

Meeting Notes Thursday, April 14, 2014 6:00 pm in the Conference Room

Present: Susanne Dahlin (Chair), Jak King, Rebecca Bisek, Ken Eliuk, Meseret Taye, Mike Evans, Jim LeMaistre, Tom Phipps, Paul Mittendorff, William Butler, Ye Chu, Vicky Scully

Staff: Hai Truong (Note Taker), Cynthia Low, Peter Odynsky

1) Introductions

2) Background of Committee and Activities to Date

The Britannia Community Services Centre was the result of an exciting community process in the 1970s that brought together students, academics, politicians, skaters, artists, readers, bureaucrats, swimmers, and parents. It's the very kind of intense involvement we need now to make expansion and renewal of Britannia a reality. Since the facilities opened in 1976, Britannia has been a leader in integrated recreation, education and social services, providing inventive solutions to community needs. Britannia is a unique partnership between the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver School Board, the Vancouver Public Library, and the Vancouver Park Board.

In 2012, Britannia's Planning & Development Committee involved the wide range of people who use and enjoy Britannia's services and facilities to engage in visioning about the renewal of its 18 acre site. They produced a comprehensive Facilities Master Plan that describes a revitalized Britannia that can be even more responsive to the diverse needs of our amazing community.

Now we want to review, update and galvanize the Vision Statement, Design Principles and Objectives for the future of renewal of Britannia.

4) Overview

Strategic Master Plan was taken to the Vancouver Park Board, Vancouver Library Board and City of Vancouver several times before. They all seem interested but Britannia is always on the backburner. The swimming pool is the only thing that is high on the list. We need to continue to push for more development not just in Britannia but for the neighborhood as well. The Planning & Development needs to revision the strategic master plan and get ready to move forward. Here are some of the tasks we can start working on:

1. Regeneration objective.
2. Design Principle.
3. Criteria to evaluate those principles
4. Field Trip to different part of our jurisdiction.
5. Small table with the Seniors, Library, VSB etc.

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6. Put together design concept.
7. Workshops on development concepts;

What about the old vision? What can Britannia bring forward in term of Capital. What's the vision that we like to see. What is the Library concept and VSB concept? We need to align our partners visions with us.

5) Discussion on Britannia Regeneration Possible Objectives

Tom Phipps presented on Britannia Regeneration Possible Objectives. The objectives are derived from public and centre staff input. They can be used to generate criteria for evaluating options derived from exploring physical plan potentials of the following 'development concepts.'

Improve the present and accessibility on Commercial Drive

Britannia is not directly visible from Commercial Drive. Its community presence would be stronger if pivotal buildings (info centre or library) could be visible or directly entered from the commercial frontage.

1. **Increase informal scrutiny of pedestrian corridors**
Public scrutiny of pedestrian corridors could be improved by internalizing walkways or increasing visibility from buildings onto the corridors (eyes on the street). It may best to eliminate some external corridors.
2. **Integrate social, education and recreation functions** (integrate service delivery)
Active and passive recreation and social activities need not be isolated into different buildings. Education has been one function of most buildings. Greater proximity could animate and de-institutionalize the centre.
3. **Broaden space programming options** (facilitate programming flexibility)
Program space has been more limited than "gym floor" space, which limits program choice. Recreational interests have changed. Floor space should follow.
4. **Renew public 'cache' of the Centre**
1970 era structures are well behind the amenity level of newer facilities in other communities. Mobile residents go elsewhere . Those with fewer choices suffer.
5. **Reduce facility operating costs**
Existing building are not cost effective. Energy and repair costs are high.
6. **Upgrade Seismic capacity**
Give priority to replacement if some non-heritage buildings (i.e. library) have not yet been brought up to recent seismic standards.

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7. **Improve public open spaces**

Narrow connecting 'alleys' are not pedestrian friendly. Blank walls, poor sight lines, unappealing landscaping, and lack of natural congregating points create the feeling of a backwater instead of a community focus.

8. **Optimize views to "Britannia" historic facades**

Seek opportunities to open up public views to high school heritage features.

9. **Capitalize on 'Grand Views' to City and Mountains.**

Opportunities should be sought to open up or keep views from indoor and outdoor pedestrian routes and gathering spaces.

Design Principles

1. **Diminish institutional image.** (public places need not have uniform, often sterile exteriors, not appealing to casual enjoyment of spaces around them)
2. **Enhance accessibility.** (physical, social, cultural: welcoming signage and imagery can augment ramping and elevators)
3. **Form a natural indoor/outdoor 'centre of gravity' where pedestrians converge.** (In villages, 'old men' sit where activity converges. Here we need to design that.) One example is the Britannia Secondary School; the students used to hang out in the school courtyard but those benches were taken away and now they congregate in the stairwell.
4. **Emphasize sustainable technical solutions to achieve or exceed City standards.** (Lower energy use reduces operating cost, increases comfort, gains political favour.)
5. **Encourage 'animated' activity centres where activity can be seen from outside.** (We need to diminish institutional look of blank wall. The more active a space, the more visible it should be; many people and places in the centre are now behind walls. This is a hospital concept which is old and outdated)
6. **Green the site with long living trees.** (Some trees may go; new ones could become landmarks in the right locations.) Use public art form to give people direction. They don't need to be monumental.
7. **Increase views toward heritage facades, mountains and downtown** (where old structures come down seek opportunities to re-establish views.)

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8. **Minimize intrusive scale visible from Commercial Drive** (Existing zoned building heights, combined with large trees provide 'view shadows' where taller buildings could be located without becoming visually dominant from Commercial Drive.)
9. **Facilitate integrated service delivery among partner agencies** (Co-location and sight lines among administrative functions offers efficiencies and cost savings.)

Discussions included;

- How the redevelopment of the site fits with current activities of the Community Plan process;
- Review of existing buildings and building conditions to see if we can build on existing forms;
- Need to look at public spaces and places for people to gather formally and informally – place making.
- Understanding that in the current climate it is difficult to find funding for a total renewal, looking at a vision that is a phased approach – like VGH
- Making the Britannia site a public space that is used with appeal and possible commercial interest on the site to bring people into the site
- What about the legacy of the site that we need to respect i.e. the original site.
- The City reported that there is a shortage of small to medium cultural space. Dance studio or music studio is important in our developing process. Britannia should have a facility that can hold about 300 people for rental. Astorino's have attracted many renters. We need a space to support local artists and musicians.
- There is also a shortage of housing in Vancouver. We can help solve this by having housing on site.
- How does the site fit in with existing VPL, City and VSB vision for the future.

6) Next Steps

The Planning & Development can start working on the principles and the design concept. We could also take field trips to different part of our jurisdiction and discuss with them about their process.

The strategy is to host a public event with the community...it is important to distance this activity from the saturation of neighbourhood planning