

How do you find meaning from a brownfield? What is the shared vision for SEFC? How do you build an authentic community? These questions and others charted the course for an incredible learning journey for the enormous team of citizens, community groups and professionals involved in the visioning and decision-making process for the future of SEFC.

Following the removal of SEFC from the industrial land base in 1990, discussion arose about how the 80-acre site should be redeveloped. A variety of ideas were proposed, ranging from a large urban park to a high-tech office district to a residential community. From this diversity of views there arose a consensus that this unique piece of property should become a model of sustainability.

Clouds of Change: A Policy-Making Milestone

A significant policy move toward adopting sustainability as a guiding principle at the city scale was the “Clouds of Change” report, passed by council in 1990. “Clouds of Change” outlined a series of initiatives aimed at improving air quality in Vancouver. The report addressed emissions, transportation and energy and land use issues and recommended that the city commit to a 20 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from 1988 levels by 2005.

In 1995, city council determined that SEFC should be redeveloped into a residential neighbourhood that would be a model sustainable community. The city commissioned studies that would determine the most economically feasible and socially and environmentally sustainable use of the land. What type of neighbourhood would best express the commitment to sustainability?

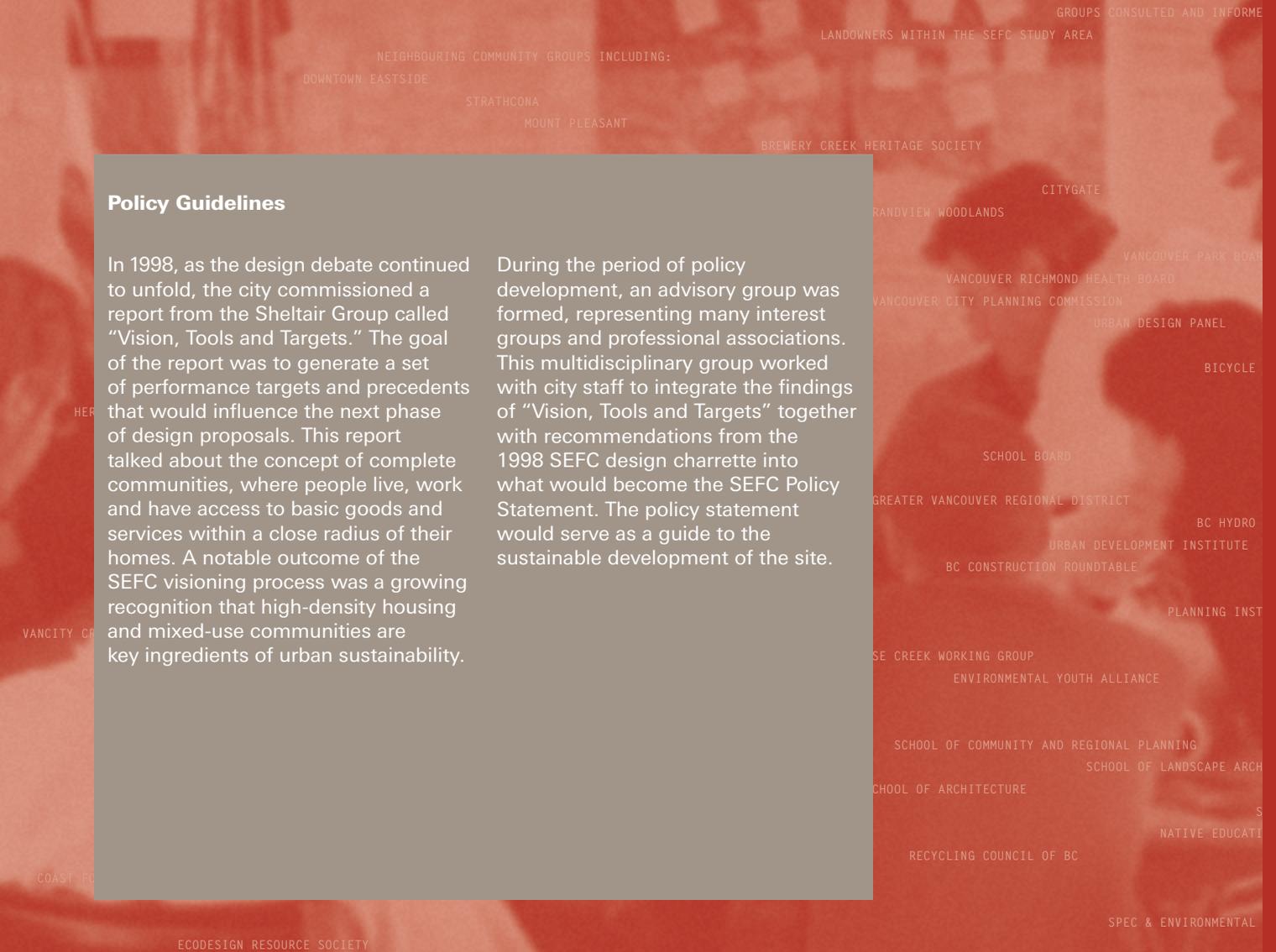
Searching for Sustainable Solutions

A number of issues influenced the approach to redevelopment. These included heritage considerations, a desire for parkland, the economics of various densities of housing and social mixes and the cost associated with remediating the contaminated land. The City of Vancouver’s Property Endowment Fund (PEF) had a mandate to accomplish the city’s goal of developing a model of sustainability. The PEF commissioned local development consultant Stanley Kwok to develop and test concepts for the physical plan of the site based on the economics of redeveloping the site. Baker McGarva Hart/VIA Architecture were retained by the PEF as design consultants, tasked with proposing an approach to planning that would integrate the sustainability aspirations of the project.

In 1997, Stanley Kwok submitted a proposal for the site titled “Creekside Landing.” The proposed built form in Creekside Landing echoed to a large extent the development at North False Creek, which is characterized by tall residential towers built on a base of street-level retail amenities and townhouses. Opponents of Creekside Landing favoured a model more akin to the dense low-rise model of South False Creek. They preferred to develop smaller sites with individual character as an explicit contrast to the consolidated towers of North False Creek.

“It takes a village to raise a village.”

Scot Hein, Architect and Senior Urban Designer, City of Vancouver



Policy Guidelines

In 1998, as the design debate continued to unfold, the city commissioned a report from the Sheltair Group called “Vision, Tools and Targets.” The goal of the report was to generate a set of performance targets and precedents that would influence the next phase of design proposals. This report talked about the concept of complete communities, where people live, work and have access to basic goods and services within a close radius of their homes. A notable outcome of the SEFC visioning process was a growing recognition that high-density housing and mixed-use communities are key ingredients of urban sustainability.

During the period of policy development, an advisory group was formed, representing many interest groups and professional associations. This multidisciplinary group worked with city staff to integrate the findings of “Vision, Tools and Targets” together with recommendations from the 1998 SEFC design charrette into what would become the SEFC Policy Statement. The policy statement would serve as a guide to the sustainable development of the site.

PROFILE

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Mark Holland was instrumental in building the sustainability agenda for the City of Vancouver in the late 1990s in his role as the sustainable development planner and project coordinator for SEFC. Mark was integral to researching and writing the SEFC Policy Statement as well as three of the ensuing action plans: The SEFC Energy Strategy, The SEFC Water and Waste Management Plan, and The SEFC Urban Agriculture Strategy. Mark co-founded Holland Barrs Planning in 2001 and is currently a Principal at HB Lanarc, a planning and design firm in Vancouver.