

# EcoDensity

## VANCOUVER ECODENSITY CHARTER



How Density, Design, and Land Use Will Contribute to Environmental Sustainability, Affordability, and Livability

Adopted by City Council: June 10, 2008

# CONTENTS

PREAMBLE, FACTS, BELIEFS 1

## CHARTER COMMITMENTS

- I. An Over-Arching Environmental Priority 4
- II. Toward an Eco-City 4
- III. A Greener, Denser City Pattern 4
- IV. More Housing Affordability, Types, and Choices 5
- V. Greener and Livable Design with a “Sense of Place” 6
- VI. Greener and Livable Support Systems 6
- VII. Neighbourhood Voice, Neighbourhood Responsibility 7
- VIII. How will the City use this Charter? 7

# PREAMBLE

## PAST COMMITMENTS

### VANCOUVER'S MISSION STATEMENT:

*“To create a great city of communities which 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.”*



THIS ECODENSITY CHARTER builds on these past commitments. It challenges all of us to address change more proactively, and adapt our city and our way of life so that Vancouver's future is more sustainable, affordable and livable.

We must change how we live as a city and region, and as communities and neighbourhoods, households, and individuals. We know that greater change must start now, but the “what, where, when and how fast” of change continues to be determined. The city-wide discourse that generated this Charter, and which will convert it into action, needs to continue.

This document represents a commitment statement of the City of Vancouver – a Charter between the City and its citizens, both current and future.



# THE FACTS

1. Vancouver is one of the most livable cities in the world. It has been planned and developed to respect and reflect the natural beauty that surrounds it, with a high level of design, public amenities and services.
2. Important steps have been taken over many years, through *CityPlan*, Community Visions, and many incremental decisions, to achieve a city of livable, diverse neighbourhoods and compact, mixed-use, walkable communities for people. These steps and intentions must be built on and respected as we move forward to do more.
3. Vancouver's future is at risk. Climate change, environmental stress, resource depletion, food security challenges and rising costs of living are seriously threatening Vancouver's environment, economy, livability and long-term sustainability.
4. Vancouver City Council has set numerous goals related to climate change<sup>1</sup> and addressing the city's greenhouse gas emissions. Meeting these requires rapid and deep action.
5. The region's population continues to grow. If new, diverse homes are not built in our city, Vancouver's already expensive housing will only get more unaffordable while sprawl is pushed out elsewhere, impacting natural resources and agricultural lands.
6. Vancouver is the region's downtown, providing employment to a broad range of households and household incomes. Housing should be available in the city that is affordable to those who work in it.
7. Vancouver's ecological and carbon footprints indicate that we are consuming too many resources and emitting too much greenhouse gas to sustain our lifestyles.<sup>2</sup> Despite our successes in building a livable city, Vancouver is contributing to climate change and is not as sustainable a city as it could be.
8. Our city's footprints are powerfully determined and influenced by our patterns of density, design and land use. Together, building and transportation energy alone make up 87 per cent of our emissions.<sup>3</sup>
9. A well-designed, compact city is an efficient, sustainable and vibrant city. A denser city uses less energy, provides easier access, promotes public health, and is more affordable than a less dense city.
10. The need for deeper and more rapid change has become clear as our achievements are being outpaced by accelerating environmental, affordability and quality-of-life threats.

---

<sup>1</sup> Including: 6% reduction in greenhouse gases (GHGs) below 1990 levels by 2012; 33% reduction in GHGs below current levels by 2020; 80% reduction in GHGs below current levels by 2050; all new construction in Vancouver to be GHG neutral by 2030. Source: City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 7.71 hectares of land per person is necessary to produce the goods and energy that the average Vancouver resident consumes. This equates to 4 planets' worth of resources if the whole world lived like Vancouver. The average resident also produces 4.9 tonnes of greenhouse gases. Sources: FCM, Ecological Footprints of Canadian Municipalities and Regions, 2001; City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Total of buildings and light- and heavy-duty vehicles combined. Source: City of Vancouver, Climate Protection Progress Report, 2007.



## BECAUSE THE CITY OF VANCOUVER BELIEVES THAT...

- A. Climate change represents the most significant environmental, economic, social, livability and quality-of-life threat to the city's future, and more significant action to mitigate and prepare for it must begin today.
- B. The pace at which we move to climate stabilization, and achieve a more resilient, prepared city, is critical for Vancouver's future social, cultural, and economic sustainability.
- C. At the same time, the city's affordability and continued livability must be fostered in order for us to progress successfully, resiliently and sustainably.
- D. We need to do more, for ourselves and future generations, and as an influential model within the region and to other North American cities, as our contribution to growing efforts around the globe.
- E. We have the opportunity to manage change, to choose and design our future in the face of these threats, to create a more ecologically sustainable, affordable, and livable city of neighbourhoods.

# CHARTER COMMITMENTS

## THE CITY OF VANCOUVER THEREFORE COMMITS TO:

### I.

#### AN OVER-ARCHING ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY

- a. Make environmental sustainability a primary goal in ALL city-building decisions – in ways that also foster and support affordability and livability.
- b. Promote strategic, well-managed density, design and land use as primary tools in achieving this goal, in all city-building decisions.

### II.

#### TOWARD AN ECO-CITY

- a. 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 and parking
  - green energy and waste systems
  - affordable housing choices for all
  - parks, public realm and recreation
  - arts, culture and creativity
  - heritage conservation
  - public and individual health
  - vitality and public safety
  - urban agriculture and local food access
  - social planning and development
  - economic development opportunities
  - and many other related City initiatives.

### III.

#### A GREENER, DENSER CITY PATTERN

- a. Achieve greater densities smartly and strategically in land-use patterns, locations and designs where carbon footprint improvements and environmental gains are highest (e.g., around fixed transit; walkable shopping, employment and amenity areas; district energy sources), and where affordability and livability are also fostered.
- b. Promote “gentle” (e.g., rowhouses, infill), “hidden” (e.g., laneway housing) or “invisible” (e.g., secondary suites) forms of density in suitable locations across the city with design that respects neighbourhood identity and sense of place.



- c. Densify and manage change in ways that constantly enhance and reinforce a city of walkable, complete neighbourhoods; improve biking and transit infrastructure and movement meaningfully and consistently over time; and reduce and de-emphasize automobile use and ownership.
- d. 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.

## IV.

### MORE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, TYPES, AND CHOICES

- a. Use density, design and land use strategically to support and facilitate greater housing affordability and diversity, in partnership with all government levels, through:
  - an increased and consistent supply to help moderate housing prices
  - the significant achievement of more affordable housing choices (sizes, types, finishes, locations and tenures) throughout the city and in every neighbourhood, including more affordable options for households with children, seniors, empty-nesters, singles, students and workforce
  - the facilitation of purpose-built rental housing construction
  - the facilitation of housing choices outside of the regular market system (such as co-operative housing)
  - the reduction of living costs related to energy and transportation.
- b. 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.



# CHARTER COMMITMENTS

## THE CITY OF VANCOUVER THEREFORE COMMITS TO:

### V.

#### GREENER AND LIVABLE DESIGN WITH A “SENSE OF PLACE”

- a. 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.
- b. Design new density to achieve both sustainable, timeless design, and respect for authentic neighbourhood values, context, character and identity at all scales.
- c. Combine heritage conservation and the sustainability inherent in retention/reuse of existing structures and materials with more dense, efficient, sustainable design and technology.
- d. Design sites and buildings, wherever possible, to consider microclimates, replicate natural systems and functions (e.g., evaporation and infiltration of water) and minimize waste.
- e. 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.
- f. 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.
- g. Design city and neighbourhood patterns to enhance urban food production, access to local food, and waste reuse and recycling.

### VI.

#### GREENER AND LIVABLE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- a. Ensure that 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.
- b. Advance and achieve sustainable district energy systems at all scales, and particularly at mid and higher densities that make such systems more feasible.



## VII.

### NEIGHBOURHOOD VOICE, NEIGHBOURHOOD RESPONSIBILITY

- a. These commitments will be achieved with traditional and creative new approaches to consultation, education (in all directions), engagement and dialogue with all voices, while anticipating the needs of future or unrepresented voices.
- b. This requires a balance between the need for City leadership, and respect for neighbourhood-level influence, capacity-building and ownership.
- c. We will respect and foster the voice of neighbourhoods, and their special values, aspirations and approaches.
- d. 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.



## VIII.

### HOW WILL THE CITY USE THIS CHARTER AND MEET OUR COMMITMENTS?

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. Where an existing policy, plan, standard or rule (hereafter referred to as “direction”) 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.
- d. 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.
- e. 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.

f. 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.

g. 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.

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

i. 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.





453 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
Canada V5Y 1V4  
[vancouver.ca/ecodensity](http://vancouver.ca/ecodensity)

Printed on 100% post-consumer stock.