

Vancouver City Planning Commission

Subject: Removal of the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts

Date: October 21, 2015

Memo to: Mayor and Council

The Vancouver City Planning Commission has previously appeared before Mayor and Council on two occasions to express its support for the exploration of the replacement of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts with ground-level streets.

We are here today to speak in support of the staff recommendation to remove the viaducts and begin a process for the regeneration of a neglected part of the city.

We would also like to draw attention to some concerns voiced around the Commissions table.

1. Public Participation and Engagement

Commissioners believe that a high level of robust, transparent public participation in the detailed planning for the next phase of the project will be essential to achieving the objectives for the new neighbourhoods. The consultation program outlined in the staff report is to encompass the full range of interests that could be affected by the plan, with the objective that “everyone potentially affected by - or interested in - decisions gets a chance to have a say.” It is arguable, however, that this area of city-wide interest, and that consultation with those directly affected should be expanded to include broader engagement.

To achieve that goal, we propose that the decision to remove the viaducts should lead to a robust public planning process to determine the form of the public engagement for the removal and site planning phase. There is room to consider models of participation and engagement in other cities, as well as lessons from other Vancouver planning processes. The Planning Commission is prepared to be a participant in this process, bringing its broader city-wide perspective and long-term viewpoint to the discussions.

2. Cost and Public Benefits

Cost estimates for large-scale projects are always uncertain, and financing the viaducts removal plan is a complex challenge involving many players. In particular, we are concerned that amenities required by the new neighbourhood may be compromised by using community amenities contributions from new development for street work, and also that cost over-runs may be financed by increased density or reduced amenities. Detailed updates on costs and public benefits on a regular basis could help allay concerns and maintain public confidence in the project.

3. Site Planning – ‘raising the bar’

A decision to remove the viaducts has the potential to transform the area and create substantial new development opportunities. We encourage the City to 'raise the bar' on these sites beyond what the City is already doing, with further innovation on sustainability in support of the Greenest City goals, affordability in support of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy and urban design performance.

This is an amazing opportunity to be innovative, both with regard to an open-ended and participatory process to determine what comes after a decision to remove the viaducts (#3), and also with regard to the site. This is an opportunity to ask what kind of a legacy this project should create. Without a commitment to an innovative planning process that goes beyond rezoning, the legacy could be simply more of what we already have. Is that good enough, for a city with Vancouver's track record for innovation?

4. Skytrain Guideway – the ‘third’ viaduct

Following removal of the viaducts, the Skytrain guideway will become prominent as a viaduct and barrier in its own right. This presents an opportunity to invite innovative ideas from citizens and community groups for the future of the guideway as prominent feature in the newly exposed public realm. Before making the final decision on viaducts removal, it should be confirmed that the project cost estimate takes account of adjustments and retrofit to the guideway necessitated by the street work.

In summary, the Planning Commission is in support of a decision to proceed with the removal of the viaducts and the implementation of the new street network, in a process that is robust, transparent and fully public.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our reflections on this great opportunity to re-integrate a neglected part of the city into the fabric of Vancouver's historic neighbourhoods.

Respectfully yours,

On behalf of the Vancouver City Planning Commission,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Bauer', written in a cursive style.

Danielle Bauer, Chair