

The “Architects’ Letter” to City Council

A group of local architects compose this letter to Vancouver’s City Council, suggesting an alternative to the ODP’s proposed approach to urban design:



Nigel Baldwin, MAIBC



Chuck Brook



Peter Busby, MAIBC



James Cheng, MAIBC



Patrick Condon, ASLA



Joyce Drohan, MAIBC



Michael Geller, MAIBC



James Hancock, MAIBC



Norman Hotson, MAIBC

Mayor and Council
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

06 April 2004

Dear Mayor and Council,
RE: SOUTHEAST FALSE CREEK

We are a group of dedicated professionals and concerned citizens committed to a better Vancouver. Our interest in writing Council at this time is to further the dialogue started in the City’s Urban Design Review initiative for the planning and design of South East False Creek. Every effort should be made to ensure that this important public site achieves the goals established by Council at the outset of the planning process to create a sustainable community and a unique neighbourhood that sets a new standard for development in Vancouver.

In order to provide constructive guidance, our group has collectively developed a set of key design and planning principles that we feel are important to achieving an appropriate strategy for this site. We trust that they will be constructive to the planning process. It is not our intention to undermine in any way the substantial effort of the many committees, staff, consultants and public groups and individuals involved in the planning to date.

Significant progress has been made in the past several weeks on the design proposed for Official Development Plan approval. However, it does not go far enough. A much clearer strategy is required, one that establishes a strong framework for development and one that is less dependent on specific architectural solutions to make the plan work.

The south shore of False Creek is different from its north shore. Your site is part of the basin of the Creek, sloping down from the heights of Central Broadway to the water’s edge. The character of Mount Pleasant, Fairview Slopes and lands surrounding the site suggests a lower form of development. We believe that a predominantly high-rise approach is the wrong point of departure for SEFC, and that a low- to mid-rise strategy would produce better urban design at little, if any, sacrifice to the economics of the project.

SEFC should become a unique neighbourhood, not a copy of the West End, Concord Pacific Place, or anywhere else in Vancouver. The planning should include the private lands south and east of the site such that a comprehensive design is developed for an entire neighbourhood. In the longer term, this plan may inform the I-C zone south of 2nd Avenue, and the False Creek Flats east of Main Street.

The planning principles are attached for your consideration. We will be pleased to continue the dialogue on the future of this outstanding property with the hope that the plan taken forward for final ratification will be of the highest order.

Respectfully submitted,

Nigel Baldwin, MAIBC	James Cheng, MAIBC	Michael Geller, MAIBC
Chuck Brook	Patrick Condon, MAIBC	James Hancock, MAIBC
Peter Busby, MAIBC	Joyce Drohan, MAIBC	Norman Hotson, MAIBC

Cc Judy Rogers, Brent McGregor, Bruce Maitland, Larry Beasley, Dave Rudberg, Graham McGarva

“We are a group of dedicated professionals and concerned citizens committed to a better Vancouver.”

Planning and Design Principles for SEFC

- Create a distinct new neighbourhood, unlike other places in Vancouver, founded on a clear, bold concept.
- Adopt principles of sustainability in all aspects of planning and building, including an on-site demonstration project, or feature.
- Engage the waterfront with active uses and open spaces for the enjoyment of all Vancouverites, while being mindful of the environmental issues associated with building close to the edge.
- Introduce additional north-south vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian greenway routes to connect the broader community to the waterfront.
- Integrate the planning and design of the public lands of SEFC with the adjacent private lands to the south and east of the site, and ensure that this new neighbourhood is well integrated with the Mount Pleasant community.
- Design a ‘town’ form of development, consistent with the surrounding context, with buildings that are principally low- to mid-rise in height, defining street frontages.
- Engineer intimate, humanly-scaled streets with a differentiation in character between the north-south and east-west streets.
- Apply a small-scale block pattern to encourage diversity, incremental development and the participation of many developers.
- Locate retail uses on Manitoba Street and along the waterfront to create a highly active, main street character, with active uses on the ground floor of other project streets.
- Develop 2nd Avenue as the neighbourhood boundary with the proposed streetcar line as part of the grand boulevard design linking with Quebec Street and Pacific Boulevard. In turn, the function and width of 1st Avenue can become that of a local street.
- Terrace building heights down from south to north to reinforce the “urban basin” form of the south shore of False Creek.
- Consider reducing the park space requirement from 26.4 acres to a lesser size to achieve density objectives, while ensuring that a significant park is maintained to serve the Mount Pleasant community.
- Develop a series of smaller public park spaces, plazas and squares, evenly distributed throughout the development, to serve the needs of local residents.
- Consider how this ‘new town’ could inform the future land use planning and design of the I-C zone, south of 2nd Avenue, and the False Creek Flats, east of Main Street.