

METRO VANCOUVER FUTURE OF THE REGION SUSTAINABILITY DIALOGUES

BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER

June 26, 2012, NORTH SHORE

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 26, 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.

Issues Summary Notes

ABOUT THE TOPIC:

BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER

- This dialogue series is intended to explore the topic of social connectedness in Metro Vancouver, which is by most accounts on the fast track to sustainability.
 - When I travel around the world representing Metro Vancouver or the City of Burnaby, we are often the example that is given of an incredibly successful city.
 - Sometimes, within our own framework here, we are less than complimentary about our own achievements, but around the world we are consistently recognized as one of the most sustainable cities in the world and certainly one of the most inclusive.
 - We are renowned for being green, for embracing diversity, and for high livability scores.
- Yet new research by the Vancouver Foundation suggests that people may be feeling a sense of isolation: a lack of connection to their neighbours, to their community, and by extension to their city and their region.
- Today, we will explore the topic of building community, and particularly what this means in the face of the emerging trend of community disconnection and individual isolation in the Metro Vancouver region. We will be hearing about potential causes and opportunities for improvement. Questions to consider include:
 - What might be contributing to this trend? Is it our growing and increasingly multicultural population, our planning approaches, our transition to a digital age, or something else?
 - Is this what you as residents of the region are experiencing in your own communities? Is the Vancouver Foundation’s evidence right? Are you feeling this element of disconnectedness in your neighbourhoods?
 - What can each of us in our respective roles do to build the social connections that support the development of strong and healthy communities? After all, health is not just about your physical health; it’s about your mental health and whether or not you are feeling connected to the people around you.



- Arguably, a sense of connection to our neighbours, our community and our region is important if we are to succeed in building a sustainable region.

THE DIALOGUE

1.0 Context

1.1 Vancouver has a reputation for being socially chilly

- [This region is socially] cooler [than California]. There is no informal contact with strangers, and social signals are sent [to reinforce that].
 - About a quarter of the people here immigrated from another country, but I came here 30 years ago from California, which shares this time zone.
 - I am from the race that was the dominant culture about 30 years ago and I spoke the same language, yet it was a foreign place to me. The culture was very different than in sunny southern California.
 - It's hard to see on the surface, but it is a much cooler environment here.
- One of my earliest memories was trying to strike up a conversation on a bus and I got such a cold shoulder it was practically frozen. So I haven't, in some 30-odd years, tried to do that again.
 - Ironically, the other day, on my way to the New Westminster talk on this subject, I sat down next to a person, asking her to move her purse without even looking at her. Striking up a conversation was out of the question. [She turned out to be a fellow panellist].

1.2 Is Vancouver less friendly than the prairies or rural areas?

- Is Vancouver less friendly than the prairie cities? And what is different? People on the prairies say they communicate and they have more social interaction.
- Whether the issues [that affect social connectivity] are technology or the infusion of immigrants, [all regions are] experiencing them, though maybe on a smaller scale.
 - I did a presentation in Abbotsford, on [social connectivity in] Metro Vancouver, for Community Foundations of Canada. All of the community foundations in the province were there. A number of people come up to me from small towns to say it was no different in their community. That surprised me.

1.3 Some of us miss the Vancouver of decades past

- I was born and raised in Vancouver and, like many citizens, mourn paradise lost. [People claim] that Vancouver was different in the past and is much better now, but for some of us, [that's not true].
 - In many ways, what we had here in the village of Vancouver was special.
 - But like all paradises, when other people find out, they come. I'm sure the Hawaiians, Fijians and everyone in the world who was discovered felt much the same way, when new people came to that beautiful place that they thought was just their own.
 - This is one of the areas in the world where there really is something special. People recognize that and they are gathering from all over the world to be part of it.

1.4 Rapid change undermines courtesy and formation of deep friendships

- Do changing demographics and urbanization impact community social connectivity?
 - I was born and raised in Vancouver on the North Shore, and have seen significant changes in the demographics of the entire region in my lifetime: aging population and changes in the ethnic mix.

- Also, hectic schedules have led to changes in traditional behaviour that you didn't experience 20 or more years ago.
- [We used to have] common social courtesy on buses: greeting people, standing up if there is an elderly person getting on the bus, and also talking to people, giving directions.
- [Now] there is road rage based on commuting distances in the city.
- What works in some of our communities is Block Watch, block parties and community days such as the Lynn Valley and Blueridge Community Days.
- Rates of change affect one's ability to make deep friendships.
 - High turnover or immigration or other change makes it harder to have evolutionary building up of custom.
 - And culture is a network of customs that lets you understand how to behave. You understand what is courtesy.
 - Some cultures don't favour eye contact. We westerners tend to say it's important, and if somebody shies away from us, we tend to think they are being snobbish. But they may be coming from a culture where eye contact is a no no.
 - Urbanization can bring about rapid changes. We tend to think about the Olympic Village and other megaprojects.
 - On the other hand, this part of Lower Lonsdale was not here 20 years ago and it's phenomenal. You have an amazing vitality down here, where people really love it, including the younger people who work in the city or nearby.

1.5 Burnaby's social sustainability strategy

- The City of Burnaby has recently produced a social sustainability strategy, which is unusual for cities in the Lower Mainland or anywhere in Canada.
 - [Burnaby] is on the cutting edge of trying to find ways to make our communities more inclusive.
 - Go online to the City of Burnaby website and look at our social sustainability strategy. I think you'll find it interesting.

2.0 The Vancouver Foundation survey on social connectivity

2.1 The Vancouver Foundation's mandate and funds

- The Vancouver Foundation's mandate is to build community. Our vision is healthy, vibrant and livable communities across the province of B.C.
 - We are the largest community foundation in Canada, and the second-oldest at 70 years.
- Many of you know the Vancouver Foundation as an organization that starts trust funds and endowed funds.
 - I am the vice president of granting, or the "money-out" side of the operation, and my team is responsible for getting the money out and on the ground in Vancouver.
 - We are addressing some of the social issues we will be talking about today.

2.2 Scope of the Vancouver Foundation survey on social connectivity

- The Vancouver Foundation recently did a major survey of 3,800 people in Vancouver, [on the topic of social connectivity]. It is the largest of its type for this topic, and the full report is on our website.
 - The distribution of the survey respondents was across Metro Vancouver, and we made sure that the numbers were relative to the proportional population in each area. It was done in four languages as well. In Surrey we had 800 respondents.

- We wanted to examine how connected and engaged residents were at three levels:
 - on a personal friendship level;
 - their neighbourhood relationships; and
 - their experiences in the larger community of Metro Vancouver.
- We wanted to quantify how connected and engaged our community is and to understand where the gaps and needs are.

2.3 Neighbourhood relationships are cordial but shallow

- The Vancouver Foundation survey discovered that neighbourhood relationships are cordial but shallow. We know our neighbours' names but that's about it.
 - Most of us have not done a favour for a neighbour.
 - Few of us have had a neighbour over or even visited a neighbour.
 - About half of us do not trust or don't know if we trust our neighbours.

2.4 More interaction is needed to build trust and optimism

- From our survey we found that the more interaction by neighbours, the greater the benefits to people who live there. Trust increased and optimism increased.
 - Statistics tell us that in neighbourhoods where people know each other and know each other's names, the neighbourhoods have regularly been safer.
 - [Our own survey shows that] knowing names matters, but interactions are the most important.

2.5 Diversity is tolerated but adds strain

- When we dug down in our survey, we saw that diversity puts a strain on our neighbourhoods, that we as a community have yet to address.
 - The more languages that were spoken in a neighbourhood, the more diversity, the more people were likely to say in our survey that they did not trust each other, and that they did not feel welcome or that they belonged. And the more likely they were to believe that it would be difficult to rally neighbours to solve a local problem.
 - This is not a knock against diversity but a reminder that we haven't focused on the challenges that come with diversity and the need to build bridges between different ethnic groups.
- At the larger community level, we found residents tolerant of diversity but also a little impatient with it.
 - The results showed that 65% of people believed they prefer to stick with their own, and 44% said they feel that those people who don't speak English aren't trying hard enough.
 - One-third of us have friends outside of our own ethnic group.
 - About one-third of us will easily identify who would not be welcome in our neighbourhood. That was a really interesting result.

2.6 Young adults often feel disconnected

- The survey showed that the most disconnected group [was adults aged 25 to 34.
 - Those that kept popping up as experiencing them most disconnection were 25 to 34 years old, or people living in apartments or condos or rented suites in houses.
 - The Vancouver Foundation is concerned that so many of our younger adults—about 60%—are feeling disconnected and are retreating from participation in civic life. This in turn is affecting their optimism and their attitude toward others in the community.
- This is something we can't ignore.

2.7 The Vancouver foundation emphasizes the importance of bonding between different groups

- In a pluralist society like ours, we need more bonding between different ethnic and cultural groups, but this is precisely the hardest type of connection to make.
 - We need to make an effort to make this happen, and this will be the focus of our work at the Vancouver Foundation.
- We also need to ensure that everyone feels that we are part of one community—that we all have an equal stake in it, that we are all in the same boat. We can't solve larger issues facing our community such environment, poverty, homelessness, if we have a large group of residents on the sidelines.
 - We can't make progress if people's concerns end at their front doors or in their own yards, or if residents are bitter or resentful—and a large percentage of them demonstrated this in the survey.
 - A sustainable community is one that's connected and engaged.

2.8 The social connectivity survey shows us where to start building bridges

- But at the Vancouver Foundation, we are optimistic and feel that this is just the beginning. We can't build a bridge until we know where the bridge is needed. We can't fix things if we don't really know what needs to be repaired.
 - This is one of the reasons why we did this benchmark survey.
 - It was revealing. It gives our foundation and others such as builders, planners, government, community groups, and businesses something to think about and someplace to start.

2.9 Scope of results in the Vancouver Foundation survey

- The Vancouver Foundation survey results that you've seen and heard about are from the first pass of our impressions from telephone interviews, which were based on a lengthy telephone questionnaire.
 - Going forward, we will dive more deeply into the [reasons for] gaps that we found and the negativity among people aged 25 to 34 and people living in highrises.
 - We will ask what is causing the gaps, why are people in highrises feeling this way, and what would bring them out and connect them to others?
 - [We have presented] what rose to the top, and we are looking to subsidiary and more analysis, which we are hoping will be ready in September or October. We haven't dug down [yet].
 - We're having these dialogues to get feedback and [talk] about why this is happening.
 - Surveys like this put [the issues] on the table: this is what's happening; this is the phenomenon. Then we all talk about why, and what to do to fix it.

2.10 Should we promote social connectivity when not everyone who was surveyed wants it?

- The Vancouver Foundation survey just gave us a snapshot of what people are thinking and some significant things rose to the top, a number of them around cultures and differences in cultures.
 - It's caused us at the foundation to have a lot of conversations about what to do, as an organization, with these results.
 - One of the questions that came up is, how do we impose our traditional views of what being engaged is on cultures?

- Some people in the survey said they don't want to be connected. They're fine with where they are.
- On the other hand, we have research that shows us that when people are connected, communities are better.
- How do we come to a common place or meeting ground on that spectrum. We don't have the answers.
- What we think of as connected and engaged may be different for other cultures.
- We have to ask, is it important, and to what level does it affect our society? And do we put dollars and time behind making those connections?

3.0 Winter weather as a factor in decreasing social connectivity

- Did the Vancouver Foundation survey [look at winter weather as a factor in social connectivity]?
 - Because of our weather, people hibernate in winter, so that in single-family neighbourhoods, people don't see each other as much as they do in the summer months when they are out gardening or walking.
- We don't know if weather or hibernation [is a cause]. The survey results that you've seen and heard about are from the first pass of impressions from telephone interviews. We are looking to subsidiary and more analysis, which we are hoping will be ready in September or October.

4.0 Community planning for social connectivity

4.1 Community planning and building design influence social connectivity

- What [you can do to] contribute to social connectivity depends on who you are.
 - If you are a planner or a city councillor or a mayor, you lay out the city making decisions around development, rezoning, etc. The official community plan or OCP is the large guiding document of a community.
 - If you are a building official, you have things to do about how spaces are arranged in buildings, fire codes, stairs, exits and the like.
 - If you are a developer, you developers have a huge role because you are putting the so-called product out there. Developers are concerned about not just money but also the efficiency of the building. Ideally, they would like to have 100% of a building be sellable or rentable. Common areas such lobbies, social rooms or amenity spaces may or may not detract from that efficiency.
- Building forms, the costs of developing them and the regulations that apply to them have a lot to do with preventing or increasing social connectivity.

4.2 Designing a building to promote friendliness

- A developer and his or her architects, if asked to design a building to promote friendliness, might design a building that is totally different from those we have now.
 - A typical highrise building has windows on all four sides, and in the middle is the core with the elevators and stairs.
 - Imagine a building with the same footprint that, in the middle, has no elevators but a nice open doughnut, that lets you see across to other doorways. It has a grand staircase that goes down, like in a French hotel building, where you almost always come out your door and see other people rather than the wall of the elevator lobby—which is usually another door.

- Living in a condo downtown, I have to go through seven doors to get to my bicycle. Those of you who live in a house go downstairs to the basement to get your bicycle, and off you go.
- In highrise buildings today, safety and security are the number one and number two concerns.
 - Nobody can get from the lobby upstairs without being buzzed in. You can't even get from one floor to the other on the elevator, because they are individually keyed.
 - If you know somebody on the next floor up or five floors up, they would have to want you to come. So that's a whole different way of interacting.
- Architects can be a lot more proactive.
 - Something happens between their education, when they are very idealistic, almost looking at architecture and planning as a way to change the world, and then going out to serve development interests, generally speaking.
 - A little bit of that idealism [should be preserved. Architects can say, "Look, I really want to work with you to build the best building that gets you the most money, but also at the same time achieves other objectives. We want people to care about each other."

4.3 Designing places that keep people closer together

- If you want to live in a place where people get to know each other, things have to be a little closer together, and there have to be more opportunities to be engaged in the public realm.
- Where I was born in New Orleans, there were 25-foot lots, zero setbacks, and often a stoop coming out right on the sidewalk, not on the property. People sat outside and knew each other.
 - I grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, and when air conditioning and then TV came along, the stoop culture disappeared in New Orleans.
 - I'm all about the front porch culture. The more we can have of it, the better off we will be as a community.

4.4 Ingredients for successful public spaces

- Really successful public spaces don't need what's called "programming"—programmed buskers and other things. They just are good places to be, but they need something like a library to make people want to go there.
 - A city hall isn't enough. It's only open 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week.
 - A library is open seven days a week. So, anchoring [a public plaza] with a library is an amazingly important thing.

4.5 Small apartments increase social connectivity

- Having a very small apartment and a very small fridge means you have to shop every day, and you will look for fresh, because it will go bad. So you're supporting those local little markets in the nearby square—local industry and local culture.
- Luckily, the economy is forcing small apartments, and you tend to get, whether you like it or not, a more vibrant street life.
 - If you live across the street from a pub like I do, you'll have noise. On the other hand, I like a vibrant street life, so I'm willing to put up with it.
 - If you really want that sense of community and a vibrant street life, you have to mix things up a bit.

4.6 Dog ownership increases social connectivity

- If you have a dog, you meet lots of people.
- I know that in buildings, dogs [make a difference]. That's how I know everyone in my building. So my solution to all of this is, everybody get a dog.
- Owning a dog is definitely a way to be a good neighbour. You will know who is out there, if they are doing good things or have other intents. You will meet other people with dogs.

4.7 Community gardens increase social connectivity

- Another thing [that increases social connectivity] is a community garden.
- If you had a small apartment, a dog, a small fridge and you grew your own food out there with other people, you would find ways of being connected. Those are lifestyle decisions.

5.0 Local planning on the North Shore to promote social connectivity

- [On the North Shore,] both the city and the district are striving to bring communities together.
- I worked some years ago with the new library in City of North Vancouver on 14th Street, finding that location, even though it didn't belong to the city at the time.
 - A land swap was made with the owner of that property. We got not only the library but the plaza.
- We're also working to make a public realm at the foot of Lonsdale on the waterfront. There are public events around that. That's another gathering space for the whole community, not just the ones who live near the library.
- Village Green, the 100-year sustainability plan in the City of North Vancouver, is an incredibly foresightful document. It suggests that in the City of North Vancouver, all even-numbered streets, say in Upper Lonsdale, that don't have through roads and transit on them and so forth, could be greenways.
 - Can you imagine what that would look like over the next 50 or 100 years if, in front of your house, instead of blacktop and sidewalks, you had green space where you could have community gardens, grow food and see kids playing, while the car still has access in the lane.
 - Also, you could, when rebuilding, move incrementally closer to that green space rather than having a 25-foot front yard that goes to your front door.
- The District of North Vancouver has gone through a major OCP update, and is now in the implementation state in each of the local areas—Lynn Valley, Lower Lynn, Lower Capilano and Maplewood. A driving aspiration of the city council and staff and community is to have a public space such as a square, a piazza or a park.
 - A whole range of things can be done.
 - I'm amazed at how popular just the corner bulges are up in Edgemont Village. You go there almost any time, night or day, and there are people sitting around talking to each other—right outside Delaney's.
 - Those kinds of things, not just the building itself or the set of buildings on a street, are important in the public realm.

6.0 The role of schools

6.1 Declining enrolment and school closures

- Connectivity often occurs through the schools, but most areas now have declining school enrolment.
 - Families in traditional single-family neighbourhoods meet each other as the children are going through the school system.
- With the demographics on the North Shore, will school closures be increasing, while on the south side, schools are being built?
- It's partly a chicken-and-egg situation. You close the schools and people with children don't want to move into the neighbourhood. Ideally, you'd like to have the children and you'd like to have the school.

6.2 Schools with small catchment areas are a building block of communities, and school closures force adjustments

- On a map of, say, Vancouver, which is 44 square miles, if you put a five-minute radius around every school, you'd touch almost every single family house in the whole city, because that's the way they were designed.
 - Cities were designed around a certain walk catchment for the school. It's a fundamental building block of neighbourhoods.
 - That catchment is bounded by arterials, so kids don't have to cross the busy streets, theoretically.
 - When you close those schools, the catchment has to be shifted by some other means such as car or bus to another place.

6.3 What is the effect of having very large schools?

- Very large schools mean savings because of scale. How much is that affecting the disappearance of schools?
- The old phrase is that it takes a village to raise a child. What is the size of the village, and how expandable is that?

6.4 Reusing closed schools to re-establish community connectivity

- On the North Shore eight schools are closed or slated for closure, and a big gap is occurring in many of our neighbourhoods because of these closures. How can these schools be reused and knitted back into our communities?
- Obviously public uses [of schools], to me, would be number one, not a private use.
 - Not every square foot of the grounds has to be used for community facilities. These are big [properties] of two to five acres in cities.
 - Schools are ideally located for a number of things, including some other kinds of housing to meet needs that aren't presently met in the marketplace.
- A closed school is a perfectly placed experimentation area or new commons for a community to work with to try new things, and we have to try new things.
- School spaces are opportunities for community gardens and other community projects.
 - The Vancouver Foundation just partnered with the City of Vancouver on its Greenest City goals, and we're delivering three granting programs to help the city reach its goals for 2020.

- As part of that, we're considering providing funding for what they're calling their orphan spaces, which are places in the city that the city owns that have done nothing for years, for whatever reason—including schools.
- We're looking at those spaces for community gardens and community projects that bring neighbours together.
- A North Vancouver art centre was built for kids, but we are closing so many schools. Why not use schools for art centres for the community?
 - The [new] building is very nice but the same programs could be available in the local schools.
- The school district redevelopment on Lonsdale is actually is a former school site.
 - It pulls together the school district offices as well as the kids' trust.
 - It's quite central in terms of proximity to transit and so on.
 - It also facilitated the redevelopment of the rest of the property with the residential units, which provided funding to seismic upgrading for both Ridgeway and Queen Mary School, which is under way right now, retaining two of the city's most significant heritage buildings.

6.6 Using closed school grounds for district energy systems

- Schools are ideally located for district energy systems, and they have big flat areas.
 - You could dig up the playground, put something under it and radiate out from it, hitting almost every house, rather than going up the middle of Lonsdale and branching out for every highrise building.

6.7 Schools create connectivity only for those who have children

- Schools are often antisocial because they close at 3:30, and, if you're not a parent, you're not welcome at any time.
 - They're also closed the whole weekend.
 - They're part of the traditional old idea of a community built around a school, which doesn't help toward a community [now].
 - It tends to have a huge negative effect unless you are a parent of one or two kids in that particular school.

6.8 Schools often duplicate services such as libraries

- Schools often have a duplication of other services such as libraries and community centres, which are often in conflict and competition with each other.
 - I've often gone to the library on 14th Street at Lonsdale, but the school has a library, too. So what's the idea of [the school] library?
 - Do you ever talk to the librarians at schools, and isn't it a huge duplication of [demand on] taxpayers' money and resources?
 - They don't communicate with each other and there's competition between the bureaucrats from the schools and the bureaucrats from the libraries. It's like the police competing with different things.

6.9 Schools and libraries need to change to adapt to changing community demands

- Our social systems are geared to society [as it once was, but society] has changed dramatically around them and they haven't kept up.
 - Our public libraries and schools would all probably prefer it not to change as quickly as society around them would like.

- So the balance between community draw (what the community wants), and the funding and politics and so on is a dance that we're not good at yet.
- But the Vancouver Foundation, [for example,] is a catalyst that helps people shift and do things in new ways.
- We need more organizations like that and more people willing to say, I'm going to occupy this space in a new way, and see what happens.

6.10 Schools and community agencies need to change faster to deliver what people value

- Education is changing, and the opportunities around that are deeply motivating.
 - We used to think education as a three-way partnership between a home, a school and a community. As parents became too busy, it became a two-way partnership. Then community became more fragmented and isolated, and schools have become burdened with so many things that it's difficult for them to operate.
 - Transitions are happening now through a number of things, not just media, as a way of creating opportunities for communities to get back in the game.
 - I honestly believe that most of our community agencies and most of our community assets simply aren't running fast enough, meaning they aren't keeping up with what people value in terms of connectedness and community. They're doing things in the same old way.
 - We desperately need the Vancouver Foundation and others to help them find their own way at a better pace.

7.0 Siting community amenities in easily accessible locations

- At city hall yesterday, they were discussing the Harbourside project, which will be about half a mile west of Lonsdale Quay, and the other side would be the auto mall, and they don't have a specific population in mind.
 - For the seniors, it would be half a mile to go to Lonsdale Quay, which is too far. For young people who have no school, there is no school around.
 - Somebody proposed that maybe it would be good for training purposes for the shipyard or auto mall or something like that, because it doesn't have a community around it.
 - [People would] have to drive everywhere to go to the food store or anything.
 - It's far, and they have to go over an overpass on Fell Street. That won't support wheelchairs because it's too steep.
- I was living in Toronto in a complex of three buildings with 20 floors, and we had a community gardens that were behind 1.5 or 2 acres behind the buildings. That wasn't working well because a community garden should be around the property and should have benches around, so people will be more involved.

8.0 Challenges with new media and technology

8.1 New technology disconnects people from the real world and from each other

- New technology has completely changed our social system, provoking a virtual world of individualism where people are all concentrating on themselves.
 - They are connecting friends everywhere in the rest of the world but are incapable of having a connection with their neighbours or other people in the same place.
 - This morning, I was in a lab waiting room for close to an hour, and all the young people were on their individual system. Approximately two-thirds of the people were

older and one-third were young people who were in between older people who could not have any connection. Nobody was trying to talk to each other, and at least a third of the young people were on the phone with somebody elsewhere.

- I find it strange that in a restaurant or other different places, people are involved in their own business, but they do not connect with the people next to them.
- Also, you see tourists going to incredible places, arriving quickly with their car, taking a picture with their cellular phone, going back into the car and leaving. They don't even look at what they have taken the picture of. I find that disturbing.
- People are not connected with nature anymore because they are in that virtual world. They haven't found a richer use of this kind of network, so I find an ambivalence in the comments [about new technology for social connectivity].
- It's like television. I grew up when television was being developed. We thought that it would be an incredible technology. Look what has been done with television. It's a waste. There is nothing interesting, it's not being used intelligently, and most of the time the 400 channels are useless.
- My fear with new technology is that we are at a point of trouble.
- I was sitting at Dundarave, watching a couple with two kids. The husband was talking on the phone. The wife was talking on the phone. And the kids were told to go away and play. We are heading down the wrong path. Nobody is communicating with anybody.

8.2 If new media is a disease, what is the cure?

- If the media around us are not working in favour of social connectivity, and are, as thought by some, a disease, how can we change that?
- If we think of the connectedness we seek as a form of health, then much of our social media is like junk food.
 - It's fast and easy but its nutrition level in terms of social connectedness and health is very thin.
 - We can change that by understanding how we can use those media in proactive ways to support community—not relying on it but using it strategically.

8.3 No technology is inherently antisocial

- No technology on its own is inherently antisocial, and people have been finding ways to isolate themselves within vibrant society for eons, whether it be through fashion or holding a book or any number of social conventions.
 - It's unfortunate that our experience of digital and media technologies for the last century or so has been progressively more antisocial, because of how the limitations of those technologies have kept them being expressed.
 - Movies took people off the street and put them in a dark room where they didn't talk to others, television put people in their living rooms where they weren't talking to each other then the Internet put people in their own rooms alone, viewing information. Then, with Web 2.0, they sat in their room pretending they were being social in the social Web.
 - That's all not because the technologies themselves are inherently antisocial but because the technologies were limited in that they couldn't accompany people who were walking or integrate with their lifestyles.
 - I'm excited now because have the opportunity of weaving the advantages of the technology into our moving about, interacting, breaking the ice and so on.

- Our major design problem is that for the last several centuries we’ve only been designing, as creative people, monolithic linear narratives, which means a monologue. We haven’t been designing our media to be better only when other people participate and contribute, and by sharing. We will learn how to do that again. There’s great resonance for community in that.

8.4 Technology that allows people to work from home can also make them feel isolated

- A lot of people who are now working from home and not having to go into an office are losing the social connectivity of talking with their fellow workers.
 - For people who are isolated, not being forced to talk to fellow workers may increase the sense of isolation.
- I have three offices and don’t go to any of them, and I do work from home a lot. I commute exclusively by bicycle and I seek the commons for my work.
 - I seek places in the public realm—gathering points.
 - I can bring the people that I’m working with to those gathering points, because I find them inspirational. I find the energy of the commons useful to inspire any conversation, whether it be creative, business or purely social.
- The notion that people will stay at home and do their work is artificial.
 - [People] may have the sense that they are chained to someplace because they have to have a [physical] connection. But all those ball-and-chain things are gone.
 - People will naturally gravitate to the inspirational commons if we built that for them.

9.0 New media and opportunities for community engagement

9.1 New media can be the solution rather than the problem

- I don’t believe that Facebook makes us lonelier, nor that the media that surround us are a disease that is causing problems in connectedness and community.
 - The media that is blossoming around us in spectacular new ways is probably the cure rather than the disease.
 - It will not be a panacea but it will be part of how we make communities work, how people interact and how people come together in surprisingly new ways.
- The popularity of things like Twitter and Facebook on the Web and on people’s mobile devices demonstrates a deep hunger that people want to connect.
 - People are connecting that way because it’s easy and it allows connectedness with all kinds of communities all across the globe—with literally a few thumb-prints or a few thoughts.
 - We don’t allow that same easiness to happen within our community, but that will change.

9.2 Social media provides the opportunity to participate

- The driver around everything on the social Web is that the people who participate feel they are making a contribution.
 - The social Web is all about, “I am doing something; I am part of something; what I’m doing is meaningful to me; it’s about my identity.”
- The opportunity to participate is what we want to create in communities as well.
 - “Communications” come to mean a one-way dialogue, not a conversation. So much of our media and communications are not about allowing people to have their say and feel like they’re a part of something or contributing.
 - Social media will provide that opportunity.

9.3 Mobile devices with location awareness can help people connect locally

- As more and more people get mobile phones and move from mobile phones to smart phones and super phones, the power of the Web moves out of static machines on desktops or even laptops to [travel] around with us, but with location and context awareness.
 - All of the potential of the Internet is weaving into our streets and into our lifestyles all around us.
 - We can use that as a means of isolating ourselves—we can be on a street corner and just use our device to shop rather than connect with people.
 - Or we can use that power to promote inclusiveness, create social ice-breakers and do things that enliven community.

9.4 The Mobile Muse Network promotes local connection, for example, through PlaceSpeak and Park Quest

- About 10 years ago, I founded the Mobile Muse Network, thinking that Vancouver would be the ideal living lab for new forms of cultural expression and new forms of social interaction, engaged by new forms of media technologies.
 - We've been using Vancouver as a living lab because we have the opportunity and potential of many cultures, a vibrant outdoor lifestyle and all kinds of [events].
 - We actually triggered the formation of Mobile Muse on anticipation before we won the bid for 2010, thinking that at least we knew what the mobile pieces would be in 2010—we knew how we could welcome the world using emerging technologies and wanted to make Vancouver a leader in that.
- With these media, we can find new ways of tying people together and giving them an opportunity to do things.
- For example, I am working with a company called PlaceSpeak, which allows a new form of dialogue to happen with civic planners, developers, neighbourhoods, and so on, based on where you live, where you work or where you spend most of your time.
 - It allows you to register the fact that you are there, then it gathers conversations around you. It's geographically embedded social conversation.
 - It allows people to feel like their home and community are around them and that they have a direct voice in the what happens in their community.
- Another example is Park Quest, which launches this week. We're working with Metro Vancouver and the regional parks to allow the average citizen to not just enjoy and appreciate the parks but contribute to them directly.
 - We've created a set of social-based apps so that when you go into the park you can do things and get credit for doing things.
 - You can get Facebook recognition, goods and services from participating sponsors, free things in the parks, and also such things as academic credits in schools for doing a particular field trip that's laid out on your mobile phone.
 - Whether it's doing species audits or cleaning up streams or simply appreciating what's in the park, we can now lay that out in the community in a deep way [through mobile devices].

9.5 Using Skype, Google Plus and the Internet to build identity and connect to community

- Skype allows only one to one communication. What do you think of Google Plus, which has “hangouts” allowing videoconferencing with up to 10 people?
- Skype does allow many people to connect at the same time. In fact, parents who have children all over the world and grandparents can bring 3 or 4 together.
- Google Plus and its hangouts is just an example of group collaboration environments, which are flourishing all over the place.
- The opportunity [with Google Plus] is, as with most of the Internet, that it makes it much easier for you to find people that you want to connect with, and connect with them in new ways, and therefore build your identity around that.
 - You can then find out how to connect the things you’re interested in back to community, if you want to seed them into the community and then interest other people around you and find other things that are interesting for yourself.
 - You can use the same technologies for that but you also want to embed those in the community to make them richer.
- I’m thankful that Skype exists because it lets me communicate with my kids in Syria. They were teaching there in a U.S. school.

9.6 Open dialogue on the Internet versus privacy concerns

- How do we use the Internet for open dialogue if people have concerns about their privacy?
 - There are more and more security and privacy issues on the Internet.
- One of the problems we have on the Internet on a much larger scale is that increasingly, we’re asked not to own the information about ourselves.
 - Whether it’s our health records in a huge background system, or our education records or any of those types of things, we’re being told that we’re too stupid to own them, so we’d better let somebody else own them.
 - The answer is that we are actually fully capable of owning the substance of those records and how we share that. It’s part of our identity, and owning that identity is the first step toward being part of a community.

10.0 Who is using new technology?

- For all of the positive things [about new technology], the numbers in front of me show that the most cynical and negative group is aged 25 to 34 years, and I would hazard a guess that that is the age group that is the largest user of technology. That is the age group that I see on SkyTrain and everywhere, not communicating but on technology.
- My experience in Mobile Muse is that it would be a real shame for us to point to any particular age or culture as being either hooked or not using technology in a particular way or contributing.
 - We see every age group and every ethnicity using technology in different ways.
 - The question of how they’re woven together is a very interesting one.

11.0 Cultural diversity

11.1 Is preservation of cultural diversity a disservice to society?

- There are a lot of cultural niches in Vancouver, such as Little Italy on Commercial Drive, Little India, and even Little Vietnam and Japanese Town.
 - They maintain a cultural richness within each community, but are they doing a disservice to society as a whole, because all of the communities are segregating themselves? Is this contributing to resentment and isolation?
 - If so, is there a way for each culturally individual community to come together and be more inclusive in Vancouver?
- The Greek Festival, Vaisakhi and other festivals help people remember and celebrate where they are from and keep culture alive, but it's definitely a two-edged sword.
 - Fantastic things happen in those communities, but we also need to identify where it break down. We need to be brave enough to say what issues are occurring because of it and then looking for ways to solve them.
 - We don't want homogenous communities, but we do have to deal with the many challenges that arise.
 - [The Vancouver Foundation] will be coming out later with [survey] results around that.
- It's a high-quality problem to have. I can remember when Vancouver didn't have nearly the richness it has now, and it wasn't nearly as nice a place as it is now. The richness we have creates problems, but what a great problem to have. Let's solve it.
- Andy Yan of Bing Thom Architects has done studies of the mix of ethnicities in Vancouver versus other places, and we're quite a bit more mixed.
 - The Chinese communities are in pockets in various sizes. Richmond is very big, but there are other places.
 - In Los Angeles, 90% of them live in the same community. They are not distributed. That's a real concentration and a real silo.

11.2 Foreign ownership and investment breed resentment

- One of the big issues is resentment of foreign ownership and foreign money in real estate. A lot of it comes down to money. People are concerned about their own pot of money, for a lot of reasons. That's breeding resentment, [although the assumptions on which the resentment is based] may not always be true.

11.3 We have less conflict because our immigrant population is relatively wealthy

- Vancouver hasn't had the kind of conflict American cities have had about immigration partly because our immigration has tended to come from the top.
 - People who already had money and wealth and could buy property or create a business. Our criteria for immigration have changed us from the top.
 - In other countries such as the U.K, they tend to change from the bottom. That's because [immigrants] are competing with other people already on the bottom for jobs, for housing and services, and it creates more conflict.
 - I don't think we've understood this dynamic well enough in Vancouver—that we have imported, generally, wealthier people, and they've bought property and changed neighbourhoods.

11.4 As a city of immigrants, we can become one of the great cities of the world

- [Greater Vancouver] is becoming a city of immigrants, [which destines us to be a great city].
 - In Burnaby, 51% of the people were not born in Canada. We speak over 100 languages. Every major religion is represented in my city.
 - That transition is hard to cope with. Working through it challenges us. As Canadians we have been accomplishing that. We have been doing a tremendous job that is envied around the world, being able to bring people together from so many diverse backgrounds and ensuring that they work together. We should be very proud of the progress we have made.
 - As we engage people, that diversity will us develop into one of the foremost cities in the world. Remember that all the great cities of the world have been cities of immigrants. Whether it's been Carthage, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, London or New York, the great cities of the world have been cities of immigrants. And we are a city of immigrants, which [suggests that] we are destined for greatness.
 - We will discover that as we build upon this base of people coming from all over the world to be part of the education and the enlightenment that is [available] in a city of immigrants.

12.0 Using ethnic festivals to promote social connectivity

12.1 Having a different ethnic festival every weekend

- [It would be great] if we could take turns [with ethnic festivals], so one weekend would be the Greek Festival and the next weekend would be another festival for a different nationality, to get people onto the street.
 - The Greek Fest last weekend was nice, with four blocks of streets blocked off.
 - In Toronto, they had the same thing and everybody was dancing on the street.

12.2 Festivals are successful when the community itself invests its energy

- I was at Greek Days and loved it, [and it's better organized than ever].
 - I also remember it from 20 years ago and when it closed down.
 - The difference with it coming back is that it's so much better organized now.
 - You can't get that organization without a lot of people coming together and wanting it to work well. That's a demonstration of the kind of energy and expertise that we can harvest in our community to make this kind of festival work.
- We can't expect these kinds of events to be dropped down upon us. If there is something we love, each of us has the ability to gather a few people together to make it happen in the community, whether it's as small as a block party or as large as a Greek Fest.
 - Our city is a living lab, where you can paint or dance or whatever else. It's ours.
 - We just haven't understood how to choreograph it as well as we should.

12.3 Developing a central place to provide information and co-ordinate local festivals

- Often, we read about these festivals on Sunday in the Saturday paper and say, "Gee, I wish I'd known about that." [There is no central] repository where everybody thinks [to look].
 - I know someone who doesn't read the *Vancouver Sun*, and didn't see what was on that weekend. You get bits and pieces from all over the place.

- [It would help] if there was one place where you knew, when you wanted to connect with people around community events, like OpenTable for dining, that that's where you would go to see what festivals are on.
- Some festivals seem to run concurrently, and it's challenging because there are two or three things going on the same day.
 - So if there were some place where they were a little more co-ordinated and out there so that more people knew, then more people would go.

12.4 Ethnic festivals need to be driven by popular demand, not imposed

- Ethnic festivals are good examples of demand-driven [events]. If people don't want them, there is no way you can impose them, but cities are in a position to support them.
 - I was at a workshop last night with Commercial Drive merchants and the Business Improvement Association, and they annually have their Italian Days.
 - The city thought it was such a good idea, they wanted to have weekly closures on Sunday on Commercial Drive.
 - That had a tremendously deleterious effect on the small produce stores. Nobody could get there. People doing their weekly shopping wanted to go shop to shop and get their produce or their meat or their baked goods or what-have-you, and they couldn't do it. They actually had to lay people off because they didn't have the business on that particular day.
 - So imposing festivals from the top is not necessarily the way to go, but supporting them when there is a will and an interest and demonstrated need, is something cities can and do do.

13.0 Social connectivity for young and old

13.1 Connecting different age groups with each other

- How do you connect different age groups—the young people and the elderly—with social media and with urban planning, to create that sense of connectedness?
- There wasn't anything specific in the Vancouver Foundation survey, but it is one of the areas in which the Vancouver Foundation is considering granting.
 - The intergenerational projects that we've done have had astounding results.
 - Also, we've started to talk about how to bring seniors into more use of technology, which will automatically connect them to their grandchildren, the wider world and community we live in.
- My 99-year-old mother-in-law has a Facebook account and an e-mail account. The benefit of technology with a Facebook account or Skype is that, if your children or grandchildren aren't near you, it enables connectivity.
- From a physical urban planning perspective, you could close off a block permanently at both ends, use the lanes for your vehicles, and walk that little block from your house to say Lonsdale or some other community centre.
 - The kids could play between the front doors of other houses, allowing integration to begin to occur among people of different ages and counter the isolation that people feel with their technology, or just their age.
- Free range children are just as important as free range chickens. We're having policies around chickens in your yards but we don't have a lot of policies around letting our kids be free and roam around on their own.

- I have a place on Pender Island where the kids are free range. They have to learn to get along with adults because they're brought up in it, and I benefit from knowing children that are not my own.
- I know them by name, I know what they're up to, I know their talents and interests.
- That doesn't happen unless you're in a fairly village-like place. There has to be some contained sense of the village or the green or the [shared plaza].

13.2 Community kitchens and food can connect people of all ages and cultures

- The North Shore has a complex problem, dealing with a lot of groups with different interests, ages and technologies, [but they can all be brought together by a community kitchen].
 - As a Chinese immigrant, [I can say that] the Chinese are very social people, and from a Chinese perspective, an incredibly powerful instrument is the “table.” What the table does is connect people. Whenever you are sitting around with a bunch of people, there is always a table in between.
 - We Chinese do specialize in the mahjong table, and we also have the dim sum table. [We gather around these tables] almost every day and every weekend. Kids run around, grandma and grandpa sit around and play mahjong, and everybody laughs and yells at each other, very much like Italian people do.
 - So, at the community level, I would like to see a bigger table.
 - The schools that are closing on the North Shore, ideally, could be transformed into community kitchens with a big hall and a gigantic table.
 - The kitchen is important because food is the one thing we all have to share, regardless of our age or our cultural or religious background. We all have different interests—not everybody is a gardener and not everyone loves dogs—but we have food daily.
 - The problem in our society now is that we have a kitchen that is either too big or too small. We spend way too much money renovating our big kitchens, and then nobody wants to come because they look at our kitchen and feel bad about their own kitchen. So they don't come to our house anymore. And when we have a very small kitchen in a condo, and a very small fridge, nobody wants to come either, because it's too small.
 - So a community kitchen sponsored or funded by the city would be nice. It costs no money [for users,] and everyone can come and gather, mark the schedule and cook any time, and share their food and their love.
 - It would solve problems for homeless youth and isolated seniors. The main problem for seniors is loneliness, so if you can get the seniors out and cooking for the homeless youth who need free food, what more can we ask for?
 - And the big community kitchen that I envision would have no Internet connection.
- Farmers markets and food carts are all about food, and they are growing because they are a perfect gathering points for people in a community context.

13.3 The Vancouver Foundation's Neighbourhood Small Grants program helps people of all ages connect to community

- The Vancouver Foundation's Neighbourhood Small Grants is a unique program with tiny amounts of money—\$500 to \$1,000—that's been running it for about nine years.
 - We look to community members to say, “I want to have a block party,” “I want to plant a garden,” or that they want to do anything that connects people, and we give them the money.
 - That's straight to the individuals, through the neighbourhood houses.

- We've seen some amazing things happen through that program.
- A 10-year-old boy wanted to teach people in his neighbourhood how to do origami. We gave him \$500 and I think he had 40 people show up.
- Through the Neighbourhood Small Grants program, the Vancouver Foundation funded two isolated Chinese grannies in a neighbourhood who decided to have cooking classes.
 - We gave them a grant, and they had a huge turnout of people from their neighbourhood.
 - We featured that story either on our website or in our magazine.

13.4 Getting older people out into our streets and community instead of segregating them

- How can we rethink our neighbourhoods so that we get everyone, including old people, out of their houses and into [the street]. I know it has something to do with villages.
 - If you walk down the street, [you should be able to see] a bunch of old guys sitting on a bench, and then some older ladies doing their shopping, walking along.
 - I just spent month in rural Italy and, in all the villages, we saw old people.
 - You don't see them here, because people are siloed—hidden away in places where there are only other old people.
- The Vancouver Foundation does this by supporting projects that promote connection and engagement across communities of difference, cultures and abilities.
 - We will be looking to projects not only that fit in our nine fields of interest but also have that as an important component.
 - Surveys like the one that we've just done start the dialogue, and we have to make these changes. We've all seen lately, how people in the world rise up and say enough is enough.
 - If it's driven from the community, then that's where the change will happen.
 - I would suggest that you look for funding from organizations and really get involved.
- We don't build places for boomers or older people, and, the older I get, the more I am aware of ageism in our society.
 - If I didn't wear these [red] glasses, young women probably wouldn't have a reason to talk to me. At least once a week a young man or woman comments on my glasses.
 - The single biggest demographic is boomers, and yet you won't find much in movies or on TV that's centred around the boomer's own experience of aging.
 - We just don't have it as a culture.
- We can design places and do other things to encourage [people of all ages to come out into the streets].
 - I parked last night next to six men all speaking Italian. Three chairs were next to the building, three chairs were next to the parking meter, and they were talking across the sidewalk. They knew how to interact from their cultural perspective with people in their own language.
 - Those of us who want to take back some space have to just do it.
 - Also, it's a cool place here, and people don't smile at each other. There is an individual responsibility: if you want to be friendly to people, you start by smiling at them. Maybe they'll think you're an idiot but maybe the 10th person will notice your smile and think it's a friendlier environment.

13.5 Lack of housing options contributes to seniors' isolation

- Seniors experience a lot of isolation. They are caught without housing options in our community—they live in their houses but they don't have a place to move.
 - That's a challenge on the North Shore. Yes, there are seniors' complexes but that isn't necessarily where they want to move.
 - And you want a mixture of ages in a housing complex.
 - In other parts of Metro Vancouver, you also have gated communities, which is tremendous isolation.

13.6 Age-Friendly Communities engages seniors on their own terms

- Age-Friendly Communities is an international movement that is alive and well in this province, with provincial seed money going to local groups.
 - This is an important bottom-up movement that engages seniors where they are, in what they want. They are in partial or even full control.
 - The Age-Friendly project here on the North Shore has had the seniors in control, but provides facilitation at neighbourhood houses, city hall and so on.
 - The seniors say, from their perspective, what their issues are. They talk about mobility, housing, respect or civic engagement issues.
 - Then an action plan is worked out with a larger table of resource people to figure out how to solve problems and work with these seniors.
 - The seniors are front and centre, which is an important element of building connectivity. We have to engage people better.
- I would also encourage those groups of seniors to reach out, because there are amazing cross-generational stories, and seniors bring value to a lot of discussions because of their experience and the knowledge.
 - We don't do a good enough job of capturing that, and I don't see that a lot of organizations or youth are seeking it out.
 - So don't restrict [a program so that it focuses only on] seniors. Start crossing some boundaries.

13.7 Educating young people about the importance of connection in communities

- I firmly believe that we need to look at the kind of people we are raising. We need to reach people in schools and talk about the importance of community and connections and what kinds of people are coming out of universities.
 - I had a meeting yesterday with UBC about how to engage UBC students in communities and change who they are as people.
 - A lot of this comes down to the individual level—what kind of people are we raising? And are we creating the kind of world where they are able to connect and engage with others?

14.0 Traditional thinking versus new ideas about community

- This forum challenges traditional thinking, but what does traditional thinking mean? As a young country we don't have much traditional thinking.

14.1 Large single-family lots versus dense urban communities

- The house on a separate lot with a front door and a 25-foot setback is a pattern that in the United States is called the American dream. There's a corollary in Canada—the Canadian dream is the house on its lot, as far away as humanly possible from your neighbours.

- It's an irony that this is the ideal, because this distances people literally and figuratively from each other and their sense of community. You can't pick a form that will do more distancing than that. The bigger the lot, the farther away you are away from everybody.
- That isn't the city, but it's some parts of this world.
- The reverse is where things are quite close to each other, and you almost have a forced relationship to each other.

14.2 Living and travelling in a grid versus having what we need wherever we are

- Traditional thinking in a city looks like a grid with a transportation network that takes people from their point in the grid to work in some place that also looks like a grid—cubicles in offices.
 - This is designed purely for the efficiency of getting people from one place to another and holding information and the tools of work and so on.
 - All of those things are disappearing—the requirement for everybody to be in one place because that's where the phone lines and office records were, or that's where people take transit.
 - We have an opportunity to think in new ways about the affordances of the places we live—how do we bring all the things that we want to do and the way we want to connect with people much closer to us all the time, rather than relying on the traditional grid?

14.3 Homogeneous populations versus multicultural populations

- When I think of what is traditional, I think of the southern Ontario town where I grew up, when there might have been only one person from another culture.
 - Now, the makeup of our world has changed significantly and rapidly based on a mixture of cultures that have come together.
 - Our Vancouver Foundation survey shows that there is real richness [in multicultural communities], but also that, without the traditional sameness of people in neighbourhoods, come significant issues and challenges.

15.0 Achieving systemic change

- Many of our problems are systemic and economically based. Can you give one example of what you would do to disrupt the system so that we can start changing it?
- Systemic change has to happen on a number of fronts. [The Vancouver Foundation] is looking at that through granting.

15.1 Beginning to change the built environment

- It's nice to propose future communities, but we have to somehow reconstruct the built environment. How would you start doing that?
- Community takes place on foot. The more you can put things in places where people can walk to them, and the more people live close enough to each other, the better.
 - People living close to each other is another way of saying density—the gentle density, the reasonable density or the appropriate density.
 - Proximity is underpinning of all planning—putting people close to things, even if it's transit.
 - Getting people to walk, making sure things are available to them to walk to, and reclaiming some of the space are all important things to do.

- And I would try to emphasize the communal gathering places, not just the commercial places such as restaurants or cafes, but the libraries, the squares and those places where you can just hang out without feeling that you are intruding.

15.2 Systemic change to address youth homelessness

- The Vancouver Foundation won't continue to throw dollars at things where systems need to change. Our signature program for youth homelessness is an example.
 - We are concerned about the number of youth who are becoming homeless, and that number is growing.
 - We're focusing on kids coming out of care, because a huge percentage of the kids that come out of government care end up on the streets.
 - Systems need to change where that age increases.
 - We're looking at lobbying to increase the age for qualifying for support to 24 years. We want them to get enough support so that they hit the ground running, know what to do and know how to live in homes.
 - We bring anybody who is working on youth homelessness together and talk about what all of our parts are.

15.3 Taking personal responsibility for making the city friendlier

- Even waiting at a bus stop has potential for interaction, but do you wish to take advantage of that?
 - If you are there every single day, will you smile, say hello, and reach out when you get on the bus?
 - In October of last year, my wife and I were in New York, and the bus driver asked if it was anybody's birthday. It happened to be my wife's, and he had everybody sing Happy Birthday. And two or three little girls came up and smiled and said, "Happy Birthday." Those are deep cultural things. You can't force somebody to say "Happy Birthday."

15.4 Transition Towns and Resiliency Circles facilitate bottom-up solutions

- Transition Towns and Resiliency Circles [are two organizations that help communities develop bottom-up solutions].
 - They function primarily in the United States to facilitate people in small communities getting together to support each other through all the trauma with the housing market, economics, etc.
 - We have an active branch of Transition Towns on Bowen Island, and so does Vancouver. Vancouver has a very active group that is working with people in small neighbourhoods to get them together to help solve problems.
 - I'm happy to see top-down solutions, but the bottom-up solutions are also important.
- We are fortunate on Bowen Island because we are a small community of less than 4,000 people, but we have a huge volunteer organization. The island is run by volunteers.

15.5 Crowd-sourcing and other bottom-up solutions are only part of the picture

- The notion of crowd sourcing is bottom-up. It's incredibly important, but it never can be the only piece.
 - There is a pendulum swing in that direction.
 - For a long time, we've been used to a top-down-dominated society where things were things were bestowed upon us by relatively wealthy city councils and [other

bodies]. All of those school boards and governments and so on are cutting back. They are getting much smaller.

- But the wealth in the community collectively is huge. So my sense is that we have to find ways of allowing that crowd-sourcing to happen.
- It's not to get rid of the other, but to be ready to embrace and support it.

16.0 The role of business in supporting social connectivity

- Is there any role for business? How can business support improved social connectedness?
- I come from a corporate background and [joined the non-profit sector] about 12 years ago. At a lot of meetings, we talk about who should convene around the table, and the absence of business is significant.
 - [However,] I was in a meeting the other day with [people from] Price Waterhouse Coopers, who were coming to us and asking how they could be involved. So there is a shift in some companies that have a track record.
 - [Business] needs to be at the table talking about how to be involved, whether it's [by offering] volunteers, money or skills. There are a lot of skills in corporations that can help move or shift [things], and we have to do a better job of inviting them.
- Another way of saying business is busy-ness, and a lot of people have no time to do other things. I'm wondering about the [how realistic it is to expect] that staff could have time to reach out and do some volunteering.
- [Service businesses like Starbucks can provide a forum.]
 - The real forum we have around here is Starbucks and other coffee houses, creating places where you feel that once you're done consuming you don't have to leave.
 - That's not nearly enough because not everybody is in a service business.

17.0 The economic reality is that people must work and have little time to volunteer or connect with community

- Let's face it, all parties working in the household, there's just no time to do volunteer work in most communities, at least in [certain] age groups moving through the system. It's very important to have time to make contacts and make friends.
- We can talk about solutions being the public realm and more people walking, biking and having allotment gardens, but the economy and changes in people's lives play a real part.
 - When I grew up, often, mom stayed home. One person went to work. They were able to go to work and provide a good living, pay the mortgage, give their family all the necessities, save for college for their kids and go on vacations. Why was that occurring in the 1950s and 1960s and not now?
 - Now both people need to go to work, and in fact your children need to go to work in order to ensure that your family can survive.
 - That change has happened as part of globalization and the corporate economy.
 - Now we are finding that young people just don't have the time. I asked my kids why they aren't participating more at university—I have four in the 24-to-35 age group. I was so involved at university, I went there in the morning and came home late at night. They said to me, "Remember Dad, I have to go to work." When I was going to university, in the summer, I worked all summer at a good job, made a lot of money, and I could support myself at university for the year and participate in all the things that university meant.

- Now kids are commuters. They go to university for a few courses, they go home, and they go to work, because they can't get good jobs in the summer and they can't support themselves, and tuition costs have gone over the moon.
- So we need to also deal with the economic realities that are disconnecting people.
- In our communities in the past, whichever spouse was at home was often the cornerstone for the community. They were the people out volunteering and looking after the free range kids. There was a parent in every home who felt obliged to make sure those kids were okay. Now those homes are empty.
- We shouldn't be afraid to confront the issues. Often, we sit around and talk plannerese, but the reality is that there are deep social necessities that need to be dealt with in the long term. As citizens, we need to demand big solutions that change the way people are able to deal with their lives.
- Remember the dream we had was that modern society would give us more time?
 - We were told that with technological improvement, the reward would be more time. But the reward has been less time.
 - It has meant that people no longer have the time to go home and participate in their community. They are desperately trying to make up for the washing they didn't do during the week. They are trying to get out and do the shopping that was never done. They are trying to drag their kids off to whatever event, with both parents fighting about whose responsibility it is tonight. That's the reality of existence for many young families.
- Connectedness and participation only comes when you have the time available. That's been lost in many ways.

18.0 No matter how quickly things are moving, we can find time to connect

- We tend to think that things are moving so quickly we are being left behind.
 - It's as though we have so much mind candy that we're running around like kids that have too much sugar, so there's just no time to connect.
 - [But we do have time to connect], and we haven't even come close to the individual or collective human capacity to engage with each other, with information and with the world in many ways. Our capacity is enormous.
 - An emeritus professor, when I was an undergraduate and well before the Internet, stopped the class one day and said that things are just going too quickly. He said that when he is sitting at home reading a book and somebody comes and knocks on the door, he finishes the chapter before answering. If it's not important enough from him or her to stand there, well it's not important enough for him to stop.
 - For him, the world was moving way too quickly. Every generation feels that.
 - We have an opportunity not to feel isolated but to feel included in new ways and to actually create connectedness in new ways and participate.

19.0 Getting organizations to work together

- We have all of these different organizations that have different scopes. How do we get them working together?
- At every meeting I go to with large and small organizations, we about how to have collective impact. We recognize that we have to do that.
 - Those discussions are happening regularly and seriously.
 - For example, we bring them together anybody who is working on youth homelessness and talk about what all of our parts are.
 - That's happening on a regular basis across the sectors.

20.0 Engaging a wider range of people in the conversation

- My concern is that we are often talking to the converted.
 - At the Vancouver Foundation we are looking at how to reach those people who aren't already having these conversations.
 - Anybody that you can refer to us or talk to about how important it is to be connected and engaged will help us in our work in addressing what's going on in community and causing disconnection.

21.0 If you care about community planning, get involved

- How we plan our cities and design buildings and public spaces is incredibly important. They affect all of us. If you're interested in those things, get involved in official community plan updates, and in how you plan and update your local area and community.
 - Those are tremendous bonding opportunities. People rally around a common cause and have a long-term stake in the outcomes.
 - And when you are looking at those plans, make sure you think about places for people to gather, that they don't have to pay money to go to. They are just the public realm.
- If we are going to make change, who else but us, and when else but now?
 - We need to talk about these issues now so that the kids growing up now have the same opportunities we had, to develop a socially cohesive community that lets people live out their dreams.