

**Principles & Goals  
for  
Collaborative Neighbourhood-based Planning  
in the City of Vancouver**

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**Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods**

**APRIL 7, 2014**

# Mission of the Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods

The mission of the Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods is to restore and strengthen the primary role of neighbourhood-based planning<sup>1</sup> in shaping land use and development in the City of Vancouver.

Neighbourhood-based planning founded on meaningful community involvement in decision making is essential to Vancouver's future as a livable city of neighbourhoods.

## Building on Vancouver's Tradition of Neighbourhood-based Planning

Vancouver has a history of meaningful community involvement in land-use planning and decision making, including precedent-setting neighbourhood-based planning processes such as CityPlan. Many neighbourhood plans<sup>2</sup> were developed through a genuinely collaborative planning process. This document builds on this history.

## The Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is twofold:

- To establish principles and goals for neighbourhood-based planning that will ensure a truly collaborative partnership that works for all of us, as exemplified in models such as CityPlan.
- To form the basis for discussion and endorsement by individual candidates and parties in the run-up to the November 2014 Vancouver civic election.

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<sup>1</sup> By neighbourhood-based planning we mean the development of local neighbourhood plans and land-use decision making based on a genuinely collaborative partnership among the City, community residents, local businesses, and other agreed-upon stakeholders. Neighbourhood boundaries, for planning purposes, should be agreed upon by the communities affected, through a collaborative partnership between the City and the neighbourhood.

<sup>2</sup> The general term *neighbourhood plan* is used in this document to refer to local Community Plans, Local Area Plans, Design Guidelines, and CityPlan Community Visions.

# Planning Principles and Goals

## 1. Collaborative partnership with residents and communities

The primary basis for community involvement in neighbourhood-based planning and decision making is the local knowledge and physical, social, cultural, and financial contributions and investments of area residents and local businesses<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, at all stages of neighbourhood-based planning, from problem definition through to implementation, planning must involve a collaborative partnership among the City<sup>4</sup>, its residents, and local businesses, and may include, at some stages, other agreed-upon stakeholders<sup>5</sup>.

The local planning process must include the following goals:

- Strive for solutions that work for everyone
- Be neighbourhood-based
- Respect existing neighbourhood plans that have been created in genuine collaboration with communities
- Work closely with local residents, neighbourhood associations, and other community groups
- Give most weight to the views of local residents in matters that impact the liveability of their neighbourhoods and especially of those in closest proximity to the impacts of decisions
- As part of the approval process for any neighbourhood plan, or for other significant planning decisions where consensus cannot be reached, develop a decision-making strategy to be determined by the collaborative partnership, such as:
  - a full household survey<sup>6</sup>, with survey questions and survey area boundaries developed in partnership with community residents, or
  - neighbourhood planning meetings, using voting as a means of reaching decisions, with attendance at an agreed-upon number of meetings required for voting privileges, or
  - a combination of the two, or
  - some other decision-making strategy to be determined by the collaborative partnership

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<sup>3</sup> The term *local businesses* is intended to include business owners, business operators, proprietors, owners of rental dwellings, and owners of leased commercial properties.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this document, *the City* refers to both elected officials and staff.

<sup>5</sup> Other agreed-upon stakeholders might include, as appropriate, schools, places of worship, social service providers, non-profit organizations, or developers. CityPlan Terms of Reference state that the participation of special interest representatives from outside the community will be limited to providing information or ideas through materials prepared by staff or participating on an invited basis. Such an approach is also recommended here. However, in order to strike an appropriate balance between neighbourhood rights and responsibilities, in certain situations such as responding to proposals designed to accommodate special needs populations, it is important to include representatives of those special needs groups in the collaborative partnership.

<sup>6</sup> CityPlan provides a useful example of such a practice in the form of Community Vision Choices Surveys.

- Require that planning staff recommend to Council the approval of the option selected by community residents through a decision-making strategy determined by the collaborative partnership.
- Re-evaluate, through a decision-making process determined by the collaborative partnership, any plans, significant planning policies, or rezonings previously approved without demonstrated community support or approval,

## **2. Accountability to residents and communities**

Vancouver’s planning process shall be accountable first and foremost to its residents and must include the following goals:

- Act in the best interests of residents and communities, as defined by the local community
- Respect residents and their views as a central component of decision making.

## **3. Transparency of the planning process**

In order to facilitate transparency, a goal of the planning process must be to ensure that all pertinent information is readily available to all concerned. To this end, the planning process must:

- Be based on applicable factual information and data, including evidence-based research, that is clearly demonstrable to residents
- Include detailed data and analysis on current population demographics, growth projections, zoning, and existing zoned capacity
- Include detailed and accurate information on projected and actual impacts of major development projects and other significant planning decisions or policy changes
- Ensure that information provided to the public is timely, accurate, detailed, and complete
- Ensure open access to detailed land-use planning data and financial and budget information
- Provide comprehensive and appropriate notification, in a timely and accessible manner, to individuals and groups affected by planning decisions.

## **4. Vancouver as community, not commodity**

The City must remain a vibrant, prosperous, and liveable city of neighbourhoods that values and encourages the diversity and character of its local communities. To this end, the planning process must include the following goals:

- Place the public interest of communities and residents above developers’ profits in planning, development, and policy
- Develop and enforce mechanisms to ensure that new developments are occupied rather than remaining vacant.

## 5. A Liveable, Sustainable City

The Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods takes the view that certain basic principles and goals should apply city-wide in order to facilitate a vibrant, successful city that results in the well-being of its citizens now and in the future. These city-wide principles and goals, including efforts to increase liveability<sup>7</sup>, sustainability,<sup>8</sup> and affordability<sup>9</sup>, should be considered, and terms defined, through collaborative partnerships between the City and neighbourhoods. A key way in which cities maintain and improve liveability and sustainability is through planning and regulation of land uses. Meaningful community involvement and influence in land-use planning is essential for ensuring the future liveability and sustainability of Vancouver and its neighbourhoods.

City-wide principles and goals will inform neighbourhood-based planning; however, their interpretation and implementation at the neighbourhood level will be the right and the responsibility of neighbourhood-based collaborative partnerships. Under no circumstances should the specific interpretation and implementation of these city-wide principles and goals be imposed on neighbourhoods against their will. Methods outlined in *1. Collaborative partnership with residents and communities* must be employed to determine the will of the community in the interpretation and implementation of these principles and goals.

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<sup>7</sup> Liveability is best defined at the community level and may include such goals as retention of neighbourhood character and scale; retention and addition of trees and green space; minimization of shadowing, view obstruction, air and noise pollution; and access to quality schools, daycare centres, and other family-oriented social amenities.

<sup>8</sup> A classic definition of sustainability, provided in the 1987 United Nations Brundtland Commission report, is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A commonly used concept of sustainability includes environmental sustainability, social sustainability or equity, and economic sustainability. However, definitions of sustainability and its implementation at the neighbourhood level must be determined through a collaborative partnership at the local level.

<sup>9</sup> Housing affordability is a goal that is part of both liveability and sustainability. The term affordability is a complex and relative one. Its interpretation and implementation must be determined at the neighbourhood level through local collaborative partnerships. For example, affordable housing in some neighbourhoods may primarily take the form of retention of affordable housing options such as rental suites in existing buildings, cooperative housing, or existing low-income housing developments.