

Tools for Change: *CityPlan* Vancouver's Strategic Planning Process

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CityPlan was a three phase strategic planning process, directed by the author, for the City of Vancouver, Canada. Beginning in 1992, the first phase involved over 100,000 people in considering choices and consequences of a wide range of city directions. The result was CityPlan: a Council adopted Strategic Plan. The second phase continued stakeholder engagement in preparing and implementing a variety of city-wide policy plans based on CityPlan Directions. The third phase built on community support to prepare new zoning and servicing plans for increasing housing choice in established neighbourhoods. This case study focuses on intensification initiatives incorporated into Phase 1 (1992–1995) and concludes with an assessment of subsequent policy plans and intensification programs (1995–2006).

Twenty years after the start of CityPlan the passage of time and the author's experiences in similar cities provide a basis for evaluating the benefits, shortfalls, and transferability of Vancouver's engagement process. The study concludes that four features of planning processes – broad public engagement commencing with the initial steps of plan-making; including all city responsibilities to provide a coordinated response to sustainability; public involvement in choice making when limited land or funds require tradeoffs between city values; and allocating funds for early implementation – contribute to public support for change. The study also demonstrates that support for change wanes over time. New directions, expeditiously implemented through regulation or funding, are better able to withstand political and staff changes. Phased planning processes, which require further plan-making prior to implementation, experience approval decay among citizens and politicians.

Public engagement literature uses the terms 'citizen' and 'public', as well as 'involvement', 'participation' and 'engagement' interchangeably. All describe 'processes by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into decision making' (Nabatchi, 2012, p. 6) and may range from 'indirect participation' (voting for others to represent your interests) to 'direct participation' when citizens are actively engaged in developing policies and programmes. Direct participation tools take many forms both onsite (e.g. public meetings, workshops) and more recently online (e.g. social media, computer simulations).

When applied in practice, these techniques are used to ensure a range of voices are heard and, when combined with a willingness of decision-makers to listen, determine the extent to which public engagement shapes policy outcomes. This paper illustrates the role onsite engagement tools played in planning the City of Vancouver.

In the decade following the Second World War Vancouver was described as an unspectacular city in a spectacular setting. Forty years later Vancouver, a city of 603,000 in a region of 2.3 million people, was the world's most liveable city. In 2006 the United Nations

World Urban Forum drew thousands of urbanists to Vancouver. They experienced ‘Vancouverism’ a term which describes many aspects of urban living including enabling governance, engaging citizens in plan-making processes, and the design and delivery of sustainable and liveable communities. Much of the literature describing Vancouverism focuses on the transformation of the inner city (Punter, 2003; Grant, 2009). The focus of this paper is Vancouver’s award winning strategic planning process during the period 1992–1995, which provided a platform for the citizens of Vancouver to discuss a range of issues facing the city and to negotiate the difficult tradeoffs that accompany growth and change.

Predating widespread internet use, few documents used during the *CityPlan* process are easily accessible to researchers. Therefore, this case study draws on the author’s experience and personal documents (e.g. work programmes, budgets, and field notes). Given the absence of accessible documentation it is interesting that the Vancouver *CityPlan* process continues to be widely recognized by other cities (e.g. Sydney, Auckland).

This paper reflects upon the plan-making process that produced *CityPlan* and the role that public engagement played. The paper offers a unique and practical contribution to the strategic planning and public engagement

literature since the author, as Co-Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver, led the *CityPlan* process. The case study is an in-depth account of the process as well as a reflective piece that draws on longitudinal experience to assess the consequences of change processes over time in Vancouver. A retrospective analysis of the impact of *CityPlan* allows a unique perspective on the legacy of public participation in city planning. Albrechts (2002, p. 344) observes, ‘Innovative practices emerge out of learning by doing, but their impact on planning theory is limited’, the result being different outcomes for practitioners and academics. The *CityPlan* process was invented and delivered by practitioners who, after the plan was completed, moved to implementation. In writing this article my intent is to document *CityPlan* for those interested in comparative planning processes, particularly how community engagement can be an effective planning tool.

Strategic Planning Models

Over the past 80 years Vancouver has undertaken three types of plan-making process which can be described as Expert Plans, Goals Plans, and a Public Choicing Process (see table 1).

Expert Plans are prepared by staff (and/or consultants), who assemble information

Table 1. Strategic planning models: Vancouver examples.

<i>Planning Process</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Plan-Making</i>	<i>Choice Making</i>	<i>Next Steps</i>	<i>Public</i>
1 <i>Expert Plans</i> Bartholomew Downtown Plan Vancouver Plan Central Area Plan	1930 1976 1986 1991	Land use, transportation, infrastructure and parks	Consultant/ staff prepare draft plan	Staff/ council	Zoning capital investments	Key stake- holders
2 <i>Goals Plans</i> Goals for Vancouver	1980 1987	Range of community topics	Staff assemble public input	No choices	More plans	Invited stake- holders
3 <i>Public Choicing Process CityPlan</i>	1995	All city responsibilities	Staff assemble public input	Public involved in choicing	More plans	Broad public

and make choices necessary to prepare a draft plan. Traditionally these plans focus on land use, they incorporate some public review of the draft plan, and following Council approval, are implemented through zoning and funding decisions. Staff driven processes were typical of the 'technocratic' or 'expert' planning of the pre-1990s (DeSario and Langton, 1987) where planners were seen as value-neutral experts advising decision-makers on the best way to accomplish their goals and serve the public interest (Parker, 2003).

In Vancouver, Expert Plans worked well in the Downtown where brownfield redevelopment affected few if any residents. The 1976 Downtown Plan followed by the 1991 Central Area Plan provided a context for a more intensive and environmentally sustainable Downtown through the co-location of jobs and housing. City policies required new development to provide a mix of housing opportunities and full community services. These policies became the public face of 'Vancouverism'.

During Downtown Vancouver's redevelopment period, 70 per cent of Vancouver was occupied by single-family detached-houses. Physical change was limited to the replacement of post-war bungalows by larger single-family houses which underutilized city services and limited housing choice. However, around the same time period, Vancouver was witnessing a change in its demographic. Aging homeowners and young families were seeking alternate and/or more affordable housing and a broader range of services.

Seeking solutions to a range of neighbourhood planning issues, such as more housing choice and improved community services for seniors and working parents, Vancouver prepared a new planning document called a *Goals Plan*. Goals plans were a product of the time in North American cities (Goals for Dallas 1965; Goals for Seattle 1973) where councils typically appointed a citizen advisory committee to identify city-

wide planning goals. The 1980 'Goals for Vancouver' addressed a range of topics – movement, leisure, people, economy, services, neighbourhoods, city management – concluding with a list of desired city goals. A weakness of this plan was that no choices were made as the 'goals' provided an aspirational list of values with which everyone could agree. Goals such as 'distribute acceptable housing types in all appropriate areas' did not help Council make decisions as developers could quote the ambiguous 'provide housing variety' goal in support of their development proposals. Simultaneously, residents quoted the equally ambiguous goal 'to maintain neighbourhood character' in opposition to development. Other cities were experiencing similar challenges with Goals Plans. Reflecting on the 1993 Planning Strategy for Northern Ireland, Brand and Gaffikin (2007, p. 298) wrote of the plan:

[Decision-makers] laid great stress on building a consensus through comprehensive engagement and felt able to conclude that the final plan was an expression of the shared vision, values, and principles identified through the extensive consultation process. Yet there is little evidence of specific directions for planning in a contested space other than declarations of broad principles.

Even recent plans fall prey to articulating aspirational, yet ambiguous goals which defer the process of making difficult choices about future growth. For example, *The Auckland Plan* (Auckland Council, 2012) contains policies to promote urban intensification and manage peripheral growth yet the *Plan* contains contradictions:

No area should be compromised by ... inappropriate density... Development opportunities must maximize the potential of each site, but never at the expense of high quality living. (Section 571, p. 248)

Caveats are easy to include in a Goals Plan, but they are difficult to incorporate into regulations such that there is regional consistency while acknowledging local variations. To provide the necessary guidance tradeoffs need to be made.

In 1986 City staff prepared *The Vancouver Plan*. This 'Expert Plan' assessed choices facing Vancouver and recommended a strategic response for managing change. *The Vancouver Plan* attracted minimal Council and community interest, rather community attention was focused on hotly contested rezonings in suburban neighbourhoods fostering a NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) response from residents. Six years later, in 1992, Vancouver Council asked staff to propose a process to prepare a new city plan to address social, economic, and environmental issues in the context of limited land and funds. Based on the lessons from previous plan-making exercises, Council was concerned that another Expert Plan would be negatively received by the community who would ask, 'why weren't we involved in developing the plan?' and that a Goals Plan would not address difficult choices that needed to be made. In response, Council made the extraordinary decision to invite the community to 'Walk in Council's Shoes'.

On the premise that new minds might find solutions to old problems, Council proposed a *Public Choicing Process*. Council wanted to 'Hear about all issues', 'Hear from new people', and 'Hear through new ways'. These became the 'Prime Directives' of Vancouver's *CityPlan* process. Council's rejection of a staff driven 'technocratic' process mirrored concerns that had been raised 10 years earlier by Nelkin (1981, p. 274) that scientific and technocratic approaches 'not only failed to solve social problems but often contributed to them'. Similarly DeSario and Langton (1987, p. 9) concluded that 'The technocratic approach to decision making is difficult to apply successfully to social problems because social goals are often complex, conflicting, and unclear'.

While there is now an array of literature that examines the role of public participation in decision-making (e.g. Albrechts 2002; Innes and Booher 2003; Healey 2006; Legacy 2012), very few studies were available in 1992 to serve as models for Vancouver's strategic

planning process. Instead, City staff reviewed planning processes in two Canadian and seven western American cities where they found that typically plans focused on land use and transportation (e.g. Portland 1988, Seattle 1991), with limited examples of multi-topic plans (e.g. land use, affordable housing, transportation, economic development, and social services in Denver 1989 and Toronto 1991). Notably, no plans overtly addressed choices resulting from limited funds and completing land uses, instead plans were typically prepared by staff or consultants with limited public engagement apart from the advice from a citizen task force (Toronto) or commission (Denver). Vancouver offered two examples of limited choicing. Both *The Vancouver Plan* (1986) and *The Greater Vancouver Regional District Creating Our Future* (1992) initiatives identified growth options that were prepared *by staff for public input*. Three features distinguished Vancouver's *CityPlan* Choicing process from existing practice: 1. including broad public engagement from the start of a comprehensive planning process; 2. addressing all city responsibilities; and 3. engaging the community in identifying and advising on land and service choices.

The Vancouver *CityPlan* Process: Public Choicing

An early step in any planning process is determining what role citizens will play in decision-making. In 1992 academic literature offered two models of citizen engagement. Arnstein's (1969) eight-step ladder suggested that 'worthy' participation is achieved through processes where citizens are 'in control' of the outcome. This raised questions around the role assigned to elected decision-makers. Connor (1988, p. 253) saw consultation as an advisory process whereby:

the proponent may accept or reject the views expressed by the public, but at least these are now clearly identified and can be addressed in more relevant ways than before the consultation occurred.

The *CityPlan* process reflected Connor's model. Council wanted a process that would position the public as a partner in the plan-making process and that their advice should be incorporated into decisions to the greatest extent possible.

A Council approved Terms of Reference clarified the task and roles of participants, stating that the public would advise the elected Council which was tasked with making the final decisions. Council stipulated that recent decisions, approved through public hearings, were not up for review, and that people would only advise on variable expenses as Council was not prepared to defer infrastructure repairs to fund new programmes. The four-step *CityPlan* process the Council underwent, which is described below, invited the public to 1. Generate ideas for the plan; 2. Review the ideas and recommend those for further consideration; 3. Consider issues, choices, and consequences of possible directions; and 4. Review the draft plan. The public was engaged at each step.

Step 1. People Generate Ideas (November 1992–March 1993)

In late 1992, Mayor Gordon Campbell sent 1,000 letters to randomly selected households and 1,000 letters to community and business groups inviting them to participate in a plan-making process. City representatives met with English and ethnic media to explain the process and newspapers ran stories encouraging people to engage by joining a 'City Circle'. Circles were groups of ten to fifteen people who met in public buildings, participant's homes or offices and were comprised of either members from existing organizations (such as the Board of Trade, School Parent Advisory Committees) or were interested citizens who came together to form Circles to propose directions for Vancouver's new plan. Over 4,000 people from all parts of the city and many who lived elsewhere but worked in Vancouver engaged.

The generation of ideas works best when

the ideas are unfettered and not constrained by staff priorities. Influenced by this view, Circles were facilitated by volunteers (urban professionals, teachers, multicultural and youth workers) and each participant received a *Tool Kit* to ensure equal access to information. Providing factual information encouraged participants to discuss ideas for the City's new plan rather than debate facts. Most Circles focused on one idea or direction; but to manage expectations, the only stipulation was that 'Ideas and Solutions travel together'. For example, if a Circle was proposing community policing they had to suggest how this would be achieved by raising or reallocating funds. Over four months 300 Circles prepared ideas.

Planning processes are often criticized for not including marginalized populations (Panagiotis, Heinelt, and Sweeting, 2006, p. 13). In Vancouver, to engage its large multicultural community, information was provided in six written languages and discussions were held in eight languages with seventy Circles engaging in languages other than English. A Resource Centre, staffed by representatives from five City departments, provided programme support in English, French, Vietnamese, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hindi, and Punjabi. Large format text and recorded information supported those with vision challenges and 150 Classroom Circles involved younger children tasked with drawing pictures of their desired neighbourhood while older students participated in the 'adult' programme.

To ensure submissions could be shared, all participants received a 477 page *Ideas Book*. While most submissions were written, some people chose to express themselves through maps, videos, photographs, and models. Over 3,000 submissions were received, some from individuals and others from Circles. The *Ideas Book* provided a permanent record of submissions, which were referenced as the plan developed.

Step 1 in the plan-making process engaged many more people than initially antici-

pated. On the premise that most people do not engage in city-wide issues (Vancouver, 1986), staff expected twenty-five 'adult' Circles and that several schools would also participate. Based on these estimates, the process was initially supported by six professionals (mainly planners), three assistants, and one media consultant. By the end of Phase 1, the 300 adult and 150 student Circles required over thirty-five staff from all city departments to provide information, Circle support, multicultural and youth programming. During Step 1 active Council involvement, media stories, and broad public engagement generated a city planning 'buzz'. Participants stated that being invited to engage in the first step of the plan-making process built trust and a sense that their contributions were valued. Councillors who attended Circle discussions observed that they were meeting 'new people' and not 'the usual suspects'.

From a staff perspective, Step 1 submissions were well thought out with most tackling the challenge of 'Ideas and Solutions' travelling together. The *CityPlan* process could be described as an early example of 'crowd-sourcing'. Problem solving was no longer the activity of an 'individual genius' or city experts, rather tasks were 'outsourced to a large network of people' (Brabham, 2008, p. 75). How can so many individuals address highly complex problems when traditional problem-solving teams cannot? James Surowiecki (2004) in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds* examines several cases of crowd wisdom at work. He concludes that the 'wisdom of crowds' is derived not from averaging solutions but from aggregating them.

Step 2. People Discuss and Review Ideas (April–June 1993)

Initially, the Step 2 process was to involve Circle participants in a workshop to identify ideas for further consideration. The number of responses made this impractical. Instead, staff identified 1,500 distinct 'ideas' from the

3,000 submissions. Circle representatives grouped ideas into twelve themes for organizing displays at an 'Ideas Fair'. These 'themes' would subsequently become 'Chapters' in *CityPlan*.

To ensure equitable access to the ideas and to convey information in a range of different forms, volunteer artists helped Circles display their proposals on coloured 6 foot by 4 foot (1.8 m x 1.2 m) panels. The use of artists ensured the quality of displays was not influenced by resources, as a result two very different stakeholder groups – the Urban Development Institute Circle and the Vietnamese Single Mothers Circle – could be, and indeed were, equally proud of their high quality submissions.

The Ideas Fair attracted 10,000 people over three days and included organizations (e.g. Port, Airport) presenting plans and illustrations of pending development. Likewise, city services (e.g. libraries, parks, recycling, and disaster preparedness) provided information about available services and challenges facing these services into the future. The Ideas Fair also included the building of a model city which involved children while their parents discussed proposed city directions and street theatre and workshops to entertain and engage participants. Over 100 staff from all City departments assisted.

The purpose of the Fair was for participants to indicate in an 'Ideas Checkbook' those ideas the City should pursue further. Staff tabulated the results which were shared with Circle representatives at an Ideas Forum, which was used to confirm publically ideas which staff would recommend to Council for further consideration. The output for Step 2 included:

- ◆ Ideas that received minimal public support were removed from further consideration.
- ◆ Ideas that received broad public support were implemented. For example, the idea of creating Neighbourhood Integrated

Service Teams (NISTS) comprising representatives from City Departments (e.g. Community Police, Parks and Engineering) and provincial staff working in the community through Community Health, for instance, would provide a coordinated response to community service delivery. Reconfiguring selected streets to create a city-wide network for enhanced walking and cycling was widely supported. This wide support triggered Council to allocate funds to build a Greenways network before *CityPlan* was completed. Council was seen to be listening and responding to people's ideas.

◆ Where there was no clear public consensus on an idea, for instance on intensification to increase housing choice, these topics formed the focus of Step 3.

Step 3. People Make Choices (February–August 1994)

The objective of Step 3 was to engage the public in addressing the difficult choices a Council faces when deciding between often equally valid, but contradictory, values. Following Step 2, staff (eight professional planners, four planning assistants, and an editor) assembled a twelve-theme (housing, jobs, neighbourhoods, movement, services, safety, infrastructure, arts, public places, environment, finance, and decision-making) forty-page *Making Choices Workbook*. Each theme described choices, the consequence of each choice, and how the choice could be implemented. Choices addressed growth (consequences of more housing, more jobs, what types, and where) and services (which services should the City provide, who for, and who pays). There were no 'right' or 'wrong' choices, but there would be different consequences for the city which needed to be considered. The workbook, which was translated into six languages, was distributed to City Circles, to 6,000 people on the *CityPlan* mailing list, and through libraries and community centres.

The *Making Choices Workbook* responses resulted in five broadly shared directions and seven areas of continuing uncertainty. Based on feedback from the Workbook staff identified four futures: neighbourhood centres, mixed residential and main streets, central city, and traditional city. All futures (scenarios) included transportation priorities (encourage walking, biking, and transit), more varied public places, community policing, environmental improvements, and funding (growth pays for services and redeploy existing funds rather than raise taxes). The four futures differed on the topics where Workbook responses failed to provide clear directions – housing location and affordability, neighbourhood character, jobs, community services, and decision-making. For example, the jobs and housing directions ranged from limiting city growth to various ways of accommodating more housing and jobs. Research by Albrechts (2005) has found that scenarios, prepared by staff, can be met with public resistance. To overcome this problem, *CityPlan* incorporated two processes to help ground scenarios in community support. Firstly, the scenarios derived from public input presented a range of options that reflected the range of public sentiments (from no growth to options for allocating growth). Secondly, the scenarios were derived from the underlying premise of 'Ideas and Solutions travelling together', which contributed to the development of implementable options for discussion.

City Circle representatives reviewed the scenarios and, with the assistance of graphic artists, prepared displays illustrating the futures. These were exhibited in a mobile tent visited by over 15,000 people. Those who visited the Futures Tent were invited to discuss the choices and fill in questionnaires indicating their preferred future. The four futures were also described in an eight-page brochure which was mailed to all city households and inserted (a translated version) into ethnic newspapers. Those who filled in the Futures Questionnaire were asked to select their preferred future and indicate where

they live, and their tenure, gender, age, and ethnicity. Staff tabulated the results of the futures questionnaire including the demographic profiles of responders. When these profiles were compared with City statistics staff found some neighbourhoods were under-represented. In response, the City hired a survey company to do a 1,500 household phone survey, which was stratified to include over-representation for the neighbourhoods, tenure, gender, age, and ethnic profile under-represented in the self-selected survey responses. This helped avoid criticism that some neighbourhoods/tenure/ages were not adequately reflected in the public input.

At the time *CityPlan* engendered debate in the profession including criticism from Seelig and Seelig (1997) who condemned planners for becoming pollsters. However, this view was not widely shared as planners who engaged in the process saw their expertise used to its full extent and felt the Plan was richer because it emerged from an inclusive plan-making process. What critics of *CityPlan* under-estimated was the research which accompanied the policy directions. For example, underlying *CityPlan* was an analysis of the physical, economic, and social impacts of inserting multi-family housing in otherwise single-family areas (McAfee and French, 1986) and post-occupancy based design guidelines to maintain liveability as densities increase (McAfee *et al.*, 1978, 1992). Financing and transportation directions were based on fiscal impact and mode share analysis.

Step 4. People Discuss the Draft Plan with Council (February–June 1995)

Results from the *Making Choices Workbook*, the Futures Questionnaire, and the random sample were assembled by staff into a Draft Plan for public review and Council action. Circle discussions, displays at Fire Halls, a City Hall open house, and posting the Draft Plan on the web provided opportunities for people to review and discuss the proposed City Directions. As a final step Council held

Public Hearings which allowed community speakers participating in the Hearings to describe *their* role in the process and to encourage Council to adopt '*their* plan'. Eighty per cent of the speakers supported *CityPlan*, while most who spoke against the Plan were against intensification of single-family areas. Given the widespread support, Council approved *CityPlan* with only minor revisions.

The Vancouver response to 'Discuss the Draft Plan' was different from experiences in other cities. The response in Vancouver to Step 4 could best be described as pride and impatience. The former because the Draft Plan reflected the ideas expressed by participants and the latter due to the length of time it took to produce a plan, which was twenty months over two and a half years (there were gaps during a civic election and while staff assembled the Workbook and Draft Plan). Having engaged in the process most people wanted to get on with implementation.

In contrast to Vancouver, other cities, such as Melbourne, Australia embarked upon a more traditional planning process. The Draft Melbourne 2030 Plan started with staff preparing a draft plan, which was released in 2002 for public comment. The Melbourne 2030 plan was adopted in 2005, but without changes to reflect the expressions of concern contained in many of the 1,400 submissions. By 2011 Melbourne 2030 was 'finally buried, unmourned and unloved' (Mees, 2011, p. 1). Mees's review of Melbourne 2030 concludes that Melbourne 2030 in part failed due to a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the public and stakeholders. This supports Albrechts (2002, p. 340) observation that 'The purpose should be to develop a plan/project for which public support can be found and not to look for public support for a finished plan'. The author's examination of the Auckland Unitary Plan (2013) suggests that a bridge between 'Expert' and 'Public Choicing' models is emerging. The *Draft Auckland Unitary Plan* was assembled by staff following input from key stakeholders where broad public engage-

ment from March to May 2013 resulted in 21,179 submissions. In responding to the submissions, Auckland Council incorporated many of the suggestions into the *Proposed Unitary Plan*.

Throughout the *CityPlan* process people were offered many ways to engage. This included active participation in Circles and workshops, viewing displays, watching press coverage, reading information distributed to homes and businesses, and purpose designed programmes prepared for children, youth, and ethnic communities. A survey, administered following the adoption of *CityPlan*, found that over 100,000 people, reflecting 40 per cent of city households, participated in the *CityPlan* process. To this point the process had cost CAD3.4 million (roughly equivalent to one 'specialty coffee' for each person who lived or worked in Vancouver). This included two and a half years of staff time from an interdepartmental team (Planning, Engineering, Social Planning, Housing, Permits & Licenses, Parks, Fire, Police, Finance, and Environmental Health), which accounted for CAD1.5 million. Steps 1 and 2 cost CAD1.2 million to support development of the *Tool Kit*, publishing the *Ideas Book*, and Fair displays. Step 3 cost CAD500,000 and Step 4 cost CAD200,000. The process also received significant 'in-kind' media coverage. Consultants provided communications support; however no consultants were used to manage the process or develop content. The process can be commended for strengthening the relationships between Council and staff who met at least monthly to discuss progress and the development of a 'Sponsor Committee' of Department Heads which built cross-organization commitment to implementation.

Post *CityPlan*:

City-Wide Policy and Area Plans

When the *CityPlan* process commenced Council wondered what kind of Plan would emerge from the process. Would citizens glorify 'NIMBY'? This was not to be the case. *City-*

Plan retained many features people liked about Vancouver (e.g. a vibrant downtown, affordable housing programmes), but it also charted new directions which included: support for increased housing choice throughout the city, including in single-family areas; maintaining a diverse economy by preserving remaining industrial lands; and implementing new ideas such as greenways, community policing, NISTs, and neighbourhood centres. *CityPlan* changed budgeting processes by supporting full recovery user fees for environmentally impacted services (e.g. waste removal) and reallocating existing budgets to fund new services. Directing new development to areas with excess services and requiring new development to pay its way contributed to doing more with less.

Despite the success of the plan-making process, *CityPlan* was best described by a newspaper headline 'Master plan provides destination, but no route' (*Globe & Mail*, 22 April 1995), reflecting the absence of maps and zoning schedules. To further define the route the City needed to update city-wide and area plans. The results of post *CityPlan* implementation provide lessons for change processes.

City-Wide Policy Plans

During the decade following *CityPlan* Vancouver Council worked to further articulate Directions for implementation through new city-wide policy plans, e.g. Industrial Lands Strategy (1995), Greenways Plan (1995), Transportation Plan (1997), Financing Growth Policy (1997 and 2003), Sustainability Plan (2002), and Community Climate Change Action Plan (2003). All policy plans started with a Council approved Terms of Reference specifying the task, roles, and engagement process and each plan was supported by different approaches to public engagement. For instance, the Transportation Plan continued broad public consultation, the new Industrial Land Strategy engaged owners and tenants of industrial properties, and the Financing

Growth Plan was prepared by staff with the assistance of a multi-stakeholder Task Force. What this experience shows is that city-wide policy planning processes can be custom designed to address the specific circumstances (Glass, 1979; Cogan *et al.*, 1986) and that by moving expeditiously between policy agreements (e.g. *CityPlan*) and implementation, through zoning and capital improvements, increases the likelihood of policies standing the test of time. As will be seen in the next section, longer planning processes diminish support for change.

Area Plans

Following *CityPlan*, Council embarked on community planning to provide more choice of housing in previously single-family areas. Prior to *CityPlan* many single-family residents supported neighbourhood protection by limiting new development in the city or continuing to redirect new housing to rezoned industrial sites. The *CityPlan* process brought together aging homeowners who wanted to stay in their familiar neighbourhood; recent homeowners who, fearful of declining property values, were resisting change; and those seeking affordable family housing. Discussion of the choices and consequences of various scenarios resulted in broad support (80 per cent of participants) for increasing housing choice in single-family areas, provided new growth was accompanied by improved services. The explanation for why residents changed their mind varies. For some it was the outcome of discussions about where they and their children would live as they aged. For others it was concerns about the relocation of service and support jobs. Research by Fishkin (1988) on Deliberative Polling shows how individuals may change their views as a result of engaging with, and being educated on, public policy issues and tradeoffs. The information sharing (Tool Kit) and *CityPlan* choicing processes allowed citizens to consider the tradeoffs. As a result of the 'deliberative' *CityPlan* pro-

cess participants supported new directions to intensify neighbourhoods thereby making more efficient use of existing services and providing opportunities for more housing choice.

The new agreed upon directions in single-family neighbourhoods were implemented through three sequential programmes:

- ◆ *New City-Wide Residential Zoning*. Prior to *CityPlan* secondary suites (a second dwelling unit in an otherwise 'single-family' dwelling) and laneway houses (a second dwelling located off a rear lane) were considered and rejected due to community opposition. Following *CityPlan* rezonings to improve the design of apartments above shops (2003), increased housing opportunities through secondary suites (2004) and, later, laneway houses (2009) received community support. Changes, which were expeditiously implemented through new zoning, increased housing choices in lower density neighbourhoods.

- ◆ *Community Visions (Area Plans)*. Other housing and neighbourhood improvements were to be implemented through nine area planning programmes (1998–2010). Public engagement included resident committees to ensure that the plans included broad community input and reflected community priorities. 'City Perspectives Panels' of residents from other communities monitored the impact of plans on adjacent neighbourhoods, while the Visions illustrated a combination of 'top-down' and 'bottom up' planning. Broad city-wide directions to increase housing choice were grounded by communities who identified location specific land uses and local funding priorities.

- ◆ *Neighbourhood Centres*. Visions identified locations for site specific rezonings. Residents engaged with local businesses, developers, and planners to prepare a Local Shopping Centre Improvement Plan and a Neighbourhood Centre Housing Plan for rezoning to increase housing choice. The two components

reflected the initial *CityPlan* contract with residents to intensify single-family areas provided new growth was accompanied by service improvements as mentioned above. Council approved the first Neighbourhood Centre (Kingsway and Knight in 2004) to cheers from the community that had just watched Council adopt 'their' Centre Plan. NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) had become YIMBY (Yes in My Back Yard). The scale of the first community supported Neighbourhood Centre rezoning (including a 400 unit high-rise, housing above shops, and infill zoning for 1,500 area properties) belied criticisms that community engagement reduces the likelihood of bold steps. Approval of the first Neighbourhood Centre supports the observation that 'People are more likely to support an agreement that they had a hand in shaping' (Albrechts, 2002, p. 333).

While staged planning processes (obtaining broad support for key policies before detailing zoning and budget allocations) offer the benefit of focusing public attention on 'bite sized' tasks, they take time to complete. *CityPlan's* neighbourhood programmes have not stood the test of time. In retrospect public support was fragile. Time and funding shortfalls contributed to 'planning fatigue'. Burks (2013) illustrated the consequences of planning fatigue in Detroit (post-recession) and New Orleans (post-hurricane) where residents grew weary of ongoing studies. As the years passed commitment to implementing *CityPlan* in Vancouver's single-family neighbourhoods waned. By 2007 proposals to increase density in neighbourhoods were being met by community resistance. This raises the question of why community groups shifted from enraged (1992) to engaged (2004) and returned to enraged (2007). There appear to be several reasons. Resources for *CityPlan* implementation were considerably less than for plan preparation. Planning resources were divided between preparing policy plans, city-wide residential rezonings, Community Visions,

and Neighbourhood Centres. In addition, the process of preparing nine community visions before initiating area rezonings further delayed implementation.

In 2006 the incumbent mayor, concerned that *CityPlan* was taking too long to implement, articulated a new 'EcoDensity' programme to increase densities in single-family neighbourhoods. EcoDensity (City of Vancouver, 2008) was seen by communities as ignoring approved Visions. As Council wavered public support waned. A new Mayor and Council won the next election with their priorities being to produce a Greener City and to provide more affordable housing. Both of these goals were supported in *CityPlan* Directions, though they were not presented as such. In Vancouver's case political change coincided with staff changes. Between 2006 and 2009 a significant portion of senior staff with *CityPlan* experience retired. While public engagement continues to be a component of Vancouver's area plans observations from community members attending a retrospective on *CityPlan*¹ on 18 June 2013 suggests recent area planning processes are returning to the Expert Model.

The fragile nature of trust is observed in other studies. Gaventa and Barrett (2010), analysing 100 citizen engagement projects in twenty countries, concluded that citizen participation produces positive effects in 75 per cent of cases though outcomes varied according to the type of citizen engagement undertaken and the political context. They found change is highly iterative, rarely linear and often uneven with gains and reversals, progress and disjuncture, successes and failures.

Tools for Change: Public Engagement in Retrospect

One of the reasons for describing case studies such as *CityPlan* is to draw lessons with potential for transferability to other cities. *CityPlan* offers lessons for engaging citizens in policy planning. Firstly, broad public engagement began with the initial plan-making steps.

Secondly, topics included all city responsibilities providing a coordinated response to sustainability.

Thirdly, the public was involved in assessing choices and consequences. This made the future a result of choice not chance. What the initial steps of *CityPlan* demonstrated was that when the consequences of choices are incorporated into the plan-making process the public understands trade-offs and politicians receive direction on decisions. Fourthly, *CityPlan* also demonstrates the importance of expeditious implementation. Two transferrable lessons follow.

*The Role of Visionary Leadership:
Lead, Listen, Lead*

CityPlan, and more recently the Auckland Unitary Plan (McAfee, 2013, p. 9), demonstrate the role elected officials play in articulating what they require to make decisions and to support plan-making processes. Vancouver Council established guiding principles for the process and sought to address tough choices facing the city. Echoing Bruand (2012, p. 12) City Councils must guarantee that the objectives and ambitions of a programme are clearly set out and include a Council adopted Terms of Reference to clarify the roles and tasks of stakeholders. Vancouver Council managed stakeholder expectations by requesting that ideas and solutions travel together throughout the process. The *CityPlan* process from 1992 to 1995 was bi-partisan creating a united approach to plan-making, but what City Council did not do was claim personal credit for the Plan. Instead, they ensured the plan achieved wide ownership. Prior to 2006 the completed Plan was not the 'Mayor's Plan' or the 'Council's Plan'. It was 'Vancouver's Plan'. This contributed to initial support for plan implementation.

CityPlan illustrates a change process where Council led by articulating a new planning process, listened to public input, and led by adopting new City Directions. The *CityPlan* process confirms conclusions of the *World*

Happiness Report (Helliwell *et al.*, 2013) that citizens are happiest when they respect their politicians and when policy-makers listen when they solicit their views. The *CityPlan* process illustrates how a public engagement process can achieve change which is supported by regulation and funds. The policy plans and the first neighbourhood centre, which were enshrined in zoning and funding, continue to be implemented. *CityPlan* also illustrates how support can be compromised without timely implementation.

*Including Citizens in Urban Change:
Transferable Engagement Tools*

Provided there is Council support many *CityPlan* tools are transferable:

- ◆ Tool Kits, whether print or online, provide equal access to information;
- ◆ City Circles encourage people to talk to each other about city choices;
- ◆ Ideas Books, whether print or online, share citizen contributions;
- ◆ Ideas Fairs, touring displays, and web access attract 'new' people;
- ◆ Choosing Workbooks organize information for review and response;
- ◆ Scenarios provide coordinated policy packages to facilitate discussion of tradeoffs;
- ◆ Special access programmes involve seniors, youth and multicultural communities; and
- ◆ Interdepartmental planning teams provide expertise and support implementation.

CityPlan took discussions to where people are and gave groups a chance to formulate their ideas after listening to others (Albrechts, 2002, p. 343). However *CityPlan* experiences do not support Albrechts's observation that

forums should engage people with similar rather than opposing views (Albrechts, 2002, p. 339). *CityPlan* brought together people with varied perspectives and this contributed to identifying and choosing between Directions which subsequently received broad public support.

The direction setting phase of the *CityPlan* process occurred before widespread use of the internet. A 1992 survey of public preferences for *CityPlan* engagement found only 5 per cent of citizens preferred to receive information from the web. In 1994 the draft plan was posted on the web, though few responded. Today information and feedback is regularly delivered through an interactive website (e.g. Voice of Newcastle, Surrey's CitySpeak, and Talk Vancouver).²

Few articles address the comparative contributions of 'online' and 'onsite' engagement to change processes. Kim and Lee (2012) concluded that citizens were more receptive to e-participation when responding to service preferences and much less likely to use the internet for more advanced consultative activities associated with complex policy development. Allegretti (2013) also observed that participatory budgeting approaches which ask people to indicate their individual preferences via the internet do not provide opportunities to listen and learn from each other's preferences. Participatory budgeting approaches, which put more emphasis on bringing people together and building consensus, were more successful. To illustrate this point, the Shape Auckland website received 1,200 comments, however in a recent review of the Shape Auckland posts, it was concluded that 3 per cent (or eleven participants) posted 44 per cent of the total conversation (Parsons, 2013, p. 3). This raises a question about the value of web posts to plan preparation. Milakovich (2010, p. 1) observes that information technology facilitates broader citizen participation, but concludes that research into online engagement needs to be more explicit about the comparative utility of the web to various stages of a planning process. This

paper concludes that the web is an excellent platform for disseminating information (e.g. *CityPlan* Steps 1 and 4) and a less satisfactory way to improve plan content (e.g. *CityPlan* Steps 2 and 3). Face-to-face discussions build understanding, consensus, and cooperative working relationships; however there is no evidence to suggest that online engagement would have significantly improved the range of income, household, age, and ethnic mix that supported *CityPlan Directions*.

Most city plans developed during the past 20 years engage citizens in the process. Older plans such as the Vancouver Plan (1986) and more recently Melbourne 2030 (2005) invite the public to review plans prepared by staff, while other processes (*CityPlan* 1995, Guimaras Philippines 1995, Nantes 2030, and Amsterdam 2040) start with public input. Public engagement literature provides mixed assessments of the use of public engagement tools as change agents. Some studies such as Grant (2009) and Punter (2003) referencing Vancouver's Downtown redevelopment of industrial land illustrate that significant change can occur with Expert Plans. Other studies express concerns there is a 'real danger of reinforcing inequities between one group of citizens who get involved and get their voices heard and those who do not' Bruand (2012, p. 14). Recognizing the possibility of 'hijacking', both the *CityPlan* process (1995) and the more recent Auckland Unitary Plan (2013) used a variety of engagement tools such as targeted ethnic and senior programmes and both used onsite and online access to support inclusiveness. Gaventa and Barrett (2010, p. 56) concluded that:

Engagement is a way of strengthening a sense of citizenship and the knowledge and sense of awareness necessary to achieve it... Engagement also contributes to a broader sense of inclusion of previously marginalized groups and has the potential to increase social cohesion across groups.

Both Vancouver's *CityPlan* and Auckland's *Unitary Plan* processes reinforce Gaventa and Barrett's conclusions.

Conclusions:

Realizing Change through Engagement

Given public engagement is often a legislated requirement, there is a tendency for cities to undertake 'extensive' public processes for all planning issues. *CityPlan* demonstrates that:

A community dialogue is not cheap, fast, or easy. Community dialogue is best used in instances where the issues are critical, the political process is deadlocked, and there remains sufficient time to complete a public process. (Irwin and Stansbury, 2004, p. 58).

The *CityPlan* process suggests that 'extensive' public engagement is a tool for change when reaching a decision that requires choices between important values. When funds are limited public advice can help target local needs. When choices or time are limited, other engagement processes such as an appointed Commission or Task Force may be more appropriate.

CityPlan illustrates citizen involvement is not easy. There is no one 'public interest' but rather people have various needs and perspectives. Varied education, language, culture, age, incomes and life experiences all challenge and enrich public processes. To be successful public involvement must respect and respond to these differences. Underlying all public involvement should be clear principles for how citizens will be involved and what their role will be in decision-making. Beyond this principle there is no one right way to engage the public. Each process needs to fit the task and resources available. In general, as a decision becomes more significant or controversial, the level of involvement increases from providing information to active engagement.

Would *CityPlan* have been much different if planners followed the traditional Expert model where the staff prepare a draft plan for public response? The answers are 'no' and 'yes'. 'No' in that most Directions which emerged from *CityPlan* – increasing housing choice in neighbourhoods, more efficient use of existing services through intensification,

and maintaining a diverse economy – would have been proposed in a staff plan. 'Yes' in that if past experience was an indicator, zoning proposals in residential areas, preserving industrial land, development cost charges, and decisions to fund some services and not others would have been met by opposition. *CityPlan* brought a wide range of stakeholders together to agree on shared Directions. The *CityPlan* experience suggests that while the steps in the Expert and Citizen Choicing plan-making process are similar, involving citizens through the process establishes support for change. As a Chinese Proverb says: 'Tell me, I forget; Show me, I remember; Involve me, I understand'.

Are planners 'focused on reproducing answers on the basis of similar problems encountered in the past' (Albrechts, 2005, p. 262)? Both Vancouver's *CityPlan* (1995) and the more recent Auckland Unitary Plan (2013) public processes negate this conclusion. Planners and politicians are grasping momentum and inventing different responses, many of which are unconventional and unique approaches to changing times. New planning processes and tools for change are emerging to address changing circumstances. There is a wealth of practical experience which would benefit from review by academics in consultation with practitioners to better understand and improve planning practice which includes public engagement as a tool for change.

NOTES

1. Organized by CityHallWatch; see: <http://cityhallwatch.wordpress.com/>.
2. A good illustration of a web enhanced public process can be found on the City of Auckland (2013) website [www//shapeauckland.co.nz](http://www.shapeauckland.co.nz).

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