

MEMORANDUM

July 8, 2010

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Penny Ballem, City Manager
Sadhu Johnston, Deputy City Manager
Marg Coulsen, City Clerk
Wendy Stewart, Acting Director of Corporate Communications
David McLellan, General Manager, Community Services
Rob Jenkins, Assistant Director of Planning - Central Area
Jill Davidson, Assistant Director of Housing Policy
Michael Gordon, Senior Planner - Central Area Planning
Edna Cho, Housing Policy Planner

FROM: Brent Toderian, Director of Planning
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SUBJECT: West End Community Engagement - Community Needs and Affordable Housing

This memo provides information to Council on the background elements and feedback collected during the West End community engagement process which staff undertook at the direction of Council in May 2010.

I. Key Activities in the West End Community Engagement

1. **A New Web Site** (www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/westend) went online on May 05 to provide information materials on the West End neighbourhood, City programmes and initiatives and other relevant information pertinent to community needs and affordable housing. Information on zoning and guidelines for the West End is also provided;
2. **Two Community Meetings** (May 12 and 13, 2010) with the same format and agenda were held, one in the morning and one in the early evening;
 - a. The meetings were advertised several times in the local community newspapers and on the web site. In addition, posters with information about the meetings, contact information and notice of the online community survey were posted in community facilities, cafés and retail stores;

- b. At the meetings, staff gave presentations focusing on community needs and affordable housing followed by presentations by four community groups (West End Seniors Network, West End Residents Association, West End Neighbours and the Tenants Resource and Advisory Centre);
 - c. At each meeting comments were received from the floor verbally and as well as written comments or questions; and
3. **A Community Survey** was distributed to those attending the meetings and it was also available on-line from May 12 to May 21, 2010.
4. **Presentations by City Staff at the Community Meetings:**
- a. Community Needs - highlighted population growth since 1971, development trends, existing community facilities and amenities and how they are financed.
 - b. Affordable Housing - included a focus on rental housing, and described City initiatives for different parts of the housing continuum:
 - Very little new purpose-built rental housing constructed since the 1980s
 - Low vacancy rates in the City (average 0.9% over the last 30 years); the current vacancy rate in the Downtown/Westend is 0.9%
 - New rental supply is essential to addressing affordability
 - Rate of change regulations have been effective in the West End in preserving the existing rental stock
5. **Presentations by Community Groups at the Community Meetings:**
- a. West End Seniors Network. Their membership is concerned with: being evicted from rental housing; the affordability of housing due to fixed incomes; and the mix of frail seniors and individuals with mental illness and substance abuse issues in affordable housing projects.
 - b. West End Residents Association. Their membership is concerned with and has worked on: community gardens; art projects; the 'renters at risk' campaign; homelessness; supportive housing; the affordability of new market rental housing; and advocacy regarding the homelessness action plan. The group is also interested in sustainability issues; transportation planning; diversity and immigration; and the aging of society.
 - c. West End Neighbours. Their membership is concerned with the scale, density and character of new buildings being proposed in the West End. The group has concerns about the STIR program and feels that no rezonings should be considered until a comprehensive plan has been prepared for the neighbourhood. The group perceives that the proposed rezonings are being brought forward and considered too quickly and more time needs to be taken to understand implications.
 - d. Tenants Resource and Advisory Centre. TRAC is concerned with the affordability challenges that are faced by renters in the West End. This group supports the rental housing being proposed in the STIR projects and also supports the need for more consultation in the West End to address the concerns of the community.

II. Feedback Collected at the West End Community Engagement

1. Volume of Feedback Collected

Approximately 250 people attended two meetings on May 12 and 13, 2010, and 95 verbal and written contributions to the discussion were recorded at the meetings. In addition to the comments received at the meetings, 600 surveys were completed, generating 1,912 individual comments on issues of interest to the community either on the distributed surveys or on-line (92 hard copy and 508 online). A 280 page report containing a summary of discussions at the meetings and the detailed community survey results, including a complete list of all the comments provided in the surveys, will be available on-line (<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/westend/>) within the next 24 hours. This comprehensive report on the input collected from the West End community will also be on file in the City Clerks office.

2. Summary of Key Messages Identified at the Meetings and in the Survey:

a. Priorities Identified in the Survey

Question 1 of the survey asked respondents to indicate, on a “not important” to “very important” scale, a number of issues and concerns relating to the West End community. In rank order by the percentage of people who selected “very important”, the areas of greatest importance are:

- Neighbourhood character 69%
- Parks and green space 67%
- Housing 60%
- Sustainability 56%
- Crime and safety 55%
- Transportation 45%

Approximately 590 people responded to Question 1.

b. Key Messages with Respect to Community Needs

- Neighbourhood character and green space is important.
- Increased density will increase pressure on already stretched community infrastructure and services.
- Recent tower developments don't appear to fit in the context of the West End's unique neighbourhood character.

c. Key Messages with Respect to Affordable Housing

- There are growing affordability challenges for renters, and concerns with the ability of STIR projects to alleviate this problem.
- There is a lack of options or support for the elderly who are living on fixed incomes and cannot afford further increases in rent.
- Respondents supported increased density and the City's efforts to encourage purpose-built rental housing, but the majority of respondents also expressed fears about the tower height, loss of sunlight, green space, and affordability.
- The speed at which the Short-Term Incentives for Rental (STIR) developments are proceeding and the lack of consultation with the community is a concern.

d. Key Messages with Respect to Planning Issues

- There should not be any further site specific rezonings until a comprehensive community plan is developed.
- The public should be more involved in the planning process.