

2018 IDA DOWNTOWN ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS — ENTRY SUMMARY (PLANNING CATEGORY)

“ *The changes proposed for Northeast False Creek are a transformative step in accomplishing the vision that we saw emerge from Re-Imagine Downtown Vancouver. It will promote livability and sustainability and help to make this community one of the best in the world in which to live, work, play and learn. It will accelerate the City’s 2040 Transportation Plan initiatives to increase mode share, in particular, for cycling and walking — which are so important to a vibrant and healthy downtown. It’s the next evolution in making downtown more easily accessible by all modes of transportation.* ”

- Charles Gauthier, President and CEO of Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association.

INTRODUCTION

The Northeast False Creek Plan is an innovative and comprehensive plan to replace the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts (2.6 km of elevated freeway infrastructure) with a new mixed-use waterfront community. Today, Northeast False Creek sits on 10% of the downtown peninsula and is a complex pattern of mostly brownfield lands along one kilometre of downtown Vancouver’s False Creek waterfront. These lands are owned by the Province, various private landowners and the City of Vancouver. As a result of intensive collaboration between the landowners, senior levels of government and the community over an 18-month planning process, a 20 year plan for the buildout of Northeast False Creek was approved by Vancouver City Council on February 13, 2018.

INNOVATION

The plan provides an opportunity to reconnect through reconciliation and cultural redress, replacing the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts with strong cultural, social and physical linkages. The Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen relations with Vancouver’s local First Nations and Urban Indigenous peoples by meaningfully engaging and integrating input and feedback into the street and park designs. It also creates an opportunity to advance cultural redress with adjacent Chinatown and the former Black Community of Hogan’s Alley. Significant engagement was undertaken during the planning process to develop principles for design, including community-based co-design of the Hogan’s Alley Block.

The plan puts in place evolved principles for a unique place and new building typology in Vancouver. The typology focuses public life on the ground plane, emphasizing publicly accessible uses and amenities at-grade while designing the buildings to frame public views, terrace down toward the water and bring vertical and horizontal green up onto the buildings, creating habitat to enhance sustainability and local climate modification and blurring the line between inside/outside and built/natural.

The Great Street design principles are fundamental to creating successful places for people, one of the goals of the City’s Transportation 2040 plan. The new street design will replace elevated freeway infrastructure that bisects and bypasses adjacent neighbourhoods, with a new network that is designed for connecting people and places. The new Pacific Boulevard is designed to accommodate 100% of existing traffic and goods movement, and improve access for all other modes, including provision for a future streetcar. At the same time, over half of the overall street width is dedicated to the edges for grand street trees that will form a green canopy above, protected cycling facilities and comfortable walkways and patios. Georgia Street, Vancouver’s ceremonial street, will extend down to the water’s edge, reconnecting the downtown to the waterfront and form a critical post-disaster emergency response route into the downtown.

REPLICATION

The policies within the plan reflect a balance between community values and City objectives. They can be applied to a range of planning scenarios and scales for new, mixed-use downtown communities. Additionally, many elements such as specific policies, principles or strategies can be used in other jurisdictions to achieve similar objectives. For example, the principles for a “Great Street” could be applied to other street designs, where cities are seeking to replace elevated infrastructure and create welcoming, accessible, people-friendly streets that promote inclusive public life, are resilient, and integrate critical infrastructure into the design.

The plan is unique in having a defined and fully costed \$1.7B (CAD) Public Benefits Strategy, which provides direction for the public benefits that each future development will contribute. These amenities ensure communities are livable, healthy and sustainable as they continue to grow and evolve. Community facilities, childcare, parks and open spaces, affordable housing, civic facilities, transportation and utilities are all secured through the Public Benefits Strategy.

REPRESENTATION

An extensive, collaborative and multi-phased process utilized a wide range of public engagement and consultation techniques reaching out to over 17,500 people at more than 95 events. The planning process included monthly meetings with a Stewardship Group that was appointed by City Council at the onset of the planning process to steward Council's guiding principles. The engagement was broad, inclusive and community-based. Dynamic events included two, week-long pop-up storefronts in the winter months and multiple outdoor street parties with community programming during warmer months. The process was co-designed with the Stewardship Group and intended to activate underutilized areas through purposefully designed pop-up events and activities that hosted food-trucks, an interactive LEGO tent, pop-up shipping container bar, community and cultural programming and live DJs to create a fun place for all-ages.

SUSTAINABILITY

Northeast False Creek Plan advances the City of Vancouver's goal to become the world's Greenest City. In addition to the foundational reconciliation and cultural redress components of the plan, it also advances social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability in several ways, such as:

- Deepening housing affordability, with over 1,800 new social housing homes for approximately 3,300 people.
- Enhancing community well-being by ensuring that community facilities help to create a welcoming and accessible community for people of all ages and abilities.
- Achieving the overall job space objectives that support regional economic performance as part of Vancouver's Central Business District, through an additional 1.8M square feet of job space.
- Enhanced directions for environmental sustainability with fresh initiatives that go beyond city-wide goals and targets, including a new standard for sea level rise resiliency, an expanded district energy system, high performance building envelopes, as well as a low carbon source of heat and cooling.
- Additional travel mode choices to reduce car trips including a fine-grain pedestrian network, convenient bike facilities and well-integrated transit connections between two major rapid transit stations.

EXECUTION

The planning process focused on four distinct phases and launched in September 2016, each phase transitioning to the next with further refinement and broad community check-ins. Phase One was a 5-month process that collected high level ideas, interests and opportunities and developed emerging directions for the plan. Phase Two was a 4-month process that collected input on the emerging directions to develop an early draft of the plan, including draft policies for each chapter. In Phase Three, the early draft of the plan was refined based on the input received over a period of 6 months. The final phase asked for input on a refined version of the plan, and refinements were made before the final plan was presented to Council. Landowners and their design teams also participated in the community engagement to maximize transparency.

OUTCOME

What started off as an infrastructure project to replace elevated freeways became a transformative planning process about people, reconciliation, cultural redress and reconnecting communities. It represents a step forward in city-building while advancing principles of livability, accessibility, enjoyment and inclusivity.

“ *The plan to remove the viaducts and deliver a new neighbourhood in Northeast False Creek is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct historic injustices and build a more inclusive city. This is a transformative project for the last remaining waterfront in Vancouver's downtown.* ”

- Mayor Gregor Robertson
