

Woodwards Social Housing Coalition Project

**CRITIQUE OF REPORT
PRESENTED BY THE
WOODWARDS STEERING
COMMITTEE TO
VANCOUVER CITY COUNCIL
ON JULY 8**

**THIS CRITIQUE PRESENTED BY:
WOODWARDS SOCIAL HOUSING COALITION**

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Woodwards Social Housing Coalition Project

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To the Attention of the Vancouver City Council members;
Dear Councillors;

As consistent participants to the Woodward's Vision Workshops we need to bring to your attention several discrepancies between our recollection of the Workshops and the Report arising from them.

In an effort to make this as easy to follow as possible we will deal with the indiscretions on a page by page basis.

We hope this will help you to see more clearly the desires of the community and to make an accurately informed City Council decision in conjunction with the citizens of the DTES.

We did not take the writing of this letter lightly as we view the decision before you as one of the most important decisions this Council will make in its life span.

We hope this critique of the Report will make your job easier.

Page 1 and 2

Comments pertaining to pages 1 and 2 will be dealt with in addendum 1, as these pages do not pertain to any items which were up for discussion at the community workshops.

Page 3

Re. Overview meetings.

Woodwards Social Housing Coalition would like to be included in the list of groups being presented with an overview meeting.

Re. Attendance at Ideas Fair.

While there may have been a great number of people who browsed through the Ideas Fair we believe it would be erroneous to understand the Report to indicate that there were 300 people (75%) who participated in or took seats at the meeting. In our estimation there were only a maximum of approximately 100 people who stayed for any significant portion of the meeting. Many wandered in and out.

Re. Appendix B

We express grave concern over the artist's process and the rating system. It was our common experience that the artists were limited in how much they could include in their drawings, and in fact due to that were seen by the participants as being selective over what they chose to include.

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It appeared that quite significantly it was the more assertive who got their 'vision' included. Additionally, it became obvious that any items which pertained to the topic but did not fit into the artist's current theme for the drawing were excluded. An example of that is the suggestion which was made at four different workshops that an Aboriginal Restaurant which would train local First Nations people in cooking etc. be included in the site. This was finally included in one drawing after some persuasion by an aboriginal participant.

The rating system is of questionable value due to the process used. Drawings completed on the first day of the workshops would have much greater opportunity to accumulate check marks than those drawn on the last day. One of our members at the Chinese Cultural Centre observed two people placing multiple check marks on the features which they most strongly supported. We believe that both of these factors remove the rating system from having enough integrity or accuracy to be included in the report in any context.

Page 4

Drug/detox/addiction services.

As a collective of participants who attended most of the workshops we hold this to be the most glaring of the inaccuracies in the Report. We strongly oppose any suggestion that even close to half of the participants were opposed to these services going into the site. In fact other than the Library workshop which was attended by Gastown property and business owners, who are on record for being traditionally opposed to any addiction services anywhere in the DTES, there was never a strong voice in these workshops opposing these services. Our liberal estimate would be less than 20 % opposition.

We would further question the directives of the artists since there was a strong and written guiding principle governing these workshops that no negative items could be included in the drawings yet the artists at the library workshop included the item "NO ALCOHOL OR DRUG SERVICES" in the drawing, at the behest of the Gastown clique. Was there some sort of directive? Why was the strong opposition to this breaking of norms not included in the Report.

Re. Bowling Alley.

The bowling alley was suggested at each workshop by the same person, sort of a pet belief, and should not have received the same emphasis as the gym and swimming pool, if the same yard stick was being used as with the A&D Services in the last paragraph.

Re. Cultural Uses.

Addressing Aboriginal needs under a group for Arts and Culture was viewed by the co-signators as marginalizing. Possibly the largest non-white population and the most decimated by poverty and disease in this community, we believe that much can be done in Woodward's to address and rectify the marginalization of the Aboriginal community. We feel very strongly that this is the best opportunity we have ever had to resolve systemic discrimination against the aboriginal community. It very clearly should have been a category unto itself. Including it in other categories does not assure its inclusion in the selection process.

Re. Conclusion as reflective.

Certain items brought up consistently at the workshops were not included in the Report. One stellar example of this is the 'late night' or 'overnight' drop-in centre. At almost every workshop it was suggested by different participants that there should be a late night drop-in for either 'street youth' or 'working women'. These suggestions were well received by the other participants. Why does the Report not reflect that fact?

Page 5**Non-market housing units**

The dominant request at each of the workshops was for "more than 250 units of deep core non market housing" why is this section stipulating only 100?

Re. The Woodward's Project must:

This was not open to community input and we were told upon queries at the Ideas Fair that this list was not prioritized.... Many of the participants in the workshops did not accept economic viability as a key guiding principle and in fact held that this priority would not resolve the poverty issues in the DTES. They viewed it as penny wise but pound foolish. i.e. what impact would the failure to provide certain services and adequate social housing have upon the City's enforcement and Sanitation budget? What impact would the continued failure to address the health and housing needs have upon tourist and business income in the neighbourhood?

Page 6**Re. Heritage opportunities...**

In coffee chatter at the Workshops there was a strong sentiment expressed that the heritage value was negligible and that the preservation of the entire site for its heritage value must not be maintained if it meant that at the end of the day services or social housing would have to be sacrificed or reduced due to budget concerns. The money is better spent on the real needs of the community.

Page 7**Re. Strata owners**

Many in the DTES relate any form of strata ownership with the onset of gentrification. We would not like to see this lead to the establishment of strata title upon the housing portion of the site. (see Re. More than 250)

Re. Non-market housing sponsor will be approved...

Where in this process is there a capacity for community input or decision making?

Re. In excess of 100 non-market units...

Again it was a consistent theme at the workshops that “at least 250 units of non-market housing” be the standard. Some in fact were suggesting 400 units.

The signators in attempting to reflect the spirit of the workshops suggest that most in the workshops were not willing to accept less than 250 units. A recent survey by the Woodward Social Housing Coalition has found that over 96% of respondents supported a call for at least 250 units (see Appendix 3). We hold that to generate any less will be tantamount to promoting gentrification. If a majority of tenants occupy market value housing, the merchants will choose to cater to those forces and will not provide the services and goods which are affordable to those on lower incomes or in poverty, thereby driving the poor out of the neighbourhood.

It is also worthy of note that RRAP is not viewed by the authors as a portion of the social housing component. It is not subsidized to an amount which would make the units affordable to those in poverty or on fixed income. If memory serves correctly the figure which Jeff Hughes was bantering about after RRAP subsidy was \$600. a month for one bedroom, far out of the reach of anyone on Social Assistance or Widows Pension. The final concern about RRAP is that it is a subsidy to the developer, by all levels of government for ten to fifteen years following which there are no constraints upon the property owner to keep the rent below market levels or even to keep the units as rental units. If these units were converted to condominiums etc they would be lost forever from the social housing pool.

Page 8**Re. ...Public consultation process...**

As our input in this letter has indicated, we do not view this Report as being closely “reflective” of the community process. The glaring inaccuracies which we have identified should serve as evidence for the one thing we have called for since day one. There must be some substantive power imparted to the community to have representatives at the decision and priority making table.

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We express concern that this letter may be arriving on the desk of the City Councillors too late to rectify the problems created by the inaccuracies. This is very clearly due to the fact that the 'community' did not have an opportunity to review the input prior to submission to Council last week.

Attached to this letter you will find three addendums.

Addendum 1 – is a broader letter of concern from the Woodward's Social Housing Coalition, and is not to be interpreted as endorsed by the workshop participants who were signatories to this letter.

Addendum 2 – Is one page extracted from a large community survey conducted by the Woodward's Social Housing Coalition.

The remainder of the survey should be released to the public within the next two weeks.

Below are the signatures and contact information of Workshop participants who support the findings of this letter.

We hope this information will help you in your deliberations, and that you will take the opportunity to contact some of the below listed participants to verify the accuracy of the letter.

Attached to this letter, to facilitate research by the Council members is a list of co-signatories and how they can be contacted. This list is not for circulation outside of council members, and must not be circulated to any copies circulated to others.

Sincerely;
 Jim Leyden
 Organizer –

ADDENDUM 1**A Letter of Concern.****To Vancouver City Council****Re. Process.****To All Concerned;**

We send this attachment to express our concern over the absolute lack of access by the community to the decision making machinery being employed to design and implement a plan for the utilization of the Woodward's Project.

It appears to many on the outside that this significant project is being planned and implemented by a handful of 'select bureaucrats and novice politicians'.

The community must be involved in a more meaningful way than has happened to date. To fail to do so is to ignore the safeguards which are availed by community based democracy, a tool which was significant in the retention of Woodward's over the past ten years.

This turning away from democracy is what has set up the situation wherein the 'Woodward's steering committee' has submitted a report to this council which selectively ignores or minimizes some of the key recommendations which came out of the recent public workshop process.

Sometimes politicians view the exclusion of the public from the decision-making process as a way to expedite matters. We would warn that all practices which are exclusionary in nature have their own costs.

If this council wants to be seen as meeting the needs of the community, rather than just meeting the needs of city hall in this process, it must include the public at the decision making table. The least this would do is to provide a safeguard for the community. The greatest capacity this would have is to show civic democracy at its' finest. There needs to be a formula found for bringing the community to the decision making process. If you truly want to "Think Democracy" then you must acknowledge that the true power does not lie in giving input which has already, in this project proven its capacity to be marginalized and ignored, but rather it lies at the recommendation and decision making table.

If the Woodward's steering committee and council indeed have nothing to hide then they should have no problem welcoming one or two representatives of the community to the steering committee table. They should embrace the idea of having their community participate in the process of composing the EOI package and the review of submissions and the concurrent short-listing of proposals.

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To not allow public involvement in the process again until after the short-listing can appear to be more about tokenism than democratic involvement of citizenry.

This affect can already be seen in the fact that we currently encounter the constant belief expressed by community members (participants and non-participants alike) that much of the fate and usage of the Woodward's building has already been pre-determined. There is a strong rumour originating from what the authors hold to be credible sources that an agreement was reached that, as a precursor to the \$1.49 day Woodward's sale price of \$5,000,000, the province will not be approached by the city of Vancouver for any more social housing in Woodward's than the already agreed to 100 units. In this milieu we now constantly hear city politicians beginning to resurrect the co-op housing idea, and we shudder. We do not view co-op housing as any longer being accessible to people in poverty since the federal government stopped subsidizing co-op housing several years ago.

The Woodward's Social Housing Coalition has no opinion on these rumours except to express the hope that they are false and that this council is conducting itself with openness and integrity in all dealings related to Woodward's.

CONCLUSION

Democracy is a bottom up process, however, we fear that the process this COPE council is currently undertaking is a top down process where the public input is only used in a tokenistic way which lends the air of democracy but rests all power in the hands of a select gaggle of bureaucrats and politicians bent upon picking and choosing those things which fit into their 'vision' of a "self-sustaining" Woodward's.

If the community is to feel it owns any part of this process it must be included in a significant way in the process. It must have some input and control over what goes into that building. Failing to do that will only result in some in the community being justified in their claim that the process was about nothing but manipulation and the Vision Fair was nothing more than a \$300,000. game of smoke and mirrors.

We believe that this Council wants to do the right thing with Woodward's but in closing we are reminded of the old axiom that [social] 'justice must not only be done - it must be seen to be done'.

Sincerely;

The Woodward's Social Housing Coalition

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ADDENDUM 2

Dear Council Members;

We send this letter with the greatest of hope that it will result in the Woodward's building being used to resolve the issues encompassing the DTES.

Immediately following the election of the new City Council we brought down the Woodward's Squat with the assistance of the owner of the Dominion Hostel and the new Council. We immediately set about to find out what the poverty community needed to see happen in the Woodward's building. Out of this evolved a 7 page quantitative and qualitative survey. Some of the results can be found in Attachment 2.

At the heart of Woodward's lies the opportunity to offer honour to those who have been denied it by so many other governments of all levels.

We hope that yours is finally a government which truly understands the relationship between governance and social justice.

We hope that you understand the relationship between offering social housing and reducing the Public Safety budget. We hope you recognize that failing to adequately house the homeless has a negative impact on the local community and its capacity to attract shoppers and tourists into the neighbourhood, thereby generating negative financial results and reducing the city's potential tax base.

We also hold that the most significant opportunity afforded to you by the redevelopment of Woodward's relates to the aboriginal components of the workshops. Although there are a large percentage of First Nations people in the DTES community, there is no formal Aboriginal community. Woodward's and the recently purchased retail space in Blood Alley are the chance for Vancouver to finally entrench the Aboriginal community in the DTES. By setting up aboriginal art galleries, carving and craft store fronts, First Nations restaurants, Aboriginal healing centres, sweat lodges, long houses and other services you will finally restore some long denied honour to the local aboriginal community. We believe this can all be done within a financially sustainable package, where funding from other levels of government and subsidy through pooling of all lease income will balance the total books. The other point which cannot be given a financial value is the capacity to generate an aboriginal retail and enterprise zone which links Gastown and Chinatown creating a major tourist attraction.

In closing we would express concern over the frugal shortsightedness of any decisions which are not bold and remedial in resolving the poverty which suppresses the market value of the DTES property and thereby results in a reduction of city coffers.

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Over the years we have tried ignoring poverty, we have tried moving the poor from one neighbourhood to another. We have tried criminalizing poverty and its related problems and have discussed using four pillars to remedy the addiction problem which exists in concurrence with poverty. We have tried charity, criminalization, relocation, and minimalization. We have tried everything but hope and honour.

The Woodward's Social Housing Coalition challenges the COPE Council to break new ground. Today you have before you the chance to offer hope rather than poverty and death to the most marginalized in our community.

Do not allow the manipulation of the Woodward's Vision Workshops. Do not take the softer easier way out by pursuing the shortsighted view of budgeting which has placed this province in the crisis it is currently in through the anality of shortsighted micromanagement. Do not allow the agents of gentrification within city council or the broader community to influence or compromise your integrity.

From the urban warriors who held the line at the Woodward's Squat we encourage you to not falter in your bravery. Stand behind the commitments you made during the recent civic election. Make Woodward's more than just another glitzy agent for gentrification and the marginalizing of the poor.

As a Council you have the fortune of being presented with the greatest opportunity in the last twenty years to address and significantly reduce the environment which cultivates poverty and entrenches addiction and other poverty related diseases in the downtown east side of Vancouver.

We encourage you to do what you know must be done to address the needs of those in poverty, in a way which does not minimize, marginalize or in any other way avoid dealing with the problems which keep so many of our citizens entrenched in poverty and hopeless despair.

What lies in front of you is the capacity to offer real solutions and genuine hope to the most marginalized in our community.

Be wise, be brave and do not falter.

In solidarity with the poor;

Jim Leyden

Organizer

On behalf of the Woodward's Social Housing Coalition