

October 22, 2009

To: Mayor and Council
From: Vancouver City Planning Commission
Subject: Northeast False Creek High Level Review - Comments

INTRODUCTION

Northeast False Creek is the final remaining precinct surrounding False Creek to be planned. It is a challenge from many perspectives and the VCPC would like to acknowledge the hard work to date that has been put into this undertaking.

Unlike False Creek South, False Creek North and, most recently, Southeast False Creek the urban fabric of Northeast False Creek (NEFC) is already largely defined. It is a complicated geography of indoor and outdoor space complete with stadiums, the Seawall, viaducts, busy one-way streets and False Creek itself.

The VCPC has focused on four principal facets of NEFC: **built form, noise, transportation, and environmental performance.**

BUILT FORM

The footprint of NEFC on the ground is quite limited and there is a broad desire on the part of the City and landowners to place a significant amount of density on the site while still ensuring generous open space. Taken together this will mean buildings with considerable height. The VCPC fully supports this approach. Indeed, the task of designing high-performance green buildings that provide density, height and outstanding noise attenuating properties could well prove to be a welcome catalyst for generating expressive buildings that differ significantly from the Vancouver norm. We strongly support architectural experimentation with massing and character on this site and new building typologies.

NOISE

The immutable truth of this neighbourhood is that it will be noisy at times. Neither the present or future iterations of BC Place are soundproof, nor is GM Place. Add to that the earnest hope that the public square will be a successful gathering place for formal and informal occasions and you have the ingredients for a neighbourhood unlike anything else in the city.

This is a good thing. However to ensure that residents and commercial tenants of NEFC can live comfortably with their loud neighbours steps must be taken to ensure that outstanding noise attenuation is incorporated into buildings at an architectural level. We suggest that language be included in the NEFC Official Development Plan to require this.

An additional consideration for noise is an expectation that NEFC will be merely an annex of Yaletown. With that association comes an expectation of inclusiveness for families and the public amenities that support them, coupled with an expectation of reasonable amounts of noise. We are confident that family-friendly units will be located throughout NEFC in locations that afford the greatest level of sound dampening, but we also think that more daring architectural expression could also play a role in visually delineating the loud areas from quieter ones.

TRANSPORTATION

The VCPC believes that the proposed downtown streetcar will be a transformative public amenity, and that the proposed stop on Pacific Boulevard in front of the public square and VAG site will certainly help activate that space. There is also great potential in NEFC to further reduce parking requirements in light of the presence of SkyTrain, the future streetcar, new Seawall, improved pedestrian linkages to Georgia and Robson and protected on-street bike lanes and new passenger ferry service.

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

The environmental performance of both residential and commercial buildings in NEFC must meet and surpass the baseline established in SEFC. The momentum has been built and this is the opportunity to put a “new business-as-usual” into practice.

In light of the new City economic development brand of “Green Capital,” we believe that the entire False Creek basin tells a powerful narrative of the evolving practice of sustainability for residential neighbourhoods. In NEFC, commercial buildings would be brought into that narrative and the missing piece of False Creek completed. Every effort must be made to incorporate a neighbourhood energy utility into the precinct, and serious consideration should be given to whether it could be expanded to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the SEFC approach to a largely naturalized shoreline should be continued for the NEFC Seawall and a full-size Creekside Park.

CONCLUSION

Three brief final comments. The Roundhouse and Olympic Village community centres were not imagined to support the 7000+ residents of Northeast False Creek and the lack of public amenities in the neighbourhood could affect its livability. The urban design of the public plaza and the entrance to the proposed Vancouver Art Gallery would be strengthened if they were adjacent instead of separated. Finally, the proposed downtown streetcar should be built out at the earliest opportunity, and ideally in conjunction with the neighbourhood, to improve its accessibility and help activate the public spaces.

NEFC is a highly visible section of the city’s waterfront located within a world-class urban development, and as Vancouverites we look forward to seeing this part of our city evolve into something remarkable

THE VANCOUVER CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

The Commission has a mandate to assist City Council in an advisory capacity by considering and submitting reports to City Council on matters relating to the planning and development of the City and in particular to represent ideas and opinions about the future of the city, as citizens of the City of Vancouver, and to consider and report to Council on any proposal likely to have a significant effect on the future of the City.

Submitted on behalf of the Vancouver City Planning Commission

David Godin, Member