass species extinction. NASA says that we must keep the planet from warming more than two degrees or we will trigger feedback loops of runaway climate change.
The Challenge

Planning for an Environmentally Sustainable, Affordable, and Livable Future

Although Vancouver is frequently considered one of the world’s most livable cities, we live in a way that has a significant impact on our environment and our long-term sustainability. Remarkably, although Vancouver is considered an international model of sustainability, our ecological footprint is oversized - if everyone on the planet lived the way we Vancouverites do, it would take four planets to sustain us. This simple realization that Vancouver consumes more resources than is sustainable comes at a time when we have never been more aware of the consequences of climate change and other environmental threats, as well as the implications of the end of cheap and abundant energy. This awareness dictates the need to take swift and decisive action.

While some strategies across the continent seem to nibble around the edges, the need increases to address the largest, hardest-to-change factor impacting our environment - our urban environment and the way we inhabit it. Density, and equally its design, mix of uses, and location, is central to any comprehensive effort to address our environmental impact at the urban scale. Fortunately, as we have learned in Vancouver, density can also deliver substantial benefits for affordability and livability. Therefore EcoDensity was designed from the outset to tackle three major and interrelated challenges:

Environmental Sustainability

How can we grow in a way that reduces our impact on the environment?

With a significant majority of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Vancouver linked to buildings and transportation, using density and sustainable design is key to reducing our environmental impact. Higher-density urban development decreases automobile reliance and development pressure on the urban periphery, while increasing the potential for energy efficiency, and providing the critical mass necessary to support complete, diverse, and walkable neighbourhoods.

Livability

How can we grow in a way that enhances Vancouver’s livability?

As Vancouver continues to grow and adapt to the challenges of sustainability, how can we maintain and actually enhance our city’s renowned livability? How can we emphasize a longer-term, more ‘resilient’ livability given the challenges we face. New residents, as well as current ones, will require expanded community amenities, a beautifully designed urban environment, improved and sustainable transportation options, opportunities to participate in civic and community life, and increased urban vitality while respecting neighbourhood character and identity.

Affordability

How can we grow in a way that creates more affordable types of housing?

Housing affordability continues to be a major challenge in Vancouver - with median home prices beyond the reach of many Vancouver households to afford, and a very low rental vacancy rate. Addressing affordability is a key challenge to the long term sustainability of the city, its economic resiliency, and its ability to house a diverse workforce. And as a city that cannot grow outward, Vancouver must find creative ways to add variety (in type, unit size, and tenure) and provide more affordable housing and lifestyles throughout the city in ways that are resource efficient.
above: early images and open house boards used in launching the EcoDensity process
Setting the Stage
Making the Case for EcoDensity and Planning for a Sustainable Vancouver

Understanding the relationship between density, design, and land use, and a sustainable, affordable, and livable city is not always a straightforward and obvious task. To inform our understanding of the issues facing our city and our planet, City staff engaged a wide range of citizens and experts, including neighbourhood groups, experts on climate change and ecological footprint, respected speakers on sustainability and urbanism, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies, academics and scholars, and the development industry. Discussing the ‘D-word’ is never easy, and in many cities such discussion is avoided in favour of less controversial aspects of sustainability. Rather than avoiding the ‘third rail of municipal politics’, EcoDensity sought to discuss density bluntly and honestly, with the statement that “a city cannot talk seriously about sustainability without talking about density”. The goal was never consensus, but rather learning, honest debate and bold decision-making.

The diverse viewpoints ensured that the EcoDensity process was inclusive and incorporated leading-edge thinking on the most challenging issues facing Vancouver. It became clear from the beginning that the public dialogue itself was destined to be contentious and controversial. Initially, and indeed to some extent throughout, the notion of EcoDensity was received with reservations from many Vancouver neighbourhoods. Many city residents expressed concern that more density would also mean more traffic, higher costs-of-living, increased pressure on limited public resources and amenities, and greater environmental impacts. Other residents were understandably concerned about neighbourhood character and saw a threat to traditional planning processes, including the Community Visions plans established after the last major city-wide planning effort: CityPlan. At the same time, other residents, and many experts, were concerned that the EcoDensity approach was overly timid and needed to be more assertive in seeking change to address affordability, and reduce our carbon and ecological footprints. In short, we do not have all the time in the world to lower our ecological impact.

Why Density?
- reduces fossil fuel emissions, as people live closer to where they work, shop, and play
- makes better use of resources, and existing infrastructure such as roads, sewers, and sidewalks
- significantly improves housing choice and enables affordability for all residents, including young families and the elderly
- adds diversity, safety, vitality, and opportunities for creative interaction
- enables public health benefits from more walkable and bike-friendly neighbourhoods
- enables investments in new and better community amenities
- facilitates green design and district energy
- makes transit more viable and efficient
- helps keep the local economy vibrant and healthy
- reduces development pressure on agricultural and industrial land as well as existing green space

The image of a tricycle was used to communicate the interrelationship of environmental sustainability, affordability, and livability. Although sustainability is the big wheel where the steering and pedals are, all three are needed for forward momentum.
DEBATING DENSITY: ECO DENSITY’S PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

As a public citywide initiative, EcoDensity actively sought the participation, insights, and ideas of Vancouver’s diverse communities. Creative thinking on public outreach and engagement led to innovative approaches to a citywide dialogue on our city’s future.

Planning in Vancouver has always been a collaborative effort - and at its heart EcoDensity was a public discussion on the sustainability, livability, and affordability of our city. On one level, involving our neighbourhoods was natural and easy. Vancouver is fortunate to have an active, informed, and engaged population, and a rich history of public engagement and participation in planning and city decision-making. However, with EcoDensity and the contentious debate over density throughout the city, the challenge was never greater. It was not an easy dialogue, but it was important enough to ensure that we could not shy away from the challenge.

To ensure a healthy and informed public discussion, the EcoDensity team developed a wide-reaching public engagement process, including a speaker series, video series, media strategy, and the following key events and products:

**EcoDensity Primer**
An engaging, full-colour publication designed to introduce the EcoDensity project to a broader public, develop the case for action in reducing Vancouver’s ecological footprint, and to educate on the relationship of density, design, and land use on affordability, transportation, and amenities to successful density and sustainable development.

**Ideas Fair**
To expand the dialogue, the EcoDensity team organized a two-day EcoDensity Fair in March 2007. The Fair, attended by approximately 1,000 people, featured movie screenings, informational boards and computer applications about planning to reduce our ecological footprint, and an ideas exchange between city residents and staff. Over 1,500 ideas and comments were received through the interactive displays, reviewed and analyzed by staff, and made available on the EcoDensity website.

**EcoDensity Speaker Series**
Following the Ideas Fair, a number of renowned speakers participated in the EcoDensity Speaker Series. Stimulating keynotes and thoughtful questions from the audience resulted in a lively dialogue about the possibilities for EcoDensity. Speakers included Avi Friedman, William Rees and John Helliwell, Edward Mazria, Lawrence Frank, architect John-Paul Thornton and transportation engineer Lon LeClaire.

“[Many Vancouverites] tell us they believe change, done right, is necessary. Maybe because of climate change, or because they’ve seen density work well and bring community benefits with it, or because they want the chance to build a mortgage-helper unit above the garage or a coach house for their kids to stay in the neighbourhood. They see change as a way to improve their livability or protect it for their children.”
- Brent Toderian, Director of Planning
**EcoDensity Workshops and Public Meetings**

The most direct means to consult and listen to the community is to meet with them in person. To achieve this, over 60 workshops and meetings were held in neighbourhoods throughout the city, engaging residents directly through a variety of meeting formats including open houses, interactive workshops, and presentations to community groups (the format was often the choice of the community group). These meetings provided City staff with a wide range of comments and suggestions, but also clarity on where there was general support versus continued disagreement and conflicting perspectives. Even though consensus was never reached, in total more support than opposition for the initiative was achieved.

**EcoDensity Forum**

The initial EcoDensity consultation culminated in the EcoDensity Forum in June 2007, providing the first opportunity for City Council to hear directly from the public regarding the draft EcoDensity Charter and suggested ideas. The event was professionally facilitated, attended by approximately 230 people, and allowed both the public and Council to express their hopes and fears for EcoDensity in an open forum. It was a remarkable dialogue among Vancouverites, and among neighbours, sharing and exchanging points of view.

**Multicultural and Youth Initiatives**

To ensure an inclusive public participation process, the EcoDensity team translated materials and advertised all events through community papers, including the Chinese and South Asian community papers. Additional efforts were made to involve youth, including youth-specific workshops and engaging events that generated some of the most interesting and creative ideas and comments. This is understandable as young people made it clear through the process that they would more likely have to live with the costs of inaction.

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**EcoDensity Top 10 Things We Heard**

- the environment is important – many people are optimistic about how density can help improve the environment and others remain skeptical
- there is a wide interest in new housing types and locations (e.g. infill cottages in backyards; housing around Neighbourhood Centres)
- amenities must accompany density in order to ensure Vancouver is accessible and livable
- the City should reduce barriers and create incentives for more sustainable development
- more sustainable transportation options are needed (transit, cycling and walking opportunities)
- development cannot just be for developers’ benefit
- affordability must be planned to match EcoDensity, and many people are still not sure how EcoDensity can help improve affordability
- there needs to be ample community involvement in decision-making
- some residents simply still oppose density
- the City should show leadership and courage in its actions
What is EcoDensity? What is next? What are we hearing? Eco 101 FAQ History Media Centre Links Eco Tips Chinese

Building communities green, livable and affordable.

EcoDensity Primer

EcoDensity is about high quality density that helps reduce our ecological footprint. It's also about improving affordability and seeking to make our neighborhoods more livable.

Whether you're a homeowner, investor, architect or developer, your feedback is vital to the success of EcoDensity. Get involved and give us your ideas for how Vancouver can achieve EcoDensity.

Ideas for the City to consider.

• Use alternative energy sources in new developments, such as heat from the sun, waste heat and/or the earth (geo-thermal).
• Increase number of denser housing options in low density neighborhoods.
• Reduce non-renewable energy use by providing efficient heating and lighting.
• Expand affordability with new and renovated single-family housing; secondary suites within apartments and basements.
• Click on the links below for more details.

Laneeway Housing
Secondary Suites in Apartments
Basements in Single Family Areas
Removal of Barriers to Green Building

EcoDensity Priority Action Items:

On June 16, 2009, Council made decisions related to increasing opportunities for rental units in existing homes, through the following initiatives: laneeway housing, secondary suites within apartments, and basements. Click on the links below for more details.

Laneeway Housing
Secondary Suites in Apartments
Basements in Single Family Areas
Removal of Barriers to Green Building

What is EcoDensity? EcoDensity, simply put, is about how Vancouver will grow in the future in a way that is green, as well as livable and affordable.

EcoDensity is about achieving high quality density that helps reduce our ecological footprint. It’s also about improving affordability and seeking to make our neighborhoods more livable.

Whether you're a homeowner, investor, architect or developer, your feedback is vital to the success of EcoDensity. Get involved and give us your ideas for how Vancouver can achieve EcoDensity.

Tools for the Future

EcoDensity is about building communities green, livable and affordable.

EcoDensity is all about density that helps reduce our ecological footprint. It’s also about improving affordability and seeking to make our neighborhoods more livable.

Building communities green, livable and affordable.
THE ECODENSITY WEBSITE

The online home of the EcoDensity project and a comprehensive resource for EcoDensity ideas, presentations, commentary and project history

At the centre of the EcoDensity public consultation toolkit is the website - an invaluable and interactive tool for communicating with a very broad (and international) public. The website was designed to have a unique and distinctive visual identity, to be highly accessible, and to function as a living documentation of the entire EcoDensity project.

The website (www.vancouver-ecodensity.ca) has several functions. Primarily, it is the first place to search for information on the project, including events, draft proposals, and opportunities to participate. However, the website offers much more. Loaded with pages of detailed information on density, housing, transportation, land use, sustainable living and design, and other City initiatives, the website features videos, downloadable PDFs of project documents (including Chinese translations), articles related to EcoDensity, and links to local, national, and international sites for more information. The site also provides a catalog of EcoDensity events, draft documents, and public comments submitted to the City via email, mail, phone, or the website itself.

The website is especially useful as an archive and resource on EcoDensity for planners and communities both locally and internationally (the EcoDensity team continues to get requests and follow-up questions from planners around the world interested in learning more about the EcoDensity approach). Not only was the website a tool for local engagement, education, and information - it was also designed as a tool for international assistance for any city struggling with density issues and debates. Every step of the EcoDensity process is documented on the website: every report, every presentation, every public event, and every idea - to help with some of the ‘heavy lifting’ needed by other cities seeking to do similar things. And perhaps that will be the website’s greatest legacy: a permanent record to facilitate global discussion around density and the carbon footprint of cities.

Key Features of the EcoDensity Website

- **What is EcoDensity?**: a detailed history of the EcoDensity project including project documentation, updates on project milestones, and a record of public hearings and decisions
- **What is Next?**: the latest updates on the EcoDensity project including details on priority actions leading from the Charter and Initial Actions. Currently, this is where residents and planners can learn about the latest EcoDensity proposals, including Laneway Housing, Secondary Suites in Apartments, and removal of green building barriers.
- **What are We Hearing?**: feedback from the public on draft EcoDensity documents and proposals as well as comments from major public events such as the EcoDensity Fair and Forum and a FAQ section.
- **Media Centre**: an archive of videos, presentations, media material, and fact sheets/backgrounders on the EcoDensity project and related sustainable urbanism initiatives.
Density Done Well
Making the Case for Density that is Well-Designed, Strategically Located, and Neighbourhood Compatible

Planning for higher densities is a key challenge for North American cities - and Vancouver has developed a reputation for density done well, with careful attention to building, site, and public realm design. Higher densities can create many urban benefits - more population can support a broad range of retail choices, new or sustained public schools, better public transit, and more urban vitality - but density also delivers the kinds of civic benefits and amenities that make density work.

Despite our successes with density, particularly downtown, our approach to density has differed significantly across neighbourhoods. Approximately half of the city’s land area is still made up of single-family housing blocks, much of it within close proximity to transit, public amenities, and neighbourhood centres. This is a very urban and adaptable street pattern, but many have characterized some of the densities as ‘suburban’. Planning for new density that complements and is compatible with established lower-density neighbourhoods was a key challenge for the EcoDensity process - a challenge made even more difficult by the reluctance of many city residents to embrace new density, even relatively minor forms of densification such as row housing, coach houses, or secondary suites.

Thus, one of the key messages of EcoDensity is that not all density is the same. Density done well - designed to complement and enhance neighbourhood character, minimize environmental impact and energy use, adapt over time with flexible form, and contribute to walkable and interesting streets - can take many forms, from the high rise towers of downtown and mid-rise buildings along commercial arterials to other, more character-sensitive density types, including:

**Gentle Density**
Gentle density includes housing types, such as rowhouses and infill that ‘gently’ fit into an established neighbourhood in that they are a similar scale to single-family houses and are usually ground-oriented.

**Hidden Density**
Hidden density includes housing types such as laneway houses (coach houses or units above garages) that are hard to see from the street but change the nature of the lane. Hidden density can create more affordable housing options while contributing to the livability, texture and interest of the lanescape.

**Invisible Density**
Invisible density includes housing types such as secondary suites that can fit into an established neighbourhood with minimal or no impact to built form. Vancouver currently permits secondary suites in all single-family residential zones, and EcoDensity envisions making all new single-family homes suite-friendly, and enabling secondary suites in other building types, including multi-family apartment buildings (“suites within suites”).
ECODENSITY IN THE MEDIA

Ecodensity generated as many creative headlines as creative ideas - from newspapers to TV and radio to blogs and the internet. Media was deliberately courted to advance the community engagement. Coverage was not always flattering, but always valuable in moving the density debate into a broader public arena.

A sampling of the EcoDensity news media coverage
ECODENSITY CHARTER AND PROJECT ADOPTION

SEEKING COUNCIL APPROVAL FOR ECODENSITY

Over two years of extensive work and debate, several drafts of the EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions were prepared for consideration and debate by Vancouver City Council. The process leading to public adoption was exhaustive - with over 1,000 Vancouverites participating in workshops, discussions, and a Special Council Meeting spanning seven sessions over seven nights between the second and third drafts alone. A few highlights of the road to Council approval included:

Following review of a second draft of the EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions, Council refers the draft documents, plus five additional items added by Council for further public consultation.

January - February 2008: Public Consultation
Six staff-initiated workshops plus approximately 50 meetings attended by staff at the invitation of community and stakeholder groups. Over 200 feedback forms were received on the still-draft Charter, Actions, and EcoDensity process in general.

February - April 2008: Special Council Meeting
Seven Council meeting evenings were required to accommodate the overwhelming number of speakers (144 registered speakers), including former mayor and premier Mike Harcourt, nationally renowned urbanist and educator Peter Oberlander, several former councillors, Smart Growth BC and other urban/environmental groups, prominent architects and planners, community activists, and other residents and stakeholders, who came out to support, critique or object to the EcoDensity project, its basic principles, and its final work products - the Charter and Initial Actions. Delegations were often passionate, with strong feelings on all sides of the debate. Groups of residents concerned over potential impacts to deeply valued community character conducted raucous protests on City Hall steps and taped their mouths to demonstrate how they felt their voices had been stifled. Designers and other creative professionals made unique contributions with sophisticated publications and presentations. The evenings were watchable live via the internet and downloadable afterward, and bloggers provided play-by-play analysis after each night of speakers. Many on all sides said these evenings ended up being very educational and even fun, with one commenting that they were “better-than-must-see-tv!”. By the end of the seven evenings, Council had a lot to consider.

After exhaustive deliberation, Council referred the Charter and Actions back to staff to incorporate comments and new ideas and return by June 2008 with third and final versions.

June 2008: Approval and Adoption
Following four weeks of review after the Special Council Meeting and having filtered through, summarized, and incorporated comments from the public and Council, staff returned with a final draft for Council consideration. With the third draft being the charm, Council unanimously approved the EcoDensity Charter and the majority of the proposed Initial Actions - launching a new era for Vancouver where environmental sustainability, affordability, and livability will be the guiding forces for city-building decisions.
THE ECODENSITY CHARTER

THE ECODENSITY CHARTER COMMITS THE CITY TO MAKE SUSTAINABILITY A PRIMARY GOAL IN PLANNING DECISIONS. UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY VANCOUVER CITY COUNCIL, THE ECODENSITY CHARTER OUTLINES EIGHT MAJOR COMMITMENTS TO ITS CITIZENS, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

1 An Over-Arching Environmental Priority
   - Making environmental sustainability a primary goal in ALL city-building decisions - in ways that also foster and support affordability and livability
   - Promote strategic, well-managed density, design and land use as primary tools in achieving this goal, in all city-building decisions

2 Toward an Eco-City
   - Align density, design, and land use holistically and comprehensively with other tools and methods for environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability, to achieve mutual and cumulative benefits, including sustainable strategies for: transportation, green energy, affordable housing, public realm and community amenities, arts and culture, heritage, health and safety, urban agriculture and local food access, social planning, and economic development

3 A Greener, Denser City Pattern
   - Achieve greater densities smartly and strategically in land-use patterns, locations and designs where carbon footprint improvements and environmental gains are highest and where affordability and livability are also fostered
   - Promote ‘gentle’, ‘hidden’, or ‘invisible’ forms of density in suitable locations across the city with design that respects neighbourhood identity and sense of place
   - Densify and manage change in ways that constantly enhance and reinforce a city of walkable, complete communities; improve biking and transit infrastructure and movement meaningfully and consistently over time; and reduce and de-emphasize automobile use and ownership
   - Protect and ensure proper space for diverse jobs, shopping and economic activity close to home for a balanced, resilient city with minimal commuting as the city grows, including protection of key commercial and industrial districts for economic activity rather than housing

4 More Housing Affordability, Types, and Choices
   - Use density, design, and land use strategically to support and facilitate greater housing affordability and diversity, in partnership with all government levels
   - Plan densification strategically - including when and where to densify - to recognize the value provided by existing affordable housing stock and low income housing, including the strategic retention and enhancement of existing purpose-built rental options
5 Greener and Livable Design with a “Sense of Place”

- Design all density with architecture and public realm that marries meaningful and significant ecological performance with lively, beautiful, accessible, responsible, people-oriented design, particularly as density levels increase.
- Design new density to achieve both sustainable, timeless design, and respect for authentic neighbourhood values, context, character, and identity at all scales.
- Combine heritage conservation and the sustainability inherent in retention/reuse of existing structures and materials with dense, efficient, sustainable design and technology.
- Design sites and buildings, wherever possible, to consider microclimates, replicate natural systems and functions (e.g., evaporation and infiltration of water) and minimize waste.
- Incorporate extensive natural and designed green features in creative ways, on sites and on/within buildings, to maintain connections with nature and mitigate urban heat/greenhouse gases.
- Apply ecological ‘best practices’ for public realm and infrastructure design to achieve sustainable, beautiful, safe, accessible, adaptable, and engaging streets, parks, and public places. Designs should embrace natural processes, use environmentally responsible materials, and consider opportunities for food and energy production.
- Design city and neighbourhood patterns to enhance urban food production, access to local food, and waste reuse and recycling.

6 Greener and Livable Support Systems

- Ensure the parks, open space and public places, and other amenities, services, and infrastructure needed to support Vancouver’s neighbourhoods as they grow are provided in a timely way relative to the population levels they serve.
- Advance and achieve sustainable district energy systems at all scales, and particularly at mid and higher densities that make such systems more feasible.

7 Neighbourhood Voice, Neighbourhood Responsibility

- These commitments will be achieved with traditional and creative approaches to consultation, education (in all directions), engagement and dialogue with all voices, while anticipating the needs of future or unrepresented voices.
- This requires a balance between the need for city leadership and respect for neighbourhood-level influence, capacity-building and ownership.
- We will respect and foster the voice of neighbourhoods, and their special values, aspirations and approaches.
- We will also challenge all neighbourhoods across the city to help meet the commitments of this Charter, and their shared responsibilities to their city and beyond, and to future generations. An Eco-City must be made up of many Eco-Neighbourhoods.
How Will the City Use This Charter and Meet Our Commitments

- We will consider this Charter in all aspects of our decision-making regarding the management of change in the city, and all decisions on city-building

- We will coordinate achievement of these Charter commitments with continued implementation of CityPlan, Community Visions and area policies, the Community Climate Change Action Plan, and other Council-approved policies and plans

- Where an existing policy, plan, standard or rule specifically requires or prohibits a decision that may conflict with commitments of this Charter, the city will continue to be governed by the specific requirement or prohibition (e.g., height, density or land use), until the direction is consciously reconsidered by Council after appropriate process and consultation

- Where existing direction allows flexibility, discretion, interpretation or the weighing of choices, or where there is no governing or guiding direction, approaches that will support the achievement of these commitments will be emphasized

- New directions and approaches will be reflective of the commitments of this Charter and will seek to overcome barriers and obstacles to its implementation. Existing directions will be brought into alignment with these commitments over time

- We will bring to bear the appropriate resources, methods and timeframes for creative, responsible, thorough, transparent, engaging and educational planning and consultation to meet these commitments

- We will foster a creative civic environment for learning through well-considered risk and experimentation that might challenge traditional practices in order to achieve these commitments. We will monitor, adapt to learning and make adjustments in a more timely, dynamic manner. We will study and learn from the best and most creative ideas from around the globe to achieve these commitments

- We will evaluate how considerations relate to the WHOLE of this Charter and its many balancing and tempering aspects, rather than focusing singly on individual passages to base support or opposition to an idea

- We will think beyond our city limits to regional, national and global needs, and champion change in other communities, at other levels of government and with other decision-makers to make these commitments a reality. We will partner creatively, do that which we can and should, and urge others to do what they can and should as well

These last two commitments, 7 and 8, are important in describing how the Charter will bring about change. Commitment 8 is innovative in that it clarifies the Charter’s power and role as a change-agent relative to existing policies and mind-sets.
THE ECODENSITY INITIAL ACTIONS

WITH APPROVAL OF THE ECODENSITY CHARTER, VANCOUVER CITY COUNCIL ALSO APPROVED 11 INITIAL ACTIONS THAT PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE WORK AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECODENSITY COMMITMENTS. THE INITIAL ACTIONS RANGE FROM SHORT-TERM AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO LONG-TERM PROJECTS. THE INITIAL ACTIONS PROVIDE A WELL-DEFINED IMPLEMENTATION AND WORK PROGRAM FOR CITY PLANNING STAFF.

A  New Policy

A-1  Rezoning Policy for Greener Buildings. New development requiring a rezoning will be required to meet a minimum equivalent of LEED Silver, with minimum energy, water and stormwater points. This will rise to LEED Gold in 2010. Green design is emphasized over green technology or LEED ‘point-counting’. This policy places Vancouver at the forefront of North American cities for requiring green building design and construction.

A-2  Rezoning Policy for Greener Large Sites. Sites of two acres or more are expected to meet a number of sustainability measures in addition to the Rezoning Policy for Greener Buildings. This policy emphasizes a comprehensive approach to green development including requirements for site design, district energy or cogeneration, urban agriculture, transportation demand management, rainwater management, solid waste diversion, and for those projects including housing, a range of unit types and tenures that enhance affordability.

B  Directions to Include in Existing Work

B-1  Historic Precinct Height Study. City staff have been studying potential suitable sites for increased height and densities in Gastown, Hastings, Chinatown, and Victory Square with the intent to support heritage conservation efforts, provide replacement low-income housing, and to support other public benefits and amenities. This action will place the study within the broader comprehensive policy work of the EcoDensity initiative.

B-2  Community Gathering Places in Each Community. Through work being done in Vancouver’s many communities, opportunities to develop significant gathering places, strategically located and designed in the individual communities, will be pursued. These spaces are central to the idea of livability and community ‘place-making’ and this action is intended to be flexible, inclusive of community participation, and to be completed in coordination with the City’s Social Facilities and Cultural Facilities planning efforts.

B-3  Greener RS-5 Character Design Guidelines. RS-5 is a single-family zoning district that allows additional floor space, above other single-family zones, subject to local neighbourhood character guidelines. This action would review the character-based guidelines to balance character with ecological design performance. It will be completed as part of the City’s Green Building Strategy.
Next Steps Towards Action Implementation

C-1 An ‘Eco’ CityPlan. A new city-wide plan, building on and respecting CityPlan and the established Community Visions, will provide the physical direction to manage change and density to implement the EcoDensity commitments. The ‘Eco’ CityPlan will be guided by the need for: dialogue and consultation, shared city-wide responsibility, goal-setting and measurement, international best practices, scenario creation and evaluation based on ecological footprinting, physical plan development, creation of layers of strategies/plans, and monitoring and adaptation.

C-2 Interim EcoDensity Rezoning Policy. Existing Council-approved Community Visions envision a wide range of medium and higher-density housing types, with differing levels of community support for type and location, that can only be allowed (or ‘unlocked’) following future planning studies. The Interim Rezoning Policy will examine how to ‘unlock’ housing that meets the EcoDensity vision for more sustainable, affordable, and livable housing.

C-3 EcoDensity Leadership on City Land. In this action, the City will explore opportunities to leverage City-owned land to translate EcoDensity principles into market-replicable demonstration projects. These projects will allow the City to explore and test cutting-edge performance based green design, renewable energy sources/production, sustainable transportation demand management, innovative affordability approaches, alternative parking standards, and urban agriculture.

C-4 New Types of Arterial Mid-Rise Buildings. Developing detailed information and best practices on different forms of arterial mid-rise will provide a key input into future planning efforts and a model for future strategic densification throughout the city. This action will examine issues of compatibility with adjacent buildings and residential areas, shadowing and sunlight, design, provision of amenities, energy use and green building performance, and development economics and feasibility.

C-5 Issues and Options for Backyard/Laneway Housing. Laneway housing (‘hidden density’) provides an exceptional opportunity for incremental densification and new affordable housing options within residential neighbourhoods. This action directs City staff to explore issues and options with laneway housing including consideration of variable lot sizes, building by-law and code requirements, location options, retention of existing homes, retention of heritage buildings, design and character issues, impacts on open space and urban agriculture opportunities, parking, infrastructure, rental vs ownership, amenity contribution, and potential for ‘green’ lanes.

C-6 More Options for Rental Secondary Suites. This action provides for new secondary suite options (“invisible density”) in zones where a single suite is already permitted (single-family zones) and in zones where suites are not (duplex and multi-family zones). These additional options can improve affordability, sustainability, and flexibility and this action directs City staff to report back with proposed by-law amendments, with consideration of issues including retention of existing housing stock, unit livability, parking, and impact on utilities and infrastructure.
C-7 Public Amenity and Public Benefit Methods and Funding Tools.
To be a successful tool of livable city-building, density must be accompanied with amenity. This action is a key element of the EcoDensity vision and directs staff to explore new and innovative options for delivering public amenity and civic benefit. Building on national and international precedent, City staff will develop alternatives ranging from new financing and taxation tools, to partnerships, to use of development incentives and requirements.

C-8 Discretionary Density Increase for Public Benefits. This action suggests by-law amendments that would allow an additional 10 percent discretionary density increase in the Downtown and Central Broadway areas without a rezoning that could be used to fund additional public amenities such as community centres, parks, affordable housing, libraries, social facilities and others. With this action, City staff will examine issues of site compatibility and potential, compatibility with the City’s heritage density transfer program and density bank, ability to achieve green performance goals, and the need for a Vancouver Charter amendment.

C-9 Removal of Barriers to Green Building Approaches. As part of the effort to move towards carbon neutral new construction, requirements for green building practices need to be matched with removing barriers and disincentives to green building in existing zoning and development controls. Allowances for additional mechanical space (e.g. for hydronic heating and cooling systems); expanded building envelope for greater insulation; encroachments for external shading devices; extra height to access green roofs; external walkways, hallways and stairs for natural ventilation; exemptions for larger balconies for improved energy performance and occupant comfort; and additional financial considerations could be considered through this action.

C-10 Priority to Applications with Green Leadership (Green Means Go). As a key incentive for projects that meet the sustainability goals of EcoDensity, green projects of the highest standard will join heritage and social housing projects to qualify for ‘front-of-the-line’ status in staff review. Through this action, City staff will consider a range of issues, including: level of green aspiration, method of ensuring follow-through, balance with other City priorities, impact on all other public and private priorities, and method of periodic review.

C-11 Accountability for EcoDensity Follow-Through. This final action is geared to ensuring the EcoDensity commitments are properly implemented over time. This action has two major components: investigating and developing tools to measure our progress on Vancouver’s carbon and ecological footprint, and the formation of a limited-term EcoDensity ‘Think Tank’ charged with advising the City on EcoDensity implementation and publishing an ‘arms-length’ EcoDensity Progress Report Card.