



10 June, 2008

Mayor and Council  
Vancouver City Hall  
453 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Re: EcoDensity Revised Charter and Initial Actions

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Smart Growth BC is generally pleased with the revisions to the EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions, and very pleased with the public consultation process that has resulted in this third draft. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these observations and recommendations.

## **RESULTS OF CONSULTATION**

Vancouver's extensive consultation on this subject has captured and expressed the key themes heard from the public. Community Visions do need to be respected. We suggest, however, that they are not immutable. Because they are plans and policies, they need periodic review to respond to changing conditions. The EcoDensity Charter is also a plan and policies, responding to the current needs of housing affordability and adaptation to climate change. Their implementation needs to be blended, where possible. We support the Vancouver City Planning Commission's recommendation that where there is a conflict, existing land-use regulations and by-laws may take precedence in the short term, but that the larger issues addressed by this Charter and Actions should "take precedence within a defined time frame."

While neighbourhoods should have distinct characters, each must take on its share of responsibilities for implementing city objectives.

We are pleased that the Charter has been clarified so that density is a tool of EcoDensity, and not the goal.

Smart Growth BC supports the commitment to laneway and backyard units, and to secondary suites. We support the strategy to expand C-2 districts on arterials, with housing above shops. We urge the Council to set aggressive targets and strategies for affordable market and non-market housing.

The success of False Creek North, the classic example of the Vancouver Style, is its combination of density and amenities. This must be continued in new developments. As residences become more expensive, and often smaller, their livability depends on creating attractive and loved public spaces that are provided at the same time as the development. This timing builds confidence that the public's

interest is secure. This was easier to do when there was a single developer to negotiate with. With smaller developments, that opportunity will not always exist. It may not always be appropriate or desirable for a smaller development to provide public amenities on site. For example, Smart Growth BC is working with the Vancouver City Planning Commission and local citizens to map amenities in two neighbourhoods, and identify the tangible and intangible characteristics that help make their neighbourhoods special. This pilot project will help identify what public facilities are needed to enhance livability in these communities. That is part of the extended public consultation process that is critical to success.

We welcome the strengthened expression of the connection between land use and transportation, the emphasis on walking, cycling and public transit, and the specific discouragement of automobile use and ownership. Actions and implementation mechanisms need to be more clearly expressed. We encourage Council to move quickly to disaggregate parking and housing costs.

We support the overarching commitment to reduce the energy and transportation components of living costs.

#### **A-1 Rezoning Policy for Greener Buildings.**

We support the requirement for all buildings on rezoned properties to meet green standards (initially, enhanced LEED Silver or BuiltGreen BC Gold) without receiving density bonuses for doing so, and the quick phasing to higher standards. Performance-based standards are the ones ultimately to strive for.

We recommend that the City move quickly to require at least minimum LEED or equivalent standards for all new or major remodel construction, in addition to rezoned projects, and set a schedule for raising standards over time. The typical time horizon for building changes is too long to meet the targets of reduced energy use.

#### **B-1 Historic Precinct Height Study.**

This Action is still a struggle, and this area has been the subject of much planning. We would prefer to see staff's valuable and limited time devoted to more pressing Actions that would have greater EcoDensity payoffs.

#### **C-1 An Eco CityPlan.**

It is not clear how this plan would fit with existing plans, nor whether it is appropriate to answer the question, "What exactly will the City look like in the decades to come?" By definition, the City will experience organic growth, and technological and natural changes can alter needs in a faster time scale than planning. We believe that the original EcoDensity deliverables, a high-level charter and new tools and actions, were the correct ones. The energy and amenity strategies, and future land use changes, are key components. Transportation and regional cooperation and coordination need to be given equal weight. Whether these should be layered into a new plan, at this time, with commensurate staff resources and public input, we leave to Council's discretion. We are more concerned for effective and speedy implementation of the EcoDensity Charter and its Actions.

#### **C-2 Interim EcoDensity Rezoning Policy.**

It is very clear from the Discussion of this Action that some of the most publicly popular Actions will take decades to implement under existing procedures, particularly the Housing Demonstration Policy. This Action is a modest attempt to speed things up. For the well-accepted lane housing, we would urge a more aggressive, citywide approach, such as the action Council took to approve secondary units.

**C-4 New Types of Arterial Mid-rise Buildings.**

Strong support.

**C-5 Issues and Options for Backyard/Laneway Housing.**

We recommend that the analysis for this Action be given one of the highest staff priorities. The opportunity for turning lanes into neighbourhood amenities, in conjunction with new housing, could be illustrated with photographs of the exquisite and famous lane between Pendrell and Comox streets, west of Thurlow.

**C-6 More Options for Rental Secondary Suites.**

We encourage that this Action receive a high priority for staff time.

**C-7 Public Amenity and Public Benefit Cost Recovery and Funding Tools.**

Strong support. Smart Growth BC recently published *Innovative Infrastructure Financing Mechanisms for Smart Growth*, which council and staff may find useful. It is available at

<http://smartgrowth.bc.ca/Publications/ResearchReports/tabid/155/Default.aspx>

and we will be happy to provide Council and staff with additional hard copies.

**C-9 Leftover Lots in Older Apartment Zones.**

Smart Growth BC strongly favors infill development, and this action offers an opportunity to do some innovative affordable infill housing. We encourage the City to implement this opportunity on a case-by-case basis, as well as to immediately begin developing a more comprehensive policy on parking standards, provisions for car sharing, and funding that supports walking and cycling, that would support a greater city-wide effort for infill development.

**C-11 Priority to Applications with Green Leadership ("Green Means Go")**

Very strong support for the Action and for its rapid implementation. Rewarding innovation is one of the best levers the City has to push the industry to green supply chains, technologies and practices. This Action has the potential to rapidly expand the market for green products, and thus reduce their cost. The City will have to be vigilant in its reviews, as a priority system will invite abuse. We appreciate the concerns that heritage and social housing needs would lose their current priorities. We recommend that priorities be set considering the entire package of priority needs, rather than setting one category ahead of others.

Thank you for the thoughtful weight you have given to Smart Growth BC's comments and suggestions, and to your continued meaningful and comprehensive public consultation.

Sincerely yours,



Cheeying Ho  
Executive Director