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City of Vancouver

Final Report

Community Review of the Draft Vancouver Agreement

November 1999



Canada

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	Page 1
Summary of Community Review	Page 3
General Comments	Page 3
Principles of the Vancouver Agreement	Page 3
First Focus: The Downtown Eastside	Page 4
Community Health and Safety	Page 4
Economic and Social Development	Page 6
Community Capacity Building	Page 8
Appendix 1: Background	Page 11
Appendix 2: Community Review Process	Page 12
Appendix 3: Government Representatives	Page 13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 15 1999, the government of Canada and British Columbia and the City of Vancouver signed a draft version of the Vancouver Agreement. The Agreement lays out a framework and principles for the three levels of government to work together to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development in Vancouver, with a first focus in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

Public meetings were held in the Downtown Eastside during the month of September to solicit community input on the draft Agreement. More than 200 people attended these meetings. The purpose of this paper is to report on the key findings from those meetings.

Throughout the community review process, people emphasized that the Downtown Eastside is a unique neighbourhood and there is a strong interest in creating a healthy and viable community. Overall, there was broad agreement that the key issues for the Downtown Eastside are linked to health, safety, housing and economic opportunity.

Feedback related specifically to the Agreement included comments about the proposed boundaries for the Downtown Eastside being too narrow and that a broader definition is preferred. There is concern that existing funding would not be sufficient to support new programs as well as maintain existing programs. There is also cynicism about the governments' capacity to action the activities as outlined in the agreement. There has been a lot of research and discussion on identifying the needs of the Downtown Eastside community. For this agreement to be seen as a positive development, the community must see action rather than more discussion on the problems.

Community Health and Safety

Residents of the Downtown Eastside are very concerned about the gaps in health care and related services. Lack of access to general health care, affordable dental services and quality meal programs is an ongoing problem for this community. The community also feels very strongly that services that address the specific needs of women, children and members of certain cultural groups are urgently needed in the Downtown Eastside.

A comprehensive substance misuse strategy is immediately required and community residents continue to be concerned about the lack of treatment resources and addiction services. There is a need for a region wide comprehensive continuum of care for people who are addicted. This continuum would need to link substance misuse programs with other supports such as housing and employment training.

Safety and Justice

Safety is a major concern for residents. There is a perception that the community is not a safe place and action must be taken to improve safety for everyone. In terms of justice, improvements in the effectiveness of the justice system and increased efforts to get drug users into health services were

seen as the two major directions on which governments need to focus. Community policing was seen as an integral part of the solution and the community would like to have more of a say in how policing is going to be carried out in their neighbourhood.

Economic and Social Development

Neighbourhood economic development is key to achieving the goal of creating a healthy and viable community. How this goal is achieved varies throughout the DTES community from implementing training programs and increasing support for employment and new businesses to reducing the concentration of social services and low-income housing while providing incentives to preserve and develop the many heritage buildings.

Housing

The protection and improvement of existing Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units, construction of additional affordable housing and adding a reference to market housing in the agreement are very important to different stakeholders in the community. For some, housing is linked to community health and safety. For others, it is linked to economic development.

Community Capacity Building

Members of the Downtown Eastside community support the concept of community capacity building and see it as an important part of the Vancouver Agreement. There was a strong feeling that local residents have a great deal to offer in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities and they must be given an opportunity to fully participate in decisions that affect the neighbourhood. To achieve this, they would like to see increased information sharing between themselves and government.

People questioned how proposed problem solving or decision-making mechanisms such as roundtables would work. They also questioned how members of the community could get involved and articulated a strong desire to be an equal partner in the process. In terms of participating, they recommend that resources be made available to support them in this process.

Conclusion

While generally in agreement with the concept of the three levels of government working more closely together on the areas outlined in the Agreement, the community continues to be concerned about the length of time it has taken to address some of the urgent problems. The community review process was essential in informing the residents about the Vancouver Agreement. It should be noted that feedback received is consistent with that of other recent consultations that have taken place with the Downtown Eastside community.

The next step in this process includes the finalization and signing of the Vancouver Agreement based on community feedback. This will be followed by the development of a schedule of activities for programs and services in the Downtown Eastside for the coming year.

Additional copies of this report as well as copies of the feedback from individual community review meetings can be obtained by contacting the Office of the City Clerk at 873-7276 or by accessing the City of Vancouver Website at www.city.vancouver.bc.ca.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY REVIEW

The draft Vancouver Agreement was, for the most part, viewed favourably by the community. At each community meeting there were supportive comments and general approval for the three levels of government to work together to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development. There was however, concern expressed that government action to address many of the significant issues has taken so long. People hope this is not just more discussion of the issues, but that real action will be taken to address the many problems in the Downtown Eastside.

The following section highlights the common themes identified during the review process. It includes comments related to the document framework, the proposed three components: Community Health and Safety, Economic and Social Development, and Community Capacity Building, as well as overall general comments and concerns as expressed by the community.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The first part of the Vancouver Agreement sets out what the three levels of government have agreed to do in order to work together. With regards to the sections dealing with mandates and authorization policies, there was concern that the Agreement does not address the reality that existing government policies and mandates create access barriers for some people. It was suggested that the three levels of government should develop new policies across governments in order to ensure equal access to programs and services for all people.

At each community meeting, there were many questions about the section of the Agreement that limits expenditures to existing funds. The community wondered what would be accomplished without additional money to address the issues in the Downtown Eastside. There is a real concern that without new money, even existing programs in the community may also be in jeopardy.

As well, the community wants the three governments to work together efficiently, in close collaboration with the community, but in a way that allows strategic actions to be taken in a timely manner.

PRINCIPLES OF THE VANCOUVER AGREEMENT

Under this section of the Agreement, there was support for the principle of innovation, particularly in terms of testing new ways to address community issues. There was however, concern that community groups would have to repackage existing quality programming for the sake of innovation in order to continue receiving funding. They noted that the toughest part of developing innovative programming is not coming up with the ideas, but rather the lack of resources to do so.

In relation to the principle on program evaluation, the community expressed a need to evaluate existing as well as new programs to determine their success. If organizations or programs do not demonstrate desired outcomes, then funds should be cut or changes made to the programs. The

community wants government to ensure that organizations do not become institutionalized and overly bureaucratic and less responsive to the community. They expressed a desire that government see the community through the eyes of its people.

FIRST FOCUS: THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

Questions were raised about the boundaries of the Downtown Eastside. Some participants described the street boundary description as inaccurate while others felt it was geographically impossible. Some community members feel the area selected was too restrictive and there should be a broader definition for the Downtown Eastside. It was suggested that a map that clearly outlines the area of focus be incorporated into the document.

At many of the meetings, people criticized the lack of recognition of the distinct needs of the various citizen groups living in the communities both in and around the Downtown Eastside. The community would like the Agreement to reflect the unique needs of children, women, families, urban aboriginals and seniors, among others.

Similarly, comments were made indicating that the Vancouver Agreement did not highlight assets in the community. For example, some people said the distinct heritage character of Chinatown and Gastown should be taken more seriously. These two areas are national treasures and should be treated as such. There is also a healthy community in the area that should be recognized. Opportunities to build on these kinds of assets have been ignored.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY

Many people expressed strong support for maintaining social services for DTES residents while expanding services in other neighbourhoods. People said that the well being of citizens was a citywide responsibility and that everyone has a right to access services in their own community. There was concern that the concentration of services in the DTES has contributed to some of the problems in the area.

Some people see government programs as a source of problems criticizing funding decisions and the effects of government policies on residents. For example, some people in the community link the reduction in BC Benefit rates to an increase in homelessness, violence, prostitution and incidents of mentally ill people selling their medication for money. Others spoke about the need to have social policy that reflects the realities of the community. As an example, they stated that the policy of same-day distribution of welfare cheques promoted drug use and increased the incidence of needle sharing: when everyone receives his or her assistance on the same day, the result is excessive drug use for the short period of time the money lasts. This increases the risk of contracting HIV and Hepatitis.

The issues around community health and safety were of major concern to all that live and work in DTES. People explained in many ways their pride in the community and their commitment to creating a healthy and viable environment for everyone. People noted that DTES has a unique and special character, but that the problems of poverty, drug abuse, crime and ill health were threatening to overwhelm them. They wanted recognition of the conflicts that exist in DTES, and of the diverse

and competing values at work. These competing values have created a climate of opposition and which required resolution to allow the community to move forward.

Some in the community view the Vancouver Agreement as a social service document with not enough emphasis on economic development. Others believe there is not enough emphasis on social problems. There is a belief that governments have made a conscious decision to contain the problems of crime and drug addiction in DTES. People referred to conditions that were tolerated in this community but would not be tolerated in any other community in Vancouver. Everyone agreed that it is time for concrete action.

Primary Health Care

Many people expressed concern about the gaps in current health care and related services. Examples given by the community included lack of quality meal programs and lack of affordable dental services in DTES. Another example was the lack of access to medical care in the treatment of a serious illness. If there are any costs associated with medical care most DTES forgo that care because they can't afford it. Throughout the review process, community members frequently stated that more money is needed for existing and additional services.

They spoke about barriers people experience when trying to access services in the community. They identified gender specific services, and cultural and language specific services as important components of any service delivery model and urged that women, children and families not be forgotten when looking at linkages between health care and social services in DTES. Also, in an environment where most residents do not have telephones, communication in the context of providing service was raised as an issue.

Comprehensive Substance Misuse Strategy

Developing strategies to deal with the use and sale of drugs is seen as one of the key areas for the Vancouver Agreement to address. Many argue that the criminal justice system does not respond adequately to people who deal drugs or commit crimes in order to sustain a drug habit.

Others suggest that substance misuse is primarily a health issue and should be dealt with by increasing services to those who use drugs. Some expressed concern about the effect that services for drug users, such as safe injection sites, could have and questioned whether they should be attempted in the DTES.

Availability of treatment for addiction was a constant theme throughout the review process. There is an identified need for more treatment in DTES and in other areas of Vancouver. The community does not support the concentration of all treatment services in the area, as they do not want people with problems from outside the area to come to the Downtown Eastside for services. They want individuals to have choices of where they can go for service. There was support for the concept of a continuum of care in addiction services including availability of housing before, during and after treatment and provision of employment training. Similarly there is concern about the lack of infrastructure for youth with addiction problems.

On several occasions, community members suggested that the term "harm reduction" needs to be clearly defined in the Agreement. They also identified the need to review and evaluate existing programs, with a focus on future planning. With a population of 10,000 to 15,000 drug users in the Lower Mainland, responses to the problem must be appropriate, timely and be regionally focussed. Many meeting participants lamented the loss of Pender Detox.

Safety and Justice

The issues of drugs, prostitution, crime and safety were seen as interconnected and there was an emphasis on the need for a focused approach. The business community stated that public perception around lack of safety in the DTES has had an adverse effect on them. Residents were concerned about personal safety especially when they were out in the community.

Some community members supported zero tolerance for drugs. They considered the problems of crime and prostitution to be directly connected and viewed the justice system as the vehicle to deal with these issues. Others in the community differentiated between addicted users and drug dealers and wanted to see the dealers dealt with by the courts while the addicted users are supported by an expanded health system. Some felt that existing laws do not deal effectively with drug and crime problems. Several participants observed that there is a revolving door for drug dealers through the courts. It was suggested that laws in all levels of government need to be amended. There was also concern around displacing the problem to other areas, and a suggestion was made that strategies that worked here could be utilized in other areas.

Policing was raised repeatedly and comments varied depending on the meeting. The community made a number of suggestions: more enforcement/ more police officers, increased foot patrol in DTES, and community meetings with police around how the community should be policed. A concern was voiced regarding aggressive enforcement methods used by the police in the low-income community.

The community clearly wants an environment that is safe for everyone who lives and works in DTES. Some people suggested improving public amenities to enhance the overall condition of the area. These suggestions include increasing the number of public washrooms and their hours of operation, providing better and safer public open spaces, and increasing the amount of parking and street lighting.

Community participation was an important theme in solving problems. Some participants suggested establishing a Block Watch program to bring the community together and having local people work with the police to make DTES a safer place. The community clearly wants to be involved in the process.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Neighbourhood Economic and Social Development

There is strong support by many of the people who participated in the Vancouver Agreement discussions for an economic revitalization strategy to create jobs for local residents, fill empty commercial spaces and provide revenue to conserve the area's many heritage buildings. There is also

agreement that conditions on the street - cleanliness of the public realm, maintenance of building facades and public safety - must be improved before new businesses can be successful and that clearly measurable outcomes need to be identified.

However, there were significant disagreements about the orientation that should be given to economic development. Some people believed that the focus should be on improving the standard of living for existing low-income residents so they can participate in the labour force. They recommended that welfare payments, social housing and job training be increased so residents can afford better housing and nutrition and be prepared to fill emerging employment opportunities. Work co-ops and a non-profit service to provide short-term employment should be established. Priority should be given to hiring local residents in government initiated projects and local businesses should be encouraged to hire locally. Additional supports were also suggested for easing the transition from welfare to work, especially for single parents, aboriginal people and individuals with drug and alcohol addictions.

Others argued that the concentration of low-income housing and services and the people they attract from throughout the region and province are creating the conditions on the street. They believed the Vancouver Agreement should reduce government expenditures on low-income people in the Downtown Eastside and refocus these resources in other parts of the city and region. They also called for zero tolerance of crime and drugs, an emphasis on public investments, and incentives to conserve the area's heritage resources. These measures are seen as necessary to create a long-term vision for a stronger economic base to create a more mixed-income community.

As a result, participants suggested that government may have to play several economic development roles to reflect both the needs of the low-income community as well as the needs of more affluent residents and businesses in the community.

Housing

Housing issues were brought up at all meetings. Many participants wanted to ensure that low-income residents are not displaced and that additional homelessness is avoided. Protecting Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units (via an anti-conversion bylaw) and providing additional affordable units were some of the strategies discussed. The absence of federal funding for social housing construction since 1993 was noted. There were calls for more social housing for seniors, for women, and for families with children.

Some participants also linked housing with other issues in the community. For example, some said that there are vacancies in some buildings because landlords will not rent to drug addicts. Another example was the suggestion that promoting as much social housing as possible on Hastings Street to fill up the vacant buildings/properties would promote economic revitalization.

A significant number of participants noted that the Agreement does not even refer to market housing. They believed that market housing could support many important initiatives, including restoring heritage buildings and acting as a catalyst for economic revitalization. They suggested that the document should explain how governments could support more market housing in the area. Some

supporting market housing would also like to see an end to the construction of non-market housing in the area.

The government is therefore being asked to perform two basic functions: protecting and enhancing low-income housing, and promoting market housing.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

There were many comments in the area of community capacity building. People were very clear in saying that they expected the Vancouver Agreement process to respect the skills, abilities and knowledge already existing in the community. There exists a wariness of outside experts as many feel that local community resources have not been tapped and local knowledge should be sought before going outside the community to look for expertise. They say there is a wealth of experience among residents and organizations in the DTES. People say they do not want to be "done to" once again but rather want to be part of any creation of knowledge about local problems and their solutions. The comment "We do not need any more studies!" was heard several times. Participants said that numerous studies have been done and now it is time to bring together information from previous work and act on it.

Another common theme was the notion that the Vancouver Agreement should be a process of empowerment for people in the community. Some feel that government and mainstream agencies in the community have not been successful at empowering individuals in the community and hope that involvement in the Vancouver Agreement process will facilitate this.

Questions were frequently raised about how residents were going to be represented throughout the process. Some participants felt that direct resident involvement is important to the integrity of the process. Others commented that some organizations have clear mechanisms for determining representation and question the accountability of other organizations claiming to represent the community. Representation was clearly important to people throughout the consultation. There is a fear that this process will do nothing to increase the participation of marginalized groups in any decision-making processes in the community. The community wants to be involved throughout the process, not just at the last phase.

In terms of decision-making, many community members made it very clear they desire to be involved at a level where decisions about their community are being made. Although many questions were

asked about the specific roles and responsibilities of the various committees identified in the Agreement, there seemed to be agreement that the decision-making authority rests with the Management Committee. Many participants felt that they should have representation at that table.

Many participants had definite concerns around the sharing of information between themselves and government. They would like to see more dialogue between the two to better track plans or initiatives for the area. The suggestion was made that if people in government would spend more time learning from people in the community, reading existing research on the area, and demonstrating this knowledge, the community's confidence in government would grow.

Many marginalized people in the community want support to fully participate in the process. It was underlined that people cannot fully participate when barriers exist, such as language, literacy, inconvenient meeting times or lack of resources for childcare. Participants recommended that funds be provided to help groups and individuals participate more fully in the process.

In terms of ability to participate, there was also a fear that people who live outside the community will take any job opportunities that result from this planning process. The comment that many Downtown Eastside residents are not ready for full time jobs speaks to the issue of not only preparing people to participate in the Vancouver Agreement process, but also in preparing them for any outcomes of the process such as jobs created through economic development strategies. Building the capacity of people in the community to participate was seen as a key first step. Others believe that immediate action by government in areas such as drug and alcohol treatment and housing is a key step in building capacity by demonstrating the governments commitment to the process.

Round tables

During the consultation there were many questions regarding the concept of round tables, particularly around how people could become involved and how decisions were going to be made throughout the process. The idea of direct involvement by citizens in the decision-making process was raised several times. Some organizations suggested that they be at the table as legitimate groups in the community that represented a larger constituency. The notion that the community should be the fourth partner (with the three levels of government) under the Vancouver Agreement was brought up by some participants in reaction to their perception that in the Agreement there is only token acknowledgement of community as a participant in decisions affecting their neighbourhood. Others suggested that they needed support in order to mobilize people to become involved in the process and that this was key to the community having control over planning processes for their community.

There was also a fear expressed that setting up a process that brings community 'representatives' to the table will divide the community and pit one group against another. Some participants recognized that there will be competing interests throughout the process and that social justice principles should prevail when decisions are made.

Participants said the round table process should be open and transparent and it should communicate information to the community so people can track decisions and proposed initiatives. It was suggested that the local forms of communication must be respected if this process is to be successful. Many people do not have phones or computers and hear about things from posters or word of mouth.

The point was made that Governments must be patient as it takes time to involve people that are marginalized or disenfranchised. It was underlined that certain meeting formats do not work in this community, so individuals organizing for the Vancouver Agreement need to listen to the local wisdom around how to involve people in the process. People asked for sensitivity to the ability of people to participate when setting up any kind of formal processes involving public participation. Concern was also expressed about the speed at which this Agreement was unfolding and the timelines outlined for actions.

In terms of equity during the round table process, many participants indicated that they want to ensure that people with limited resources are able to fully participate. The suggestions were made that groups should receive funding in order to do strategic planning in preparation for round table participation; the round tables or other mechanisms to bring forward ideas should not be top down processes but rather bottom up; and ideas from the community should flow up to the policy level, rather than politicians and bureaucrats telling the community how things will be done.

Many people welcomed the opportunity to participate in the process, but they also had questions concerning the legitimacy of the process and what agendas were going to be met. There was a concern that the political agendas would overshadow the community agenda. Some questioned the level of community consultation that had taken place prior to the development and release of the draft Agreement.

The perception that there had been very little consultation to date did not lead to rejection of the Agreement. In fact, participants took this opportunity to bring forward suggestions on how to ensure they remain informed throughout this process. Potential obstacles such as language, literacy or culture need to be addressed so that everyone can actively participate in future planning processes of the Vancouver Agreement. Another suggestion around consultation was that the community, not the government, should be defining the consultation processes used. Different communities may use different processes.

Appendix 1: Background

The draft Vancouver Agreement was translated into French, Chinese, Vietnamese and Spanish. Copies were available at eight locations in Vancouver. It was also available on the City of Vancouver website.

Approximately 600 invitation letters and bulletins were distributed to individuals and groups in the Vancouver area.

In total there were 11 community meetings. Six were open to the general public and five were by invitation to representative community groups. The three levels of government were represented at all meetings.

Public meetings:

- Public meeting at SFU Harbour Centre
- Public meeting at the Carnegie Centre
- Public meeting (in Chinese) at the Chinese Cultural Centre
- Public meeting (in Vietnamese) at Strathcona Community Centre
- Public meeting (in French) at La Boussole
- Public meeting (in Spanish) at First United Church

Community Representative meetings:

- Community Directions Committee (representatives of the low-income community)
- Gastown community (Business Improvement Society, Homeowners Association, Historic Area Planning Committee)
- Chinatown community (Merchants Association, Historic Area Planning Committee, cultural and community organizations)
- Vancouver Aboriginal Council
- Women's community (service providers in the Downtown Eastside)

Appendix 2: Community Review Process

The community review was carried out by members from the three levels of government. Working in conjunction with the community, a schedule of community meetings was established as a way to obtain feedback on the draft Vancouver Agreement.

The following objectives were identified as being essential to an effective and inclusive community consultation process:

- Ensure all major ethnic community groups in the Downtown Eastside are included in the process.
- All written material to be made available in the major language groups.
- Ensure that as many community groups as possible are included in the process.
- Public meetings to be held in different venues and at varied times, in recognition of the diverse nature of the community.
- The process is to be as inclusive as possible, given the time frames.
- Ensure the community has several ways to provide feedback on the draft agreement.
- Feedback from the community should include comments on the content of the agreement as well as the concept of "Round Tables".
- The community will have an opportunity to freely voice their views.

The mechanisms used to inform the community of the consultation meetings were:

- Distribution of approximately 600 notices, bulletins and copies of the agreement to community organizations and individuals.
- Advertisements in Vancouver Courier, Ming Pao, Sing Tao, L'Express du Pacifique.
- Posters placed in community sites.
- Notice on the Vancouver Agreement web page (City of Vancouver Web site).
- Invitations were sent out for the major community representative meetings.

Appendix 3: Government Representatives

Management Committee members:

- Donna Mitchell, Western Economic Diversification Canada
- Linda Charles, Human Resources Development Canada
- Elaine Scott, Health Canada
- Judy Cavanagh, B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality
- Mike Corbeil, B.C. Ministry of Children and Families
- Rick Roger, Vancouver-Richmond Health Board
- Judy Rogers, City of Vancouver

(Note: the City of Vancouver will eventually have three representatives on the Committee.)

Working Group members:

- John Hansen, Western Economic Diversification Canada
- Susan Stevenson, Health Canada
- Sally Chaster, B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality
- Wendy Au, City of Vancouver

Community Review Team members:

- Nancy Shewchuk, B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality
- Donald MacPherson, City of Vancouver
- Melinda McGraw, Human Resources Development Canada
- Michel Desrochers, City of Vancouver
- Nathan Edelson, City of Vancouver

Vancouver Agreement

Feedback Consultation Process

Summary

In July, 1999, the governments of Canada and British Columbia and the City of Vancouver signed a draft version of the Vancouver Agreement. The Agreement lays out a framework and principles for the three governments to work together to address issues in Vancouver focusing first on the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

During September the three governments held public meetings in DTES to solicit community input on the draft document. More than 200 people attended these meetings. Below is a summary of what people said at these community meetings.

Generally, people supported the ideas and principles contained in the Agreement, and they wanted to make sure that governments worked together to take quick action on critical issues. Some people were worried that existing government spending in the area would not be enough to address serious problems, or that money would be taken away from existing programs to pay for new ones.

Community Health and Safety

- Poverty, substance misuse, safety, prostitution and the poor health of many residents overwhelm the community, and action is needed immediately to address these issues.
- Residents in and around the DTES are worried that health and safety issues in their neighbourhoods will not be adequately addressed under the Agreement.
- In addition, people say there should be a more regional approach to many of the health problems.
- Strong support exists for setting up special health services for women, children, youth and members of specific cultural groups.
- A strategy to address use and sale of drugs is required immediately.
- The lack of treatment resources and addiction services are pressing problems. A region-wide comprehensive continuum of care for people who are addicted is required to help them to move off the street.
- Before developing any service delivery model, a complete listing of existing services should be created to help identify service gaps. Substance misuse programs should be linked with other supports such as housing and employment training.
- The term "harm reduction" should be defined.
- Governments need to focus on improvements in the effectiveness of the justice system and increased efforts to get drug users into health services.
- Community policing was seen as an essential. The community wants to have a greater voice in how their neighbourhoods are policed.

Economic and Social Development

Many people strongly support the notion that neighbourhood economic development is key to achieving the goal of creating a healthy, viable community. However, there are differing views on how this should be approached:

- Some participants said that training programs and increased support for local residents are needed so local people could get jobs or start new businesses.
- Others claimed that the high concentration of social services and low-income housing contributes to the economic problems and that new and innovative incentives to preserve and develop the many heritage buildings in the area should be pursued.

On housing issues participants recommended:

- Protection and improvement of existing Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units
- More construction of affordable housing.
- Adding a reference to market housing in the Agreement.

Community Capacity Building

Members of the Downtown Eastside community supported the concept of community capacity building and saw it as an important part of the Vancouver Agreement. There were strong feelings that local residents have a great deal to offer in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities and they must be given an opportunity to fully participate in decisions affecting the neighbourhood. To achieve this, they would like to see increased information sharing between themselves and governments.

People questioned how proposed problem-solving or decision-making mechanisms such as round tables would work. They also questioned how members of the community could get involved and articulated a strong desire to be an equal partner in the decision-making process. They recommended that resources be made available to assist them to participate in the process.

THE VANCOUVER AGREEMENT

VISION

The governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver share the vision of creating healthy, safe, and sustainable communities. In such communities all organizations, from informal groups to governments, work effectively together to improve the quality of everyone's life. Sustainable communities make the lives of people healthier and safer now and in the future.

These three governments already make substantial contributions to the well-being of Vancouver. And yet they recognize that by working more closely together they will be able to enhance sustainable economic, social, and community development in Vancouver. Their mandates, though different, are complementary, and all are directed at the same people. The citizens of Vancouver will be affected by how the separate programs of these governments interact to produce joint results. Each government therefore sees the importance of cooperation and coordination with the others both to achieve its own goals and to provide the best results for the people of Vancouver. This recognition has fostered the five-year Vancouver Agreement.

PURPOSE OF THE AGREEMENT

The Agreement demonstrates the commitment of the three governments to work together, within their jurisdictions and mandates, and with communities in Vancouver to develop and implement a coordinated strategy to promote and support sustainable economic, social, and community development. The three governments agree as follows:

1. To form a Policy Committee, made up of the Federal Minister, the Provincial Minister, and the Mayor of Vancouver, or their designates, to oversee the implementation of the Agreement.
2. To focus their efforts on those parts of Vancouver where the need is greatest.
3. To focus first on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.
4. To establish processes to engage members of the community in achieving their economic, social, and community goals.
5. Within three months to develop an implementation schedule (including activities, timelines, focuses, and financial commitments), and at least annually to negotiate an updated schedule of initiatives and commitments which updates existing ones and documents new ones.
6. To see that initiatives under this Agreement link with and build on one another.
7. To work within the jurisdictions, mandates, policies, strategies, and fiscal direction of

each government.

8. To make balanced investments in support of social and economic change within their respective mandates.
9. To finance activities under this Agreement initially through more effective targeting of government allocations.
10. To encourage funding from non-government partners.
11. To use their individual authorization procedures for committing the funds required when they agree to support an activity under this Agreement.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Decisions and actions under the Vancouver Agreement will be guided by the following principles:

- **Appropriate delivery of services and programs:** Some services and programs require a complementary mix of national, regional, and local delivery. This Agreement recognizes that governments will work within their own jurisdictions and mandates. As well, programs and services delivered in some parts of the City of Vancouver, and elsewhere in B.C., may reduce the demand for service delivery in other parts of the City of Vancouver. Some programs and services require a national approach, some a provincial approach, some a regional approach, and some should be delivered in specific parts of the City of Vancouver.
- **Strategic planning:** Sound strategic planning principles will be used, including issue analysis, gender and diversity analysis, problem solving, consultation, and implementation.
- **Community diversity:** There are many communities in Vancouver, and their diverse interests must be articulated, understood, supported, and balanced.
- **Gender and cultural diversity:** Respect for the differences associated with gender and cultural diversity, including that of urban aboriginal people, will be shown in both the evaluations and the communications connected with programs, projects, and actions under this Agreement. Gender and diversity lenses will be applied to activities under the Agreement.
- **Heritage Areas:** The Agreement recognizes the importance of heritage areas.
- **Communications:** Improved communications and information-sharing with the community will help decision-making under the Agreement to be open and transparent.
- **Innovation:** This Agreement will promote and support innovative ways of addressing issues.
- **Participation:** Community processes will be inclusive and accessible.
- **Build on existing work:** Planning and decision-making under the Agreement will draw on the many reports and analyses that are already available.
- **Sustainable, local economic development:** The parties agree to promote economic development which is locally based and sustainable and to work with community and business organizations to do so.

- Partnerships: Where appropriate, the parties will partner with other institutions, including foundations, the non-profit sector, post-secondary and other educational institutions, and the private sector.
- Evaluation: Programs, projects, and actions under the Agreement will be evaluated, and the principles cited here will form the criteria.

IMPLEMENTATION

A Policy Committee will be made up of the Federal Minister, the Provincial Minister, and the Mayor of the City of Vancouver. A Management Committee made up of senior public officials will report to the Policy Committee and carry out activities under its direction. Processes for community participation will be established by Policy Committee.

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee will consist of the Federal Minister, the Provincial Minister, and the Mayor of the City of Vancouver, or their designates.

- The governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver will work in full and equal participation to carry out this Agreement through the Policy Committee or other designated committees,
- The Policy Committee will be ultimately responsible for decisions made under this Agreement.
- Decisions of the Policy Committee will be acted upon when they are unanimous.
- The Policy Committee will establish the Management Committee and other committees as needed.
- The Policy Committee will establish community input/participation processes.
- The Policy Committee will ensure that broad consultation is carried out as appropriate during the design of action plans.
- Communications arising from the Agreement will be drafted and announced in a cooperative spirit.
- Programs, projects and actions under this Agreement will reflect the principles agreed to in this Agreement.
- Policy Committee may delegate to Management Committee any authority necessary to support the Vancouver Agreement.

Management Committee

This Agreement will be administered and managed by a Management Committee of nine senior public

officials, three to be appointed by each government. One of the delegates for the province will be a representative of the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board.

- Decisions of the Management Committee will be acted on when there is consensus among the three governments.
- If the Management Committee is unable to reach consensus on a decision, the decision will be referred to the Policy Committee.
- The Management Committee will recommend, for approval by the Policy Committee, detailed proposals that are consistent with this Agreement and can be carried out by one or more of the governments.
- The Management Committee may establish subcommittees as required to assist in the management of this Agreement, and it may delegate to them all necessary authority to carry out their mandate.

Community

The Vancouver Agreement envisages that the community will be engaged in participation processes. The Policy Committee will establish such processes, which will be inclusive in gender and cultural diversity and which will provide advice to the Management Committee on:

- Gaps in services and programs
- Community priorities
- Strategies and action plans.

The community participation processes will draw on reports and studies already available or underway.

FIRST FOCUS OF THE VANCOUVER AGREEMENT: THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

The Agreement provides for the future adoption of focuses for action through consultative processes. However, an initial focus is part of the Agreement itself. This first focus is the well-known section of Vancouver called the Downtown Eastside.

PROPOSED DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE STRATEGY

a) Description

The Vancouver Agreement will focus initially on the Downtown Eastside, which is the approximate area bounded by the waterfront along Burrard Inlet on the north, Richards Street on the west, Clark Drive on the east, and Pender and Terminal Streets on the south. These boundaries will not preclude initiatives that fall outside them yet which contribute to the goals and objectives of the Downtown Eastside strategy.

b) Strengths of the Downtown Eastside

This proposed strategy builds on the strengths of Downtown Eastside communities including (but not limited to) the following:

- The Downtown Eastside is home for at least 16,000 long-term residents – men, women and children of diverse backgrounds and origins.
- Its residents are passionate about the future of their communities.
- It is the historical heart of Vancouver and contains within its boundaries many heritage sites.
- It is located beside Vancouver's central business and tourist district.
- It has a well-developed tradition and network of support for low income and less advantaged people.

c) Goal of the Downtown Eastside Strategy

The goal of this strategy is to create a healthy, safe, and sustainable community in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. In such a community all organizations, from informal groups to governments, work effectively together to improve the quality of everyone's life. Sustainable communities make the lives of people healthier and safer now and in the future.

d) Objectives of the Downtown Eastside Strategy

The Downtown Eastside strategy has the following objectives:

- Create a community in which people can live, work, visit, and do business, while promoting and supporting positive linkages with neighbouring communities and the rest of the city.
- Help people gain access to affordable and safe housing and take advantage of job opportunities.
- Support heritage and cultural development.
- Create sustainable economic growth and community health.
- Create a framework for women and men to influence decisions that affect them.

e) Principles for the Downtown Eastside Strategy

In addition to the principles governing the implementation of the Agreement for the whole of Vancouver, the following principles are proposed for the Downtown Eastside Strategy:

- **Multicultural:** Support the character of the Downtown Eastside as home to many cultural and linguistic groups.
- **Linkages:** Promote linkages between the Downtown Eastside and Vancouver and the rest of B.C.
- **Housing for existing residents:** Promote the maintenance and upgrading of a diversity of housing (including market and non-market housing), so that existing residents are not displaced from the Downtown Eastside.
- **Local train, local hire:** Promote the training of local people and the hiring of local people for local jobs, emphasizing groups underrepresented in the labour market.
- **Heritage:** Promote heritage conservation in the Downtown Eastside and the special designated heritage status of Gastown and Chinatown.

f) Process

Key stakeholders will be consulted. The community at large will be kept up-to-date and encouraged to participate in decisions. A schedule of activities, programs, and initiatives will be developed through consultation processes that involve the community and the three governments

g) Proposed Components of the Downtown Eastside Strategy

- The Strategy proposes three equal components: Community Health and Safety, Economic and Social Development, and Community Capacity Building.

1. Community Health and Safety

1a. Primary Health Care

Residents in the Downtown Eastside should have access to coordinated, high quality, primary health care. Effective linkages between health care and social services programs will be promoted. Strategies which promote programming where outcome

evidence demonstrates effectiveness will be developed in collaboration with the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board.

The following are some objectives:

- Improve the health status of residents in the Downtown Eastside.
- Reduce the need for emergency and crisis interventions.
- Improve access to hospital care.
- Reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.
- Reduce preventable deaths.
- Increase service integration to improve continuity of care.
- Increase the proportion of residents receiving regular primary care.

1b. Comprehensive Substance Misuse Strategy

Substance misuse is a health and social issue which is best addressed through collaborative health and social programs that get at the root causes of substance misuse.

An effective substance misuse strategy consists of a continuum of services from prevention and education to treatment and rehabilitation. A key feature is to build a range of comprehensive addiction services including a continuum of innovative approaches to reducing harm. Links to primary health care, housing, education and training, and employment are critical to the success of this strategy.

The following are some objectives:

- Decrease preventable deaths related to substance misuse.
- Reduce incidence of communicable disease associated with injection drug use.
- Reduce preventable harm associated with alcohol and other substance misuse.
- Reduce overall costs to the economy related to substance misuse.
- Enhance integration of services to address the social causes of substance misuse.
- Enhance prevention initiatives for all age groups.
- Increase public awareness and education to reduce harm.
- Promote rehabilitation options.
- Reduce criminal activities associated with substance misuse.

1c. Safety And Justice

Everyone should be able to walk the streets in safety. This can be done by reducing the number of people in the community affected by crime, and by increasing the sense of security on the street and in the community as a whole. It is also done by recognizing

and addressing the linkages between crime and poverty, substance misuse, and the need for adequate housing.

The following are some objectives:

- Reduce crime (including violence against women, children and youth) with the involvement of an informed, active community.
- Reduce the public nuisance associated with crime (i.e., appropriate disposal of used needles).
- Coordinate the efforts of the police, government enforcement agencies, health and social service agencies, and the community.
- Enhance the range of diversion and alternative measures options, and explore alternative options to traditional sentencing models, particularly for drug offenders.
- Reduce crime associated with trafficking for profit in controlled or illegal substances.

2. Economic and Social Development

2a. Neighbourhood Economic And Social Development

The neighbourhood economic and social development component of the strategy aims to reduce poverty and increase the self-reliance of the community by creating an economy that is capable of sustaining the needs and aspirations of the community. These actions may span a continuum: meeting basic needs, overcoming barriers, and building skills. They might also focus on such things as attracting new business and business expansion, empowering the community, creating local employment and training, and community enterprise development and investment, in a manner consistent with the principles in this agreement.

The following are some objectives:

- Build economic development on ideas stemming from within the community.
- Ensure that revitalization activities (for example capital/infrastructure projects) are linked to skills training and maximize the benefit to Downtown Eastside residents by promoting policies and programs that increase the access of residents to jobs and business opportunities associated with a development.
- Build partnerships with public and private, profit and non-profit organizations that foster mentoring and sponsorship of projects within the Downtown Eastside.
- Increase the number of people from within the community who can provide business planning advice and consultation to current businesses and to those planning to create new businesses.

- Develop job training and economic development strategies that reduce dependence on government funding.
- Develop strategies for revitalizing and upgrading buildings.
- Promote linkages between the Downtown Eastside and the economies of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada.
- Promote skill development and enhance employability in the Downtown Eastside.
- Develop strategies to attract and encourage legitimate business, retail and service outlets, and other amenities.

2b. Housing

Safe, affordable housing is an essential base on which to prevent homelessness and build a safe, healthy, and economically vibrant community. The housing sub-component aims to ensure the availability of a wide variety of housing that includes affordable housing options to ensure that residents are not displaced by changes to the housing stock or by revitalization of the area. While it is recognized that housing in the Downtown Eastside, particularly for low-income people, is linked to the availability of housing in other areas of the region and the province, the vast majority of Downtown eastside residents are long-term residents for whom this neighbourhood is a permanent home.

The following are some objectives:

- Ensure an adequate number of safe, secure, and affordable permanent housing units for low-income and high-risk individuals.
- Ensure that existing single-room occupancy units in the Downtown Eastside are maintained and offer safe, affordable, and livable shelter until other forms of housing are available in Vancouver and the province.
- Increase the supply of shelter beds.
- Increase the availability of safe houses for youth and women in danger of violence.
- Develop strategies that recognize the importance of both market and social housing to residents of the Downtown Eastside.
- Increase housing options for low-income people in other parts of the city and the province.
- Increase the effectiveness of health services by integrating them with a range of housing alternatives.

3. Community Capacity-Building

The importance of community input cannot be over-emphasized. Residents of the

Downtown Eastside, expert professionals, and those who are delivering programs and services all need to be involved at one time or another in program planning and design. Communities in the Downtown Eastside recognize and value their multicultural and multilinguistic natures. There is respect for people, regardless of their situation. With this diversity comes an array of values, some of which conflict and compete with one another. These are challenges that the Community Capacity-Building component should address with community participation and engagement.

The following are some objectives:

- Develop and pilot new networks of communication that help to coordinate the implementation of activities and projects.
- Develop public input processes that empower the community and include them in decision-making.
- Establish participation processes, which include representation from Downtown Eastside communities, to advise the Policy Committee, and to develop proposals for their consideration.
- Develop opportunities for the community to consult with experts so that actions are based on the latest information available.
- Hold symposiums and workshops, and draw on experts as required.