

Report on Urban Design Panel Response to City Planner Presentation of Norquay Village Planning on 22 Sept 2010

Summary and Conclusions

The short answer of the Urban Design Panel to Director of Planning Brent Toderian's overarching question about whether Norquay planning amounts to "great place-making" was: *Not there yet*. We in Norquay say that the future of ten thousand residents and between one and two square kilometers of Vancouver should not be forced to a hasty conclusion when the planning is *not there yet*.

Even after the extensive time and effort that city planners have devoted to Norquay (with two separate restarts), the Urban Design Panel has reacted to their current version of the plan with many of the same concerns and criticisms that have continued to come from Norquay residents. To highlight a few in our own words:

- A neighbourhood centre must have a single heart. It cannot be an elongated 1.35 km strip of Kingsway.
- Human scale along Kingsway means four-storey buildings, perhaps going up to six to achieve significant additional sidewalk space. Anything beyond six storeys is not human scale and requires careful justification and significant mitigation.
- The central 2400 Motel site must encompass an inviting public space. Cramping as many buildings as possible into the area and making them as tall as possible is not appropriate.
- A substantial performing arts facility would be an appropriate public feature for the neighbourhood centre.
- There is too much orientation to the automobile, and parking and traffic impacts have not been adequately addressed (as required by the community vision).
- Of the potential new housing forms, fee-simple traditional rowhouse is most favored by the community and should be more than a token part of the mix.
- The social character of the existing and projected community needs proper assessment.
- Adequacy of public transit cannot be just a vague assumption.
- The interconnectivity demanded by pedestrian and bicycle traffic has not received due consideration.
- Accounting for affordability needs to go beyond assertion of the desirability of creating new dwelling units that will market for \$300,000 to \$650,000 while older rental spaces are eliminated.

Planners invoke a new urbanism that says resident involvement is essential. Since July 2009 the Norquay Working Group has been cut out of the planning process. What we said before then (and since) has not been listened to. The Urban Design Panel review supports many of our contentions.

The Event

Vancouver city planners (Brent Toderian, Neal LaMontagne, Paul Cheng) presented their planning for Norquay Village Neighbourhood Centre to the Urban Design Panel on 22 September 2010. [The posted agenda](#) described the session as a workshop, which went on for approximately three hours. Two Norquay residents (Larry and Xin Xin Deschner) observed and took notes on the entire workshop.

What the Planners Asked

Two primary goals were stated at the outset: To obtain panel opinion on (a) proposed new housing types (b) measures to revitalize Kingsway. More specifically, the project planner posed these five questions:

- Whether the overall plan was too conservative or proposed too much change
- Whether locating the neighbourhood centre at the 2400 Motel site is a good idea
- Whether or not the transition planning between Kingsway and surrounding residential neighbourhoods is too aggressive
- Whether the transition planning promotes livability and affordability
- Whether the new housing types will adversely affect the character of the neighbourhood

In addition, Director of Planning Brent Toderian on several occasions posed this separate overarching question:

- Does this Neighbourhood Centre planning make for great “place-making”? [The final time with a caution that observers were present]

The Presentation

The panel sat around a conference table and observers sat at the end of the room. Adding to the difficulties of note-taking were limitations on being able to see and hear. In any event, what was presented seemed little changed from [what was shown to the public at the June 2010 open houses](#). There appear to be two instances where city planners now seek a density that goes beyond what has been communicated to the Norquay community already:

- If the City can acquire the Church’s Chicken location just east of the 2400 Motel site, they would like to add a third tower to the site.
- Stacked townhouses: More parking spaces (up to five) are envisioned for a single lot.

Selected Comments from the Urban Design Panel

Many points were made by more than one speaker. There is some grouping by theme.

- Paul Cheng was commended for the quality of his presentation.
- Interconnections should have been made more evident, and a 3-D model would have helped. Sectional perspective is needed for Kingsway addressing traffic, sunlight, noise, and pedestrians.
- Buildings along Kingsway should respect human scale, and the definite maximum for human scale is six storeys. Lower building types suit Vancouver. Podium and tower does not have a future. Heights up to 10 or 12 stories not essential. Ground-oriented housing is appropriate. The “visibility” offered by street-oriented development is an economic driver.
- Elongation of the neighbourhood centre along Kingsway does not work.
- The plans for the 2400 Motel site are ill-defined (one commenter mentioned that present sketches resemble a large hospital). Much more work is required on this. Podium and tower is not appropriate for a neighbourhood centre.
- The Kingsway–Nanaimo–East 33rd Ave area should have been planned as a unit. The prime location is the 2300 Kingsway site. The opportunity is lost (the Kingsway-Nanaimo corner was rezoned in 2006 and an unintegrated development is underway.)
- There is not enough planning for recreational activity (art space, movie theatre, etc.) More attractions are needed to make the area a “place” that draws pedestrians.
- Retail space needs to be planned. A grocery anchor is key.
- A significant performing arts facility would be appropriate for the neighbourhood centre. [Planner Response: This is planned at City not neighbourhood level.]
- A profile of who would want to live in the area is needed; the market does not follow the planner. [Planner Response: City makes policy and does not regard market.]
- Creation and preservation of employment opportunities within the community (industry, commercial, office) need more attention.
- The planning is too oriented to the automobile and needs to take better account of parking (permitting existing street spaces, reducing allowance for parking automobiles in new development, etc.).
- Pedestrian and bicycle transportation have not received due consideration. Bike paths are needed on Kingsway.
- Among new housing types, the balance of allocation to rowhousing is not sufficient.
- Assessment is needed of what additional ridership public transit can accommodate.
- 2400 needs a central plaza. “Tangible space is necessary.” The current proposal shows three public spaces, which results in no heart for the community. New York style pocket parks would be appropriate outside of the central site.
- Norquay Park should be a focal point.

- Character and qualities of Kingsway (rusty, industrial, etc.) need to be respected. “Kingsway, after all, is Kingsway – it is not Paris.” Different from, for example, Broadway. Vancouver is becoming too homogeneous with podium and tower.
- Planning should incorporate variety, intimacy, and materiality (quality building materials).
- The transition zone between Kingsway and the surrounding neighbourhood offers potential for district energy systems for geothermal heating.

Based on the observations and notes of Larry and Xin Xin Deschner; reviewed and written up by Joseph and Jeanette Jones

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