



# COALITION OF VANCOUVER NEIGHBOURHOODS

<http://coalitionvan.org>

August 8, 2016

OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR AND COUNCIL

## **Re: Grandview-Woodland Community Plan**

On June 27, City Council abruptly passed a very flawed Grandview-Woodland (GW) Community Plan. It is a plan that purports to set 'the foundation for the community for the next 30 years'. Five years in the making, the final plan reflected primarily the priorities of city staff and council, ignoring many of the recommendations from the City's orchestrated community engagement process and including a great many policies to which a significant portion of the community object. We, the Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods (CVN), find ample reason for concern around its recent passage.

One might question, "Why did this process take so long?" About five years ago, the community and the City planning staff, including the City's Urban Design Studio (UDS), began working on developing a framework for the future of Grandview-Woodland. In time, together they formulated a plan about which both sides were fairly optimistic, one that would accommodate both change and increased densities.

Then came the sudden and now infamous turn-around by the City, where senior officials decided the community really 'needed' a massive increase in density, to come in the form of a multitude of towers across GW. The UDS did not support this imposition of towers by the City, nor the City's tactics. Yet senior staff determinedly moved ahead with the revised proposal. The community so strongly opposed these unilateral changes that the City was forced to reconsider its options, and this unfortunate episode created an atmosphere of mistrust in the community. Trust is difficult to build, and even more difficult to rebuild once destroyed.

Out of this environment of anger and mistrust came the birth of the Citizen's Assembly (CA) - again, an initiative completely formulated by the City and imposed upon the community. Despite the fact that many GW residents felt that the CA process was unfair and/or inappropriate, well-intentioned citizens worked diligently to formulate a plan within the strictures of this arrangement.

The final CA report reflected a great deal of hard work but unfortunately left many areas open to broad interpretation. Despite the City's commitment to giving residents a significant voice in the final plan, staff and Council overrode some of the most substantive recommendations in the CA report, including specific limits to height of new developments.

Following the completion of the Citizen's Assembly report, the City went through a year-long, non-transparent review process, ultimately releasing a substantially revised Draft Plan for Grandview-Woodland. The public was given just four weeks in July to review this 252-page Draft Plan and only six days to review the Final Plan. This unexpectedly short timeframe for review clearly did not provide adequate opportunity for public feedback, let alone time for staff to give meaningful consideration to that feedback prior to Council's deliberation on the Plan. It also signaled a de-valuing of community input and flies in the face of the Mayor's pre-election promise to 'do a better job' of consulting with

communities.

The new Plan that Council approved will bring enormous changes to Grandview-Woodland, entailing a radical departure from existing zoning and neighbourhood character guidelines. There is nothing 'gentle' about the planned densification.

Vancouver and Metro reports and data (e.g. the City's Coriolis Report of June 2014) show that there is enough existing city-wide zoned capacity to meet future growth projections in the Regional Growth Strategy over the next 20 to 30 years, and that current new housing builds and approvals far exceed projected housing needs for Vancouver (see CoV Information Bulletin, 7/22/16).

Clearly there is no justifiable need for such extreme increased density in GW. Worse, the proposed changes place at risk the large number of existing lower-rise affordable rentals, co-ops, and social housing buildings. A primary concern is that, given what has consistently occurred in other neighbourhoods, new units will be smaller and more expensive than existing units. 'Affordability' as a justification for up-zoning and extreme densification is simply unsupportable in today's reality.

We have expressed our concerns relating to the flawed planning process above. We would also cite the following examples of results in the Plan that are a product of that faulty process, whose adoption clearly run counter to resident preferences:

- Explicit or permitted upzoning throughout GW will ensure that despite the Plan's stated intent, many or most existing affordable rentals and neighbourhood character will not survive. Britannia Woodland, west of Commercial Drive, is slated for new rental housing development of up to 6 storeys throughout the area. Pace-of-change policy will be in place for three years, but then the Plan directs staff to report back with the possibility to bring forward new zoning schedules to fully rezone the area to 6-storey apartments.
- The Britannia Community Services Centre has been working with site partners and the community on a re-visioning process for the centre. However, the new Britannia site has not been protected from incorporating housing of 6-storey or even higher up-zoning, despite stated resident opposition to developing housing on that site. The premature adoption of the GW Plan raises the potential for development pressures to interfere with Britannia's ongoing community engagement work.
- The City, while planning on 10,000 new residents in the GW Plan, has not called for any more green space where lack of green space is already an issue. This situation may be further exacerbated given possible changes at Britannia.
- Heritage character of the area, while mentioned often in the GW Plan, is given insufficient consideration. The Plan directs that the existing design guidelines will be replaced without concrete details as to what those changes will be. Without stronger and explicit policies, much of GW heritage and character will be lost.
- The GW Plan has taken in a key area of the Kensington-Cedar Cottage Community (KCC) Vision at Broadway and Commercial. The south side of Broadway was part of the KCC Vision planning, but is now in the GW Plan, overriding the KCC Vision without consulting that community. Such a unilateral usurping of one community's existing Vision by another's Community Plan is entirely inappropriate.
- With respect to the Kettle/Boffo decision, we are particularly concerned by the lack of

sensitivity shown by Council in passing an amendment to the Plan, allowing for the height (12 storeys) and high density (6.0FSR) originally requested by Kettle/Boffo. The final GW plan had recommended a maximum 9-storey height along Venables, and even that was in excess of resident preferences, such as expressed by both the CA and the No Tower Coalition's call for a maximum of 6 storeys. Although the developer claims that they could not make the project self-funding to cover the Kettle with anything less, there are other provincial funding programs just announced that could fill any gap.

The process of producing the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan has been long and arduous. It has been much more problematic than it would have been had the original proposal not been so badly derailed by City senior management. The concerns expressed by public hearing speakers provide clear evidence that an ongoing very flawed process has led to a faulty Plan.

While change is inevitable, the massive changes the City plans to impose on GW, against the will of many of its residents, threatens to destroy the diversity, character and relative affordability of this unique neighbourhood. A community's character is a fragile thing. Change needs to be carefully managed. This Plan does not have careful management of change at its core.

We respectfully request that Council direct staff to work in partnership with the community to address the community's concerns in the substance of the GW Plan to more firmly protect the existing character and livability of the area. CVN's own *Principles and Goals* document can provide some guidance. We remain confident in the success of collaborative relationships between neighbourhoods and the City, and the effectiveness of bringing neighbourhoods into the decision-making process. And finally, this collaborative process must be transparent and ultimately accountable to the citizens of both Grandview-Woodland and the City of Vancouver. One opportunity for such a truly collaborative process would be the coming Kettle/Boffo rezoning application.

Sincerely,

Larry A. Benge, Chair

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On behalf of the Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods

### **Member Groups of the Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods**

Arbutus Ridge Community Association  
Arbutus Ridge/ Kerrisdale/ Shaughnessy Visions  
Cedar Cottage Area Neighbours  
Chinatown Action Group  
Citygate Intertower Group  
Community Association of New Yaletown  
Crosstown Residents Association  
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council  
Dunbar Residents Association  
False Creek Residents Association  
Grandview Woodland Area Council  
Granville Burrard Residents & Business Association  
Joyce Area Residents  
Kitsilano-Arbutus Residents Association

Kits Point Residents Association  
Marpole Oakridge Community Association  
Norquay Residents  
NW Point Grey Home Owners Association  
Oakridge Langara Area Residents  
Ray-Cam  
Residents Association Mount Pleasant  
Riley Park/South Cambie Visions  
Shaughnessy Heights Property Owners Association  
Strathcona Residents Association  
Upper Kitsilano Residents Association  
West End Neighbours Society  
West Kitsilano Residents Association  
West Point Grey Residents Association