

## METRO VANCOUVER FUTURE OF THE REGION SUSTAINABILITY DIALOGUES

### *BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER*

June 19, 2012, CENTRAL NORTHEAST

The Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues are a series of discussions intended to assist decision makers shape the future of the region by inviting a range of views that challenge conventional wisdom and stimulate fresh thought on regional issues. The sessions explore topics such as housing, industry, labour and immigration, drugs and crime, the regional economy, transportation, energy and agriculture. The “issues summary notes,” below, provide an overview of unique points raised in the June 19, 2012, dialogue on building community. Summary notes from each regional dialogue and related board reports are available on the Metro Vancouver website [www.metrovancouver.org](http://www.metrovancouver.org).

### Issues Summary Notes

#### **ABOUT THE TOPIC:**

#### **BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER**

- This dialogue will explore the topic of building community, particularly what this might mean in the face of indications of an emerging trend of community disconnection and individual isolation in the Metro Vancouver area. We'll be hearing about potential causes and opportunities for improvement.
- The Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues are an important part of Metro Vancouver's Sustainable Region Initiative. It's a commitment to centre our plans and operations on sustainability. The dialogue we're going to have today is extremely important because our city is using it as one of our footstools to make what we want this community to be.
- What do we mean by social connectivity? What might contribute to it or undermine it?
- Hopefully today we'll get some ideas from our panel of where we're going and how to bring back that sense of community. At the end of the dialogue, I hope we have some positive results for what we can all do to make every community a better living place for everyone.

#### **THE DIALOGUE**

##### **1.0 Context**

- A sustainable community must be a connected and engaged community. It can't happen in any other way.
- I spent most of the last decade checking out cities around the world and moving through literature and the laboratories of neuroscience and psychology to try to understand what the link is between built form, system, and the psychology of happiness. Happiness is almost the same as human engagement, because that's what matters most. The happy news is that the green city, the low-carbon city, the engaged city and the happy city are all the same place.



- We need all people to feel they are part of one community, that we all have an equal stake in it and that we're all in the same boat. I don't think we can solve the larger sustainability issues if we have large groups of people sitting on the sidelines with their concern ending at their front door.

### **1.1 Communities were more connected in the past**

- I come from an era when we did not have a problem with communications between people.
  - Most of us had a party line on the phone, so you got to know all your neighbours.
  - When you went to the bank, all your friends and neighbours were there, so you had interaction and you had dialogue.
  - When you were a child, you played in front of your house on the street, and you played with everybody in your neighbourhood. Because each neighbourhood had only so many children, it didn't matter what age you were. You were playing with the 13-year-olds even though you were six or seven.
  - You got to meet everybody, and these social activities took place for the rest of your life. I have no problem getting into an elevator and asking people how they are, or helping or just talking to people I meet on the street.
- From what I'm reading, we're losing that.

### **1.2 It takes an investment of time to build connections with people**

- You need to have substantial amounts of time to be involved with people. Ask yourself when you were most connected in your own life.
  - For me, it was in graduate school because I spent 24-hour days with people I was doing the same kinds of things with. University is a tremendous opportunity for connection.
  - Work is sort of a surrogate.
  - Church provides some opportunity, but it's usually just weekly, maybe once during the week, but not sustained periods of time.
- How do we make time for social connectivity?
  - Not that many decades ago, most women didn't work, and therefore neighbourhoods had people in them. When the kids came home, their mothers were home and they knew who belonged in that neighbourhood and who didn't.
  - Making time is probably our single biggest issue because people's lives are full. They work very hard and they might recreate, but they have to plan things.

### **1.3 People export the habits that they build at home into the community**

- We know from psychological research that we export the habits, feelings and relationships that we build within our neighbourhood group or close group.
  - If you feel crowded at home and you don't want to engage with your neighbours, you end up feeling the same way on a subway, in your car, on the road and at work. It transfers out.
- When someone is feeling disconnected it has a ripple effect into many other areas of their lives and into the community.

### **1.4 Neighbourhood engagement is just as important as personal engagement**

- Personal isolation affects our health and well-being, but neighbourhood isolation affects our level of trust in others and our ability to work together to build a quality community.

## **1.5 The proportion of immigrants in Metro Vancouver is expected to increase substantially**

- We have some useful projections from Statistics Canada for what our cities are going to look like in 2031.
  - The projection for Metro Vancouver was that by 2031 there are going to be 3.5 million people living in our region. This is 1.25 million more than now, which is like adding Calgary.
  - In 2031, 44% are going to be first-generation immigrants. Another 26% are going to be the children of immigrants. This means that 70% of people living in Metro Vancouver will have what the Europeans call an “immigrant background,” meaning they either are immigrants or experience the idea of immigration because their parents had that experience.
  - In that 3.5 million people, 60% will be non-white (about 2% will be First Nations). That’s a very different kind of social profile than we’re used to now.
- How will this play out? Will these be parallel societies or a socially integrated population?
  - The evidence so far is very mixed. We have two dynamics that are playing out at the same time. The social landscape of Vancouver has lots of enclaves, but we also see lots of dispersion of communities.

## **1.6 Metro Vancouver contains many temporary residents**

- I’m sure you all appreciate we have a high level of immigration coming into this city, but we also have many temporary residents coming into Metro Vancouver.
  - By the most recent estimates from 2009, there are about 100,000 people from all around the world living in Metro Vancouver who are here on a temporary visa for anywhere from 6 months to 2 or 3 years. They have a very specific legal status: they’re allowed to be in Canada for a specific set of reasons for a specific amount of time.
- Something that we should consider is the question of what we owe temporary residents. They’re spending money to go to school and they’re often in the labour force. What part do they play in the society of Greater Vancouver?

## **2.0 Results of the Vancouver Foundation’s survey on connection and engagement**

- Yesterday the Vancouver Foundation released the top-line findings of a major survey of 3,800 people in Metro Vancouver. We wanted to look at their levels of connection, their levels of engagement, and the barriers to being connected and engaged. We looked at their experience at three different levels: their personal friendships; their experience within their neighbourhood; and their experience and attitudes in the larger community in which they exist, Metro Vancouver. The Vancouver Sun is running a five-part series on our study.
- We did this survey as a way to identify gaps and needs that we could help address. There was a lot of good news, but I’m going to focus on some of the gaps that we found, especially at the neighbourhood level.

### **2.1 Neighbourhood relationships**

- Neighbourhood relationships are cordial but very weak.
  - We know the names of our immediate neighbours, but most of us have not done a favour for a neighbour.
  - Few of us have had a neighbour over or gone over to their place.

- About half of us do not trust or don't know if we trust our neighbourhoods. When neighbours know each others' names, automatically those neighbourhoods are safer.
- The survey found that although knowing names matters, what really matters is the level of interaction between neighbours. The more interaction between neighbours, the more people begin to feel positive. They start to trust a lot more and optimism increases.

## **2.2 The effect of diversity on neighbourhood connection**

- Diversity is putting a strain on our neighbourhoods.
  - The more languages are spoken in a neighbourhood, the less likely people are to feel that they trust each other.
  - They are less likely to feel welcome and that they belong.
  - They are more likely to believe that it would be difficult to rally their neighbours if there was a local problem to be solved.
- Diversity is a very remarkable thing in our neighbourhoods, but it brings its own challenges and we need to build bridges and address those challenges.
- At the larger community level residents are tolerant of diversity but also a bit impatient. We found that this in our consultations last year too.
  - Sixty-five percent of us believe that people prefer to stick with their own ethnic group.
  - Forty-four percent feel that those who do not speak English are simply not trying hard enough to be part of the community.
  - A third of us have no friends outside our own ethnic group.
  - About a third of us will very easily identify who we think will be most welcome and who will be least welcome in our neighbourhood.

## **2.3 The most disconnected groups**

- Three groups showed up as being the most disconnected:
  - people 25–34 years old;
  - people living in apartments or condos, or living in suites in houses (especially basement suites); and
  - [certain groups with ethnic differences].
- There were some very interesting ethnic differences that [the Vancouver Foundation] needs to examine and understand better before it releases those results.

## **2.4 Findings about people 25–34 years old in Vancouver**

- We found that 60% of 25–34-year-olds are rather negative. This really concerns me because these people are at the beginnings of their lives. We need to pay attention to this result because this is our next [generation] and we ignore this at our detriment. In theory the world should be their oyster, but:
  - They find it the hardest to make friends.
  - They're more likely to believe that Vancouver is becoming a resort town for the rich and that there's too much foreign ownership.
  - They're less likely to trust.
  - They're more likely to feel other ethnicities are not trying hard enough.
- Were the findings about the 25–34-year-olds the same across Metro Vancouver? I'm on the board of the Roundhouse community centre and was meeting with people interviewing for a committee. There were candidates from France, Iran and Mexico in

the 30-something category who were fabulous people who wanted to be involved. We have to be a little careful about stereotypes.

- The 25–34-year-olds [surveyed] lived disproportionately in the City of Vancouver. They broke down into thirds:
  - About a third were very positive: everything’s great.
  - Another third, who were homeowners generally, were still quite negative about what they thought the pressures were in the community.
  - Another third were feeling much more isolated and very negative. That negativity infected how they answered many other questions.
- As a 26-year-old, I’m curious about the reasons for the attitudes of the 25–34-year-olds. I suspect that it’s not that there’s a bunch of youth sitting around being wilfully negative.
- [The Vancouver Foundation] hasn’t fully [understood those results].
  - We’re wondering how much the affordability issue is driving those results. This group comes out so much higher than any other group on believing that Vancouver becoming a resort town for the rich and that there is too much foreign ownership. [Perhaps it’s because] they finish university and then get out in the real world and find that it is not such an enticing place; it’s much more of a struggle.
  - We will be investigating that much more over the next few weeks.

### **3.0 The effect of digital media and social media on social connections**

- Sometimes the growth of digital media and social media may result in people cocooning away, but if we use these kinds of media correctly they’re also an opportunity to improve communication and perhaps get to a level of social cohesion we’ve never seen before, at least in living memory.
- I like to use the term “Renaissance 2.0.” We’re on the threshold of something that could be the greatest thing — not just for Vancouver — but for all cities around the world.
  - The time has come in terms of capacity and ideas, and also in the ability to connect. If we can break off the notion that somebody else is going to do it for us and look at all the ways we can do it ourselves, all of a sudden the place we’re living in has the most extraordinary potential humanity has ever seen.

#### **3.1 The attraction of social media**

- The background of why so many people use Facebook is clearly that they have a very deep hunger to connect. They want to contribute something, have a voice and feel like what they are doing matters.
  - We’re not necessarily very good at enabling people to have similar impact and participation in real-world societies today. That’s largely because societies have become more complex, there are lots more distractions, and people have a tougher time feeling valued and feeling that they can participate.
  - To use a social networking term, my sense is that community is something that is crowdsourced, meaning that it is something that you produce by creating an opportunity for people to contribute so that it continually builds.

#### **3.2 Social media as “junk food”**

- Facebook is very much like junk food. People are addicted to it, they use it all the time, and although it fills them up, it isn’t nearly as nutritious or as fulfilling as interaction in the outside community.

- I really love the analogy of social media as junk food. I think people truly believe that if they're using Facebook they are social.
  - I would really love to see an advertising campaign that focuses on the positives that social media can offer for communication, but not as a substitute. Are there any plans for handling that as an educational piece to take the blinders off people's eyes?
  - Social media is taking over many things that we can do more for building connections.

### **3.3 Social media have different social effects than older types of media**

- For the last couple of centuries our media have been profoundly anti-social. Not deliberately so, but because of the limitations of the technology that they come from.
  - Movie theatres took people off the street and put them in dark places where they weren't talking.
  - Television put people in their own homes around a box, still without talking to each other.
  - Then the internet came along, and you sat in a room by yourself without talking to anyone else.
  - And then, worst of all, social media came on top of that to make you think you were being socially connected—in a small room, by yourself.

### **3.4 Social media can be used to facilitate real-world interaction**

- Now the internet, this grand connecting regime, is weaving into the streets through handsets and tablets. It's weaving into the fabric of society and creating opportunities to connect in ways that we haven't seen before.
- My daughter gathered a group of Sherlock Holmes fans to meet in a restaurant in New Westminster and then to meet again downtown to watch a movie. These were strangers in the 18–25 age range, and they organized this through Tumblr.
- I really admire your daughter's initiative and the initiative of many to break out of the purely digital fashion and move that into the geographic.
- I'm developing a society called "Collaborate Delta."
  - The purpose is to create opportunities for interconnection between all the different organizations in Delta because no one knows what anybody else is doing.
  - The biggest challenge we have is getting people to communicate and [we are] using social media as an opportunity to do that.

### **3.5 Safety with social media contact**

- There are opportunities [to connect], but how do you manage them in such a way that it feels safe?
- The issue of how we feel safe in our streets has been around for as long as there have been streets and before that. The fact that we have cell phones and social media really hasn't changed the issue that we're are connecting with people we might not know. We need to create an environment where everybody is contributing to the fact that we can feel safe together.

### **3.6 Mobile Muse innovates in new forms of social interaction**

- Mobile Muse is a network that innovates in new forms of social interaction and cultural expression using these technologies.

- We specifically chose Vancouver because it’s probably one of the best living labs you could ever find in the world. It has cultural diversity and all kinds of affordances and opportunities coming together.
- It’s a very exciting place and I’m just learning how to play it well.
- This week [Mobile Muse is] launching Park Quest with Metro Vancouver. It’s a set of opportunities for youth laid out on mobile phones to do activities that are beneficial to the parks and to get social, school and other recognition for that.
- Another project we’re involved with is PlaceSpeak. PlaceSpeak is a new forum that allows people to start having a voice based on the place they inhabit. It verifies where you live and presents opportunities for you to have a direct say in things that are happening around you, in a very constructive way.
- This is a really exciting time for Vancouver. We have a wealth of opportunities. The thing we have to do is start learning how to design those opportunities for people to connect and for communities to grow through that connection.

### **3.7 Social media in schools**

- Right now if you’re in any K-12 classroom in Metro Vancouver and you pull out your smartphone, you’re likely to be sent to the principal’s office. I’d like to change that over the next decade so that children are using their smartphones in a purposeful way for their education.
- The reason that can be done is that education used to be much more of a three-way partnership between the whole community and the school.
  - Increasingly as the home has gotten busy and the community has gotten complex, the burden has fallen on the school. The schools want more of the education to happen in the community.
  - The single device that goes with everybody is already in their hand. We can use design to stage opportunities to learn that connect directly with forces in the community to enable people to interact not in that “junk food” way but in very groundbreaking ways.
  - We need interaction design and participation design, neither of which we’ve had a lot of experience with because we’re so used to monolithic narratives telling stories rather than opening dialogue as we are [doing] today.
  - Maybe it’s a complex question, but I think in every realm we’ve got we have the opportunity to create a conversation, and enable that conversation using our digital media and all of our public forums.
- I couldn’t agree more about smartphones in schools.

### **3.8 Social media for online consultation**

- I’m a SCARP [School of Community and Regional Planning] student. We’re doing the online consultation for the City of New Westminster’s ongoing transportation plan.
  - I’m curious about how the rest of the panel feels about online consultation, given our discussion of how face-to-face interaction can’t be replaced. Where is the future for online engagement and the possibilities and constraints given the need for retreat and engagement?

### **4.0 Cultural integration**

- In a pluralist society like ours where there are many different ethnicities coming together, we need to build stronger connections, but it is the hardest in this type of society. We need to make an effort to make it happen.

#### **4.1 It takes time for immigrants to integrate into the community**

- It takes almost generations for a new family to settle in. It probably won't be the people who come first, if they're already mature. It'll be their children who will have sufficient time to plant their roots here.
- The process [of integration] takes time over a complicated life cycle of a person.
  - When people are new to a society it takes time for them to get out of the bubble of the people that they feel comfortable being around.
- In a society like Vancouver where we get a constant influx of people coming in, we have to face this long-term unfolding of people's connections and ways of living all the time, because there's always a new person coming. There's probably a plane arriving this minute at Vancouver international airport with 30 people or so on it who are just starting out today in Vancouver.

#### **4.2 Children are the first to integrate**

- I'd like to take issue with the statement that it will be generations before we can interact productively with new people. If you look at the school system, it has historically integrated a tremendous number of different groups.
- It's the children who will probably begin because they are seeing people day to day.

#### **4.3 Sport and the arts are powerful forces for integration**

- Aside from work, when I first came here 35 years ago, it was through the arts community and playing sports that I met most of the friends that I still have today. Those kind of activities are extremely important.
- I am working on a youth arts festival with the Port Moody Arts and Culture Committee. About 75–80% of the kids who are participating are from immigrant backgrounds.

#### **4.4 Lack of connection between neighbourhoods contributes to intercultural tension**

- In the U.K. 11 years ago there were a series of race riots in the northern towns of Great Britain, and other riots in the suburban areas of London.
- After, there was a commission of inquiry about these events. This commission found that there was a much higher degree of residential segregation between communities in Britain than people had realized.
- More important than just the simple fact of residential segregation was the fact that people from different communities weren't talking very much.
  - Trevor Phillips, the commissioner on racial equality in Britain, coined a phrase that really reverberated in Britain for the last eight years: he said Britain was "sleepwalking its way to segregation" through the lack of inter-community dialogue.

#### **4.5 Economic deprivation increases intercultural tension**

- After the bombings in the London subway in July of 2005, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion stated: "As deprivation increases, there is a fall in the number of people who agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together and a fall in the number who agree that residents respect ethnic differences between people."
- That commission of inquiry added another layer to the dialogue. The problem was not just neighbourhoods being relatively segregated, or people not talking very much across cultural differences, it was these things in combination with economic marginalization of particular communities. When you put those things together, you have a big risk of intercultural breakdown, breakdown in social cohesion, etc.

#### **4.6 Interaction builds intercultural trust**

- As we saw in [the Vancouver Foundation's] study, the only way to build connections is by interaction.
  - We know this from other studies in the United States. After September 11, there was tremendous distrust of Muslim-Americans, and no matter how much they talked about Muslim-Americans and showed idealized Muslim-Americans, it didn't really change people's opinions. The only thing that did was when people met a Muslim-American and got to know him or her.
  - In Chicago, there was a wonderful project that brought Muslim-Americans, people with Christian backgrounds and Jewish people to work together on neighbourhood projects. These groups would only get the money if they came up with a project together. Trust levels started to increase.

#### **4.7 Crowdsourcing community solutions**

- We tend to look for solutions to challenges from our old paternalistic paradigm: that if we just make enough noise our city council will look after it. [Instead, we should crowdsource solutions.]
  - The complexity of the welcome we're trying to put out for all kinds of different people coming to and enjoying our environment, whether it be from a viewpoint that differs in language, culture, religion, ability, disability or any number of differences that might keep them from feeling welcome, is beyond the capacity of any government to look after, because there are too many of them.
  - But getting back to richness, all of us are capable of supplying some part of our own sense of our love of this place and our ability to navigate this place. We can do that personally, and I'm saying we have to own it, but there are also lots of technologies to help us with that.
  - We can provide a navigation system for people who might be interested in anything from stamp collecting to quilting, or who speak Polish or are gay, in a wheelchair, blind or any of those things. We can't create maps for all of this. We have to find ways of engaging the people in our community who know how to navigate [these viewpoints].
  - We need to crowdsource community rather than think we can tax everyone and then forget about it because our urban leaders will look after it. We have to do it ourselves.

#### **5.0 Cultural differences affect integration**

- [The Vancouver foundation] found some very interesting ethnic differences in how connected people are. Some of those differences are related to whether you're first generation, but some of it is cultural.

#### **5.1 Canadian culture is influenced by our British origins**

- Coming over here on the SkyTrain, I asked a woman to remove her purse from the seat so I could sit down. I am an immigrant myself from California, and that reminded me of how different the transit experience was between a U.S. city, especially a warm one like San Diego or Berkeley, versus Vancouver.
  - The willingness to engage, perhaps even against your will, that people in the public realm in California and elsewhere in the United States showed versus the inability to connect that people here displayed was a defining characteristic.

- It was an early insight into the very British legacy this place had in the 70s, when the waves of immigration from South Asia and mainland China that we know now started. That was a profound experience.
- Another defining moment was trying to find a parking space in Gastown with a bunch of Canadian friends.
  - I said, “Can I park here?”
  - “No, it says you can’t park here.”
  - “Can I park here?”
  - “Can’t park here.”
  - “What about here? I don’t see a sign.”
  - They said, “Frank, this is Canada; if it doesn’t say ‘yes’ it means ‘no.’”
- Crossing the street in downtown Vancouver, the light had turned green but the little white man didn’t come up. I started to cross, being from San Francisco where you crossed when you could, and a little old lady pulled me back, and said, “We wait for the signal.” I was shocked at this display of social control.
- This place really does exercise some degree of control over behaviour. There’s a box you’re supposed to be in: don’t talk to me on the bus; don’t park here; don’t walk over there.
  - Those kinds of constraints on society are always there; you just don’t always know they’re there.
  - Luckily I spoke the language of all those people involved.

## **5.2 The effect of faith and ethnicity on integration**

- What role does ethnicity and faith play in how we end up becoming integrated or not? My upbringing and the perspectives that were brought to me through my parents and family really [affected] the way that I view my community. I suspect I wasn’t born that way.
  - I grew up in a Jewish household but my upbringing was very integrated. My parents worked with a lot of different cultures. Most of my friends now are not Caucasians and I rarely hang out with other Jewish people, other than through practice.
  - I know most of my neighbours in my low-rise building in Coquitlam. We interact with each other socially periodically. I know my neighbours in single-family houses in the community that I live in.
- Ethnicity and faith groups contain people who hold very different sets of allegiances to the group, and very different sets of interconnections with people from other groups.
  - Groups tend to have within them people who are very closed within that group and people who are more outwardly focused. Usually that has to do with how long people have been here and where they are in their life cycle.
  - There’s no easy relationship between ethnocultural communities and internal versus external connections, that is, connections within them and between them and others.

## **5.3 Asian cultural norms are different from those in Canada**

- In the Chinese community, being boisterous, loud and gregarious is frowned upon.
  - University students from mainland China don’t interact in class very much. If they know the answer, they don’t put up their hands because it looks like they’re bragging, but if they don’t know the answer they don’t put up their hands because it looks like they’re ignorant. They tend to withdraw.

#### **5.4 Difficulties speaking English are a barrier to integration**

- Sometimes first-generation Asians are considered cold because they don't respond, say hello, or engage in conversation, but we've heard from them that the language issue makes them embarrassed so that they can't speak. It's a tremendous leap from their languages and characters to learning English.
  - We've seen in the results of the [Vancouver Foundation] study that they are feeling more disconnected, and we need to unpack that and see whether this effect is stronger for more recent immigrants and whether it depends on what language you're speaking.
- The arts are trans-language. I am working on a youth arts festival with the Port Moody Arts and Culture Committee.
  - About 75–80% of the kids who are participating are from immigrant backgrounds.
  - The arts allow people to participate in a porous community without having to have great language skills. Sport does that as well and I love seeing kids of new immigrants playing hockey and things like that.
  - Language is such an enfranchising tool that I think we have to look at languages in a larger way to engage people in the community.

#### **5.5 A neighbourhood with a shared culture or values can have strong cohesion**

- I'm trying to build smaller, cooler, more intense artistic communities out of single-family residential properties.
  - I've lived on one for 10 years; it's been one of the greatest experiences of my adult life.
  - [It's like] the tiny little centre of an onion that grows out and starts something in our neighbourhood. We don't lock our doors (I won't tell you where I live but the secret is: dogs and neighbours).

#### **6.0 The role of crisis in building community**

##### **6.1 Crisis can strengthen community connections**

- Communities generally come together in times of crisis. Perhaps we have to frame crises more often to get that conversation to happen.
  - I don't mean that in a divisive way; I mean that in the sense of "let's tackle some problems together."
- Should we manufacture crisis, at least in a benign way?

##### **6.2 A disconnected community can't respond effectively to a crisis**

- It's a good thing the Japanese tsunami didn't happen in Tokyo.
  - It happened for the most part at the local level in small villages. There seemed to be a social cohesion that people organized around. There was an intrinsic need to order their lives and respond in a positive way that showed when they went to the community centre and put their common beds down.
  - Maybe the Japanese society can do that at any level, but I fear that if we had a similar event in any of our inner cities or denser cities like New Westminster or Vancouver, social cohesion would be an abstract thing. I don't know what the response would be on the ground.
- My partner is from Mexico City, and his family looks back on the earthquake in Mexico City in the 80s almost with fondness.
  - It was a time of very powerful connections, even through the death and destruction.
  - It's as though they created a new society at that time.

## **7.0 The role of individuals in building community**

### **7.1 Community members have to want to connect**

- There's no substitute for having a society that wants to interact.
  - I'm not sure how that is created, but that really is illustrated in the film *Where Strangers Become Neighbours*.
  - What happened there is that a community in a relatively dense area where hardly anybody knew each other and people were only concerned about getting by, became a real community that had some sense of sociability.
  - It took a lot of work. Most of all, it took desire on the part of the community members.
- I realize there are many approaches to building a connected community from the high-level decisions like the built form and the way sidewalks are done, to [the low-level components] like arts, sports, gardens, dog parks and other simple things.
  - But the one thing that's really clear to me is that everyone in this room has a role to play in making their community connected.
  - I loved the example of getting people together to cook as a way to build interaction because people love to gather around food. It's interaction that is really key to building connections.
- The conversations we're going to have to engage in can be uncomfortable.
  - But we know that as we get engaged, it's not only good for society, it's good for us on an individual level.
  - We all have a right to pursue changes in our communities. We have a right to redesign our neighbourhoods, engage the city and engage other people. I'm going to pursue that and I hope we can all do it together.

### **7.2 Most communities are non-spatial**

- Most people's neighbourhoods or communities are non-spatial. They are a community of interests or intellectual pursuit or some other thing like playing games or following Shakespeare or Sherlock Holmes.
- Usually people get together at the geographical neighbourhood level when they're faced with a threat like too big a building or the wrong use. Otherwise they don't have much cohesion. My point of view is that we shouldn't expect a lot of cohesion.
  - I do a lot of work that's sort of pro bono in neighbourhoods that are finding themselves pinched by municipal activities, like in the West End where they have a densification challenge, or at least a development challenge.
  - It's only when faced with a common threat like a traffic or development problem that people feel the need to get together.

## **8.0 City of Vancouver programs to promote integration of newcomers**

### **8.1 The Mayor's Working Group on Immigration**

- The City of Vancouver has the Mayor's Working Group on Immigration.
  - This group is nominated by city hall. City hall tries to make sure that it is broadly representative of the community: not that individuals represent particular pieces of the community, but that types of people in the community are represented. It includes people from labour, business, immigrant serving societies, different ethno-cultural backgrounds and so forth.

- In the last couple of years [this group] had three priorities:
  - One was to think more about temporary residents and how they fit into the fabric of the City of Vancouver.
  - A second was to try to walk the walk and talk the talk with respect to immigrant inclusion. The City of Vancouver developed a mentorship program where city staff took on highly skilled and experienced newcomers who had no Canadian experience and brought them in to work to help them understand how advanced bureaucracies work in Canadian and the City of Vancouver. It's been a small program, but quite successful.
  - The third thing was to initiate the Vancouver Dialogues project between First Nations and newcomer communities.

## 8.2 The Vancouver Dialogues

- There's a booklet and a website that came out of the dialogues. If you want a copy you can get in touch with the social development office at the City of Vancouver. The best person to start with is a social planner called Baldwin Wong, who was the lead organizer of the series.
  - There were 10 events, half of them were in First Nations settings and half were in newcomer settings. Each of them involved quite a substantial dialogue.
  - One useful thing that we learned through that process is that life course can be very important. One thing that can be very productive is to get elders from newcomer communities speaking with elders from First Nations backgrounds. It's also interesting to get youth from newcomer communities talking with youth from newcomers, and then to mix those groups after they've had the opportunity to get to know each other a little bit and start talking. Life course can play out in intriguing ways in a dialogue process.
- Regarding a valid short-list of priorities for newcomers, at a City of Vancouver event in Chinatown last year, the board chair of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. said that besides considering language, accommodation and employment, he felt that we ought to consider including an opportunity for newcomers to listen to and experience stories of aboriginal history from aboriginal perspectives.
- [The Vancouver Foundation] would consider funding Vancouver Dialogues in the future. It brings together urban aboriginals and First Nations people as well as new immigrants and long-time Canadians, and provides an opportunity to share each other's history and to go to each other's places of worship, towns, enclaves or reserves as a way to exchange.
- Interaction and sharing is key. For newcomers it would be an excellent opportunity. We do a lot for employment and programs related to that, but wherever newcomers are settling and whatever their neighbourhoods, it's important to understand the history of other cultures.

## 9.0 The role of government in building community

- What can government do? There's an inference here that government has a role to play, which at the moment it's not playing.
- The school system has historically integrated a tremendous number of different groups. Not perfectly, to say the least, but it certainly has done a lot more than voluntary methods have done.
- There's a very nice film called *Where Strangers Become Neighbours* about Collingwood neighbourhood house in Vancouver, about its role in integrating different groups across cultures and across economic stratification in that neighbourhood.

- I'm quite happy when a communication budget is cut. Communication budgets are almost always about some form of marketing.
  - When you look at something as difficult as creating voice, I don't want communication because that's not a conversation or a dialogue. I would much rather have that kind of communication break down in order to have a conversation where people's voices are listened to, problems are shared and solutions are jointly addressed.

### **9.1 Government initiatives should include diverse viewpoints**

- The challenge is that real dialogue requires non-like-minded people talking together. This was a meeting of relatively like-minded people. I bet none of us are going to go a food bank later this week because we can't afford to put food on the table. The challenge is to have a dialogue that reaches across many more differences than we're talking about so far.
- When I look at our arts and culture committee, there's only one non-white person on it, and that distresses me.
- We have to be a bit careful because we're a pretty white group [at the dialogue today]: both the panel and the [audience].

### **9.2 Neighbourhood-level consultation in government policy could promote neighbourhood integration**

- We should bring people together on a common interest at the neighbourhood level so that people have a reason to interact.
  - When we look at the city, the province or the federal government, the laws and regulations that they develop affect everybody: newcomer, oldcomer, everybody involved.
  - [To promote] face-to-face interaction at a deeper level, not just the surface hi and goodbye, we have to talk about broad issues at neighbourhood level. These issues bring people together and focuses the interaction on issues [outside the community] as opposed to race and issues like that.
  - One of the things that is lacking in Vancouver and in the region is consultative mechanisms at the neighbourhood level. I'm not saying that all decisions should be made on the neighbourhood level, but neighbourhoods should be consulted and involved. That way, the complexity, which is increasing at a rapid rate, can start being dealt with by us, and we become more informed and educated about the issues instead of feeling alienated and helpless.

### **9.3 People tend to be happier when they feel they have some influence on their government**

- From happiness research, we know that people around the world who answer yes to the question "Do you have any control over what's happening with your government?" tend to be happier. So we know that we can have a happier society if we create mechanisms where governments invite more engagement.

### **9.4 Public consultation isn't always effective**

- Particularly in urban planning and design, government is absolutely terrified of engaging citizens fully.
  - Andrés Duany put this in a terrific essay saying, "Let's kill public process" because who comes to public process? The people who always come, not the entire neighbourhood. He's suggesting that we throw out public process and create a new

means of public process. Maybe that means that you win a lottery to participate in neighbourhood process.

- With the citizens' assembly on democratic reform here in B.C. we saw a very powerful, effective process that was then not backed up by the government. I'm not sure how many of us would have the confidence to be that deeply engaged again.
- Unless you have a political structure that encourages this it becomes hit or miss.
  - Some neighbourhoods have very active people who get everything done, but a lot of places don't have that and nothing gets done.
  - The only agency that can bring this evenly across the board is the various levels of government because they affect everybody through their policies and regulations.
- I'm a firm believer in focused community engagement.
  - There are too many professionals coming out of SCARP and other places who think their job is to facilitate a discussion rather than contribute to it. I know professionals in this room who have ideas, and often good ideas, and they have to be brought to the table.
  - A focused community consultation means real options on the table. Don't have a preference yet — let that unfold — but have options as opposed to a blank slate.
  - I saw 15 years of city planning in Vancouver, and it was pretty much asking people, "What can you tolerate?" That's an open-ended question and it usually was answered by, "We want the sun, the moon, the stars and your first child, but nothing more than four storeys — and by the way, every bit as much park as a good neighbourhood has." Those are not tenable positions in this world.
  - Have real options that present real alternatives, like: if you really want these many things, this is what it results in. If you don't want them, this is what comes off the list. That's a focused discussion.

### **9.5 What is the appropriate level of government for building community?**

- If we make this a top-down process it won't work, and if we expect it to be a bottom-up process it won't work. There has to be a handshake between the state and society on this question.
  - Allowing it to happen spontaneously from the ground up will leave lots of gaps.
  - If government tries to tell us all what to do, it's not going to work either because people are ornery.
- It's not that top-down and bottom-up approaches can't work together; in fact it's the only approach that can work. Anything that's exclusively one or the other will have a really hard time working. You have to find that handshake to make that work.

### **10.0 The effect of city planning and design on social connection**

- When people are living in containers, how would you design a grouping of those so that people would connect?
  - It's like camping. A dozen friends in different tents would probably make a circle around the campfire with the tent flaps in the middle.
  - The campground of an army outfit would be set up as the rank and file, which is more analogous to the way our communities are laid out right now. You come out of your door and you're in the public realm. You're not nearing some other person directly, or better yet, a group of people.
- I'm a parks planner for Coquitlam. We've been doing two neighbourhood plans, one in a developed neighbourhood and one in a brand-new greenfield development. The key

issues that have come up relate to connectivity. People want farmers' markets, community gardens, trails and neighbourhood parks.

- How can we build neighbourhoods that become engines for this wider engagement throughout the community?
- The default mode is that the country feeds the city and the city starves the country. How can we possibly, in a privileged urban area, ignore our life and death dependency on the hinterland and continue to show the profound disrespect that we usually do?

### **10.1 We need to design communities to reflect our changing needs**

- The nature of living and work is changing dramatically as we move from an agrarian to an industrial age to an information age.
- The whole infrastructure that we've built in cities has completely changed its meaning.
  - The meaning used to be about moving from one place to another to go to an office so you could meet with other people and share information. All of that has broken down because you don't need those spaces and those shapes anymore.
  - People need to connect in meaningful and socially inspiring places. We should be nurturing public spaces such as farmers' markets, greenways and so on, in the same way that we've cultivated very successful places online that aren't highly restrictive.
  - We need places that are nice to be at, easy to use and flexible.
- My eldest daughter has just become a landscape architect in Vancouver. I think she's hit the best career to be in right now because of the transition from the predominance of built infrastructure into creating shared social community spaces.
- It's a perfect time to be a landscape architect and park planner. Landscape urbanism is one of the emerging paradigms out there following up on new urbanism, old urbanism and other things.

### **10.2 The size of the community is an important factor**

- I don't think [a socially connected] community can be infinitely big. I don't think it could even have hundreds of people in it, like most condo towers do with about 100 units in them. It's very hard to know a lot of people, in a good way.

### **10.3 People need space to retreat into before they will engage others**

- There is tremendous tension between our need to engage with other people and our need to retreat. If we don't have space to retreat and to control our relationships with others, then we don't engage.
- We know from research into the psychology of being nice to other people that when we have positive engagement with friends, neighbours, or even people we just met, we are more likely to do the right thing to a complete stranger.
  - We're more likely to go out of our way and help or be nice to people who are outside our tribe or core group.

### **10.4 Neighbourhood and building layout affect people's behaviour**

- A significant reason that people don't know their neighbours is they have little interest in getting to know each other or they prefer to keep to themselves. I'm one of those people.
  - I have moved to a special little street in East Vancouver where the lots are small. It's only a block long.
  - We're close to each other, and there's just no getting around it. [For example] you're forced to come to the block party, you work in the front yard.

- There was a series of studies on design done in the 70s. They looked at university dormitories.
  - They compared a dormitory that was a long hallway with about 20 units off the hallway versus a pod-style dormitory where you had three shared bedrooms and a little lounge together. Same human density in both cases.
  - People who lived along the hallway felt crowded. They felt bothered by each other, and they didn't like their neighbours. The people in the pods made stronger friendships and felt less bothered.
  - Then they looked at what happened when they took these people out of that environment. They made up a doctor's appointment and called them all into the doctor's office. The people from the pod environment were more likely to comfort an anxious person next to them at the doctor's office. That's why I talk about people taking the behaviour out.
  - There are many more examples, but what we want to find is those kinds of alchemic spaces or soft zones that at least take down the barriers.

### **10.5 Heterogeneity in the community is a challenge**

- Heterogeneity, that is mixes of uses and mixes of people, matters.
  - Most places in the world that have a tremendous public realm like European cities, with very vital and attractive plazas and street life, tend to have homogeneity. Or they came out of a homogeneous past over hundreds if not thousands of years.
  - In a very short period of time we're asked to make heterogeneity work. And it can, but I think it will take at least a generation. Especially for people with different language skills and different cultures.

### **10.6 The Vancouverist planning model**

- As our region gets denser, are we going to head further in the direction of what strikes me as a very dangerous model, the so-called Vancouverism?
- We have the Vancouverist tower.
  - Whatever is happening along the base, you can argue about the effectiveness of the street-facing townhouses. I don't see anything happening on their porches à la Jane Jacobs.
  - The tower is dangerous because it uses the model of driving into underground parking and taking the elevator upstairs, which immediately kills street activity for a couple of blocks around.
- If anybody says that Vancouverism is merely market response to demand, it's not true.
  - It's not true that we were all born to live alone in studio or one-bedroom apartments, but it is true that if you make that the only thing available at the appropriate price point, we will take that opportunity.
  - More diversity would be more conducive to people in different living situations: families, relatives, kids, families that grow and shrink, or people living with friends.

### **10.7 Redesigning existing communities**

- I consider myself very privileged to live in New Westminster because it's such a walkable community and there are so many little areas that I can walk to where there is tons of social interaction. We're fortunate that we can have only one car in our family of six. My husband works in New Westminster too.
  - I have grandparents in Coquitlam who have been in the same house for 55-plus years in this sprawling post-war suburbia, and I have a sister who lives in Langley where her house was probably built 20 years ago but where people wanted to get

large lots and have all this land. I feel sorry for both of them. Especially in Langley, you have to own a car. When you go shopping there are these six-lane roads; there's no way you would ever travel on foot there.

- Do people ever go back and re-design communities so that they can be more walkable? It seems unattractive out there and it's going in the opposite direction of what is sustainable and livable.
- At least in the United States, 70% of population growth is at the urban fringe. It's consuming vast quantities of land and generating more greenhouse gases and other things. It's not that high a number here in this region.
  - Retrofitting suburbia and getting physical connectivity is a prelude to making that a better place. All our costs are a shared burden.
  - It's not just your parents and siblings who are living out in those conditions; we all bear the cost for that kind of poor choice of urban form and large houses on large lots. We have to do something about that. It's not easy.

## **11.0 Differences in urban design between Europe and North America**

- I'm constantly amazed at the difference between European urbanism and North American urbanism.
- At the building scale as well as the urban realm, we have so many differences, and in most of them we do not compare well to that other model.

### **11.1 European cities have uniform density**

- The big difference is that, on the whole, European cities don't have sprawl. They have governmental control that originated centuries ago saying, we will keep the farmland and we will live together here.
- Because of that containment, they have very horizontal cities. They have the same kind of height and density throughout the whole city.
- North American cities have incredibly dense and high centres, and then almost immediately turn into a sprawling low-rise environment that takes up enormous amounts of land, is very wasteful, and is probably our single biggest environmental and social problem.

### **11.2 European buildings are laid out to create more social interaction**

- At the building scale, European buildings have one staircase. If anybody's ever stayed in a hotel in Italy or France or someplace like that, there's one great stairway that you want to climb, that you must climb, unless you want to get into that rickety little elevator with three other people and your luggage.  
That staircase is a place of involvement and connectivity.
- Our fire codes require two staircases, maybe multiple elevators, and they're encased in concrete with doors on them. So you're not coming out of your unit and going down this grand marble staircase where you might meet the lady downstairs or the man from upstairs, you go down pretty much on your own.

### **11.3 Moving parking away from living areas**

- There's a terrific community outside of Freiburg in Germany called Vauban. It's touted as a green community, but the amazing thing is that they've internalized the external cost of parking.
  - Instead of the Vancouver tower model of having the parking garage in the building, they've put the garages on the edge of the village. If you want a parking garage you

pay \$40,000 and you get your parking spot. If you don't, you only pay about \$5,000 and you buy a piece of the park in the middle of town.

- The effect is that everybody walks for five minutes once they get out of their car and you have that warmth in the community.

## **12.0 Urban features that create social connection**

### **12.1 Community gardens**

- I'd love to do further study on community gardens. [When Vancouver Foundation] did a consultation last year, we heard over and over again that community gardens are a very natural way to draw people together.
  - One fellow in the downtown peninsula said nobody ever talks to him, but when he's in his garden neighbours and strangers walking their dogs will stop and talk.
  - Community gardens are different from a block party where you feel forced to socialize. With a garden you're not, and at the same time you're accomplishing other things in a very relaxed environment.
  - I'd be interested in doing a study to see how much social cohesion there is in communities with gardens versus those without gardens.

### **12.2 Slow food**

- Have a very small fridge and perhaps a garden plot either on the roof of your podium or better yet, out of the grounds somewhere.
- Food is really important for engaging people and building community. If you shop every day and buy locally, you put a face to food. The slow food movement is about putting a face to the food: the farmer, restaurateur, baker, or whoever is making the food.

### **12.3 Dog ownership**

- A friend of mine was flabbergasted that her son, who is very socially busy, got himself a dog.
  - There are so many young people in our tower taking their dogs downstairs, meeting friends with their dogs.
  - It sort of bugged me for a while, but now I see the social dynamic there.
- Dogs are amazing. The city of L.A. did a special project to encourage dog ownership in one area where people tended not to talk to each other, and the amount of social cohesion went up significantly.
- When I had a dog up until 2005, I was out three times a day in a pretty dense area of Vancouver, International Village.
  - You know who's around, who's a troublemaker, who's not a troublemaker: you have eyes on the street.
  - If you really want to build a sense of community and you wave a wand over things, one options is having babies, which not everyone will do, but everyone can have a dog.

### **12.4 Communal spaces**

- I really like to organize things as a resident. I started a cooking club, but I live in a townhouse with a very small kitchen. Immediately I got neighbours who wanted to participate, but there are only so many people I can accommodate in my kitchen. Most New Westminster residents live in multi-family houses, so there's no neighbour that can accommodate a large number of people.

- This is something that could build community, but when I went to schools, facilities for parks and recreation, no one would allow me to use their kitchen without belonging to a registered organization.
- I'm just a resident wanting to build community, and I can't.
- I would call some of your compatriots at work [Family Services of Greater Vancouver] in the city. They'll find you a kitchen.
- Jonathan Barnett, an urban designer of some note, wrote a book where he said, "Community takes place on foot."
  - It doesn't take place when you're driving and it certainly doesn't take place on the bus even though you're surrounded by other people.
  - It does in a way on bikes, but in very limited way.
  - If you want to accidentally engage other people you have to be walking or sitting down in a public realm. To the degree we emphasize that in the public realm and make it easy, wonderful, safe, beautiful and charming, the better off we all will be.
- The overall design should include spaces in the city where one can gather nicely.

### **12.5 Networking groups**

- A group you may want to join [in New Westminster] is N.E.X.T.
  - It started two years ago as a social network to get young people between the ages of 20 and 40. They've gone from 6 people to over 200.
  - They have a casual meeting once a month and they break into groups to discuss different things in the city. They're a very powerful group now, and they are the demographic that we want to take care of for the future.
  - We've just had a group that went to New York last week for the [Intelligent Community Forum], because we want to be one of the intelligent cities, to bring the young people here to join what we're doing.
  - Even though we have grey hair and we're older, we know that the future is the young people and people like you who can contribute. Social networking is the new way of doing things.

### **12.6 Public transportation**

- We talked about having one car in a modest-sized family; that's really good.
  - Partly that is made possible by walkability, but also by accessibility to public transportation.
  - Public transportation can decrease the potential isolation in big lot communities.

### **13.0 The effect of density on community connectedness**

- My life on Pender Island is almost a lab [for comparing] urban living, where people may or may not choose to engage others, versus a small town or a small island where you almost have engage because everything is run on volunteerism.

#### **13.1 Very low-density communities tend to be less socially connected**

- Some of the best research on this comes from American cities. What they find is that people living on the edge of the sprawl in communities that are entirely car-dependent tend to have fewer friends, fewer local friends, they volunteer less, they're less politically engaged and they eat dinner with their families less often than people in more mixed-use walkable communities.
- I live in Anmore, which is part of Metro Vancouver, but we have a minimum lot size of one acre. Three years ago we passed a resolution that all lots could be gated, which is a barrier to social engagement.

- Clearly the size of the lots we live in is changing dramatically over time.
  - I grew up on a very large lot long before social media and we didn't know our neighbours.
  - I live in Kitsilano/Dunbar now and those lots are perfect for knowing all your neighbours. I could go a lot smaller than that and still have that effect going.
  - I'm not an expert but I'd say you're going to have to work on the large lot scenario by breaking down the barriers and inviting people to you more than anything else. There's certainly not a technology solution that I can think of.
- I bought a one-lot property on a Gulf Island and we know our neighbours incredibly well, so it's not necessarily the size of the lot, it's the commonality of interests.
  - My partner and I go to the farmers' market every week, not because we sell all that much in our crafts but because it's a social place.
  - But the people who grow things need that market. If we want people to grow food for us nearby, they have to have these outlets.
- The biggest challenge in Delta and the outlying areas is that we are a car culture development. We don't have the public plazas to begin with, never mind heterogeneity or homogeneity.

### **13.2 Very high-density communities tend to be less socially connected**

- We already know [about low-density communities] and I won't go more deeply into it. What struck me as almost chilling, particularly for our region, is that you see the same thing on the other end of the spectrum. I'm not going to give you a pile of empirical evidence to support this; I'll just tell you a story that reflects some of this research.
  - This is the story of my friend Rob. Rob makes a lot of money and bought himself a high-status apartment in Yaletown in the 501.
  - He loved it, but as the weeks went by, he realized that he wasn't meeting any of the 300 people living in his building. He'd go down the hallway, which he shared with 20 people, get in the elevator, which he shared with 300 people, and head out to his day, and he became very lonely.
  - Sometimes, from his window, he would catch sight of the action on the third-storey rooftop garden that had been built along with the 501. There were people having drinks and playing volleyball, and hanging out in the garden. He longed to be part of that crowd, but he didn't notice any of his neighbours down there. Nobody in the tower felt like they had the right to invade that shared space, even though it was their space.
  - Friends of Rob's bought a townhouse at the base of the 501, where the City of Vancouver had forced the developer to build a stretch of about a dozen townhouses. When his friends moved into one those townhouses, they became part of the fun volleyball crowd.
  - Rob sold his condo, moved down into a townhouse, and in a few weeks he knew all his neighbours — about 25 people. Within a few months he considered about eight of the households good friends. I interviewed him after he had lived there for two years and I thought I'd ask him an embarrassing question. I asked, "How many of your neighbours do you love?" Rob is a shy guy, but he said, "Um, maybe six?" They're like family. There couldn't be a better explanatory story.
- Can you deduce from that example that the high-rise experience of this gentleman who lived above the clouds was what didn't allow him to participate in his local community in the same way he was able to join at the townhouse level?

- Two things: that's just a story about a guy I know. The second is that when you're speaking about design you have to be careful not to be overly deterministic. I don't think any of us can say the design forces us to engage or stops us from engaging. But does it make engaging easier or harder, or does it nudge us toward each other?
- I live in a 17th-floor condo. My neighbours are from India, Africa, Sweden and Poland, and we know each other.
  - We all meet at the elevator. You either look at your technical device or you communicate. Last year we had a Christmas/Hanukkah party. Six of the eight apartments came, and the two that didn't sent messages that they were sorry that they couldn't be there.

### **13.3 How to facilitate community building in dense communities**

- I'm a social planner from the City of Coquitlam. Given that for many reasons we are building denser and hopefully more walkable communities, what have you learned about how to build community in dense areas? Can it be done, and if so, how? I'm hypothesizing that there's a way that you can create community, because I know high-density buildings that do have community inside.
- Coquitlam is doing a wonderful job on its town centre, and I think the high street is a great piece of structure.
- I certainly am an advocate of density.
  - Propinquity or proximity planning is the core of almost all planning these days. [That means] putting things closer together, making it easier to shop locally, having a high Google walk score, or a high bike score.
  - I live in a place that has a walk score of 98%. That's the same as Seinfeld's community in the upper west side of Manhattan. I can do everything on foot. I go to the theatre across the street, shop down below at the T&T, and take transit half a block away.
  - That can only be done with density, but building community is a different thing. I still think people interact pretty much only in communities of interest.

### **13.4 Mid-rise buildings can combine density and livability**

- We need a lot more alternatives to the low part of a podium, the two storeys. We need three storeys, and the 30-storey tower. There are mid-rise forms that can blend some of those things and get almost the same densities as you can at the higher level.
- The region and places like Coquitlam are concerned about their carbon footprints.
  - Alex Boston of HB Lanarc, who I think may be doing some work with the City of Coquitlam, points out that you can achieve many of those greenhouse gas reductions and efficiencies without building a city of towers.
  - His argument is complex and involves math and tables, so I can't explain it at the moment, but perhaps we can find that sweet spot of mid-rises and greater mix without going straight to the city of towers.
- The City of Vancouver had a planning process for the Norquay neighbourhood that was very contentious. Part of that process, which I'm excited to see the results of, is enabling people to densify on their own lots or take a pair of lots. What happens when people within the community are empowered to densify in a way that pleases themselves?

### **14.0 The economic value of strong community connections**

- How can we make the value of social connections known to motivate decision-makers, governments, and people who have money and power to value these things?

- Every time there's an economic crunch the first thing that a company or organization does is cut their communication budgets.
- In the example of [neighbourhoods in the] 1950s I also note that those mothers weren't paid for that value.
- Social connections are part of the bottom line.
  - They provide big value when you consider the relationship between social ties and community health, because if we have stronger social ties, we have more connected people of all ages and generations, and we save money on health care costs in the future.
  - We also know that positive levels of interpersonal trust in communities are directly related to levels of economic development. It's not that big a split at all.

## **15.0 Role of the chamber of commerce in building community**

### **15.1 Creating connections within the business community**

- One of the things chambers [of commerce] do very well and one of our key pillars of activity is to create an environment where the business community can come together and do commerce, share ideas on how to grow a better community, attract economic development and address issues that are affecting growth in the community.
- In New Westminster we have launched our own Collaborate Delta.

### **15.2 Connecting with people outside the business community**

- What we don't do well is connect with other people in our community. I'd like to take back to my fellow chambers throughout B.C. and Canada (about 120 and 450, respectively) and ask that question. How do you connect with people in your community?

### **15.3 Welcoming newcomers**

- Another thing chambers do extremely well is to be the front door to the community.
  - We are the first point of contact when people are considering moving to the community. People are looking to move here, do business here, work here, invest here or visit here. How ready are we with the info they require?
  - Does our info allow them to integrate successfully? The research I've done in the past tells me: not so much. Chambers and community organizations can do a much better job with our info sources in order to attract those people to our communities.

### **15.4 Attracting and retaining a new labour force**

- We know in the future our business communities will be feeling a strain on their ability to attract labour.
  - We will be looking for people from outside of Canada and other parts of Canada. We've talked a lot about immigration today, but coming from other provinces and integrating into our communities can be challenging as well.
  - It's incumbent on the chambers to create an environment where all newcomers feel welcome regardless of their nationality, social status and economic status because there's a dramatic business effect if we don't do this right.
  - If we spend all this money trying to attract a work force to our community and they don't feel part of our community, they'll go elsewhere. That's a lot of resources wasted and it puts our business community at risk.

## **16.0 New Westminster's activities for building community**

- I'm very proud of our city. We're learning that we're going to take assets and use them in the city. We're using the things that work.
- We're also working on communications systems. We want to be an interactive city.
- New Westminster is the centrepiece of the general region and we're our share to make this a livable place that we can all be proud of.

### **16.1 Multiculturalism and integration**

- New Westminster has the largest multicultural component in Canada, and in [Metro Vancouver], in seven square miles.
- Last night we had our multicultural awards to those who have come in and made a difference in our community.
  - When we bring people in, we interact with them. We go and have a cup of coffee and spend some time. We say thank you for coming and bring more because we are going to need more people here.
- We promote integration of groups. We had a magnificent weekend with Pride. It's new to our community but we had a packed event at our local new theatre.
- We built the first community centre for children attached to our seniors complex. It's been open for a year.
  - We needed 400 children to make it work, but we had 850 in the first four months and it's held steady for just over that amount now.
  - That's working to integrate the different levels. We put the young people with the seniors.
- We've also had the opportunity to bring the generation in between that, the 25–40-year-olds, together with the N.E.X.T. organization. We're not doing it; they're doing it themselves because they want to be participating and they want to be active in this community.

### **16.2 Improving the walkability of the city**

- We have a main street above the SkyTrain.
  - When you leave here you will see Plaza 88, first time it has ever been done. It's constructed over the existing SkyTrain station, taking the street that was on the ground and putting it up.
- Ten theatres just opened and there's a multitude of other businesses. We're making this a walkable community.

### **16.3 Recreation**

- We've got a dog park for every neighbourhood now.
- When you go, look at the park we just built by the river.
  - That park was built because of the condominiums that we're putting into the high-rises so that families will have a place to go to teach their children about what I had on the street.
  - They have street there; a big piece of tarmac where they can ride a bicycle, skateboard, play basketball.