

## Chapter 8: Richard Henriquez and the reinvention of the West End high rise: (1983-1992)

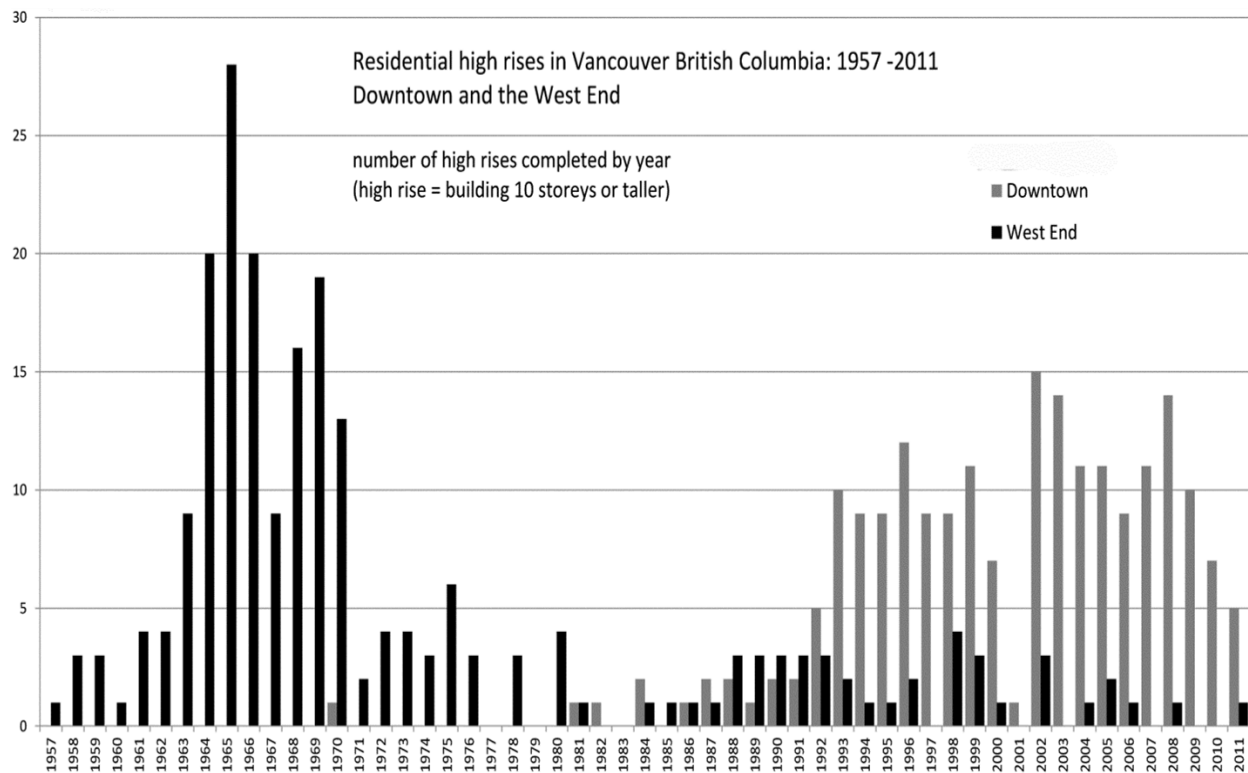


Figure 8.1: Residential high rises in the West End and Downtown (Based upon data compiled and cross checked by Robert Walsh, including data from skyscraperpage.com, emporis.com. In some instances gaps in the chronological record were filled by contacting current building owners or by studying Archival photographs).

This chapter is different from others appearing in this dissertation; an explanation is therefore warranted at the outset. One of the challenges presented in examining and presenting an accurate multifaceted account of Vancouverism is that different substantial events were sometimes taking place simultaneously in different parts of the City, which while separated nevertheless eventually produced a combined impact. This chapter takes a step away from the ongoing development and design process taking place at False Creek to examine critically important developments that were taking place more or less simultaneously with the events described in the next chapter, Chapter 9, which returns to False Creek. The work of Richard Henriquez in the West End would

prove critical to the development of Vancouverism because it is through his work that entrenched opposition to the construction of new residential high rises was overcome. His work on these important projects sparked a new wave of high rise construction in the West End, and which then spread elsewhere, including to the vast undeveloped tract of land at False Creek.

The work of Richard Henriquez in the West End charted a new course for Vancouver architecture, reviving the use of long forgotten or neglected building elements, giving his own work a fresh interpretation that then appears to have influenced the direction of architecture in Vancouver. Whether Henriquez was simply ahead of an emerging trend or whether he actually defined it is difficult to establish, but a few considerations point towards concluding that his influence has been quite substantial, and perhaps even decisive in its impact in Vancouver. The first consideration is that Richard Henriquez again and again got there first; his designs introduced new building elements that were frequently incorporated into subsequent designs by other Vancouver architects. A second consideration is that while his work was appearing at the height of post modernism, other efforts to introduce other various postmodern elements in Vancouver were made by other architects but without taking hold in Vancouver or spawning imitation and repetition. The frequency with which Henriquez's innovations came to be emulated throughout downtown Vancouver suggests that even if he was riding the wave of Post-modernism, his work nevertheless broke new ground and set a new direction in Vancouver.

There also is the issue of the use of point towers in Vancouver. Today Vancouver is known for its profusion of recently constructed point towers, yet during the first high rise building period slab towers were also very common. Indeed at Harbour Park, a residential project that began as a point tower project was turned down by the planning department, and then approved after it became predominantly a slab tower based proposal. Likewise, the early work at False Creek of Ron Dies and Zoltan Kiss initially proposed point towers and then later switched to slab towers in response to community feedback. Project 200 was also predominately a proposed mega project featuring slab towers. Had these projects been built, Vancouver today would be a city known for an abundance of high rise housing slabs.

In contrast to these earlier unsuccessful efforts, Richard Henriquez succeeded in getting his projects built, and by doing this he helped to make residential high rise towers legitimate in



Vancouver again, and in particular he legitimized the use of residential point towers. While Richard Henriquez cannot be considered the originator of the idea of using point towers at False Creek, since this was already suggested in 1969 by Ron Dies and Zoltan Kiss, prior to his designs for the West End, point towers at False Creek were regarded with skepticism, while afterwards they were embraced by city planners. As Chapter 9 shows, significant additional factors also contributed to the acceptance of point tower high rises at False Creek, independent of Henriquez's work, yet this only makes the establishment of a clear causal relationship less definitive, it does not disprove the impact Richard Henriquez had on the development of Vancouverism.

On balance Richard Henriquez is today regarded as one of the most influential architects to ever have worked in Vancouver. The degree to which he initiated the new direction that came to define residential architecture in Vancouver, as compared to simply getting ahead of an imminent trend may be hard to definitively determine, Nevertheless, the projects addressed in this chapter occurred at a pivotal stage in the development of Vancouver during which the residential architecture of Vancouver began to develop its own particular sense of tradition, and Richard Henriquez play a contributing role in this process that warrants a closer look.

### **8.1 Origins of the anti-high rise backlash**

In 1973 the Vancouver planning department had formalized opposition to new high rise projects by changing the zoning code for the West End making the development of new high impractical.<sup>1</sup> Although construction of previously approved residential high rises projects proceeded, approval of new high rise developments in the West End was dramatically curtailed (see figure 8.1). One prevalent view held that high rise housing was inevitably bad for communities, and that equally high density low rise development strategies ought to make high rises both obsolete and unnecessary (Lehrman, 1966; Liebman, 1974). This revival of interest in more traditional patterns of development was also a response to emerging critiques of Modernist architecture and planning, critiques which consistently portrayed the residential high rise in an unflattering light. In *Life Between Buildings* (Gehl, 1971) presented a well-developed if somewhat misleading argument opposing the viability of high rise living as a strategy for

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended examination of the West End high rise boom, please refer to Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

enlivening urban space.<sup>2</sup> In 1973 Constantinos Doxiados passionately argued that residential high rises represented “urban crimes,” as structures that were harmful: to families, to nature, to communities, to roadways, to social values, to traditional ways of life and to the urban landscape (Doxiados, 1973). Perhaps these negative views were to be expected, given the widespread perceived failure of publicly funded high rise housing projects in the United States, Canada and England (Klemek, 2011). Even if projects like Detroit’s Lafayette Park (Mies van der Rohe, 1959) were demonstrating that residential high rises could provide an effective and appealing form of middleclass housing, (Waldheim, 2004) and some people found the West End of Vancouver BC appealing, nevertheless, negative public opinion continued to link high rise housing in Vancouver with developer exploitation and the destruction of traditional neighborhoods. The result was public opposition in Vancouver that succeeded in derailing the urban renewal process in the East End, while also stopping the development of three high rise mega projects: Harbor Park, Project 200, and the Marathon land at False Creek (Gutstein, 1975; Hardwick, 1974; Vancouver Urban Research Group, 1972).<sup>3</sup>

By 1980, Vancouver was still mired in a backlash against residential high rise construction, with a common, though by no means universally held view that the forest of high rise towers seen in the West End was a form of urbanism to be avoided. However, as the results of the redevelopment effort at the South Shore of False Creek became available for evaluation, this position began to be called into question. In 1980 the Post Occupancy Evaluation of the South Shore of False Creek suggested that a higher density pattern would make for a more vital and

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Gehl objected to three primary problems that he associated with high rise housing: high wind levels at the ground level, wide empty spaces between buildings, and a lack of a pedestrian friendly streetscape encouraging casual social interaction. While these conditions are observable in the Scandinavian slab style high rise environments studied by Gehl, he arrives at the unwarranted conclusion that such problems always must occur in and around high rise housing of any type and in any climate. He also fails to recognize that similar negative assessments had been previously offered by other authors investigating problems with dispersed low rise housing, suggesting that building placement might be the main issue, not building height (Ivor de Wolfe, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> As was indicated in Chapter 4, it was also around this time that a problem with street based prostitution was becoming acute in the West End, and while this problem apparently had nothing whatsoever to do with the wave of high rise construction that had recently transformed the West End, it seems probable that this issue colored public perceptions of the West End for a time. It turns out that two measures unrelated to the buildings had a substantial impact on addressing the problem. The first was a traffic calming effort initiated in 1973 that reduced the incursion of out of town through-traffic into the West End, making it harder for passing outsiders to patronize streetwalkers. The second was a “Shame the Johns” campaign systematically publicizing the names of those who were caught patronizing the prostitutes. The extent to which this issue contributed to the cessation of residential high rise construction is difficult to ascertain, but it is consistent with a pervasive, if not universal backlash against the transformation that had overtaken the West End, a backlash which interestingly began to abate once the prostitution problem was addressed (Gutstein, 1975; Rossiter, 2002; Vancouver Urban Research Group, 1972).

thriving community, and that the few buildings over eight stories tall were amongst the most successful, from a user perspective (Vischer, 1980). This call for increased residential density echoes the much earlier recommendation by Harland Bartholomew concerning the West End; his suggestion that a higher density pattern of development would be beneficial had, without actually mentioning the addition of high rises, nevertheless contributed to the subsequent decision by the city to change its zoning policy, and effectively encourage their introduction (Bartholomew, 1944). Similarly, the suggestion in 1980 that increased density would be beneficial at False Creek was raised without mentioning high rises, yet the residential high rise would once again come to be used as part of a strategy for achieving this goal. The two situations, however, were also different in at least one crucial way. What prevented the first period of high rise building activity in the West End was largely a matter of zoning restrictions; once these were adjusted in 1956 to permit residential high rises in the West End, their construction rapidly commenced. Impediments to the second period of high rise construction, however included not just zoning regulations which had again been revised in 1973 to make high rise development in the West End nearly impossible, opposition to building more high rises also came from organized community groups. Overcoming these obstacles was an immense challenge. Before the residential high rise could be successfully reintroduced into Vancouver, a new type of high rise different from its predecessors would need to be invented, a high rise capable of winning over public opinion, circumventing zoning restrictions and overcoming opposition by city planners.

### **A more nuanced view of high rise development emerges:**

From roughly 1973 to 1985 popular opposition to construction of residential high rise buildings in Vancouver had become widespread. However, the position taken by Ray Spaxman and the Vancouver Planning Department was more complex, neither entirely for, nor against the construction of new residential high rises.<sup>4</sup> The issue was not that Spaxman liked or disliked high rises, but that he was focused on larger issues relating to their potential positive and negative urban impacts. Since becoming planning director in 1974, Spaxman had focused on the concept of ‘neighborliness’ and the impact of planning on improvement of the public domain. In his

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<sup>4</sup> This may also have reflected the mixed experience that Toronto has had with high rise housing. For example, the James Town development in Toronto is a high rise housing development of slab apartment buildings originally conceived of as housing your young single professionals, but now functioning as low income housing for an estimated 17,000 people. In the Toronto area residential high rise slab towers continue to be a common form of housing and efforts are being taken to rehabilitate and retrofit towers built in the early Post WWII era. For more information see: (<http://era.on.ca/blogs/towerrenewal/>).

planning guidelines for Vancouver, Spaxman consciously drew attention to larger issues of urban experience, and how local acts potentially impact public places; in some cases this included acknowledging the potentially positive role played by taller buildings as visible landmarks (see figure 8.2). At the South Shore of False Creek, Spaxman actually revised the proposed height limit for family housing *upwards*, increasing it from a proposed three story limit suggested by the False Creek Study Group, to a recommended maximum height of six stories in the official planning guidelines (City of Vancouver, 1978). Furthermore it was understood that not all new housing had to be targeted towards families with children. As construction at the South Shore of False Creek progressed, taller buildings became more common, and these taller structures were ranked more favorably by residents than the low rise structures (Vischer, 1984). At the same time, however, Spaxman was also known to oppose high rise developments in situations where this was seen as being counter to the best interests of the surrounding community (Hatch, 1989).

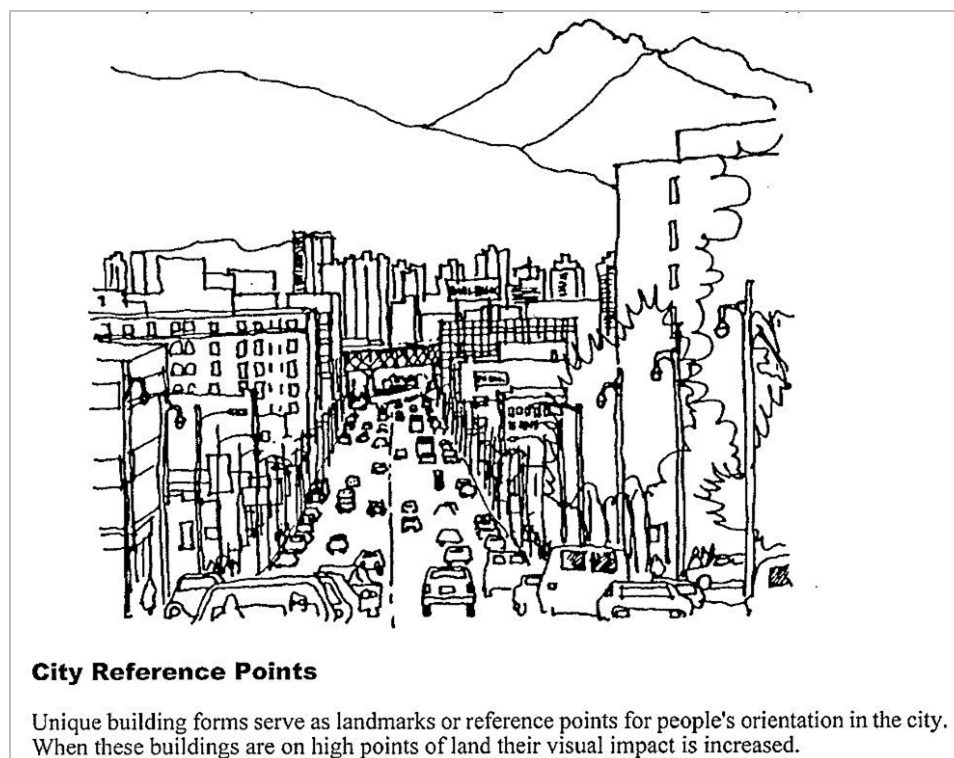


Figure 8.2: City Reference Points (City of Vancouver, 1976, 9).

The attitude of the Vancouver City Planners towards new residential high rises at this point in time, might best be summarized as cautious. The planners clearly had doubts about high rises, but this skepticism was not cast in stone. In the case of Ray Spaxman a chief source of this caution concerned the issue of views; specifically the desirability of preserving public access to

natural views and the awareness that the chief threat to this was the construction of poorly conceived high rise developments.

Ray Spaxman had arrived in Vancouver from Toronto, where he worked as a Deputy Assistant Chief Planner from 1966 to 1973 (Laporte, 2011), and during this time view protection had become an important concern there, as it was elsewhere in Canada. Drawing inspiration from a view protection ordinance in New York City from 1966, and another ordinance proposed for Halifax Nova Scotia, the City of Toronto had embarked upon the task of using zoning regulations to protect views considered to be public amenities. In comparison to Vancouver's magnificent mountain backdrop, the views that planners were attempting to protect in Toronto were modest in character, typically featuring the preservation of views of distinctive buildings and building features such as domes and church spires (see figure 8.3). Perhaps it was this scarcity of views that made these particularly precious in Toronto, heightening the awareness of planners that views were an asset that was vulnerable to encroachment and loss without protection. These issues also were brought to the forefront in Toronto by the construction of large housing developments consisting of slab style apartment towers that are especially prone to obstructing views.

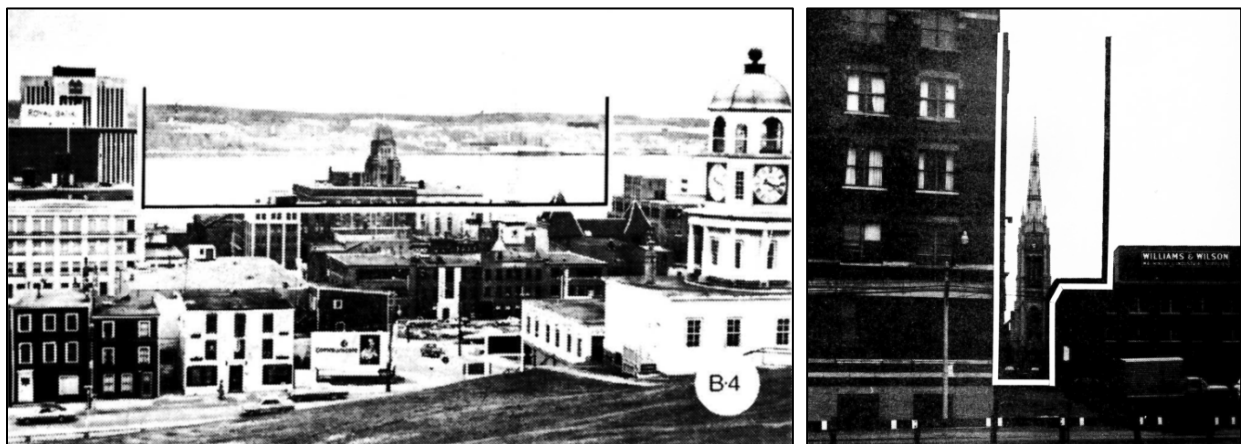


Figure 8.3: View protection precedents: left image: a protected view corridor in Halifax Nova Scotia, and at right: a protected view corridor from Toronto (City of Toronto, 1974).

In Vancouver, view encroachment by the lone tower constructed from Project 200 had provoked public outrage,<sup>5</sup> yet it was not until Ray Spaxman became planning director that view protection became a planning priority in Vancouver and regulations were developed to address this need.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5 for more information.

Spaxman used combination of methods. First, he began the development of detailed planning guidelines for many of Vancouver's diverse neighborhoods, establishing clear recommendations tailored to specific local conditions and community interests. Often the plans that accompanied these guidelines delineated existing view corridors to be protected. The effort also included perspective sketches of street scenes, encouraging a decision making process that accounted for experiential consequences of development. He also began to establish new view corridors of particular scenic views from specific locations, which came to be represented in a manner similar to that which had been used in Toronto (City of Toronto, 1974) (see figures 8.4 and 8.5).<sup>6</sup>

Spaxman made it clear to developers that the planners would continue to act in the best interests of the public and that they would not be approving developments which they saw as counter to the basic core value of neighborliness.<sup>7</sup> Ray Spaxman is reported to have argued for reducing building heights in cases where going taller would impinge upon public access to significant views. In another case he required a developer to rotate a proposed office tower in order to reduce its adverse impact on available pedestrian views (Hatch 1989, Clarke, 1980).

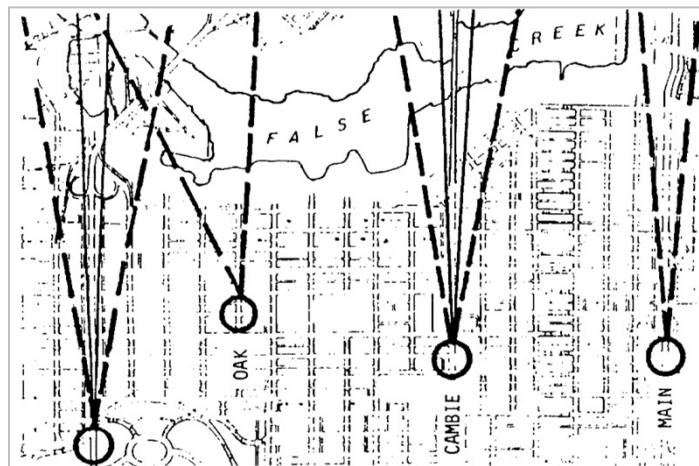


Figure 8.4: View Protection from Central Broadway Guidelines. The caption reads: *“Higher buildings should be permitted immediately adjacent to the “gateway” or arrival point to “frame: the view, but development should be reduced in height from this point (or terraced down the slope of a hill) to allow widening of views as bridges are approached”* (City of Vancouver, 1976, 9). The regulation emphasizes pedestrian visual experience while moving through space.

<sup>6</sup> Eventually Larry Beasley would take this view protection a step further by introducing in 1996 a sophisticated three dimensional modeling approach that enabled Vancouver planners to define precisely the view corridors that they and the public had expressed interest in protecting.

<sup>7</sup> In discussion with Barry Downs, a prominent retired Vancouver architect, it was brought to my attention that prior to the arrival of Ray Spaxman it had been normal for developers to submit a proposal that was excessive in size or density beyond what they actually wanted to build and that developers would then negotiate a compromise which gave them the right to develop what they had wanted all along. Evidently this tactic did not work on Ray Spaxman, who allegedly responded to such unrealistic proposals by simply rejecting them.



Figure 8.5: Vancouver today: 2 of 27 protected view corridors. At left is View corridor “9.2” at Cambie Street; at right is View corridor “D” at Leg-in-boot Square at the South Shore of False Creek. (City of Vancouver: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/views/listing.htm>).

### **Morphological limitations imposed on the first West End high rises**

During the first high rise boom in the West End (1956-1973) the city planners had tightly regulated many important characteristics of high rise form, including: lot coverage, building placement, balcony design and total height.<sup>8</sup> While this changing constellation of rules had resulted in an evolving set of typical building forms, these structures also had certain limitations in common. The actual height and size of these buildings was limited by the number of standard sized lots a developer was able to acquire and combine in any given project, with the urban block itself establishing an upper limit of about 32 stories. Similar results could be expected for a similar size parcel on one block or another, provided that the existence of a nearby view-obstructing structure such as Ocean Towers had not already rendered a site unsuitable for high rise development. The rules guiding the development of high rises in the West End rewarded developers who proposed buildings that maintained their footprint all the way to the ground plane, resulting in extruded prismatic shapes. The rules in place actually discouraged development property at the ground level in the vicinity of new towers, resulting in a barren streetscape where land not occupied by towers was left empty or filled in with parking structures.

The unfriendly streetscapes in the vicinity of many towers violated the principle of neighborliness that Ray Spaxman made a central concern, and this may be one reason he did not overturn the revised West End zoning rules, imposed shortly before he had become planning

<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking there was no height limit, but the interaction of other regulations very effectively imposed a limit that varied with lot size, with the absolute maximum being in the range of 32 stories in cases where a developer bought and consolidated an entire city block. For more information, see Chapter 4.

director, that curtailed further West End high rise construction (City of Vancouver, 1973). However, he did introduce an important procedural loophole that would have far reaching repercussions on the future of high rise development in Vancouver. Spaxman established a policy that if an architect or developer could convincingly demonstrate that a proposal that broke current rules would be better for the surrounding community than one which strictly adhered to the official rules, then allowances could be made to permit the better project to secure approval (Punter, 2003). This is an atypical criterion for requesting a zoning variance; in many cities variances can be applied for on the grounds that the rule in question, when strictly enforced, results in an undue hardship for the developer. Instead of this, the criteria Spaxman had established was not intended to increase developer profits, or eliminate developer hardships but to encourage creative solutions that yielded better outcomes for the surrounding community; he was advocating outcomes improving neighborliness. This loophole permitting a more flexible interpretation of planning regulations appears to have had little or no impact on the development of residential high rises during first decade Ray Spaxman worked as Planning Director in Vancouver. Nevertheless this policy would eventually help facilitate the return of residential high rise development in the West End.

## **8.2 Richard Henriquez: Four iconic high rises in the West End**

Of the numerous local architects who participated in the transformation of the South Shore of False Creek, one of the most respected and now celebrated from this group is Richard Henriquez. Born in Jamaica and educated at the University of Manitoba and MIT, Henriquez began his long and distinguished career in the office of Vancouver architects Rhone and Iredale. Since starting his own practice in 1969 he has designed an exceptionally wide range of projects that has included: a fire station, educational facilities, research facilities, urban designs, commercial developments, single family homes, mixed use high rise towers, row housing, and of course two housing developments at the South Shore of False Creek. Amongst numerous awards and honors Richard Henriquez has received perhaps the most prestigious would be the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Gold Medal he received in 2005 (Henriquez, 1993, 2006; Shotton, 2005; Shubert, 1996).

Despite a career that has included a broad range of project types, Richard Henriquez is particularly celebrated for his four West End high rises, built over a ten year span from 1984 -



1994 (see figure 8.6). These projects jumpstarted the development of residential high rises in the West End, reigniting an interest in tall buildings that spread beyond the West End, while suggesting new forms and new design strategies (Berelowitz, 1992). In terms of his own body of work and his continuing development as an architect, this group of tower projects represented for Henriquez a turning point, an artistic breakthrough in which his work came to life in a new way. Previously his work, such as his two row house enclaves designed at False Creek, had demonstrated a well-honed talent for making well composed buildings, however without being especially visually striking. In this earlier work he displayed a mastery of the craft of architecture; a decade later in his West End towers Henriquez demonstrated something more: a mastery of architecture as an art. In his tower designs he began to combine functional forms with a more complex range of expression and meaning.

In describing the evolution of his own particular approach to design, Henriquez credits the ideas of Alberto Pérez-Gómez for having been an especially important influence (Henriquez, 2006)<sup>9</sup>:

“Architecture is not the embodiment of information; it is the embodiment of meaning.”

“...the modern emphasis on shelter over dwelling has clouded the real issues. In order to posit a symbolic order, the architect needs to have his or her own storia, the history-theory which is not a method but rather a new mythos, an understanding of the meaning of the architect's actions "here and now" in relation to the totality of culture.”

“On one hand, the malaise of society is related to the anonymity of cities which reflect the values of land development, technology and political compromise. The physical environment is sadly mute; it lacks imagery and is refractory to desire. On the other hand, the same society supports ideological uniformity, tends to identify reality with simulations, denies the importance of myth and symbolization, assumes life to be a transparent process, and thus finally denies the essential function of architecture as knowledge.”

Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture as Embodied Knowledge*. 1987, 57-58.

Richard Henriquez stresses his rejection of regionalism, choosing instead to focus on the unique story that each place has to tell. Critically, this is a story which incorporates traces of prior acts and structures, woven into the ongoing form of the project in question. Making use of imagery and narrative accessed through an intense exploration of the features and history of the particular

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<sup>9</sup> Henriquez credits his son Gregory with having sparked his interest in the work of Perez-Gomez, under who Gregory studied while an architecture student. Gregory Henriquez is now a managing partner in the firm his father established (Henriquez 2006).

site for each project, his work has involved researching and borrowing from the long since vanished geometries of buildings that had previously occupied the site, as happened in his Eugenia Place Tower. So important has the role of a local narrative become in his work that cases where the local history has been lacking Henriquez has been happy to construct an artificial narrative, a “fictional history” as a starting point for the complex visual and metaphorical games underpinning his work (Henriquez, 1993, 2006; Shubert, 1996).



Figure 8.6: Locations of the four Henriquez West End towers (Google Earth).

In the work of Richard Henriquez, meaning and metaphor are still part of a larger process of producing a functioning and well-proportioned work of architecture. Regardless of how complex the multiple layers of meaning at times may seem to be, his work is also animated by a sense of dynamic balance combining: form, material and context, thereby helping to elevate his work to a level of art instead of allowing it to descend into something clumsy or vulgar. One consequence of imbuing his designs with so much personal significance is that Henriquez has become a stubborn and uncompromising advocate for his projects. This has proven to be especially important when faced with the challenge of gaining necessary planning approvals, even in the face of entrenched opposition. Nowhere has this stubbornness, this dedication proven

more essential in than his four West End high rise projects, where persistence and ingenuity were required to overcome bureaucratic hurdles opposing these projects.

**The Sylvia (1984: design, 1988: construction completion)**



Figure 8.7: The Sylvia Tower (left: Canadian Architect, December 1985, right: Henriquez 2006).

Of the hundreds of residential high rises constructed in Vancouver, there perhaps may be none more important than the addition to the Hotel Sylvia, designed by Richard Henriquez in 1984. The Sylvia reestablished the residential high rise in the West End as a viable development approach while redefining what such a building might be like, how it could relate to its site. Construction on the Sylvia began in 1986 and was completed in 1988 (see figures 8.7, 8.8).<sup>10</sup>

The Sylvia is a residential tower 18 stories tall, located on a parcel of land sandwiched between the eight story Hotel Sylvia, and the Ocean Towers slab high rise (architect: Rix Reinecke,

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<sup>10</sup> Dates for the buildings of Richard Henriquez used in this dissertation are based upon these listed by Henriquez in his monograph: Richard Henriquez, *Selected Works 1964-2005* (Henriquez 2006). In the case of the Sylvia establishing an accurate date is a matter of interpretation. According to the construction database maintained by emporis.com, the Sylvia was under construction from 1986 to 1988 (emporis.com). However, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada awarded the Sylvia a prestigious award of Excellence in 1985, resulting in the three page spread in *Canadian Architecture* December 1985 including photographs and drawings of the building that had yet to break ground. Before the Sylvia was completed, the positive reception this project received was already leading to additional commissions for other towers, including Eugenia place.



1958). In 1984 the rules in effect permitted a bulkier, lower structure on the site, and like dropping a keystone in completing an arch, this block of new construction would have filled in the gap between the two structures flanking it creating a visually impenetrable wall six stories tall, blocking views and sunlight for nearby buildings. Instead, Henriquez showed that by constructing a tall slender tower nearly abutting the blank end wall of the Ocean Towers building, he could preserve a more access to the view and better daylight access for the neighbors. Using cutting edge computer based shadow projection modeling, Henriquez demonstrated that his solution was an improvement over the options permitted under existing restrictions, gaining the support of the neighbors. With the neighbors in favor of his proposal, Henriquez had made a strong case that what he was proposing satisfied the neighborliness criteria better than the current rules in place and the city planners agreed, approving the project. Once this project was approved it became more difficult for the City to oppose point tower projects of similar scale for other sites in the West End, faced with this new precedent.



Figure 8.8: The Sylvia: typical floor plan (Henriquez 2006) and street view (Robert Walsh).



Figure 8.9: Urban context: Ocean Towers and the Sylvia. (Photographs by Robert Walsh)

Despite its unusual design and reportedly a high cost of construction the Sylvia proved an immediate commercial success, resulting in additional commissions for Henriquez in the West End (Berelowitz, 1992; Punter, 2004).

The Sylvia is a sophisticated response to a unique context, a high rise whose particular form only makes sense in the location where it resides. By building close to the blank end wall of Ocean Towers, this looming preexisting slab is tamed, while opportunities for excellent interior daylight and views in the new apartment units are expanded. The Sylvia functions as a terminus, somewhat like a bookend for the expansive plane of Ocean Towers, transforming its relationship to the surrounding landscape, visually reconnecting it to the urban fabric (see figures 8.9, 8.10).

In the Sylvia, this pattern of relationship to context continues to be relevant at the finer scale of building materials and details. Henriquez has taken building details and material cues from the adjoining Hotel Sylvia, producing a tower which feels like a natural extension of the original hotel. This tradition palette of form and material is then transformed when juxtaposed with an angled curtain wall of glass and steel, resulting in a fusion of old and new. The horizontal grain of the brick areas contrast the vertical thrust of the angled glass curtain wall; these competing elements are resolved by small balconies occurring at their intersection at each level. The entire composition is visually anchored by the conical roof at the upper penthouse level.





Figure 8.10: Eugenia Place, the Hotel Sylvia, the Sylvia and Ocean Towers (Bing 3-d).

While the material choices enliven the project, the unique geometry takes advantage of the opportunities of the unusual site. By opening a gap between the new tower and the older hotel Sylvia the field of view available to the building is substantially widened to the West. The insertion of an oblique glass curtain wall improves diagonal access to the view of English Bay, while the masonry portion of the tower provides a solidity needed to effectively coexist so close to the monolithic concrete Ocean Towers structure. As a result of these moves, the structure enjoys views as if it were on a corner lot, even though its position is in the middle of the block.

The relationship to the streetscape of the base of the Sylvia is also noteworthy; instead of being a free standing tower, at the ground level a smaller two story structure joins the tower to the neighboring hotel Sylvia at the back of the property, overlooking a one story restaurant at the street. Although more modest in scale than the later developments built on larger sites in Vancouver, this infill is nonetheless significant as a precedent for the strategy that would later be

mistakenly and yet commonly referred to as ‘tower and podium.’ Obviously the tower here does not sit on this base. Instead the streetscape is being defined through infill structures occupying the gap between Hotel Sylvia and the new residential tower. The restaurant, a public oriented function that further enlivens the streetscape. One important yet hidden factor contributing to this new arrangement is that the parking has been moved below ground, allowing for pedestrian oriented uses at the street level.

Henriquez’s next tower, Eugenia Place, would prove significant both for its own novel features and for the dialogue that it would set up between itself and the nearby Sylvia Tower.

### **Eugenia Place (construction: 1987 - 1990)**

Environmentalism and enjoyment of the great outdoors have long been a part of the culture of Vancouver, a city on the edge of the ocean, facing a mountain wilderness. Vancouver is the home of the international environmental protection group, Greenpeace. This affinity for all things green and growing may perhaps explain why Eugenia Place, a tree topped residential tower, continues to be viewed as an iconic Vancouver tower.

Even though Eugenia Place is just down the street from the Hotel Sylvia, where it too enjoys an excellent view of English Bay, the setting for Eugenia Place is still different enough that it warranted a different design response. In defining the context for Eugenia Place, Richard Henriquez drew inspiration from the early history of the site, which allegedly included at one time a massive towering fir tree as tall as the building now occupying the site.<sup>11</sup> Playing a game with this history, Henriquez incorporated a much smaller tree in a roof top garden; the crown of this new tree is intended to remind us of the height of the trees that once had occupied the site. At the base of the building, as an element of the landscaping Henriquez has incorporated a massive tree stump in concrete, a further reference to the original forest, making this a project that does not just elevate and celebrates a single roof top tree, but also a project that mourns the loss of the original forest (see figure 8. 11).

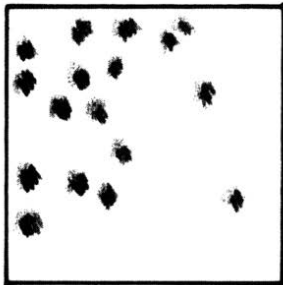
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<sup>11</sup> Whether this claim is the literal truth or simply an inferred yet reasonable conclusion has been difficult to independently confirm. Early photographs of this portion of Vancouver depict small wood frame shacks and houses occupying a torn up landscape in which all that remains of the recently cleared old growth forest are numerous tree stumps of gargantuan dimensions, consistent with claims that the forest here had included trees over 200 feet in height. In 1886, in a map drawn to commemorate the Vancouver fire, the West End is referred to as the West End Forest (City of Vancouver Archives).

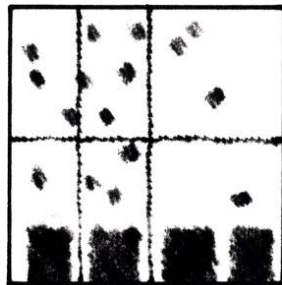




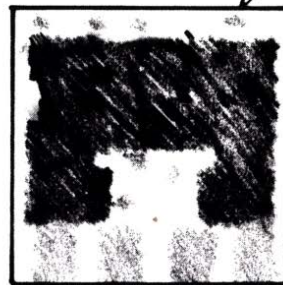
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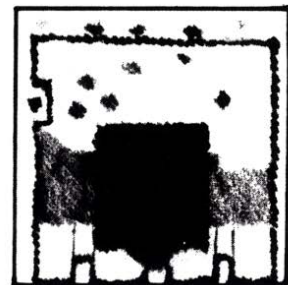
*·The 1920's Urban Forest*



*·1920's- Beach Resort*



*·1941- Huntington Apts*



*·1987- Residential Tower*

Figure 8.11 Eugenia Place: Evolution of the of the site's History (Henriquez, 2006, 114, 116; upper right hand photo by Robert Walsh).

The history of the Eugenia Place site includes its former use as a 1920's Beach resort and then in 1941, the Huntington Apartment building, which Eugenia Place subsequently replaced. A review of the historical analysis diagrams by Henriquez confirms the persistence in the new tower of traces of these three former states: forest, beach resort and apartment. The tower occupies the central courtyard around which the Huntington Apartments had originally been organized, while other hints of the beach resort plan and the outline of the apartment building can still be discerned in the treatment of the landscaping surrounding the new structure. The symmetrical



facade today facing the beach echoes the basic organization and orientation of the earlier beach resort and apartment (see figure 8.11).



Typical Floor Plan

- |                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Lobby          | 8 Kitchen           |
| 2 Entry          | 9 Laundry           |
| 3 Powder Room    | 10 Balcony          |
| 4 Living Room    | 11 Bedroom          |
| 5 Dining Room    | 12 Ensuite Bathroom |
| 6 Sunroom        | 13 Master Bedroom   |
| 7 Breakfast Nook | 14 Walk-in Closet   |

Figure 8.12: Eugenia Place Plan (Henriquez, 2006) and side view (Robert Walsh).



Figure 8.13: Eugenia Place: Fourth floor view and penthouse garden (real estate listings).

Whether people get the point that the building represents a commentary on what has been lost, however, is not at all clear. A quick review of comments posted on the internet about Eugenia Place suggested that some and perhaps most people regard the building as green and environmentally progressive, apparently because of the prominent tree at the top. Meanwhile, the provocative game of form and symbolism played by Henriquez in this structure does not end with the roof top plantings. The front elevation of the building, facing towards the beach and English Bay beyond, consists of a glass wall with vertical row of bay windows forming a central column. At the base of the building this column changes from glass to concrete, becoming a tapering conical form (see figure 8.12). At the top of building this vertical shaft flares out dramatically, at once a cornice and yet something else as well. Henriquez has emphatically stated that the form of this vertical shaft of bay windows with its dramatic top and contracted base was inspired by a wood screw. That it is a screw used in wood construction seems important too, offering another reference to the history of the site and the importance lumber for construction played in the development of Vancouver (Henriquez, 2006).

One reason that Richard Henriquez is able to get away with whimsical, narrative gestures is these buildings are also well designed inside and out, and hence profitable for their developers. The floor plans for the Eugenia Place building and The Sylvia take full advantage of primary views in the major living spaces while making good use of available daylight and secondary views. The plans feel expansive yet efficient, with little wasted space. The strategy of having only a single apartment on each floor of the building has cut the required circulation space to an absolute minimum, making the small floor plate of these structures more efficient and hence more economically viable (see figure 8.13).

The material pallet employed by Henriquez in the Sylvia and in Eugenia Place also established a crucial precedent for the emerging direction of residential high rise architecture in Vancouver. While the earlier towers of the first West End high rise boom had at times used simple beveled shapes, their geometry was still substantially constrained by the modular character of the precast concrete elements and forms. Henriquez use of the cast in place slab and column approach had cost advantages due to reduced floor to floor heights, as well as advantages in resistance to potential fire damage as compared against steel buildings. From the perspective of building morphology a major consequence of the concrete slab and column approach is the plan is no



longer restricted to an orthogonal or modular shape, resulting in buildings that can be sculpted and shaped like never before. Angled, curving, stepped and otherwise irregular shapes in plan that would have been prohibitively expensive during the first period of high rise construction in the West End (1956-1973) became relatively easy to accomplish. Henriquez would continue to explore this expanded range of potential forms in subsequent towers, while other Vancouver architects soon began to follow his example.

### The Presidio (1992)



Figure 8.14: The Presidio: Satellite images, site photo and plan (above: bing 3-d, below: Henriquez, 2006).

Located at the edge of Stanley Park, where it meets the West End, the Presidio is the third West End tower designed by Richard Henriquez. The Presidio is perhaps the most enigmatic of the four towers, for it is here that Henriquez has most fully indulged in the use of the narrative device he calls “fictional history” (Freedman, 1992). At the outset Richard Henriquez had determined that he wished to develop the form of this tower by repeatedly stacking copies of the house that had previously existed on the site, with the aim of producing by this method a residential tower. However his first design studies employing this approach indicated that this tactic was not going to yield acceptable results, at least not as long as he insisted on using the existing house as his basic module. Clinging to the stacked houses approach, Henriquez decided to make his the template for this approach a Swiss villa by Adolf Loos completed in 1906: the Villa Karma (see figures 8.14 and 8.15).

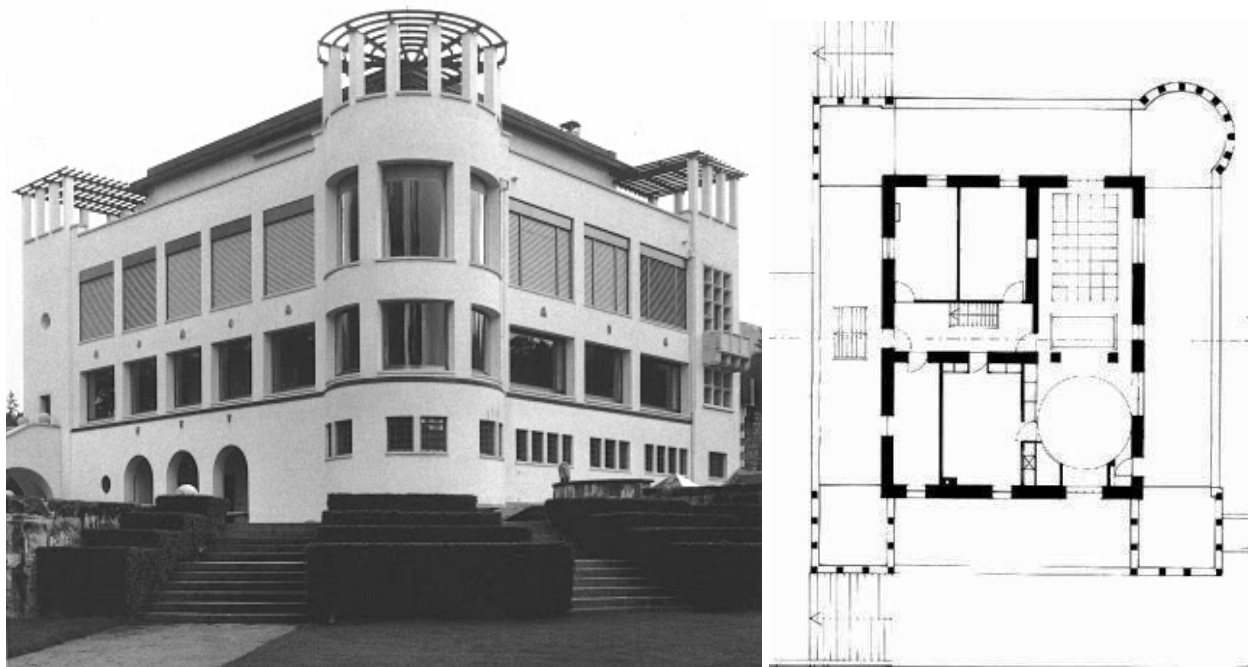


Figure 8.15: Villa Karma by Adolf Loos: exterior view and plan (Schezen, 1996).

Henriquez used the Villa Karma like a gigantic three dimensional template, to establish elements of a building mass that he then subjected to further manipulation. Beginning at the base of the building, he has traced out onto the ground three overlapping copies of the basic Villa Karma plan, extruding portions of these plans to different heights. In some case the building outline simply defines changes in landscaping (see figure 8.16).

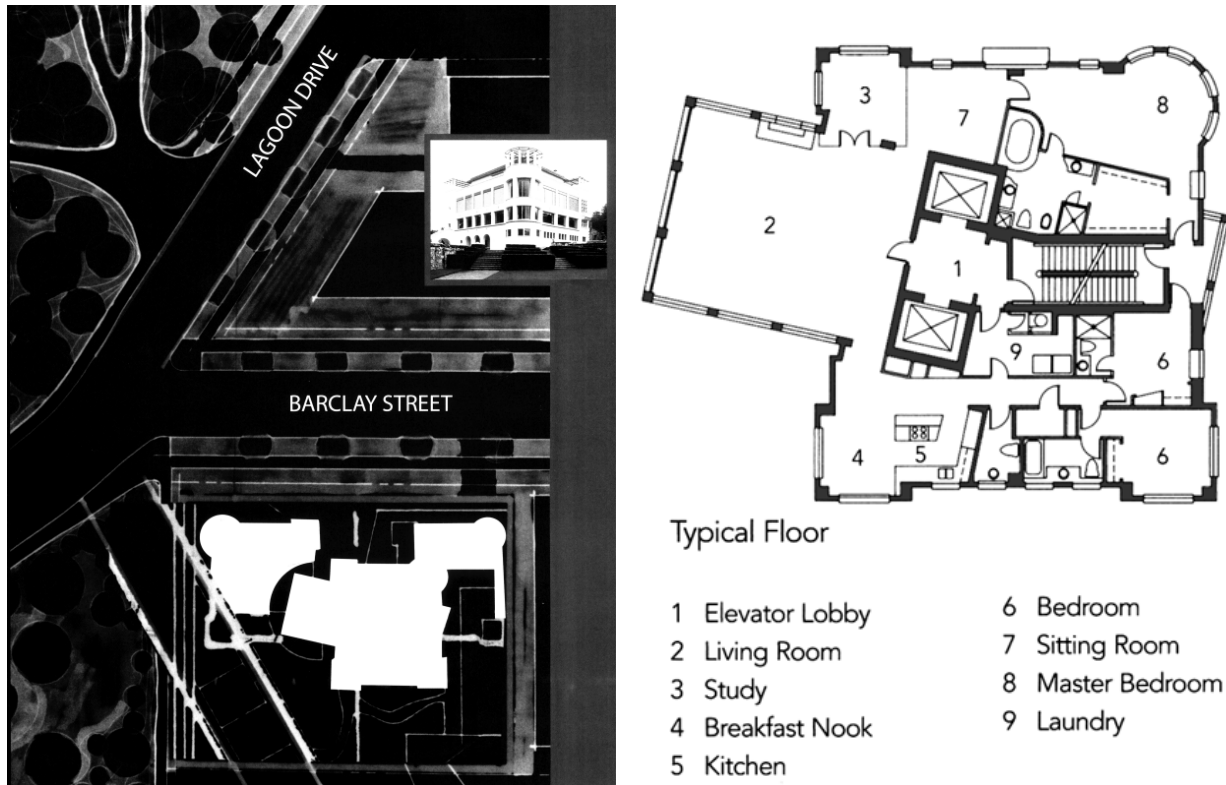


Figure 8.16: Site plan and upper levels: The left hand image is the work of Richard Henriquez, showing the bizarre diagonal cut that he imposed upon the site, the mistaken projection of Lagoon Drive made by the dyslexic surveyor. The right hand image is a typical floor plan of the Presidio. Note the similarities to the Villa Karma plan shown in figure 8.16 (Henriquez, 2006).

Into this mix Henriquez injected a story he invented of a “dyslexic surveyor.” The story holds that the imaginary surveyor had only the ability to see things in a mirror image and had thus become confused, resulting in a diagonal cut the sliced through transplanted version of the Villa Karma, lopping off a corner and resulting in a building in need of repair. It should perhaps be noted that the version of the Villa Karma that was cut through in this tale was itself a mirror image of the actual Villa Karma. Even though the actual construction took place after the invention of this fanciful account and no such building was present on the site and no surveying error actually took place, nevertheless the finished building bears the mark of this cut through the landscape and the building. This is possibly the fullest application example of a narrative device that Henriquez refers to as fictional history (Shubert, 1996).

When it came time to secure approval for this building, Henriquez had reason to be concerned that the city would want to change his design. While Richard Henriquez clearly would want his projects to prove economically viable, in terms of his actual design process his motives and



methods were more those of an artist than a businessman. Despite seeming arbitrary in its initial inception, the story of the dyslexic surveyor and the proportion system this introduced to the project was the beginning of a sustained design exploration from which a complex and dynamic composition was to emerge. Changing even a portion of this threatened to disrupt or even destroy what had been achieved, yet Henriquez had to be ready to counter just such an effort.



Figure 8.17: The Presidio: three views (Shotton 2005, Robert Walsh, [condoinvancouver.com](http://condoinvancouver.com)).

To the dismay of Richard Henriquez, when he first met with the Vancouver city planners they suggested that he ought to eliminate the ground level portion of the Villa Karma, including the portion that had been cut by the dyslexic surveyor. It was as if the city planners were responding to the mystery presented by this unusual portion of the project by simply trying to have it removed, failing to understand how this related to the rest of the building. Henriquez understood that to accept this alteration would invalidate the entire narrative underpinning his design for the project, and so he objected. He explained to the planners how this portion of the project was absolutely essential to the rest and could not be removed without compromising everything else. Fortunately, Henriquez was both persuasive and stubborn enough that the city relented, granting him permission to go ahead with the project as he had originally designed it (Henriquez, 2006).

### **1277 Nelson (1994)**

The final tower of the four West End residential high rises built by Richard Henriquez is in some respects the most different of the group (see figure 8.18 and 8.19).



Figure 8.18: 1277 Nelson, with Queen Anne Garden Apartments (Robert Walsh).



Figure 8.19: 1277 Nelson, preserved wall from prior building, and oblique view (Robert Walsh).

The Sylvia, Eugenia Place and the Presidio towers are located on perimeter blocks adjacent to waterfront or park space, guaranteeing unrestricted access to spectacular natural views. Each of these towers consists of stacked apartments, one per floor. These three towers are roughly square in plan, providing an anchor and orientation off of which subsequent visual and narrative elements then emerge. In contrast, the 1277 Nelson tower is located in the center of the West



End, not at the edge. Instead of providing luxury apartments for sale to wealthy owners and investors, the 120 units in the Nelson tower are rental units intended to serve a family oriented market, with a typical floor containing seven apartments, four units per floor at the upper three levels. And unlike the prior towers, 1277 Nelson has a curving elliptical plan (see figure 8.20).

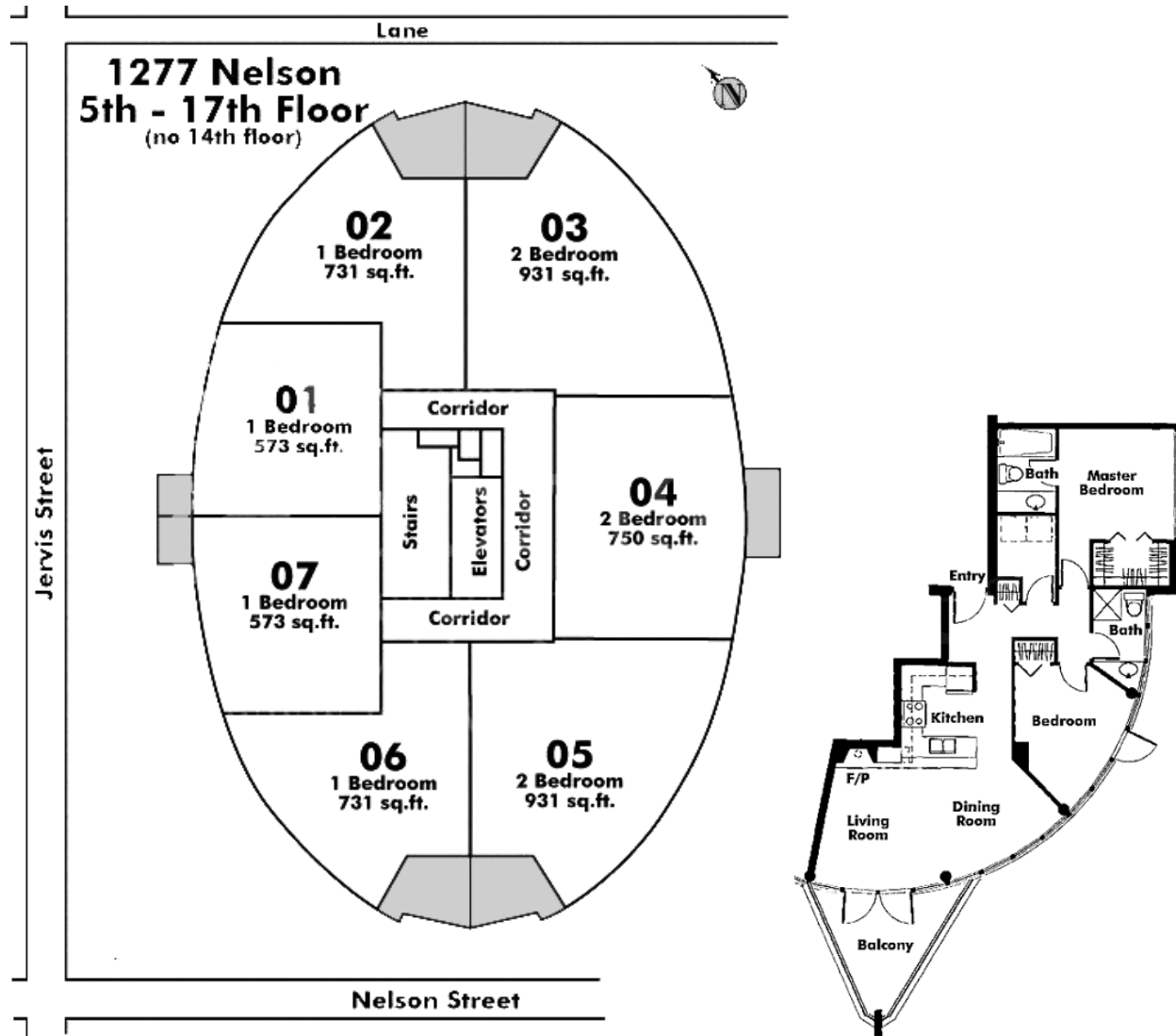


Figure 8.20: 1277 Nelson Schematic floor plan floors 5-17, and detail plan from levels 18-20. (website of real estate agent Les Twarog). Notice that every unit has a balcony.

Faced with the need for a more economical solution catering to a different market niche and a setting with somewhat constrained access to views, Richard Henriquez created an innovative solution making the best of these challenging circumstances. The site for the project contained three preexisting low rise apartment buildings dating back to the 1930's; Henriquez sited the new tower to preserve the best of these structures, a three story building named the Queen Anne



Garden Apartments. From a companion building that was demolished, Henriquez salvaged ornamental elements, integrated into the new building, including a wall and ornamental entry that now leads to a protected courtyard garden (Price, 2006). Although this might be considered a token gesture, it nevertheless reflects a deeper interest in preserving and reinterpreting the history of a site, instead of treating the site as a blank slate (see figures 8.21, 8.22).



Figure 8.21: 1277 Nelson: a bird's eye view. The pair of rectangular concrete towers to the right, Harley House (1970) and Sutton Garden (1969) are the work of Arthur Erickson (Bing 3-d).



Figure 8.22: Interior views from 1277 Nelson: Upper level and mid level views (source uploaded from real estate advertisements).

The siting of the tower and the orientation and shape of the plan also presented special challenges because of the presence of two nearby towers whose views Henriquez wanted to impact as little as possible. These two obscure towers by Arthur Erickson: Harley House (1970) and Sutton Gardens (1969), date back to the first West End high rise boom. In contending with these rectangular blocks, view obstruction was potentially problematic; still desirable views could still be enjoyed in other directions. Henriquez responded with an elliptical floor plan, a massing approach that is less imposing on the neighboring structures than another rectangular block would have been. The ellipse has the further advantage of introducing variety by giving units access to different views depending upon orientation and location.

As in his other West End towers, at 1277 Nelson, Richard Henriquez makes use of a combination of masonry tower and glass curtain wall; in this case however the curtain wall was been limited to use at the upper levels, instead of redefining a side of a tower. 1277 Nelson also comes closest of all four Henriquez towers to being bilaterally symmetrical, yet at a finer level of scale distinctive touches have again been added that distinguish one side from another, such as an immense four part window that faces East at the upper level, which on the opposite side has been translated into a garden balcony.

### **8.3 Consequences for Vancouver Architecture: a mixed outcome.**

The success of the Sylvia helped to overcome the bias against new residential high rises in the West End, resulting in more commissions for new towers by Henriquez as well as commissions for other architects willing to pursue similar projects. As the revival of the residential tower in the West End gained momentum, the form of residential high rises throughout Vancouver also began to shift, reflecting characteristics that had first appeared in Vancouver in the projects of Richard Henriquez.

The first high rises in the West End had favored simple boxy shapes characterized by bilateral symmetry aligned to the lot lines in response to detailed zoning mandates. Typically these structures can be classified into one of three categories: rectangular, lozenge shaped or octagonal. The top floors were typically lacking in details or special treatments that might have contributed to the skyline; instead roofs were most often topped unceremoniously with a flat slab and an elevator tower (see figure 8. 23). Meanwhile at the ground level little or no effort was



devoted to improving the relationship of the structure to the street, resulting in a dispersed pattern of towers divided by a combination of expansive lawns and parking lots.



Figure 8.23: Towers typical of the West End High Rise Boom: 1956-1973 (seethewestend.com).

The high rises designed by Richard Henriquez dramatically contrast with those constructed previously in Vancouver.

The four West End towers design by Henriquez introduced into the building culture of Vancouver an expanded vocabulary of high rise elements: turrets, bay windows, angled protruding elements, penthouse roof gardens, conical roof elements and other visual accents. At a larger scale, these buildings introduced tower plans, and an enlarged material pallet that

combined glass curtain walls with masonry. New organization strategies were added and old strategies were given a fresh interpretation; the Sylvia and the Presidio are noteworthy for their balanced yet asymmetric plan configurations, while Eugenia Place and 1277 breathe new life into a symmetrical approach (see figure 8.24).



Figure 8.24: Four West End high rises by Richard Henriquez, from left to right: The Sylvia, Eugenia Place, The Presidio, and 1277 Nelson (photographs by Robert Walsh).

The groundbreaking work of Richard Henriquez also reflected changes in construction technology that were opening up new design possibilities. Improvements in the technology and production of cast in place concrete were making complex and unprecedented geometries easier to achieve, making it easier to construct towers that curved in plan or had angled protrusions. To make use of these possibilities still required imagination and creativity.

Richard Henriquez refocused the basic approach to residential high rise design in Vancouver, moving away from design defined by zoning constraints, towards a more rigorous engagement with the site and the surrounding context. In this effort he was certainly assisted by the work of Ray Spaxman, and his emphasis on neighborliness. In essence Spaxman had raised the bar of



what was allowable, and Richard Henriquez proved to be the first to clear that bar, and in the process redefined what was possible. Others soon followed (see figure 8.25).



Figure 8.25: Fifteen Vancouver high rises influenced by the work of Richard Henriquez, 1988 – 2012. (Sources: these images include photographs taken by Robert Walsh and images downloaded from a variety of real estate and construction industry websites).

**Paul Merrick: the Tudor Manor and Elan, two projects influenced Richard Henriquez**

Vancouver Architect Paul Merrick followed his important work for Thompson Berwick and Pratt and the False Creek Study Group by going into business for himself, founding an architecture firm that continues to produce impressive work today (Whysall 2001, merrickarch.com). At around the same time that Richard Henriquez was winning awards for the Sylvia, Paul Merrick was beginning work on another residential high rise project in the West End, named Tudor

Manor. Both for its strengths and its apparent weaknesses, Tudor Manor provides a unique point of comparison with the work of Richard Henriquez. Tudor Manor also happens to be of genuine, if under recognized, importance to the development of Vancouverism.

When it was first completed, Tudor Manor was a highly regarded award winning project. Located in a neighborhood that had seen much of its architectural heritage overwhelmed by the onslaught of speculative development that had transformed this portion of the West End during the Sutton-Brown era, Tudor Manor was praised for encouraging historic preservation of the Tudor style exterior of a low rise apartment block built in 1928. The form that Paul Merrick proposed perhaps seemed novel and bold at the time,<sup>12</sup> an attempt to find a new solution during an era when previously accepted norms of international modernism were being rejected. Despite these positive intentions, and initial positive reception, today however, the project has come to seem somewhat dated, reflecting not so much a lack of architectural character as much as heightened level of artistry that would emerge in Merrick's subsequent works, as well as in those of many other Vancouver Architects. As a result it has been eclipsed by later developments (Ward, 1995; Whysall, 2001).

The Tudor Manor project has certain programmatic and historical characteristics in common with the Sylvia: like the Sylvia, this is a project that added a post-modern residential tower to an existing structure; an attempt was made to borrow certain visual themes found in the original structure, giving these a new interpretation in the tower. Like the Sylvia, it is located along the southern edge of the West End where it too enjoys a front row seat to the spectacular views available across English Bay. Similarly, like the Sylvia, Tudor Manor also defies earlier West End precedents by developing the upper stories in an attempt to produce a more interesting and articulated top to the building. Although begun after work had begun on building the Sylvia, Tudor Manor was also completed in 1988 (Vancouver Sun, 1989) (see figures 8.26, 8.27).

Despite these apparent similarities with the Sylvia, from an aesthetic perspective the Tudor Manor leaves much to be desired. Part of the problem stems from the well-intended but ultimately questionable decision to preserve the original low rise apartment block and in particular its faux Tudor façade. Although the building itself was gutted and redeveloped on the

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<sup>12</sup> Opinion on Tudor Manor was not universally favorable, however. One group of neighbors organized in vocal, but ultimately unsuccessful opposition to the project (Cox, 1987).



inside, the decision to maintain the exterior means that its undersized windows and lack of exterior balcony access could not be corrected, preventing a more generous and open response towards the available ocean view. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it was the preservation of these very features in the low rise structure which enabled Merrick to secure development bonuses that enabled the construction of a taller tower.

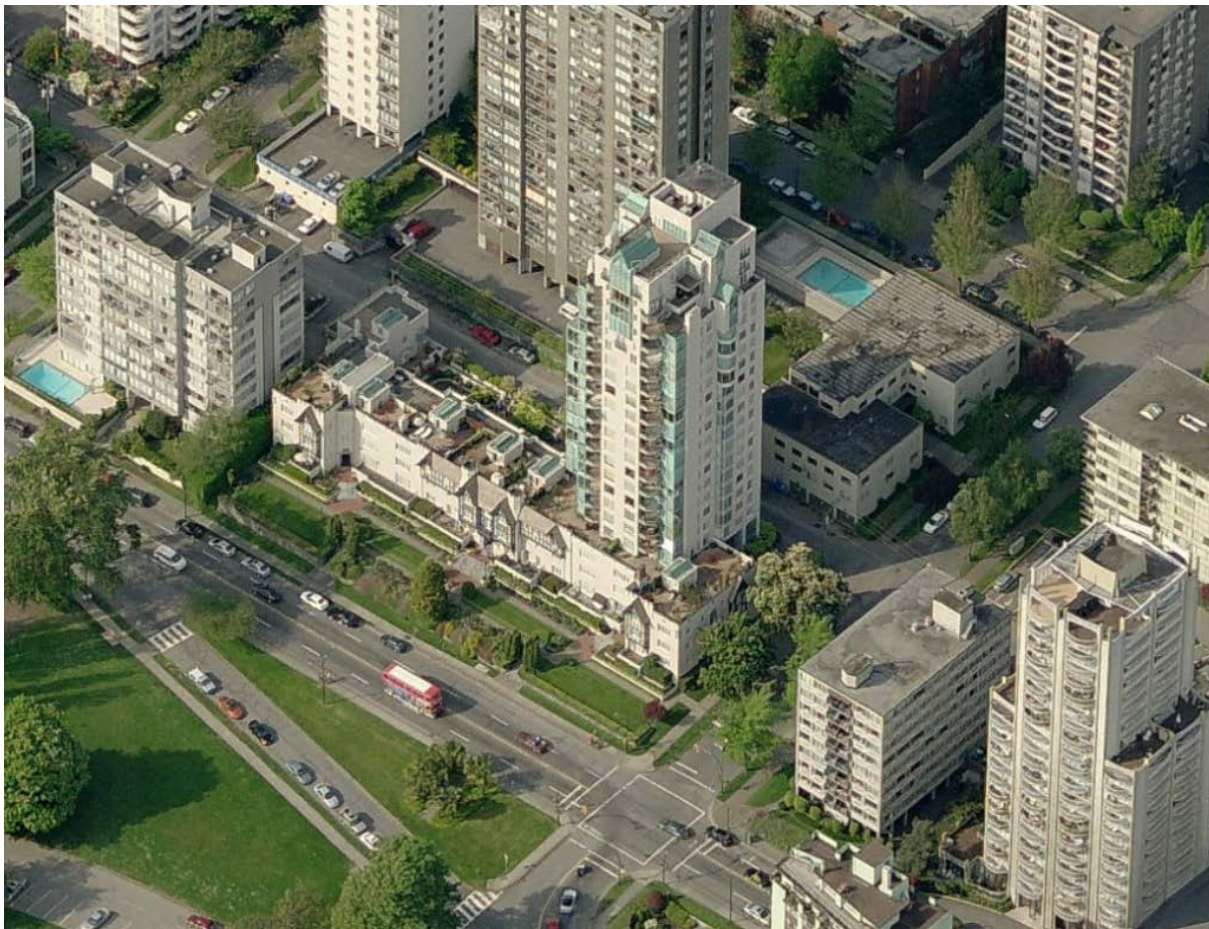


Figure 8.26: Tudor Manor: overlooking English Bay (bing 3-d).

In designing the tower connected to the low rise, the architect faced a problem of how to effectively relate the two structures, while at the same time overcoming the limitation apparent in the original portion. Overall Paul Merrick has succeeded in producing a tower apartment in which the opportunity to enjoy the available views and daylight have been well addressed. Each unit has access to a balcony, while expansive windows maximize access to daylight and views in Vancouver's frequently overcast weather. Where the building begins to seem a bit lacking is in the rather unfortunate choice of a few particular details.



Figure 8.27: Tudor Manor (Photograph by Robert Walsh).



Figure 8.28: Tudor Manor (Photographs by Robert Walsh).

Fortunately Paul Merrick did not go so far as to actually append a Tudor style high rise tower; the notion of half timbers applied ornamentally on such a tall structure seems horrifying. However, the decision to borrow the fake crenellations found in the original structure, and then apply this to the tower units in the form of stacked octagonal balconies seems, well, rather



regrettable. Other options such as a square balcony that did not protrude from the face of the building might have worked better without drawing the eye in the same way (see figure 8.28).

The Tudor Manor project provides a useful contrast to the more successful West End Towers of Richard Henriquez. The sophisticated games that Henriquez plays in developing his building designs are not just a matter of meaning and metaphor, but also rely upon a highly developed sense of design judgment, and one critical judgment made by Henriquez is that sometimes history itself is not enough. Henriquez does not rely upon fictional history in all of his projects, just those in which the available material he has to begin with is inadequate to attaining a satisfying outcome. In contrast to this, the Tudor Manor project seems limited by the original material it provides, much of which is not really suitable for translation into a high rise. Indeed Paul Merrick seems to have taken this material farther than might have been expected, while still playing with the hand that he had been dealt. But without recourse to an approach that might have given him permission to simply invent or adopt better reference materials, the range of options at Tudor Manor seems perhaps to have been too constrained.

Despite its apparent limitations, Tudor Manor remains important to the development of Vancouverism, because this appears to be the first building in Vancouver combining a point tower with an extensive lower rise apartment block at the base. The placement of the tower over and behind the low rise apartment block anticipated a similar massing strategy which has become common place in new developments in Vancouver, where the street front is defined by the low rise units and the towers rise from distance back from the street frontage.

In evaluating the Tudor Manor project it is useful to bear in mind that this project is in some sense an anomaly in the otherwise excellent body of work that Paul Merrick has produced over the years. One of the recently completed projects by his firm, a residential tower named Elan, is an interesting example of how his work has continued to evolve and become increasingly refined. Instead of resorting to obvious symbolic references of the sort that plagued the Tudor Manor, a more restrained yet also dynamic approach is used in developing the form of Elan. Instead of focusing on the narrative and historical references, Elan appears to have drawn lessons from the materiality and morphology of Henriquez's West End work. The use of angled protruding section of glass and concrete emerging from the left hand elevation of Elan evokes a

similar feeling to the massing of the Sylvia. Meanwhile the two story concrete and glass module of the tower street elevation seems reminiscent of Eugenia Place (see figure 8.29).



Figure 8.29: Elan, by Paul Merrick: five views (bing 3d; two photos by Robert Walsh; two from Merrickarch.com).

There are also aspects of Elan that bear a resemblance to the earlier Tudor Manor, not in terms of style or detail, but in terms of massing. Once again the tower extends back from the street, while a low rise apartment structure runs the width of the site, defining the urban streetscape. Yet despite these similarities in massing, Elan seems to reflect a new understanding of how to relate the apartment units to their surroundings, including a profusion of windows that enliven the nearly street, a move that had it been used at Tudor Manor just might have led this project in a new and better direction.

#### **8.4 Discussion: Reconnecting to Vancouver history: on the larger meaning of the work of Richard Henriquez**

The arguments offered by Richard Henriquez to explain the design of his four West End towers portray his work as originating from an intense interrogation of the context, combined as needed with invented contextual references in the form of a fictional history. Engaging though these accounts may be they fail to explain the extent to which Henriquez work has been so popular, or so widely emulated by other architects working in Vancouver. One possibility might be that the architects of Vancouver are singularly lacking in imagination and are simply copying the work of Henriquez out of admiration. However, this notion is contradicted by the observation that many of the architects who have adopted elements previously introduced by Henriquez continue to play with and transform these same elements, typically giving them a new and different interpretation all their own.

An alternative explanation for the pervasive influence of the work of Richard Henriquez would be that this simply reflects a larger general turn taken by the entire profession towards post-modernism, that an interest in metaphor, allusion and history was embraced by other Vancouver architects. The appeal of this interpretation is that it suggests that the same influences which impacted and helped to liberate the creativity of Richard Henriquez, raising his work to a new level, were available to other Vancouver architects as well. Perhaps the best example of Vancouver architecture to test this position is the coliseum-inspired Vancouver Public Library by Moshe Safdie (Lees, 2001). The Library is a fine example of international post-modernism by a world renowned Canadian architect and yet despite the many positive attributes of this structure, it nevertheless is profoundly out of step with the rest of the city (see figure 8.32). This novelty is not necessarily a liability for this individual building, which after all was a competition entry intended to be bold, iconic and different. However, had Vancouver architects either been lacking in creativity or simply following international trends in architecture, then it is probable that a variety of the design moves introduced here by Safdie would have begun to reappear elsewhere in Vancouver, and this has not happened. Yet this emulation is what followed from the work of Richard Henriquez. suggesting that something other than the generalized expression of an international Post Modernism is responsible for the new direction in Vancouver architecture.



Figure 8.30: Vancouver in 1939, view from West End: original and detail (Vancouver Archives).





Figure 8.31: Six Early Vancouver landmarks: The Second Hotel Vancouver, Hotel Vancouver Fairmont, The Sun Tower, The Dominion Building, The Marine Building and The Gas Silo (demolished) (images 1, 5,6: Vancouver archives; images 2,3,4: Robert Walsh).



Figure 8.32: Vancouver Public Library (1995): Moshe Safdie, with Downs Archambault (DA architects).

A third and more revealing explanation is that, despite the elaborate cover stories and the adoption of seemingly arbitrary forms like the Villa Karma in the Presidio Tower, perhaps the work of Richard Henriquez resonates with other Vancouver Architects because it also referencing and reviving forms from Vancouver's own architectural past. Without contesting the claims offered by Henriquez in describing his own work, it is nevertheless possible to discern in his four West End Towers details, features and forms found in a half dozen early Vancouver structures dating from 1939 and before, structures that had previously defined the urban identity of the City before they were either demolished or surrounded by other taller structures (see figure 8.30 and 8.31). Whether intentional or accidental, the presence of these similarities help to explain why forms seen in the buildings of Richard Henriquez have made an impact with many other architects of Vancouver, and perhaps why these forms found expression in their own work without requiring the sophisticated narrative games at the heart of Henriquez work.

In making this claim I am offering a different interpretation from the one put forward by Howard Shubert in 1996, in which he suggests that the work of Henriquez has widespread appeal on the basis that it allegedly embodies archetypal forms (Shubert 1996). One problem with this argument is that it fails to explain why Henriquez has not been substantially emulated outside of Vancouver. Furthermore, it ignores the attention to local detail that is central to his work. Finally, had Henriquez been concerned with archetypal forms his work would more closely resemble the work of architects for whom the use of archetypal forms actually mattered, such as Arthur Erickson. Instead, Henriquez's work ought to be considered a rejection of the iconic in



favor of a celebration of the local and the idiosyncratic; what has been previously overlooked is the extent to which this connection to the past in the work of Henriquez draws from the local architectural history of Vancouver.



Figure 8.33: Evolution of a turret: The Second Hotel Vancouver (1916), The Presidio (1992), 1000 Beach (1993), Escala (2002) (Vancouver archives, real estate listings and bing 3-d)

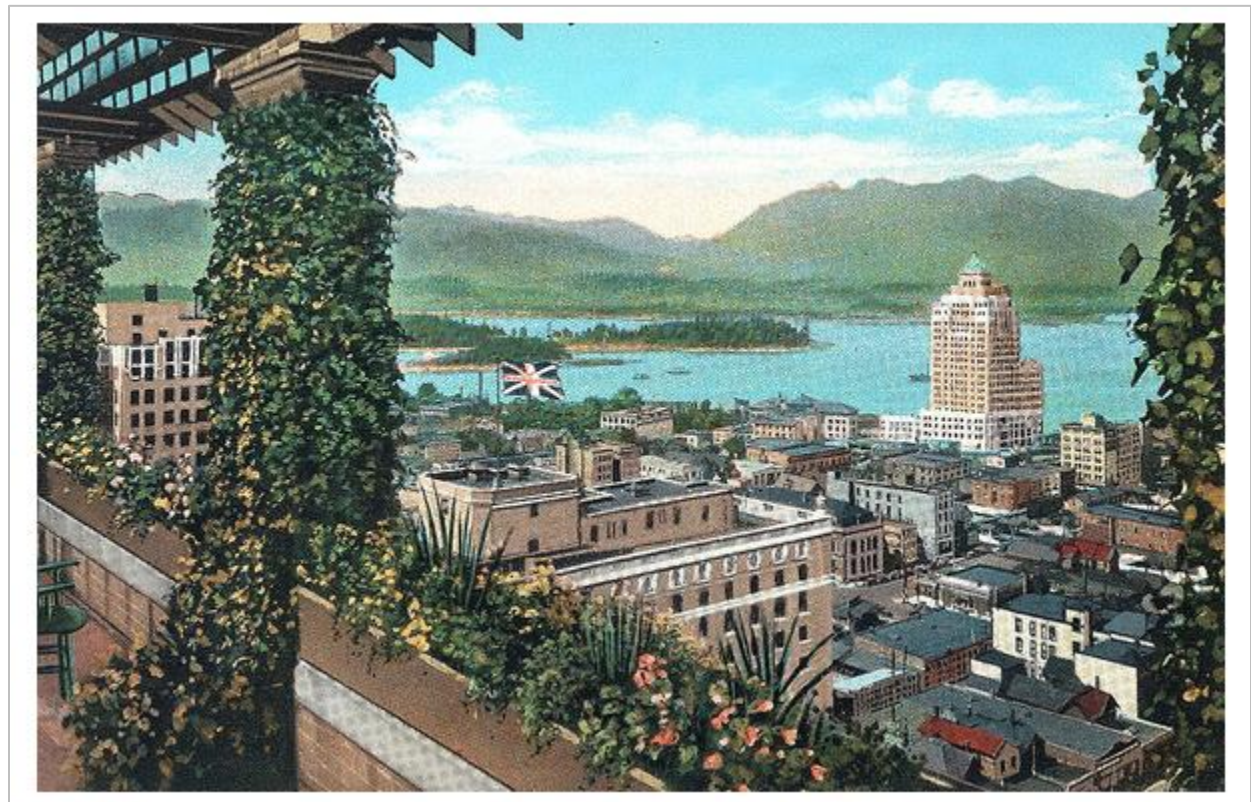


Figure 8.34: 1930 postcard view from the Second Hotel Vancouver (IllustratedVancouver.com). In the Background can also be seen the Marine Building with its pyramidal copper roof peak.

An interesting and revealing example of a local historical building detail revived in the work of Richard Henriquez is the distinctive turret of the Presidio. Although the form of this turret is consistent with the story of the stacked copies of the Villa Karma, it also bears a strong resemblance to turret found in an important former landmark tower from downtown Vancouver, the Second Hotel Vancouver (1916-1939). After Richard Henriquez recreated forms resembling details found in this early Vancouver high rise in the Presidio of 1992, other Vancouver architects began to do likewise. The turret at the Presidio was soon followed in 1993 by a similar flat roofed turret used in 1000 Beach Street, a residential tower designed by Richard Hulbert. Given how little time separates these two towers it is possible that Hulbert was drawing inspiration from the same source original source as Henriquez. Both have given the turret their own particular interpretation, yet each of the newer turrets echoes the form of the original, rising one story above the adjacent building mass, with a wide cornice emphasizing the termination of the vertical shaft. James Cheng's Escala Tower (2002) at Coal Harbor meanwhile has borrowed the turret and turned it to glass. Escala also bears a number of other visible similarities to the Presidio, in addition to being a squared point tower with a turret along one edge it uses a very similar material palette and massing strategy to that found at the Presidio, as a squared masonry tower with a protruding glass and steel mass reaching out towards the water and mountain views beyond (see figure 8.33).

The large rooftop garden featuring a small tree and other plantings at Eugenia Place is another iconic Henriquez design feature that may have more complex historical roots. While of course the story of the preexisting forest that had been part of the site history of this project is believable and important, the origins of the idea still remain elusive. Why transplant a tree to the top? Again the Second Hotel Vancouver provides a possible clue. A postcard dated to 1930 reveals that at the uppermost level of the Second Hotel Vancouver there were not trees, but there were dense plantings of vegetation turning this terrace into a leafy green oasis, redefining the view that expanded on down below. The tree at the top of Eugenia place functions as a landmark when viewed from afar but the view from the roof garden itself suggest that it is anchoring the experience of the viewer and framing the distant view in a way not that different from the earlier Second Hotel Vancouver. Perhaps the similarity with the later Eugenia Place is coincidental, yet in evoking a similar experience to what had once existed at the Second hotel Vancouver, which



had been demolished in 1939, perhaps Eugenia place is not only speaking about the forest that had been lost but also lost piece of the architectural heritage of Vancouver (see figure 8.34).

While the use of grey stone and copper roofing in the Sun Tower and the Hotel Vancouver Fairmont is a slightly different material palette from that used by Henriquez in his West End Towers, the color scheme and the overall design of these early buildings nevertheless have similarities with Henriquez later works. While the ornamental green copper roofing is used at Eugenia Place and the Sylvia is similar to the angled copper roof peaks of the earlier towers, the skillful use of concrete in Henriquez's towers evokes a similar feeling to the grey stonework of the earlier towers.



Figure 8.35: View across False Creek, June 10, 1941 (City of Vancouver Archives).

Treating the top floors as different and ornamental yet still functional is another design principle evident in the earlier Vancouver high rises that reemerges in the work of Henriquez to once again

become part of the Vancouver building culture. While this is particularly evident in the Sylvia and Eugenia Place, even in the more modest 1277 Nelson something of a similar effect is achieved through the special treatment given to the upper three levels.

Yet another important facet of the early Vancouver high rises concerns the way that they treat the lower stories, which are clearly differentiated from the upper levels to better address the streetscape. The most extreme case of this is the Sun Tower which rises abruptly from a much wider base that defines the streetscape below, anchoring the tower in the process. This characteristic of treating the ground level differently and developing it to define the adjacent pedestrian domain is a characteristic that these early towers share with Henriquez four West End Towers; it also is a characteristic generally lacking in the high rises of the first wave of construction in the West End from (1956 -1972).



Figure 8.36: Three rounded structures: the gas silo, 1277 Nelson and the Pallisades (detail of figure 8.35, Vancouver Archives; Price, 2007, 22; Robert Walsh).

High rise towers were not the only tall structures to define the skyline of downtown Vancouver in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the heritage of Vancouver also includes a looming natural gas storage tank known as the gas silo, that can be seen towering in the background in many images (see figure 8.30). If the other references to the physical past of Vancouver are not coincidental, then it seems plausible that the visible similarities between this utilitarian tower and

1277 Nelson might also be intentional. Although obviously built for entirely different purposes, these two towering structures share a similar rounded character and sense of proportion nevertheless. Furthermore the vertical stack of the gas silo that runs its height is echoed by a similar vertical element at 1277 Nelson that appears to serve no clear purpose in the apartment tower. While a strictly circular tower would not have been a kind response to the neighboring context at 1277 Nelson, compressing the circular plan into an ellipse enables Henriquez to have a tower whose rounded bulk still stands out as a landmark in an otherwise orthogonal landscape. Once the unique advantages of this elliptical form were introduced by Henriquez, other Vancouver architects, including James Cheng made effective use of elliptical towers, including a pair at the edge of the West End called the Pallisades (1996), one of which is shown here (see figure 8.35). Again, given that only two years separate the completion of 1277 Nelson and the Pallisades by James Cheng it is possible that the similarity between these buildings is coincidental. Yet it is interesting that the later structure by Cheng also has a similar orientation towards the street and a similar basic pattern of internal organization. Cheng's building has a different overall feeling that in a strange way seems more like a fresh interpretation derived from the same historical source. Nevertheless it is rather interesting that it is Henriquez who was the first to make use of the elliptical tower form.

### **8.5 Unanticipated consequences of the return of high rise development in the West End:**

Although the West End had increased in residential density through the addition of residential high rise towers built from 1956-1973, with the addition of the more recent towers an unexpected problem began to emerge: the new towers were sometimes reducing the residential density. In the case of the Sylvia the construction of the new tower was preceded by the demolition of an apartment structure with 22 apartment units, while the new tower contained only 17 apartments, one per floor. Similarly, Eugenia Place resulted in a net loss in total apartment units. Although the developers negotiated arrangements to assist in the relocation of displaced families as part of the approval process for each project, the resulting reduction in housing stock increased pressure against allowing further construction of high rises in the West End (Price, 2006).

This situation was symptomatic of larger trends taking place at this time in which a culturally loaded form of gentrification was taking place throughout many parts of the City. A large scale pattern of immigration by affluent Asians was transforming the real estate market in Vancouver.

Although Kris Olds has written extensively regarding the connection of this pattern to the construction of the new urban mega projects that began in the 1990's in Vancouver (Olds, 2002), this issue was already having a noticeable impact on the existing housing stock. Asian investors in Vancouver have often favored real estate as an investment vehicle because it is tangible and also because language may be less of an issue. By the 1980's new immigrants from Hong Kong were buying out existing apartment buildings, evicting tenants and then renovating the buildings to have larger and more lucrative apartment units to rent (Gutstein, 1990; Mitchell, 2004).

Although the new high rises Henriquez was designing were winning awards and producing profits for their developers, this was taking place in a context in which public opposition to new high rises in the West End was growing as a result of displacement of existing tenants. Meanwhile a related problem had begun to impact the West End: existing low rise rental properties were not being adequately maintained, resulting in a deteriorating general appearance. The reason for this was simply that property owners had once again begun to expect to sell their property in the not too distant future to developers who would be demolishing existing structures and constructing new high rises; therefore money invested in improvements or even routine maintenance was considered a waste.<sup>13</sup>

The solution to these issues emerged just as Ray Spaxman was concluding his fifteen years of service as Vancouver's planning director in 1989, once again in the form of new guidelines grounded in the concept of Neighborliness. Prior to the 1989 West End Guidelines, the City of Vancouver had gradually increased the allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for different sections of the West End, increasing the allowable density to levels where high rises could again be feasible in some parts of the West End. The 1989 guidelines differ from prior regulations concerning high rise development in the West End in that these new guidelines attempted to explicitly address the visual appearance of the towers themselves and how they relate to the surrounding context.

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<sup>13</sup> Information here is based in part upon discussions with Larry Beasley, the former co-director of planning in Vancouver. Although he would not be promoted to co-director until 1994, as a City Planner who began working for Vancouver in 1978 he nevertheless was active and involved in addressing these issues as they developed.



Figure 8. New Development Responds to Heritage



A contemporary building incorporating elements from the adjacent heritage building.

Figure 10. New Development Responding to Height Issues

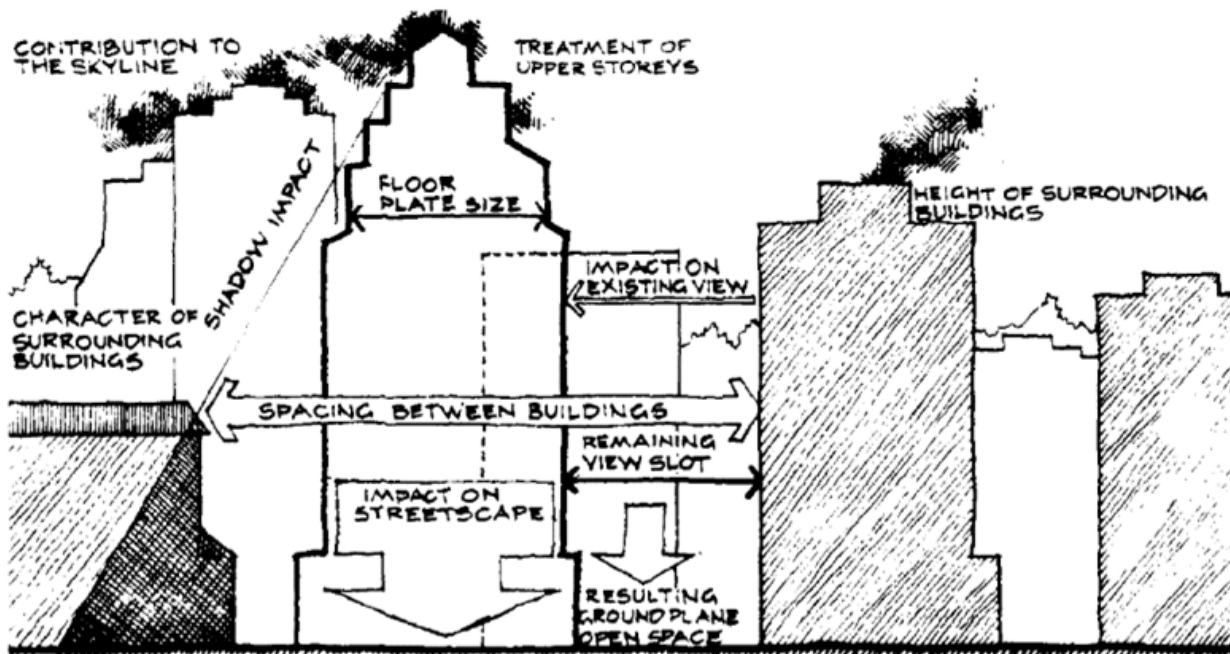


Figure 8.37: 1989 West End Guidelines images, from page 8 and 9 (City of Vancouver 1989).

One way that the 1989 guidelines attempt to inform the design of future high rises in the West End is through identifying desirable features, and distilling these into basic design principles. In a manner reminiscent of the pattern approach used by Ron Walkey at the South Shore of False Creek, the guidelines offer discrete bits of advice. One key difference however is that instead of relying upon precedents derived from foreign cities or even other parts of Vancouver, the examples used to illustrate the guidelines are all taken from actual projects built in the West End,

including the work of Richard Henriquez. The projects portrayed in the many guideline photographs remain unnamed, yet are clearly recognizable and include the Sylvia, Eugenia Place, in addition to structures by other architects. One significant aspect of these guidelines is that by recognizing positive and desirable design characteristics associated with recent high rise developments, the planners were establishing a strong position in favor of further high rise development, setting the stage for a new wave of high rise development in Vancouver based upon the new direction sparked by the work of Richard Henriquez (see figure 8.37).

An important new regulation introduced in the new guidelines for the West End was a tower spacing requirement that required towers to be spaced a minimum distance from other towers “on the same block face,” meaning that this spacing requirement did not concern tower separation of buildings on opposite sides of the street, but only spacing along the same side of the street. A separate requirement requiring a spacing of 24 meters (79 feet) in all directions between towers addressed issues of tower adjacency across streets. The actual dimension chosen for this “Minimum distance between high towers on the same block face” would have a profound impact on the future of high rise development throughout the West End (see figure 8.38).

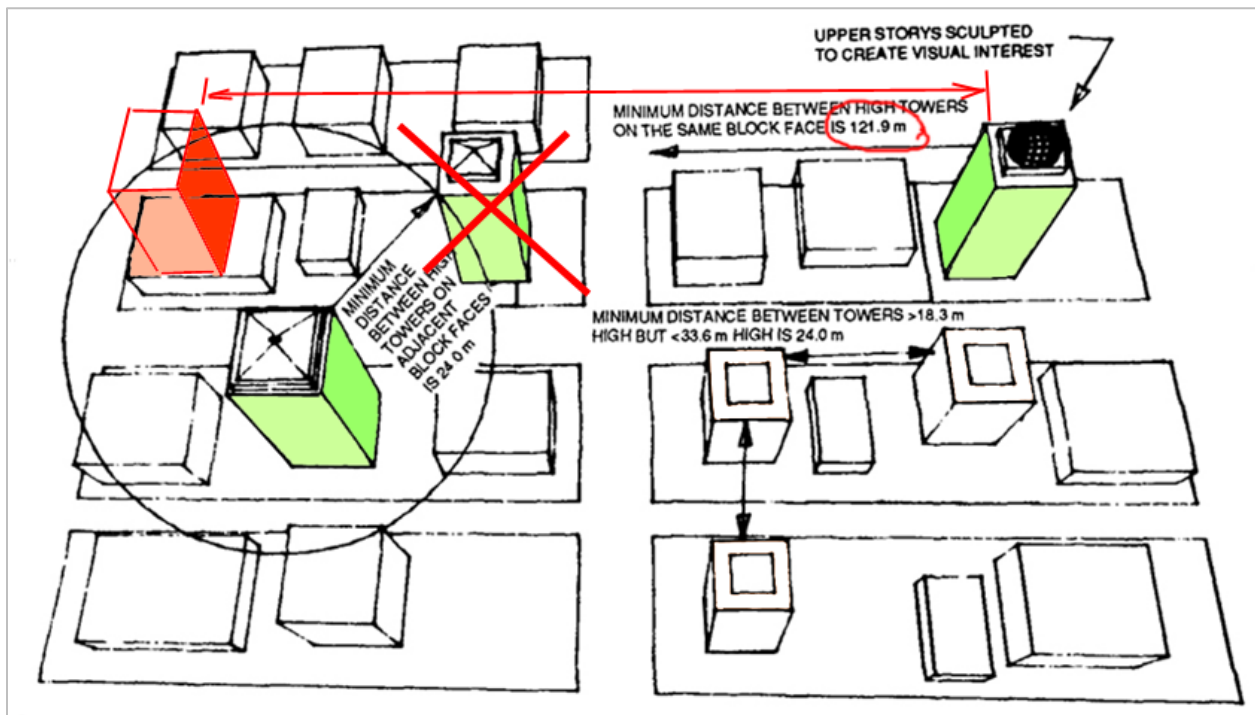


Figure 8.38: New tower spacing rules from 1989 West End guidelines ( City Vancouver , 1989, 11; color added by Robert Walsh) Green shows existing towers; red tower added to show actual impact of the new guidelines.

A diagram included in the guidelines to illustrate the new tower spacing requirements appears to suggest that the spacing between The Sylvia and Eugenia Place may have been the original basis for the spacing guideline. As depicted in the illustration the allowable tower spacing measures approximately 250 feet between Towers, while Eugenia Place and the Sylvia are separated by a distance of approximately 252 feet<sup>14</sup>. However, the adopted tower spacing requirement is substantially wider than this, at 121.9 meters or approximately 400 feet. Why this expanded dimension was adopted is not entirely clear,<sup>15</sup> but its impact was significant. In order to build a residential tower 50 wide a developer would need to find an available site between two existing towers separated by a distance of at least 550 feet if the standard portrayed in the illustration is used. However increasing the separation between towers to 400 feet on each side has a net effect of needing to find an available lot between two towers separated by at least 850 feet. Because of the existing pattern of development in the West End, where a typical city block might have a total length of 400 feet, there were very few available building sites that could be developed under the new standard. In practical terms other intervening factors such as home owners reluctant to sell would have reduced the number of potential sites even further. Henriquez's tower at 1277 Nelson appears to have been one of the very few new towers which the new standard permitted (see figure 8. 43).<sup>16</sup> Effectively, the new regulation radically curtailed further high rise development in the West End, even though the same document appeared to be concerned with promoting high rise development along specific morphological lines in the West End.

Despite severely curtailing further high rise construction in the West End, the 1989 guidelines nevertheless had a different positive impact on the West End. The new rules altered the basic economic dynamic that had been contributing to a widespread problem of building deterioration, arising from deferred maintenance. A large percentage of the properties throughout the West End were closer than 400 feet to an existing high rise. By establishing a new principle that limited development of new towers to a distance greater than 400 feet from existing towers, in most cases it was no longer reasonable to let a building fall into disrepair, expecting to sell the land to

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<sup>14</sup> Measurement made using Vanmaps open source software available through the City of Vancouver.

<sup>15</sup> One possibility is that the standard was changed after the drawing was completed, or after Ray Spaxman left the planning department in March 1989.

<sup>16</sup> I have not determined the date by which 1277 Nelson received its building permit, which is the critical date in terms of compliance with changing zoning standards, not the date of construction completion. For example the Presidio, completed in 1992, but was designed in 1989 and appears to have been approved by the City before the 1989 rules were adopted, while 1277 Nelson, complete in 1994 may or may not have been subjected to these guidelines as a condition of approval.

a high rise developer. Instead, owners of low rise apartment buildings came to quickly understand that their best course of action was now to maintain and even improve the existing housing stock, to thereby maintain the rental income they were already getting. As a result, the problem of derelict buildings abated and the visible quality of the entire West End streetscape began to improve.

By having shown a developed appreciation for the positive features of residential high rises, the City Planners in Vancouver in the 1989 guidelines had sent a strong signal to developers that the residential high rise could once again be a viable development approach they would be willing to consider. This change in attitude would prove especially significant as development activity now shifted towards redeveloping the industrial lands at False Creek, Coal Harbor and the downtown warehouse district of Yaletown, adjacent to the North Shore property. Indeed the effort to simultaneously praise the new residential high rises of the West End while imposing restrictions that curtailed their further development there, can be interpreted as an effort by the City to redirect the attention of developers to these other underutilized areas of the City.

## **8.6 Conclusion:**

All four of Richard Henriquez West End towers were point towers, not slab towers and this seems significant in terms of the eventual development of Vancouver's unique form of high rise urbanism. Although developers had previously tried to develop large slab based apartment projects at Harbour Park, Project 200 and eventual at the Marathon Property at False Creek, the future of Vancouver would be based upon the widespread and inventive use of the point tower. Also significant in the work of Richard Henriquez was his transformation of the way the residential high rise meets the ground and addresses the public at street level, a principle that in some respects was then taken further by other architects, including Paul Merrick. And finally, by reconnecting the residential high rise to the local story of each site and the larger story of the early tall structures of Vancouver, Henriquez pointed the way towards a reengagement of local architecture through intensified experience of particular places and local history, resulting in an architecture that is uniquely well suited to particular sites in Vancouver.

During the time frame in which Richard Henriquez was reinventing the residential high rise in the West End, efforts were continuing to be made to develop the land on the North Shore of



False Creek. Although Richard Henriquez also had a hand in some of this work, his work there was less directly central to larger urban plans that would transform this portion of the City. One reason for this may be that Henriquez has stressed a lack of interest in designing tower groups, preferring instead to focus his attention on the creation of his singularly unique structures (Henriquez 2006). Accordingly, Henriquez has contributed well designed and unique structures that are part of the overall mix at Concord Pacific Place and Coal Harbor, the two Vancouver mega projects that began to take shape in the early 1990's.

It would be at the North Shore of False Creek that the combination of the residential point tower and the low rise pedestrian friendly streetscape would finally become integrated into the distinctive form of urbanism now known as Vancouverism. How this transpired is the focus of the next chapter. Prior to Henriquez's work in the West End, Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies had proposed ambitious and impressive plans for redeveloping the North Shore of False Creek first using point towers, and later a mixture of slab towers and point towers, only to have these schemes shot down due to entrenched public opposition. This opposition continued to linger until the time that Henriquez began producing his ground breaking West End towers. One critical outcome of the West End Towers of Richard Henriquez appears to have been a restored public interest in the use of residential high rise point towers, enabling them to become one of the defining characteristics of the urban landscape of Vancouver.

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## Chapter 9: Vancouverism: architecture, planning and urbanism

### 9.1 Introduction: the five essential elements of Vancouverism: a review of development

In Chapter 1 Vancouverism was described as being a form of urbanism characterized by a combination of five essential urban and architectural elements. Ensueing chapters have examined how many of these elements were first introduced into the building culture of Vancouver BC, through a process that spanned many decades. This chapter and the next concern the final steps in this process, involving the addition of a final urban element, *outdoor urban rooms*, and then combining all five elements together, resulting in a new synthesis. Before examining the complex process by which the different elements of Vancouverism came together to produce something more than the sum of its parts, it will first be helpful to review the steps already taken towards the development the elements of Vancouverism.

#### Active Urban Landscape



Figure 9.1: Active Urban Landscape: at left George Wainborn Park at Concord Pacific Place; at right waterfront recreation and street trees in the West End at English Bay (Robert Walsh).

The first element of Vancouverism to be introduced into the building culture of Vancouver was the collection of sub elements grouped under the heading of active urban landscape, including: street trees, the parks system, the waterfront promenade, and the furnishing of public spaces with

benches, fountains and public art (see figure 9.1). This urban element was first introduced into the planning, design and development of Vancouver by Thomas Mawson during his work in Vancouver from 1912 - 1913, in lectures and design projects. Mawson encouraged an attitude toward public space serving the needs of all members of society. Although implementation of many of his proposals were ultimately curtailed by the great depression, variations on the concept of the “lovable city” advocated by Mawson nevertheless continued to find renewed expression in Vancouver in a variety of different forms, as did his approach to a pedestrian-oriented, experientially driven planning. Neighborliness and livability can be thought of as restatements of the basic attitude Mawson brought to Vancouver. The principles underlying the active urban landscape element of Vancouverism were later rekindled by Harland Bartholomew, and again by Ron Walkey and Ray Spaxman, and eventually others, sustaining an interest in the shaping of public space in Vancouver for the benefit of all.

### Spaced Point Towers

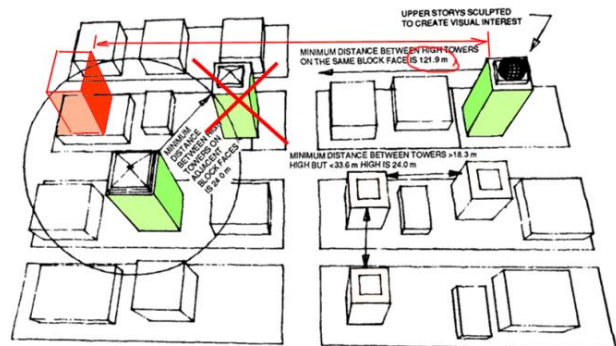
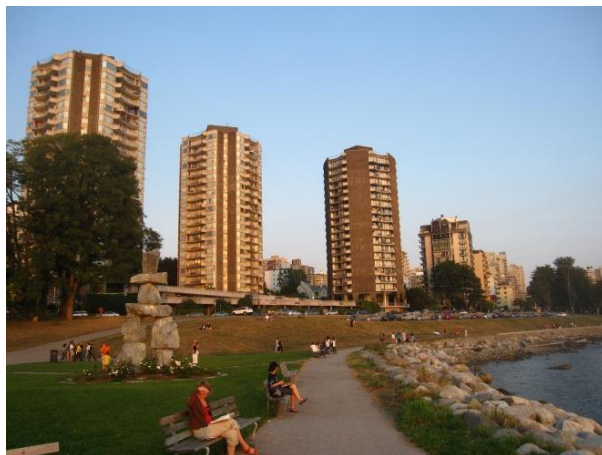


Figure 9.2: Beach Towers development in the West End (Robert Walsh), tower spacing from the 1989 West End Guidelines (City of Vancouver September 26, 1989, color by Robert Walsh).

The second essential element of Vancouverism to emerge was the spaced point tower, beginning during the wave of residential high rise construction that transformed the West End from 1956-1973. These modernist high rises were not originally limited to point towers, but also included a significant number of slab towers, and slab towers continued to be perceived as a viable option in Vancouver. Slab towers featured prominently in major project proposals at Harbour Park, Project 200 and at the Marathon Property at False Creek. Because these projects remained unbuilt, with the exception of a single tower built for Project 200, the possibility that Vancouver could have

developed a skyline dominated by slab towers has largely been overlooked. However, point towers had nevertheless achieved a strong foothold in the West End, as seen in the following image of the Beach Towers development by CBK Van Norman (see figure 9.2). After an extended hiatus in residential high rise construction, architect Richard Henriquez played a significant role in the reintroduction of residential high rises in to the West End, though the design and development of four new point towers.

### **Row House Enclaves**

While row housing dates back to the earliest days of Vancouver, the particular form that it has come to take today derives from the work of Ron Walkey, and Paul Merrick of the False Creek Study Group (FCSG), and the patterns devised to guide the development of the South Shore of False Creek (see figure 9.3). The success of this element defied initial expectations; the protected central space within was less responsible for its ultimate success than was the adjacent public streetscape it created. Even though the inner courtyard space did not result in a thriving center of social activity as had been expected, this configuration nevertheless improves daylight access to the townhouse units. Meanwhile, the ability of row houses to frame a comfortable streetscape is one reason that these enclaves are now constructed in Vancouver; another reason is their perceived family friendly character has helped to support a more diverse urban population.



Figure 9.3: Row house enclave at the South Shore of False Creek (Google 360 Panorama).

### **Protected Public Views**

The set of rules protecting public views in Vancouver is an important element of the urban form of Vancouver that impacts the city in two fundamental ways. First of all, by establishing an

overall development envelope related to the protection of public access to natural scenic views, the city has defined an upper limit to building height that protects public interests even in a system that otherwise takes a flexible approach to height and development density. In essence this means that buildings are allowed to go taller only in locations where their apparent impact on public space is minimal. The second significant way that the protected views have impacted the form of the city is that they have increased, perhaps by accident, the extent to which building occupants in the new towers also enjoy protected access to views. Although the development potential of any parcel of land might be in theory restricted by the imposition of the view protection measures, in terms of not having the capacity to go as tall as developers might want, the corresponding benefit of being able to develop apartment units assured of continued access to scenic views represents a counterbalancing advantage.

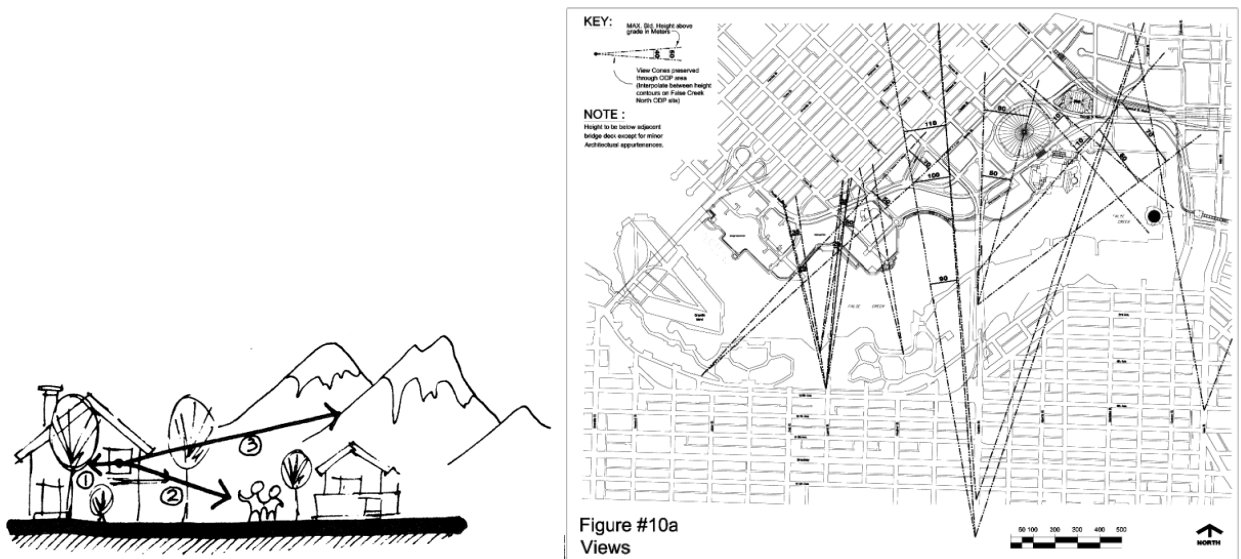


Figure 9.4: Protected views in principle and in practice (FCSG, 1972; City of Vancouver, 1989).

Like other urban elements of Vancouverism, the basic concept of Protected Public Views was introduced before the methods for achieving this outcome were developed. The first step towards making this an operational principle in Vancouver was the development of a pattern by Ron Walkey, recognizing the desirability of maintaining access to three types of view: local, intermediate and distant. This understanding contributed to the establishment of planning ordinances that repeatedly refined the form that this protection has taken, resulting eventually in a three dimensional model (see figure 9.4).



## **Outdoor Urban Rooms**

This final element addresses the particular manner in which point towers and row house enclaves are combined to produce a new urban streetscape at the city block level, and how these city blocks are then grouped together in local clusters resulting in identifiable urban neighborhoods. This element is different from the prior four in that it draws from and combines the other elements previously introduced into the building culture of Vancouver, at the same time producing something new. The Outdoor Urban Rooms element represents a synthesis that defines Vancouverism itself; how this synthesis took place, how the other elements were combined to result in Vancouverism, is the focus of this chapter. Chapter 10 examines how this new synthesis was then further refined and implemented.

### **9.2 Two competing agendas that defined Vancouverism**

The events covered in this chapter encompass the generally neglected events during which the elements of Vancouverism coalesced, finally resulting in a new urban design and development approach that would many years later become known as Vancouverism. Vancouver today is a city where Planners and developers continue to jockey for position and try to each gain the upper hand, in a process that typically also features a fair amount of negotiation and cooperation. Planners today have become quite skilled at listening to and articulating and developing plans that reflect community interests and those who do not, do not last long. Problems still exist when developer profits come up against community interests but both sides also seem to recognize the value of having a planning agenda and a development agenda that are at least attempting to move in the same general direction. Current conditions however do not reflect the conditions that existed during the crucial period during which Vancouverism itself emerged. Instead the two agendas had become far more polarized.

One difficulty presented in addressing this material is that it is neither straight forward, nor entirely pleasant, yet examining this situation in some detail is necessary because it is only through looking closely and carefully at all sides of this development process that a useful and more accurate picture emerges. Related to this is the bias that exists in many of the most popular sources to examine this material, which have tended to portray Vancouverism as something that arose through the active engagement and masterful urban design prowess of the Vancouver

Planning Department, creating the false impression that Vancouverism is something that was primarily achieved by the planners (Macdonald, 2008; Punter, 2003). Instead, as this chapter will show, the role of the city planners in the actual invention of Vancouverism, in the creative process that produced a new synthesis was at best tangential, and at worst obstructionist.

This is not to say that the role of city planning in Vancouver has been entirely negative or ineffective; to the contrary, as prior chapters have shown, their work has been absolutely essential in facilitating the development of the elements of Vancouverism. Furthermore, city planning would eventually be reenergized under the emerging leadership of Larry Beasley, who would play an essential role in the successful implementation of Vancouverism. However at the critical juncture considered in this chapter, during which Vancouverism itself was effectively invented, the role of the city planners cannot accurately be said to have been a major positive contributing factor. If anything, the planners attempted to prevent it from happening and managed to delay the implementation of Vancouverism by almost a decade.

The events described in previous chapters showed how the planning culture of Vancouver had functioned as advocates for developer interests under the leadership of Gerald Sutton Brown, only to radically shift towards a more neighborly, community centered approach through the efforts of Ray Spaxman and the TEAM party. As happened with Harbour Park, Project 200 and the Marathon development at False Creek, public opposition to large scale development became quite effective at stopping projects in Vancouver; under Ray Spaxman, planning had adopted a demanding and frequently restrictive approach towards private large scale development, using the power to block approvals as a means to force necessary or desirable design changes to major proposals (Hatch, 1989). This dynamic, however, changed radically with the involvement of the Provincial Government at False Creek, because the BC government attempted to simultaneously take on both roles: advocating for the public good and acting as real estate developers at False Creek. The Province politely but firmly would utilize an approach that threatened to make the Vancouver planners functionally irrelevant. Had this extreme approach not been taken, Vancouverism might never have been invented. Perhaps one reason that the origin of Vancouverism has remained obscure for so long is that its invention was mired in conflict.

### 9.3 The Province of British Columbia at False Creek: the Arthur Erickson Plan of 1974



Figure 9.5: Detail: Arthur Erickson False Creek plan for Province of BC (Erickson, 1974).

The involvement of the Province in master planning at False Creek begins in 1974. As a land owner of a modest size parcel at the north east end of False Creek, the Province of British Columbia had long held an interest in the rehabilitation of the False Creek basin, a view further reinforced by the perception that a revitalized False Creek would be good for both Vancouver and for the Province especially from an economic perspective. In 1974, while development proceeded along the South Shore of False Creek and Marathon Realty continued to try to implement their master plan at the North Shore of False Creek, the Province of British Columbia commissioned Arthur Erickson to prepare a visionary plan for rehabilitating the neglected eastern end of False Creek (see figures 9.5, 9.6).

In his 1974 plan, Arthur Erickson proposed the restoration of a water connection to Chinatown, replacing an unused section of recent landfill with a new freshwater lake and remaking this abandoned territory into the centerpiece of a revitalized cultural and commercial district. In recognizing that the former waterway had once been home to a fleet of commercial fishing vessels, Erickson appears to have been attempting to reconnect this portion of Vancouver with its history, anticipating the clean up of False Creek that would eventually make it fit for recreational use (see figures 9.7 and 9.8) (Erickson, 1974).

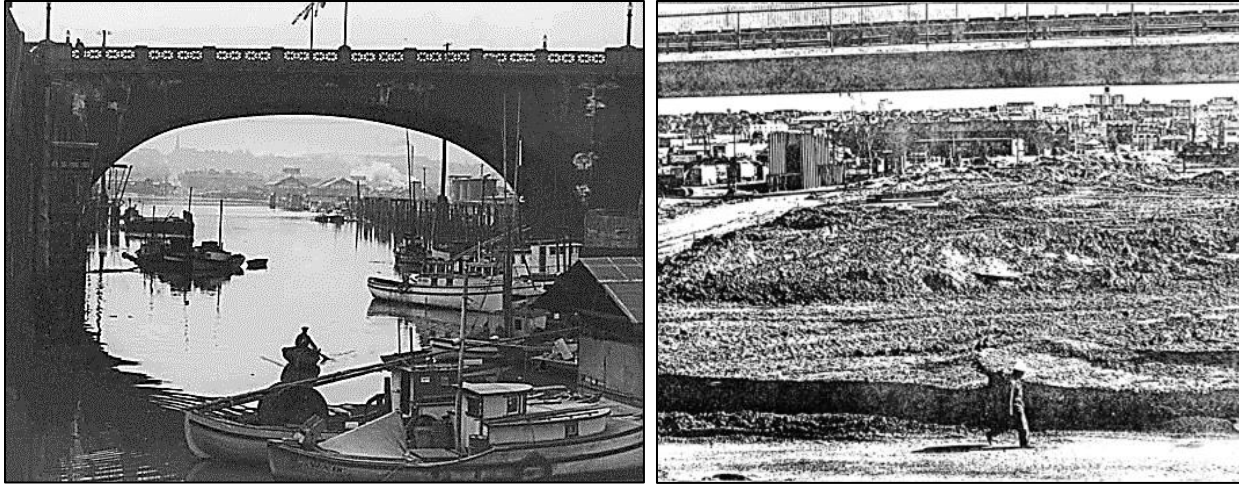


Figure 9.6: False Creek at Chinatown: left image from 1939 (City of Vancouver Archives), and right image as the same area appeared in 1974 (Erickson, 1974).

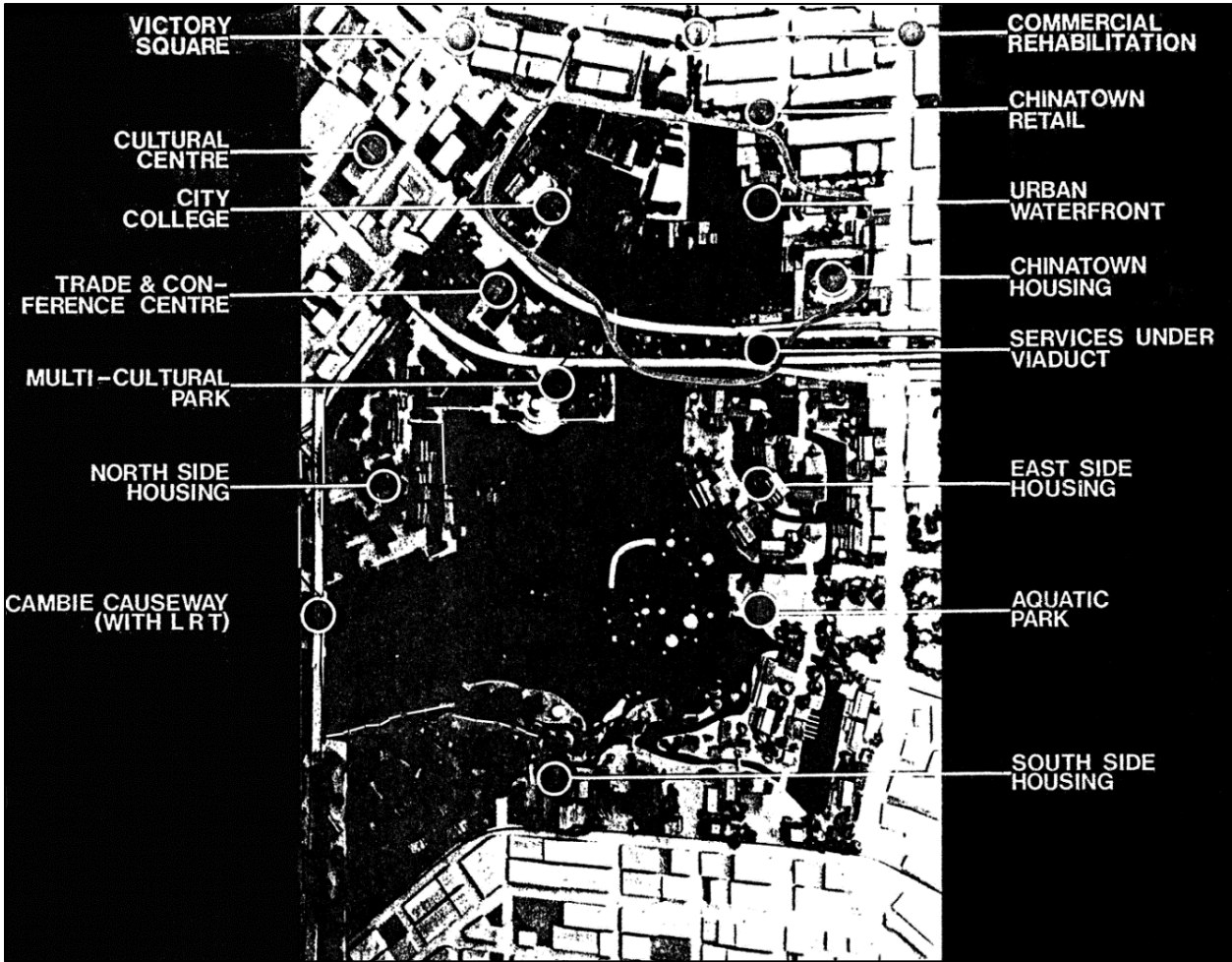


Figure 9.7: Project Program: Arthur Erickson False Creek Plan (Erickson, 1974).



Erickson's plan for the East End of False Creek was important for stimulating interest in the rehabilitation of False Creek and for framing this project as a multifaceted development initiative.<sup>1</sup> Erickson proposed redefining and expanding the range of possible functions to include: a light rail transit system, a cultural center, a trade and conference center, a college campus, and of course, housing. These features differentiate this plan from earlier efforts by Marathon Realty at the North Shore of False Creek (Kiss, 1969, 1971) and also the work of the False Creek Study Group (FCSG, 1971, 1972) at the South Shore.

Arthur Erickson's 1974 plan represents the first attempt to pursue the redevelopment of part of False Creek as an actual cultural and commercial destination, as a center of urban life at the heart of Vancouver. The idea of expanding the role of False Creek in Vancouver, and the suggestion that the Province might have a hand in this process of major urban revitalization would prove highly influential (Erickson, 1974).

### **The sale of the Marathon lands at False Creek and the promise of Expo 86**

In 1972 the administration of WAC (aka Wacky) Bennett, the longest serving Premier in British Columbia's history, came to an end after two decades in office. After a brief three year period of a provincial government by the New Democratic Party (NDP) of British Columbia, in 1975 Bennett's old party the Social Credit Party (or Socreds) returned to power, this time under the leadership of his son, Bill Bennett (Barman, 2007). This political change perhaps explains why nothing concrete directly resulted from the 1974 Erickson scheme for False Creek; having been completed during the short lived NDP administration the plan was not of interest to the Socreds when they returned to power. Or rather the Socreds had no interest in giving credit to the opposition for the idea of rehabilitating False Creek.

Faced with a sluggish economy and perhaps having a desire to emerge from the long shadow cast by his legendary father, the prospect of initiating a major project at False Creek, however, soon began to appeal to Bill Bennett. Meanwhile conditions were changing, creating the opportunity to pursue a greatly enlarged project there. Marathon Realty seemed to be faltering in its ability to develop its large tract of land at the North Shore, and if the Province could acquire this land, the

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<sup>1</sup> Erickson's decision to convert the restored portion of False Creek in his proposal into a freshwater lake appears similar in some respects to the Yale Lake proposed by Zoltan Kiss at the edge of False Creek in his Marathon Proposals. In both cases the designers wanted to make the waterfront of False Creek safe for public recreation, at a time when it was hard to imagine a badly polluted False Creek becoming clean enough to sustain such a usage.

opportunity for an expanded role for the BC government in transforming a substantially larger portion of the land along False Creek would soon be within reach (Barman, 2007; Williamson, February 1980).

Even before the Marathon Property could be acquired, a dramatic two stage plan began to take shape, beginning with a world exposition to be followed by a massive urban redevelopment program, both to be overseen by the Province. Anticipating the impending dual centennials in 1986 of the founding of Vancouver, and of the completion of the Canada Pacific Railway, Canada's first transcontinental railway, Bill Bennett saw a major exposition as an opportunity to not just host a major public spectacle, but also as an opportunity to engage in major public works projects helping to revitalize Vancouver in the long term (Barman, 2007; Piton, 1981).

This first stage of the plan involved hosting Expo 86; the second stage featured a large scale urban redevelopment project encompassing the Expo site and adjacent property. Once the exposition closed, the plan was to reuse the Expo infrastructure of streets, utilities and elevated commuter railway as the basic armature around which to redevelop the former industrial lands at False Creek into a thriving residential, commercial and cultural district. These plans also included a new sports stadium capable of attracting one or more major sports franchises to the city (Williamson, January 30, 1980).

In 1978 Bill Bennett's cabinet minister Sam Bawlf commissioned Vancouver architects Rhone and Iredale to devise a master plan for the North Shore of False Creek, and a site for the 86 expo that could then become the basis for the redevelopment of this portion of the city for commercial and residential purposes (see figure 9.8) (Barman, 2007; Clarke, 1978; Iredale, 2008).

The Rhone and Iredale plan features include: a new stadium and sports center, a Chinese cultural center, an exhibition hall, convention facilities, a new parkway with light rail train line, three new hotels - including one hotel on the waterfront, and the expansion of False Creek waterway up to the edge of Chinatown. The design features five canals aligned with the existing street grid, with land on each side to be used as the site for exhibition pavilions, and then subsequently converted to commercial and residential uses after the end of the 1986 exhibition. The plan also features the preservation of the 1888 railroad roundhouse, which was to be converted into a museum, shown in the plan as being flanked by the proposed new parkway (Iredale, 2008).

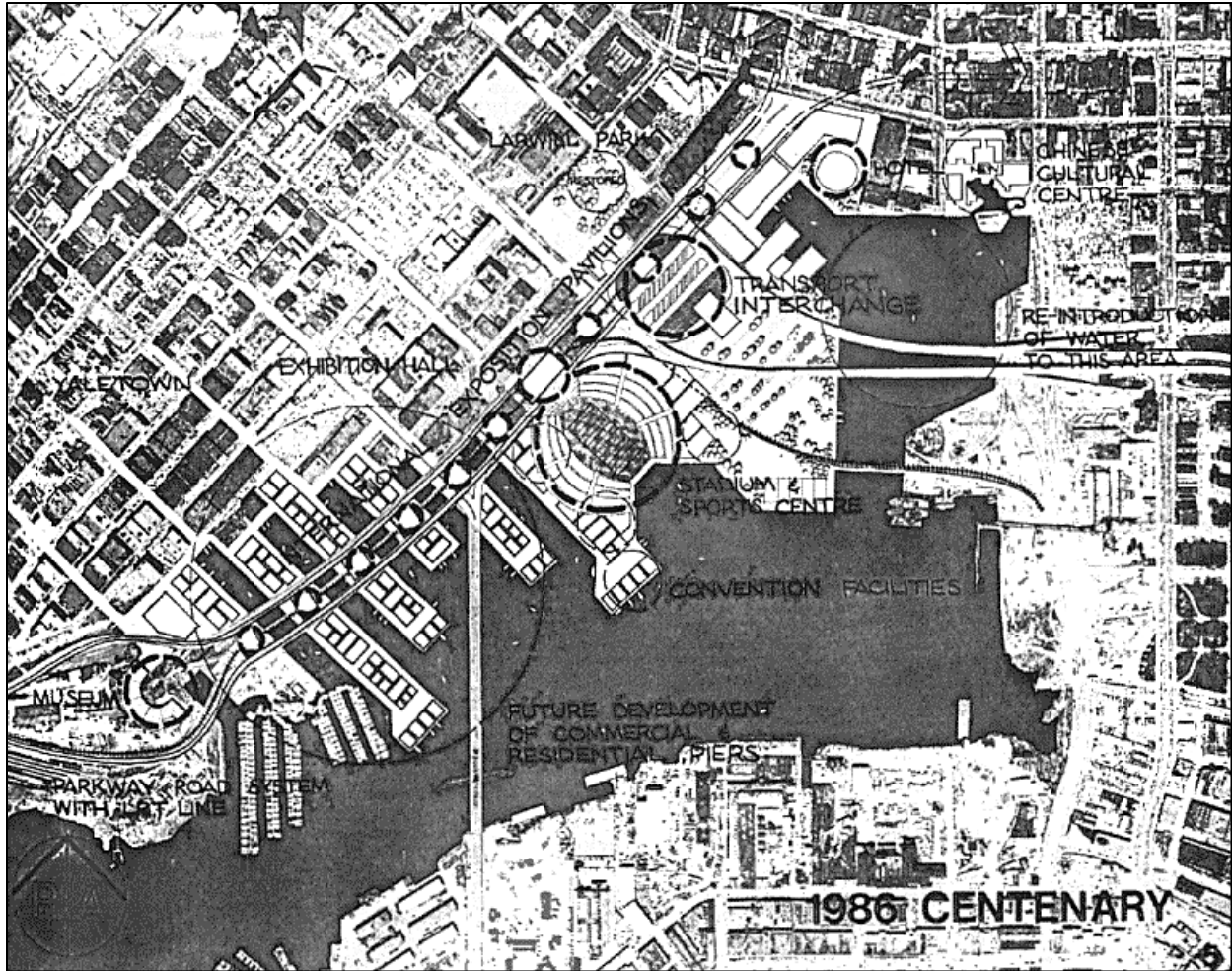


Figure 9.8: 1978 Rhone and Iredale Plan for False Creek (Iredale, 2008, 203).

Two significant outcomes resulted from the 1978 Rhone and Iredale plan for False Creek. First of all the government of British Columbia decided to move forward on the massive project, at least in principle, and promptly began taking action to make the Expo a reality. This would result in the acquisition of the Marathon Realty site, finalized in 1980. The second major outcome to arise from the Rhone and Iredale plan would be the design and construction of a new 60,000 seat stadium which now occupies the site originally recommended by Rhone and Iredale for just such a stadium. The remainder of the larger urban plan proposed by Rhone and Iredale however, would not be implemented as drawn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The most informative source on the life and work of Randle Iredale, a partner in Rhone and Iredale, is a substantial volume written by his wife Kathryn Iredale, as a tribute to her late husband. While this source is comprehensive in scope and profusely illustrated, its conclusions regarding some aspects of the work of Rand Iredale should be regarded with a measure of caution, due to a tendency to apparently offer overly generous interpretations of the significance of his work. For example, Kathryn Iredale appears to claim that the entire concept of hosting a major

Despite the comprehensive study which Rhone and Iredale produced in the interests of developing their ambitious scheme, the design did not become the basis for the development of the land that would come to be known as “the expo lands.” This was also the last time the Province would pursue both stages of its ambitious plan through a single comprehensive design. Instead British Columbia established several Crown corporations in order to first mount the exposition known as Expo 86, and then to develop the property with long term use in mind. These crown corporations chose to start over on all aspects of the design, with the exception of the stadium, which was kept in the original location suggested by Rhone and Iredale, but reoriented and redesigned. Reasons why the Rhone and Iredale scheme was not pursued, or why the services of Rhone and Iredale were no longer needed are unclear, yet one factor may well have been Randle Iredale’s own disconcerting portrayal of the project itself, in a report where he appears to suggest that, as designed, the project might prove unbuildable:

This study shows that while *there may be insurmountable difficulties* in bringing such a plan to fruition, it has the potential to contribute in many vital ways to Vancouver’s next hundred years of being a city worthy of its site, worthy of its history, worthy of its people.

- Rhone and Iredale, 1978, 2.<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added).

While Rand Iredale appears to be attempting to express a certain sense of pragmatism, perhaps tempered by a degree of modesty mixed with grandiosity, in evaluating his own urban design proposal in this manner, it is easy to see that this comment might not be well received by the politicians who had commissioned this work. It had the potential to make for very bad press. Bill Bennett was interested in making an immediate impact, at a time when the economy was struggling and a major public works project was seen as potentially beneficial due to the jobs it would create and the outside capital it would attract through tourism. To then be told by his own

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Expo 1986 originally was proposed by her late husband and then subsequently embraced by politicians in the Provincial Government. She basis this claim apparently on the enthusiasm of Rand Iredale for the False Creek design proposal, which was commissioned before permission for the Exposition was finally attained in 1980 (Iredale 2008, 195-205). The problem with this claim is that the 86 Expo was originally proposed by the government for a different site, an existing fairground at the North East corner of Vancouver, named Pacific National Exhibition (PNE). It was only after this option was evaluated and rejected by the government that attention shifted to False Creek and Rhone and Iredale were brought in to prepare a master plan. The Province of BC clearly was interested in pursuing the exhibition well before it settled on the False Creek site.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Iredale attributes this statement specifically to her late husband Rand Iredale, quoting it verbatim not once but twice, first on page 199 and again on page 204. In allowing this attribution to stand I nevertheless recognize that these might have been the words of Bill Rhone, the long term business partner of Randle Iredale and the co-author of the report in which these remarks first appeared in 1978 (Iredale 2008).



architect, in a written public statement no less, that the scheme embodied potentially “insurmountable difficulties,” would easily provoke doubts, especially doubts about the competence of the architect.

In 1978 Vancouver faced more urgent concerns than wondering how it would be viewed in one hundred years’ time, and even if these concerns might not have registered with Randle Iredale they would have troubled Bill Bennett. Vancouver had been a growing city with an increasing population throughout its entire history, until 1971, when the population of Vancouver actually began to decline. By 1976 the population of Vancouver had declined by 3.8% (statscanada.ca), and while this trend had begun to reverse by 1982, with Vancouver experiencing a growth of 1.0% between 1976 and 1982, this meant that the population of Vancouver had still declined by nearly 3% over the decade spanning from 1971 to 1981. In comparison, the population growth of the entire metropolitan region, including Vancouver, from 1971 to 1981 increased by 13.8% (www.statscanada.ca). The concern that Harland Bartholomew had previously expressed that the city was at risk of entering a period of slow decline by losing population to the surrounding suburbs via the automobile, though delayed, seemed to be perhaps finally coming true. (Bartholomew, 1944). Facing these realities it is understandable that Bill Bennett chose to continue the project, but under different designers able to inspire more confidence.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Cumberland Realty Group Plan of 1980**

After negotiating a land swap in 1980 with Marathon Realty that gave the Province of British Columbia ownership of the vast tract of land along the North Shore of False Creek, the next step was to redefine the project in a way that would confirm that the project was indeed feasible. After dropping the Rhone and Iredale Plan, BC Place Ltd, the Crown corporation set up by the Province to implement the long term redevelopment, hired the real estate analysis firm Cumberland Realty to prepare a comprehensive feasibility study (see figures 9.9 and 9.10).

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<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps useful to also understand that Bill Bennett was pursuing other development initiatives and public works projects at this time elsewhere in British Columbia, including work on new roadways connecting to the remote interior of the Province and work on other public facilities. These projects were motivated by a desire to boost a sluggish economy through government stimulus, a strategy that provoked opposition who instead believed that government austerity was the answer. Other critics argued that Bennett pursued the Expo Project purely as a vehicle for busting labor unions, a view supported by protracted disputes and work stoppages that arose from the use of non-union labor to construct the expo grounds (Barman, 2007). As a result, Bill Bennett was managing to cultivate opposition from both those who opposed his ambitious plans to create jobs, and from those whom he saw as potentially benefiting directly from the creation of new jobs. The political environment surrounding the continued effort to redevelop False Creek was therefore complex and strained.

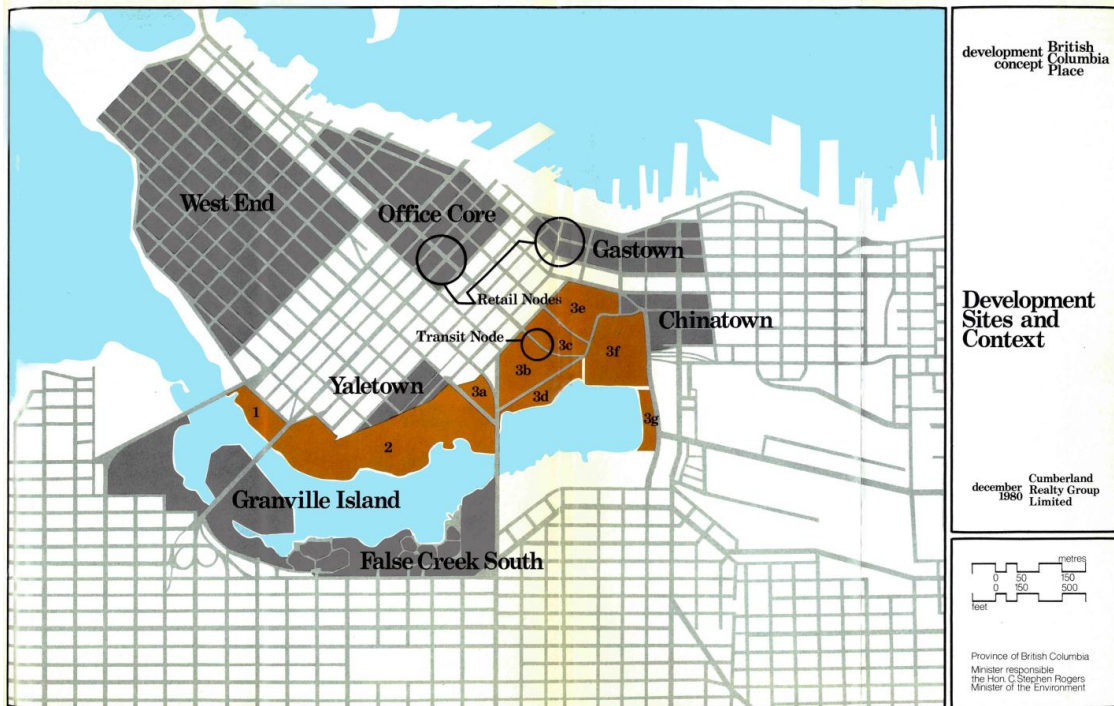


Figure 9.9: Development Sites and Context: BC Place (Cumberland Realty, 1980, appendix).

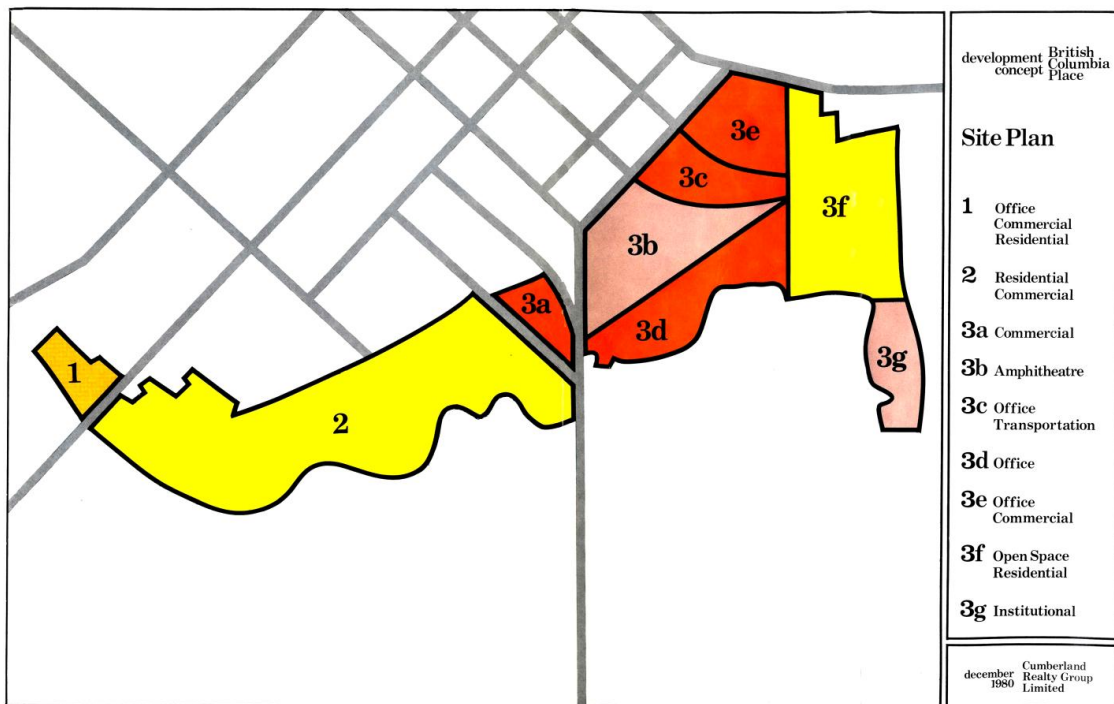


Figure 9.10: Development Concept site plan BC Place (Cumberland Realty, 1980, appendix).

The Cumberland Realty plan, while diagrammatic in character, nevertheless established several precedents that have had a lasting impact on subsequent development at False Creek. Instead of

radically changing the configuration of False Creek, the location of proposed future uses relates clearly to existing conditions, without requiring major changes to the outline of False Creek. Establishing this less ambitious, more manageable direction meant that the new stadium was able to proceed rapidly, even though development plans for the Expo itself had yet to be resolved.

The Cumberland Realty Plan succeeded in defining a workable framework for the Expo and then also for the subsequent urban redevelopment scheme intended to replace it. It cannot be considered an actual urban design, however, instead representing a fresh starting point that other designers would then develop further. Having a clear, yet simple framework enabled the Provincial Government to divide the work of the Expo and the redevelopment into separate projects. For the design of Expo 86, Vancouver architect Bruno Freschi was hired as the main designer. To develop the plans for the permanent redevelopment of the Expo Grounds, BC Place Ltd. hired five local architecture firms, all of whom had prior experience working on the development of the South Shore of False Creek.

The 1980 Cumberland Realty plan also reflects the extent to which the redevelopment proposal for the North Shore of False Creek had been further expanded, encompassing a larger area than the original Marathon Proposal of Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies, adding land at the northern and eastern end of False Creek. The plan also abandoned any attempt at reviving a water connection linking Chinatown and False Creek, an influential decision that defined how this issue was eventually handled (Erickson, 1974; Kiss, 1969, 1971).

### **Tensions develop between City and Province**

From the outset tensions between the municipal and provincial governments began to mount, at least between officials at the highest levels; somewhat offsetting this, subordinates on both sides found they were able to cooperate and collaborate in pursuit of common interests.<sup>5</sup> The source of this tension appears to have come from both sides. Although efforts were taken to bridge the

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<sup>5</sup> For this assessment I am relying, in part upon information communicated in a recent conversation with BC Place Ltd, former Planning Director David Podmore. Mr. Podmore is now the CEO of Pavco, the crown corporation that had previously been BC Place Ltd. While his insight into the development process at False Creek was extremely helpful, many of the points he raised can also be confirmed independently through the numerous newspaper articles dating to this time, and so I have tended to cite these published sources, wherever possible. One aspect of this entire situation that has not been made explicit in the printed record but which Mr. Podmore made abundantly clear in our discussion was that the people working for BC Place Ltd. were sincerely interested in the well-being of the Vancouver community, a point that seems at times to have been lost on some Vancouver residents, perhaps as a result of lingering distrust of prior redevelopment efforts in the East End.

ensuing divide, the consequences of early misunderstandings would continue to linger and periodically resurface.

An early indication of the rocky path that lay ahead appeared in July of 1979, when the Province of British Columbia formally applied for permission to host the 86 Expo with the International Bureau of Expositions (IBE), the international body responsible for granting permissions to mount major world expositions. While the the delegation that the Province sent to Paris to present their bid for the 86 Expo made a fine presentation, what was unexpected was that Michael Harcourt also appeared before the IBE to argue *against* allowing the expo to take place in his city! At the time Harcourt was a member of the Vancouver City Council, a position he had held since the pivotal TEAM election of 1972. He was planning to run for Mayor the following year (Williamson, November 14,1980).

Sixteen months later, in November of 1980 the IBE finally reached a unanimous decision in favor of the 86 Expo taking place in Vancouver. Meanwhile, Mike Harcourt was busy campaigning for Mayor of Vancouver and his opposition to the Expo was one of the defining planks of his campaign platform. Amongst other issues, Harcourt had expressed concern over an agreement with the Province that made the City of Vancouver financially responsible for 25% of any Expo cost overruns, for an event which had not been initiated by the city and over which it exerted only marginal control.<sup>6</sup> Although campaigning for Mayor not as a member of TEAM, but as an independent, Harcourt nevertheless understood where his base of support was in Vancouver. The municipal election was held in November of 1980, and when the votes were all tallied, Mike Harcourt had become the new Mayor of Vancouver, a position he would continue to hold for the next six years throughout the planning, construction and hosting of Expo 86 (Clarke, November 15, 1980, November 22, 1980; The Globe and Mail, December 9, 1980).

To his credit Mike Harcourt reconsidered his earlier opposition to Expo 86, and would eventually become an enthusiastic supporter (Harcourt, 1984). At the same time he continued to advocate on behalf of the local citizens of Vancouver, attempting to find workable solutions to difficult problems that emerged as the Expo development process moved forward. Perhaps the most significant conflict to erupt during the entire process of hosting the Expo concerned the

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<sup>6</sup> The financial losses incurred by other cities that had chosen to host major Expos, such as Expo 67 in Montreal made this a legitimate cause for concern.



treatment of poor and elderly residents facing eviction from nearby single residency hotels that were preparing to serve as housing for Expo visitors (Olds, 1998)<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless these problems were much smaller in scope than the threatened demolition of the entire Strathcona District had been. Most of the Expo related work included improving semi-abandoned and badly polluted industrial land and converting this to new uses that were intended to increase the availability of affordable housing. While Harcourt may have had a negative impression of large scale development dating back to the beginning of his career as a lawyer for the opposition to the Strathcona redevelopment effort and also the freeway effort, as Mayor his stance towards development appears to have become more nuanced as the Expo project moved forward.<sup>8</sup>

While Mike Harcourt might appear to have made a mistep in opposing Expo 86, admittedly he succeeded in achieving his objective of winning the Mayor's race. As might be expected, this ended up provoking tension between the municipal government of Vancouver and the representatives of the Provincial government. Tension would also later arise due to actions of the Provincial government targeted towards their larger constituency, of which the residents of Vancouver made up only a fraction.

### **The Stadium**

The first concrete step taken towards the redevelopment BC Place was the design and construction of the new stadium, at the location originally recommended by Randle Iredale in his 1978 Plan. By 1980 Bill Bennett had ceased referring to Iredale in reference to the proposed stadium and its location, instead portraying the stadium as his own idea (Barman 2007). Modifications to the original design included rotating the structure 90 degrees from its original orientation, making the previously rounded plan more rectangular and then adding an inflatable roof, making this the first domed stadium built in Canada (see figure 9.11).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This situation became a serious problem when an elderly resident facing eviction chose to commit suicide in an act of protest over the eviction (Olds, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Harcourt's early opposition to the Expo was not forgotten or completely forgiven; when the day came for the Gala opening of Expo 86 on May 2, 1986, an event where Prince Charles and Princess Diana were the guests of honor, Mayor Michael Harcourt discovered that his name had been omitted quite intentionally from the guest list by the Provincial authorities running the event (Barman, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> These comments are also informed by a discussion with David Podmore, the Planning Director of BC Place at the time the stadium was constructed. Mr. Podmore is currently the Chair of the Board of Directors of Pavco, the Crown Corporation that continues to own and operate the stadium.

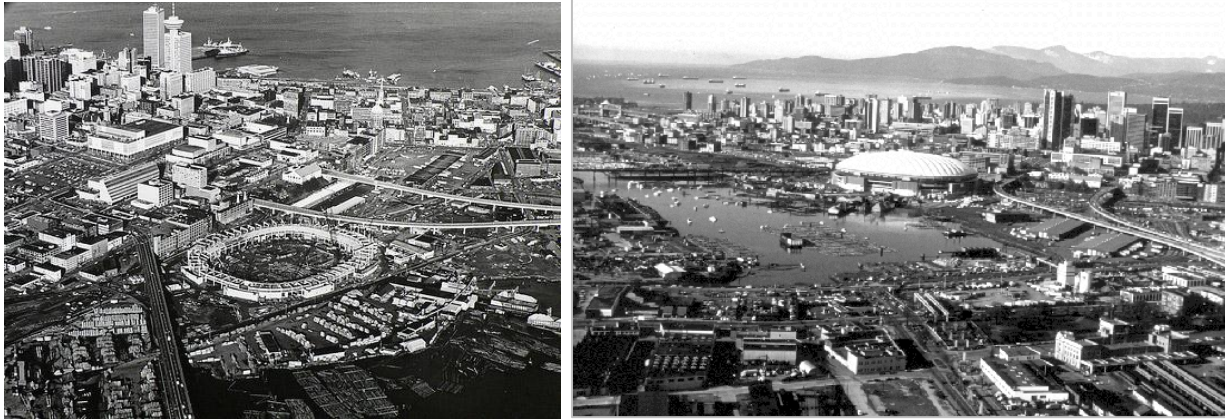


Figure 9.11: BC Place Stadium under construction in 1981 (left) and after completion in 1983 (right). (BC archives).



Figure 9.12: Aerial photograph of downtown Vancouver from 2011 (Vancouver Archives), showing the stadium with the upgraded roof. Development of the surrounding land continues to lag behind the rest of False Creek.

The stadium development did not in itself provoke much controversy or resistance from the Vancouver Planning Department, perhaps in part because there had already been considerable

public demand for a new stadium by this point in time.<sup>10</sup> Therefore when the Province acquired the Marathon property and expressed interest in constructing a major stadium there, the city appears to have offered little if any resistance. BC Place stadium was completed by June 19, 1983, at an eventual cost of \$126 million.<sup>11</sup>

The stadium was large enough that it changed the dynamic of land development in its immediate vicinity. Its location has made it a distinctive addition to the Vancouver skyline, one that has been further improved by a recent renovation featuring a new operable roof. While at the time that it was first developed it created the impression of being a potential bold first step towards rehabilitating an otherwise badly deteriorated industrial landscape, the one very significant liability it presented is that it interfered with the development of a continuous band of housing and small scale commercial development along the North Shore of False Creek. Instead, the result is an interruption in the urban fabric resulting from the sheer size of the stadium itself, and the difficulty presented by attempting to develop land adjacent to it. Realistically the stadium blocks views of either the mountains or the waterfront for any developer wanting to develop land on either side of the stadium, making other less restricted parcels more appealing to developers. Therefore, the area around the stadium is turning out to be one of the last parts of downtown Vancouver to be fully developed, despite the tremendous pace of development that has transformed the rest of the land surrounding False Creek (see figure 9.12).

### **BC Place report no.2: The British Columbia Place Concept Plan**

For the entire development project to move forward, Bill Bennett needed to find grounds for arguing that the development of False Creek would benefit the entire Province and not just Vancouver (Sigurdson, May 26, 1980). Investing hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds into the development of the Expo lands, first as the Expo and then as viable new neighborhoods and a mass transit system would obviously benefit Vancouver. In 1981 the population of Vancouver was 414,281, while the entire population of British Columbia was nearly seven times this at 2,744,467 (statscanada.ca). Bennett's political fortunes depended upon

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<sup>10</sup> Public perception held that a stadium would be a necessary precondition to attracting one or more major sports franchises, an idea that had substantial public support. The stadium was designed with a flexible configuration able to accommodate different sports, including football and baseball (Clarke, February 4, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Although the stadium was in some respects an independent facility that did not require the Expo, Bill Bennett seems to have used the money expended on the Stadium as a justification for moving ahead on the entire Expo project, on the grounds that 126 million had already been invested in the project, while failing to note that this 126 million was spent on the stadium (Barman, 2007).

pleasing the entire province (Williamson, February 6, 1980). The question was how to win the support of those who lived outside of Vancouver for his massive False Creek project?

Even though the financial costs for hosting Expo 86 and then redeveloping the land afterwards were not precisely worked out until quite late in the process, Bill Bennett nevertheless came to justify the entire project as benefiting British Columbia as a whole, on the grounds that over the long run it would be a profit generating enterprise yielding funds to be spent elsewhere in British Columbia.

Revenue will be earned through the lease of B. C. Place lands to private developers on which they will build the commercial and residential neighborhoods of British Columbia Place. Due to its central location, the creative way in which it will be developed, and the high level of amenities that will be offered, land values will be sufficiently high to pay for the Stadium, all other amenities, and return a good profit to the Provincial Taxpayer.

We do not agree with critics who suggest that it is somehow immoral for the taxpayers to earn a profit, and that the project should be watered down to avoid this danger. British Columbia Place will meet its social responsibilities in a sensible way, pay its way, and earn a good profit for taxpayers.

British Columbia Place will be North America's outstanding urban redevelopment and a project that will benefit all British Columbians for generations to come.

- Premier Bill Bennett, *BC Place Report No. 2* (1982) 1.

While this tactic may have appealed to those living outside of Vancouver, for those living within Vancouver the perception that the Expo was being held to extract money from Vancouver for use elsewhere did not sit well. From the perspective of the city this profit motive was an indication of potentially suspicious intentions on the part of the Provincial Government. As developing proposals being put forward by the Province, the City was quick to emphasize the extent to which the two sides were at odds (see table 9.1) (Budgen, July 24, 1981).

The divide separating the City and the Province had earlier origins. In 1956 the City of Vancouver had negotiated an unusual agreement with the Province known as the Vancouver Charter, which granted the City greater autonomy and control over its own pattern of development. Without this agreement, the Province of British Columbia would have had greater capacity to impose zoning and development decisions, as was typical elsewhere in Canada, where Provincial control continues to play a more central role in development. (Tennant, 1980). Despite the terms of this agreement, the Province claimed that it nevertheless held the exclusive



right to develop the land it had acquired at False Creek however it wanted, free from interference or restriction by the government of Vancouver. To avoid a major showdown, however, the Province chose to comply with the wishes of the City by voluntarily adhering to the requirements of the City Planning Department (Sewell, 1984).

<u>B.C. Place</u>	<u>City</u>
- Build as much office space as can be captured in market (7.7 million sq. ft.)	- Build some office for cash flow and urban design reasons, but limit total amount to recognize other public objectives (3 million sq. ft.)
- Build as much housing as possible (12,000 units)	- Build as much housing as possible, but moderate densities to recognize need to accommodate families in proper environment; be compatible with Vancouver character (7,500 plus units).
- Some families are welcome if they wish to live in very high density environment; do not modify building designs or site plans for their sake.(?)	- Accommodating families is a basic policy objective; ensure sufficient numbers to support basic facilities (e.g. school); make sure family environment is livable (2,000 units).
- Subsidized housing is not a responsibility of the corporation; the Province may initiate a mortgage assistance plan as B.C. Place's contribution.(?)	- Assisted housing is a basic responsibility of the largest public development project in the Province. A Mortgage Assistance Plan is acceptable but it is not sufficient. Affordable housing for families, singles and couples, and special needs groups is a requirement (3,100 units).
- One 7-acre park on B.C. Place land, rest of open space in vest-pocket portions or not usable park space. Total = ?	- Two large neighbourhood parks needed for development at this density plus good smaller parks and open space. (50 acres).
- Stadium management is B.C. Place's business; off-site impacts of development are City's responsibility; no reserved parking for stadium.	- Stadium management and off-site impacts should be shared responsibility; B.C. Place should provide 2,000 'reserved' parking stalls for stadium.
- False Creek water body should be developed; can be reduced by fill for islands, by marinas, etc. (7 acres net fill)	- False Creek water body is precious resource; perception of it as large open water must be retained. (Cut = Fill).

Table 9.1 Summary of differences in expectations for the development of BC Place: BC Place versus the City of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, City Council minutes, April 2, 1982, page 10).

Whether the city would have ultimately been able to enforce the provisions of the Vancouver Charter and deny the Province the unrestricted ability to develop its land is difficult to assess

since this issue appears to have never been put to the test. The result was an ambiguous situation: the Province proceeded with comparatively little city oversight of some issues, such as the design and construction of the Stadium, while for other aspects related to the master plan saw far more City involvement in the form of proposals and suggested guidelines. Throughout the process BC Place Ltd. maintained the position that it had no obligation to conform to demands made by the City, but that it chose to cooperate with the city to the extent possible. The city, meanwhile, continued to stress differences it held with BC Place (see table 9.1).

With the stadium project well underway, BC Place Ltd next turned its attention to tackling the development of an effective urban design that could guide the future development of the site. Given the scope and sheer immensity of the challenge, BC Place Ltd. decided to hire a total of five local architecture firms to collaborate and encourage the development of multiple design concepts. These five firms represent a diversity of local design talent and consisted of award winning firms that had prior experience collaborating at the South Shore of False Creek: Richard Henriquez, Norman Hotson, Downs/Archambault, Roger Hughes, and Peter Cardew (Boddy, 1984). The choice of relatively young firms that were proven, and yet had bright futures ahead probably also reflected a desire to work with firms able to continue contributing to the design of a development expected to take twenty five years to implement.

The team approached the urban design for the site by dividing the site up into different zones; each firm then proceeded to develop multiple different solution strategies for its designated area. The design process established a continuous process of community feedback in which the designers regularly met with interested groups and presented them with drawings, renderings and models of multiple different schemes in order to attempt to gauge public interest and community needs (Burton, 1982).<sup>12</sup>

The planning authority at BC Place Ltd. also brought in respected consultants who conducted intensive design development seminars; participants included Arthur Erickson, Michael Kirkland, Charles Moore. These outside consultants argued for either increasing the density or ignoring the issue of density altogether, in favor of focusing on other concerns related to livability. David Podmore, the Planning Director of BC Place Ltd. at this time also endorsed this general

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<sup>12</sup> These comments have also been informed by an extended discussion with Peter Cardew about this project.

direction, noting that the area could sustain a higher density of development due to the open space that would be available nearby at False Creek. Furthermore, Podmore noted that the higher density was appropriate due to the proximity to the central business district, where higher land values coincided with intensive development (Gutstein, 1982).

### Parks

A comprehensive and imaginatively landscaped park system is the central, unifying element of the total B.C. Place development and will provide a high standard of recreational, cultural and leisure space for residents and visitors. More than 73 acres of land are proposed for open space and public use at B.C. Place. When parks proposed for City, Hydro and U.T.A. lands are included, more than 100 acres will be available for public recreational use—a commitment of about 50% of the total developable area. The False Creek Basin (comprising over 300 acres of water) is perhaps the most important single open-space component of the B.C. Place Park system. With the exception of the recreational islands which are a special feature of the Provincial Aquatic Park, B.C. Place planners have been careful to seek a balance between open and fill in reshaping the shoreline of False Creek.

The open space and parkland allocation proposed by B.C. Place exceeds that which has normally been required by the City and normal land development practices. B.C. Place adds an extra commitment by developing a Provincial Park. Parkland beyond this to meet any future city or regional park needs should properly be the responsibility of the City and can be met out of its own land holdings.

#### The Provincial Public Park

The Provincial Park, adjacent to the Stadium and bordering the False Creek waterfront, will provide a gathering place that can be one of the most interesting and pleasing urban spaces in the world. The plan includes a unique 13 acre aquatic park in this area.

The creation of a large sea lake, kept at constant level, enclosed by a series of islands used for recreation and relaxation, will provide a wide range of water activity and sports for young and old.

A waterside theatre, beaches, viewing platforms for rowing, canoeing or water skiing would be among the amenities, all linked by bridges, footpaths or seawalks to other areas of B.C. Place. The possibility of a sea life exhibit garden to the community park and to a small park on False Creek.

#### Seawalks, Footpaths

A continuous waterfront walk, varying in width and design but averaging 25 feet wide, will be built along the entire length of the development providing direct pedestrian connection with the False Creek waterfront. A cycling and walking path, interconnecting all parks and parallel to the seawalk at some points, will provide a secondary route for residents and those exploring B.C. Place.

Parks averaging 2 acres would be provided at several locations throughout the site. District and community level parks will provide more than 15 acres and the waterfront walk, 5 acres. There will also be a number of small landscaped city spaces that will be designed to provide interesting and exciting contrasts and effects throughout the development. These will also serve as places to relax and rest.

In addition, it is expected that up to 40% of residential and commercial areas will be landscaped for private and semi-private use, contributing substantially to the overall greenery and spaciousness of B.C. Place.

#### Landscaping

Great emphasis is being placed on landscaping standards for B.C. Place—in terms of high quality, distinctive street furnishings, lighting, and in particular paving and planting, in order to create a truly outstanding urban waterfront environment, representative of British Columbia.

# The British Columbia Place Concept Plan.



### The Vision of B.C. Place

This Concept Plan is a step towards developing a Comprehensive Development Plan through which B.C. Place can become one of the world's great urban places.

The Concept is illustrated and described in this report and is provided to you in the hope that you will offer your ideas and suggestions to help ensure that B.C. Place is an exceptional development.

The B.C. Place planning area boundaries, as agreed with the City, include more than 314 acres of which approximately 227 acres is owned by B.C. Place, the remainder is held by the City, B.C. Hydro, U.T.A. and a few parcels of private land.

The Concept Plan is now under discussion with some of the foremost architects, planners and landscape designers of this continent. It will also be discussed with City Council, the public and a number of citizen's groups from adjoining neighbourhoods. After we have the benefit of this creative public involvement, we will prepare a Comprehensive Development Plan for your consideration.

We consider British Columbia Place an essential redevelopment of the False Creek Basin, redevelopment of adjoining historical neighbourhoods as a natural extension of the False Creek area will be encouraged.

British Columbia Place will be a very special place to visit, with an abundance of imaginatively landscaped parks, public spaces, sea walks, footpaths, gardens, lakes, islands and bays interlaced around to urban places. It will be a place where people can come to learn more about the Province and the world around them, or to enjoy their leisure time and be entertained. It will be a place to work, and a place to live; a place that will offer a robust, attractive, truly urban life-style at the centre of the Province's greatest city.

### British Columbia Place will be Profitable

Revenue will be earned through the lease of B.C. Place lands to private developers on which they will build the commercial and residential neighbourhoods of British Columbia Place. Due to its central location, the creative way in which it will be developed, and the high level of amenities that will be offered, land values will be sufficiently high to pay for the Stadium, all other amenities, and secure a good profit to the Provincial taxpayer.

We do not agree with critics who suggest that it is somehow immoral for the taxpayer to earn a profit, and that the project should be watered down to avoid this danger. British Columbia Place will meet its social responsibilities in a sensible way, pay its way, and earn a good profit for taxpayers.



Bill Bennett  
British Columbia Place will be North America's outstanding urban redevelopment and a project that will benefit all British Columbians for generations to come.

### Commercial Space

The B.C. Place Council proposes the development of a major office area of 10 acres of office and retail space on 30 acres of land over the next two decades. The central area for up to 100,000 sq ft of office space is to be developed as part of this proposed commercial area.

Commercial Space	25.3 acres
Public Office	13.3 acres
Commercial Development Program	30.4 acres

Office Space: 100,000 sq ft  
 Retail Space: 100,000 sq ft  
 Total Office Space: 200,000 sq ft

### Who's Who at B.C. Place?



Steve Hendry: Manager International for B.C. Place  
 Herb Nason: Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
 Philip Hendry: President

# That's the BC Spirit!



A Provincial Crown Corporation

Figure 9.13: BC Place Report no. 2: Back page, and Front page (BC Place Ltd. 1982).

Bill Bennett describes the concept plan contained within BC Place Report No. 2 not as a finished plan, but as a starting point meant to facilitate discussion and encourage feedback:

The Concept Plan is now under discussion with some of the foremost architects, planners and landscape designers of this continent. It will be discussed with City Council, the public and a number of citizen's groups from adjoining neighborhoods. After we have the benefit of this creative public involvement, we will prepare a comprehensive plan for your consideration.



We consider British Columbia Place as central to redevelopment of the False Creek Basin: redevelopment of adjoining historical neighborhoods as a natural extension of the False Creek area will be encouraged.

British Columbia Place will be a very special place to visit, with an abundance of imaginatively landscaped parks, public spaces, sea walks, footpaths, gardens, lakes, islands, islands and bays interlaced around its urban places. It will be a place where people can come to learn more about the Province and the world around them, or to enjoy their leisure time and be entertained. It will be a place to work, and a place to live; a place that will offer a robust, attractive, truly urban life-style at the centre of the Province's greatest city.

-Premier Bill Bennett, BC Place Report no. 2, 1982, 1.



Figure 9.14: Concept Plan from BC Place Report no. 2, pages 2, 3 (BC Place Ltd.). Colors have been adjusted to address fading and yellowing of original document (Robert Walsh).

Interpretation: Bill Bennett mentions working with the Vancouver City Council, yet no mention is made of an expectation to gain valuable feedback from the Vancouver City Planning Department. While this might have simply been an oversight, it might also have been meant to convey a message to Ray Spaxman that BC Place intended to move ahead on the project with or without the help of his department. It is also noteworthy that the plan of Arthur Erickson from



1974 is not only consistent with the basic vision Bill Bennett expressed for the False Creek area, but also continued to be relevant to how the area eventually developed years later.

The significance of this being an interim plan however seems to have been lost on the Vancouver Planning Department, and perhaps on the general public as well. Newspaper accounts of the plan from this time indicate that people were evaluating the plan as if it were a very definite proposal, a projection of what to expect (Budgen, May 24, 1982; Mulgrew, March 5, 1982), and furthermore, despite the comments of Bill Bennett to the contrary, the published plans and the numerous detailed rendering that went along with it do seem to convey a vivid sense of a real project that had already been worked out in detail (see figure 9.13, 9.14, 9.15).

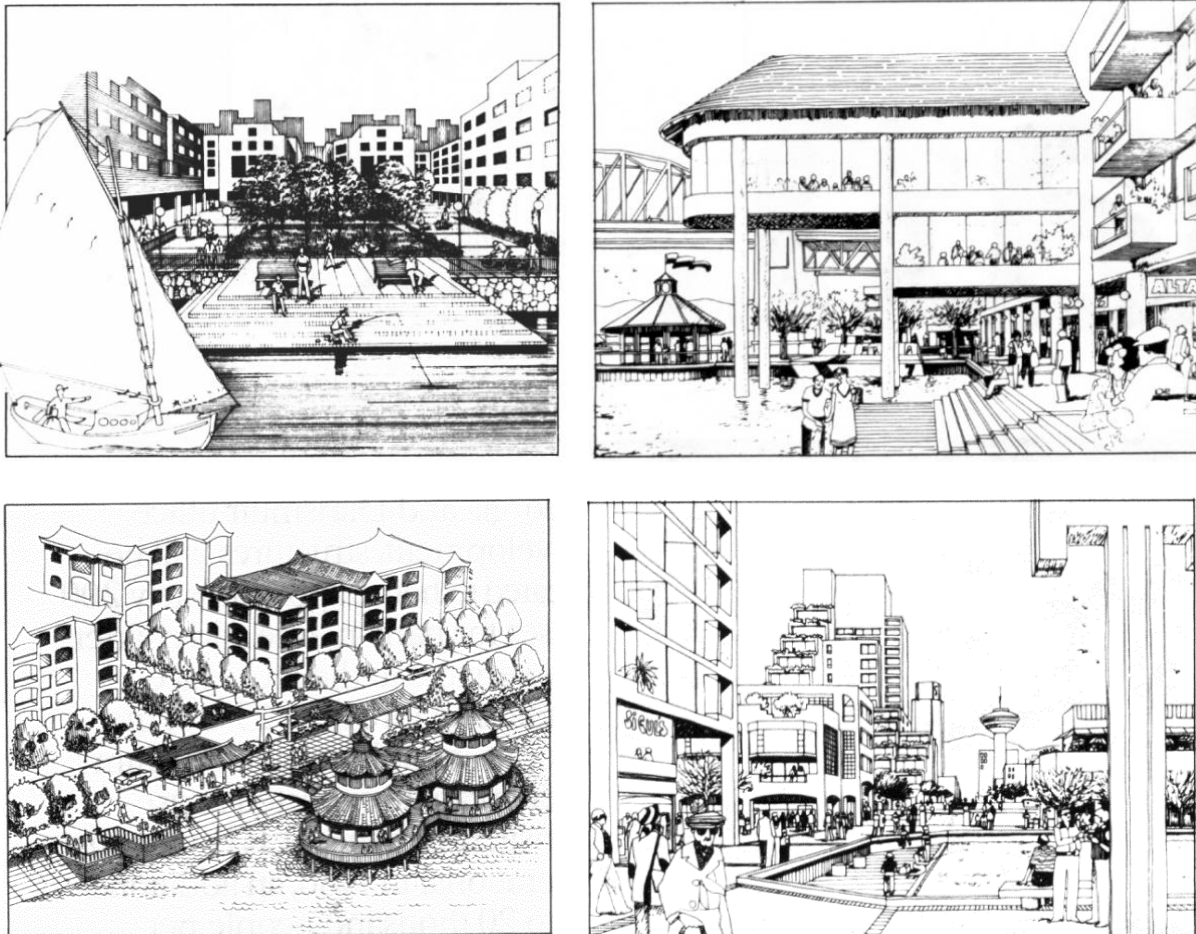


Figure 9.15: Architectural illustrations from the BC Place Report no 2 (1982, pages 2, 3).

In discussing the version of the masterplan shown in image 9.14 with architect Peter Cardew, it was brought to my attention that the plan portrayed in the BC Place report no 2, did not represent

an accurate depiction of the actual work of the five architecture firms working on the design, raising a question that I have as of yet been unable to answer: who actually prepared the drawing used in the publication? While the document stipulates that this is a concept plan, for discussion purposes only, no indication is offered concerning the identity of the draftsman.

I have managed to track down several of the actual design proposals presented by two of the architects involved in this project. While this is not sufficient to reconstruct the entire proposal as it existed at that point in time, the visual richness and complexity in these design studies demonstrates a sense of light, proportion and visual drama that is sorely lacking in the version published in BC Place Report No. 2. In the models of Roger Hughes, the architect responds to the context in detailed ways that animate the design; the lack of this and the reliance on a cookie cutter approach in the BC Place Concept Plan is an indication that the color image is not a fair representation of his work (see figure 9.16).

In a similar fashion, the area of the Concept Plan explored by Downs Archambault (D/A) seems to have been rendered by the same draftsman that interpreted the work of Roger Hughes (see figure 9.17). These design studies contain hints of the subsequent development directions that future design proposals would take at False Creek. In this respect, the work of D/A is especially significant since this would eventually end up being the one architecture firm to participate in all of the successive design efforts leading up to and including the final design used by Pacific Concord Place. Although the form of courtyard housing combined with point towers has not yet been attempted in the five versions explored by D/A for the North Shore site, other relevant strategies are at work that will reappear in later design proposals, including the use of circular forms seen in the first study image, and the use of a stepped base combined with a point tower, examples of which appear in the second study.

In the study images by Roger Hughes and D/A, the architects can be seen to be wrestling with the challenge of designing buildings as discrete entities on the one hand, and as elements helping to define a larger continuous urban fabric on the other hand. This search for an appropriate strategy for developing an intact urban fabric appropriate to Vancouver was hinted at in the work that took place at the South Shore of False Creek, which also had a fragmented character, lacking density and hierarchy. There are however indications of design evolution taking place.

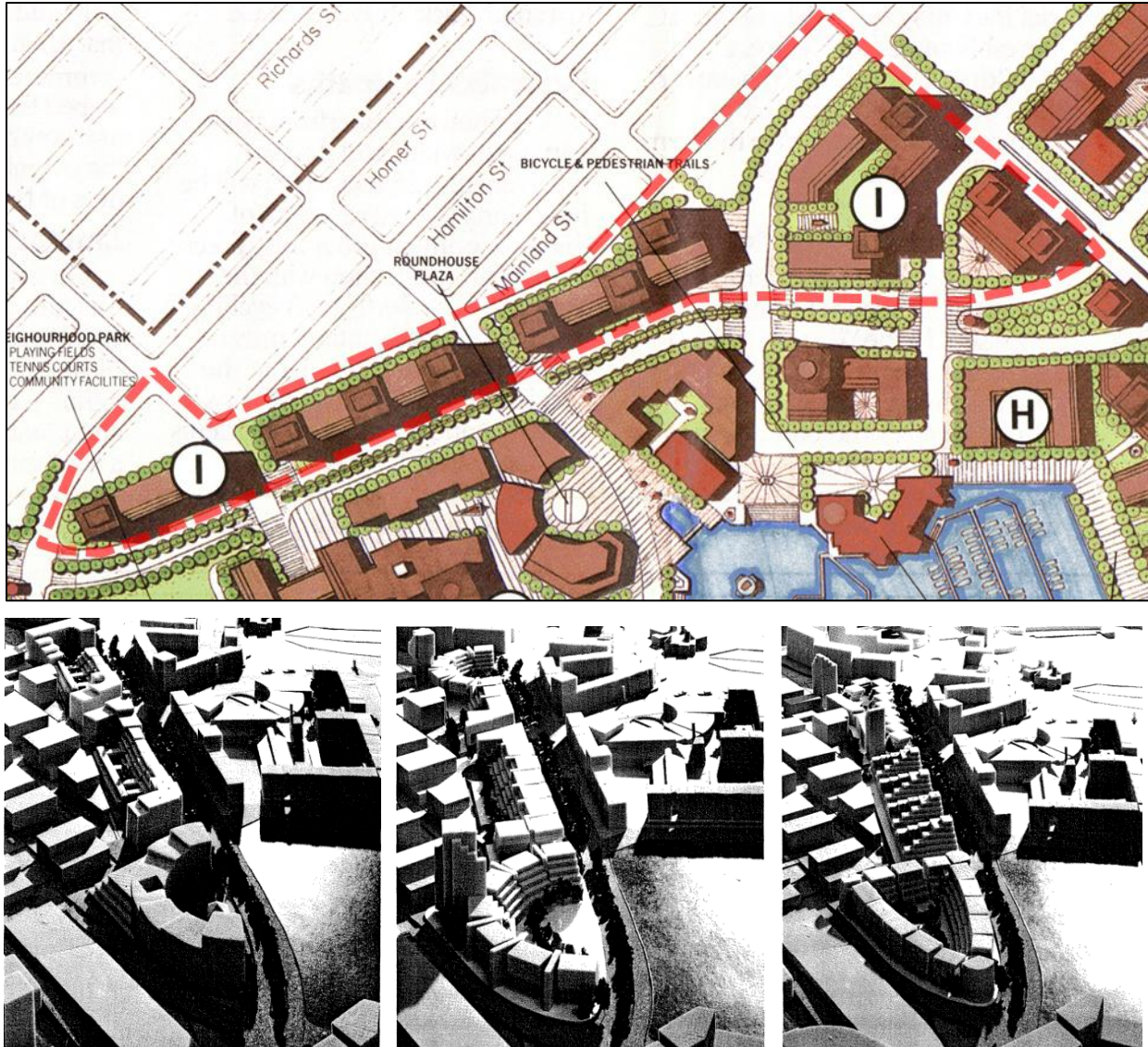


Figure 9.16: Yaletown Edge: detail of BC Place Concept Plan and three designs models of the same area proposed (shown in dotted red outline in upper image) by architect Roger Hughes (Gutstein 1982).

In contrast to the earlier South Shore designs, in the 1982 BC Place studies the buildings and open spaces are being related together at multiple scales. Although this is not yet Vancouverism, the designs being put forward nevertheless have gone beyond that which was attained at the West End, where the pedestrian experience is largely a residual left over that has not been intentionally shaped. In this work for BC Place, by contrast, the architects have taken what they learned through the intensive pedestrian oriented focus pursued at the South Shore of False Creek and then have begun to take it further, in pursuit of a higher density form of urbanism.



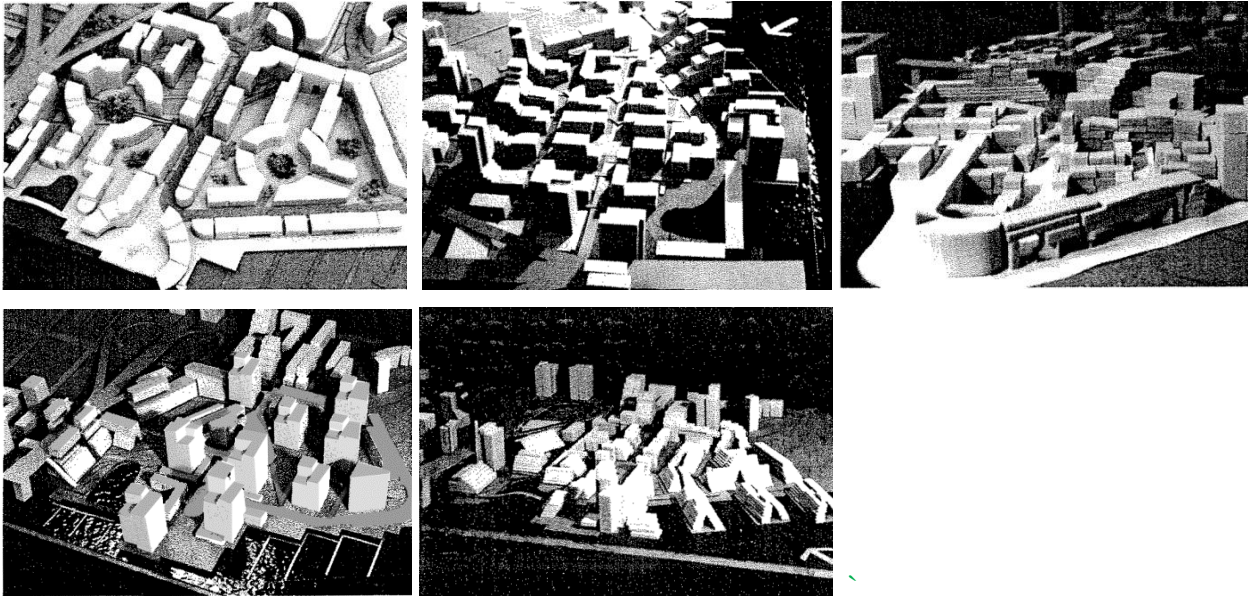
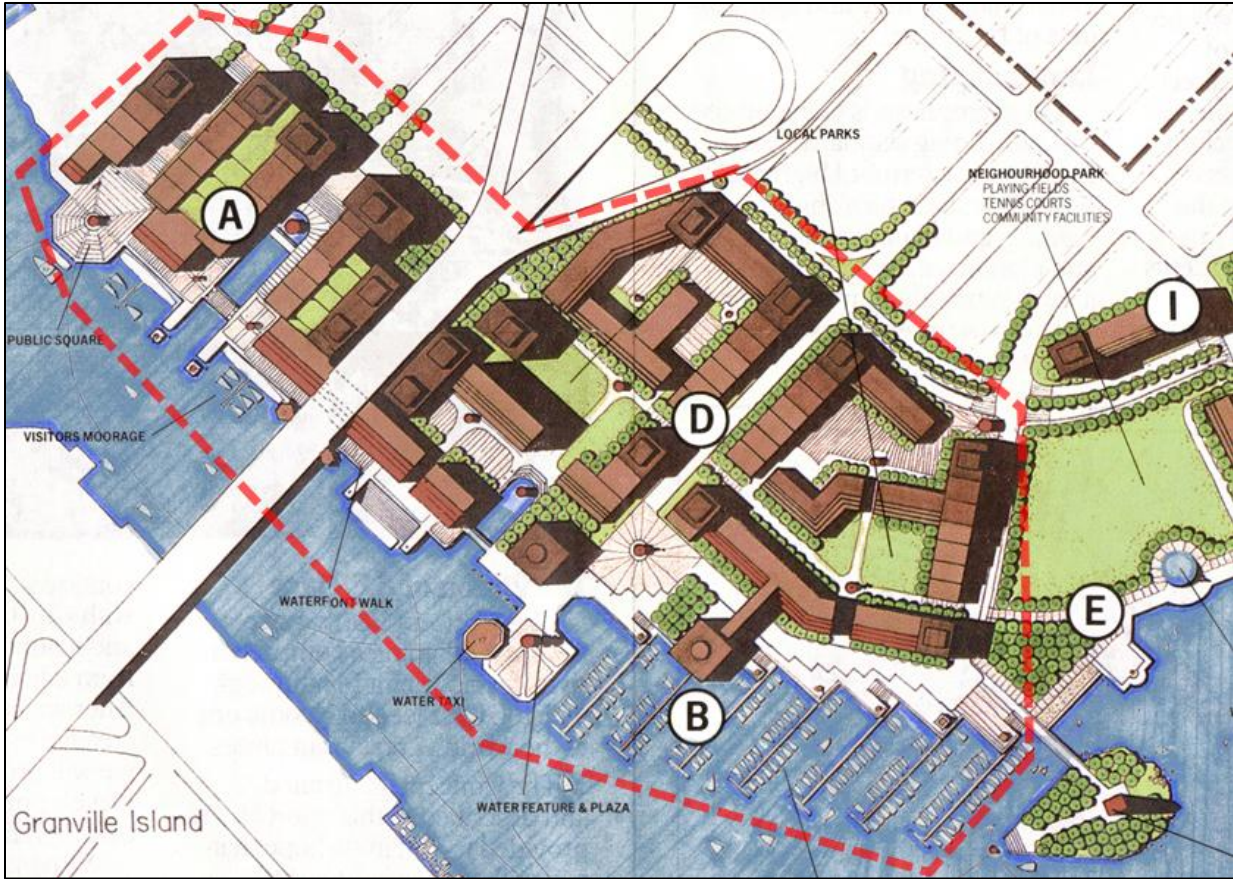


Figure 9.17: Detail of BC Place 1982 Concept Plan, and five alternative design proposals by Downs Archambault (BC Place Ltd, 1982, and Gutstein, 1982). The bottom left hand image was substantially reconstructed by Robert Walsh to improve legibility.

Fortunately for Vancouver the project did not proceed on the basis of the diagrammatic plan published in the 1982 report, instead the designers continued their process of testing, refining and



comparing different urban strategies. To aid in this search for an urban fabric embodying the vibrant livable character the designers and the developer were seeking, BC Place Ltd. revised the team, bringing in additional talent that produced innovations of lasting impact. Before examining this work, however it will be useful to consider the response to the 1982 Concept Plan and the role that this played in a situation that continued to be fraught with conflict and confusion.

### The City Responds: the June 1982 False Creek Development Concept

The first official response of the city to the BC Place Concept Plan was a new set of proposed guidelines, published in May of 1982. The North and East False Creek Objectives proposed scaling back the development, reducing the number of proposed dwellings from 12,000 new units to 8,000 and cutting the commercial development from 7.7 million square feet to 3.2 million. The planners also wanted to see the units for families and for affordable housing increased, as a larger proportion of their reduced total (City of Vancouver, May 1982).

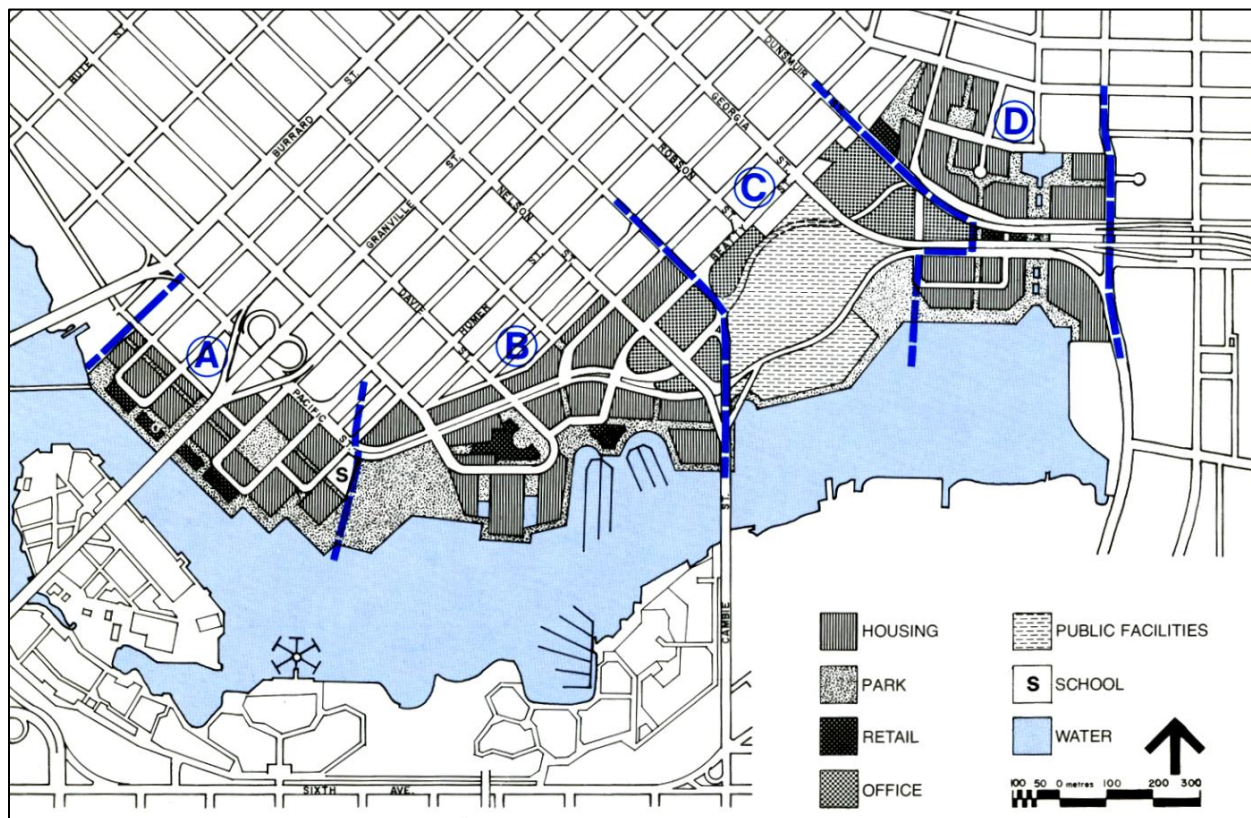


Figure 9.18: False Creek Development Concept: City of Vancouver Planning Department (City of Vancouver, 1982, 14).

In June of 1982, the city formally issued its own development concept, incorporating a plan and a set of principles (see figure 9.18). This “proposal” restates the design that had already be presented by BC Place Ltd. three months earlier, including even the proposal that the site be divided into discrete zones not all that different from those used by BC Place in developing their concept plan.<sup>13</sup> The “North and East False Creek Objectives” included a comprehensive statement of planning principles; these represent the agenda that the city would continue to pursue at False Creek for the next three decades.

### PRELIMINARY PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The following preliminary planning principles for B.C. Place were adopted by City Council on February 3, 1981. They were intended to guide City staff in the planning process for B.C. Place and to indicate to B.C. Place Ltd. and the Provincial government the general objectives the City would like to see achieved.

1. B.C. Place should provide a wide diversity of uses, buildings and experiences.
2. The planning and development process should encourage and provide a programme for public consultation; including setting up a Citizens' Advisory Committee.
3. A major portion of the site should be developed for housing persons of all incomes and all types of households.
4. To ensure that the development of this publicly-owned land responds to the City's most pressing housing needs, a significant portion of the units should be for non-market housing, and for housing for families with children.
5. Because of the site amenity, the pressing need for housing and the objectives of the Livable Region Programme, preference to residential developments should be given over office or other commercial uses.
6. Retail development should complement and enhance Downtown retail, not unduly compete with or overpower it.
7. Public open space development should (i) meet the needs of future B.C. Place residents and working population (ii) add to the amenity of the adjacent Downtown area, and (iii) provide a linear open space continuous walkway allowing for a diversity of experiences, spaces, buildings and association with the water of False Creek.
8. General public access and enjoyment of the waterfront should be provided.

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<sup>13</sup> On March 30, Jane Jacobs who was visiting Vancouver on a rare visit offered her own endorsement of the general approach using multiple architects for the BC Place development, although it is not clear from the reporting if she offered an opinion regarding the actual design at False Creek. Her view was based at least in part on the scale of the project, and the perception that it was too large for a single architect. During her visit she emphasized the need to continue the fabric of the existing streets, to think of urbanism in terms of streets and not blocks, a message which seems to have resonated with her audience (Buchan, March 30, 1982).

9. The water quality of False Creek, especially the east end, should be significantly improved.

10. Adequate transportation access to B.C. Place must be provided, sufficient to meet the needs of the development without imposing on nearby areas. This is a major requirement that will create a need for improved transit, streets, parking, pedestrian access, etc. In particular, there should be a strong emphasis on transit and the development should be designed accordingly.

11. The design and function of new development in B.C. Place should enhance the attractiveness and use of adjacent areas and recognize their individual identity.

12. Urban design should emphasize a sense of proprietorship for users of B.C. Place, whether they are residents, workers or visitors.

13. Provision should be made for a variety of community amenities to serve and be accessible to B.C. Place residents, office workers, special needs groups, the general public and in some instances all residents of B.C. This would include amenities such as an arts and science centre, a forest.

- City of Vancouver, North and East False Creek Objectives, May 1982, 2-3.

By explicitly stressing that priority be given to residential uses over commercial or retail (see items 3,4 and 5 in the above list), this document established a principle that was subsequently emphasized in a city planning policy that came to be known as “Living First” (Beasley, 2000). Other principles restate the interest that the city had in keeping the waterfront public, and priorities such as the need for better mass transit and additional public amenities. These were concerns that BC Place Ltd. was already well aware of and busy incorporating into their plans.

Interpretation: The view put forward by BC Place Ltd. in their Concept Plan was that they were under no obligation to adhere to the standards established by the Vancouver Planning Department, yet they had chosen to comply anyway. It is not at all clear that BC Place Ltd. meant that they would expect the city to impose new standards; instead, the BC Place Concept Plan can be interpreted as a reasonable attempt to comply with the city standards as they already existed in March of 1982.

The city for its part seems to have been attempting to create an impression that it was in command of the situation by producing a list of principles and a general site plan, both of which are in agreement with the direction BC Place had already published. This strategy however seems to have backfired because while the public evidently came to regard the BC Place Ltd. Concept Plan as both acceptable and representative of the development that would subsequently

be taking place, BC Place Ltd. continued to view this design as a work in progress subject to change, which may explain why they went ahead with publishing fairly crude approximation of the ongoing work. Unfortunately it made the city recommendations seem impotent and irrelevant when a new design was subsequently presented.

Widespread public concern persisted that development would result in an elitist enclave that ordinary residents could not afford to buy into. The city planners proposed to address this by requiring a large proportion of the units be reserved as affordable housing. BC Place worked instead to find a way to make higher quality housing affordable through a creative approach to home financing. On July 2, 1982 Alvin Nairod, the CEO of BC Place Ltd. announced the establishment of an innovative mortgage program intended to drastically improve the availability of housing for middle class housing at the new BC Place developments. As planned, initial up front costs of purchasing a dwelling in the new development would be subsidized by the government, with the government retaining a share of ownership that would be paid off as the units increased in value over time.<sup>14</sup> This program was intended to be a pilot program to facilitate affordable housing; the BC government expressed interest in using elsewhere as well, if it proved successful in Vancouver (Sigurdson, July 2, 1982). Overtaken by subsequent events, the program never was put into practice, yet it shows that the Province was trying to find ways to meet the needs of the residents, even when rejecting the recommendations made by the City Planners.

### **Arthur Erickson and Fisher Friedman Architects both join the design process at BC Place**

The design ideas generated by the five architecture firms appeared promising, yet something seemed to be missing at the largest scale: an overall strategy, a sense of coherence, a vision or plan that would unite the entire development. While there are noteworthy features to be found in the contributions of each of the five firms, the overall design result remained little more than a collection of parts. None of the five firms had experience implementing large urban projects.

To address this situation, BC Place Ltd. decided to enlarge their talent pool and began a search for additional architects more experienced in thinking and working at the larger scale. Arthur

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<sup>14</sup> The details of how this was expected to work remain nebulous; perhaps the government expected to recoup its initial subsidies at some future date when the unit was resold at an inflated price, in which case the neighborhood would eventually wind up being an elitist district that middle class families would not be able to afford.



Erickson had already made a strong impression on BC Place during an earlier seminar and was hired to lead the new design effort.

The management of BC Place Ltd. concluded that in addition to Erickson, their team also needed additional expertise from a production oriented firm experienced in larger high-quality housing developments. The search was expanded to include the entire West Coast of North America, and eventually, through the structural engineers on the stadium project, the management of BC Place Ltd. was introduced to the San Francisco based architecture firm of Fisher Friedman.<sup>15</sup>

Founded in 1964 in the San Francisco Bay area, Fisher Friedman Associates was a successful design firm that by the early 1980's had developed a reputation for producing large, award winning residential projects throughout California and elsewhere. Senior design partner Rodney Friedman was a graduate of the UC Berkeley architecture program at a time when influential Dean William Wurster and other noteworthy California architects, including Joseph Esherick and Charles Moore, were actively developing a cutting edge variety of west coast modernism. At one point in time Friedman also worked as a teaching assistant to Charles Eames (Fisher Friedman Associates, 2001; Stockman, 1985) (see figure 9.19).

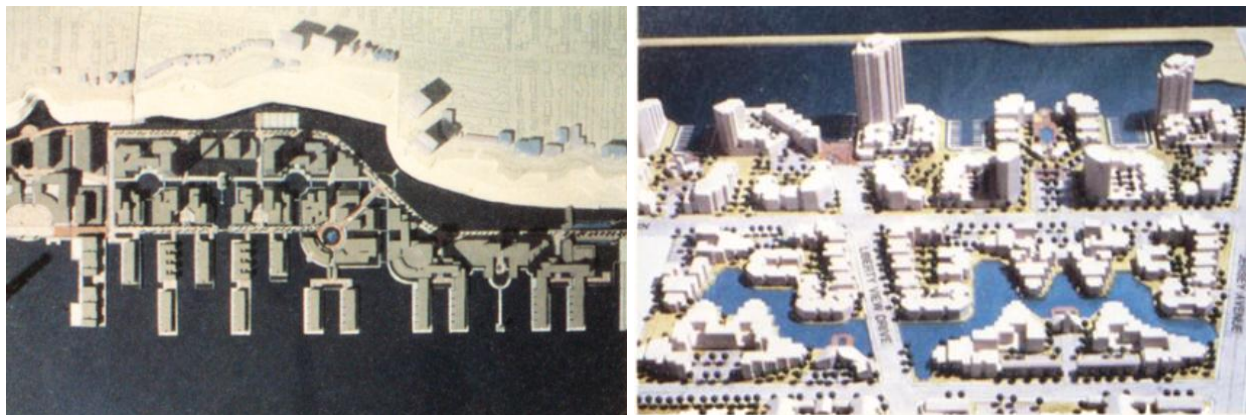


Figure 9.19: Two housing projects by Fisher Friedman Associates: Arcorp Hudson, Liberty Harbor North (Fisher Friedman Associates, 1986).

Fisher Friedman Associates embraced the new West Coast Modern design direction and became particularly interested in expanding the application of these new forms and principles to serve a wider public. In attempting to transform the production of housing on the basis of contemporary design principles, their goal was to provide a viable alternative to the more traditional designs

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<sup>15</sup> This assessment is based in part upon discussions with Barry Downs, Peter Cardew and David Podmore.

that continued to dominate the field of large scale housing production. While the earliest projects of the firm openly acknowledged influence of the Sea Ranch Condominiums of MLTW, the work of the firm soon began to find its own voice, producing a diverse range of housing projects, each a visually distinctive response to a particular context (Fisher Friedman, 2001).

### **The Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan of 1983**

Arthur Erickson effectively became the new design leader of the still evolving masterplan for the Expo lands at False Creek. Arthur Erickson's prior experience in Vancouver, including his design of several residential towers in the West End and his earlier work on the False Creek Proposal for the Provincial government in 1974 made him an asset to the project.

There is some difference of opinion regarding the extent of Erickson's involvement in the design process. David Podmore has informed me that Erickson's role was limited to that of occasional consultant dropping in on weekends to review the progress on the design. However a very different impression came out in discussion with Don Vaughan, a now retired landscape architect who worked for and collaborated with Erickson on many significant projects throughout his career, beginning with the SFU campus design. Don Vaughan was also deeply involved with the eventual development that took place at False Creek. According to Vaughan, Erickson had what might be described as a commanding personality, and was really only interested in taking on projects for which he would be the lead designer. As a highly regarded teacher, Erickson would sometimes encourage subordinates to explore their own design ideas for a part of a project, but there was no mistaking that it was Erickson who was the ultimate decision maker. Don Vaughan expressed the strongly held view that on the BC Place Project Erickson took the lead role, with Fisher Friedman acting as very able, yet also expensive consultants. It is also worth noting that the effort also featured continued involvement from at least some members of the original design team, including Vancouver Architect Barry Downs of Downs Archambault. The design documents confirm the prominence of Erickson's role; Erickson's name appears first on all plans, a strong indication that he indeed was the lead designer. Meanwhile, Vaughan has confirmed that making periodic visits of work that was in progress was a normal part of the work approach used by the jet setting Erickson, suggesting that David Podmore was indeed correct in observing that Erickson had only periodic contact with the rest of the design effort. This did not

however diminish the importance of Erickson's contribution in giving direction to the plan, but simply is a reflection of his work habits.



Figure 9.20: BC Place Master plan and renderings from BC Place Bulletin No. 3 (BC Place Ltd.).

The BC Place Master plan now known as the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan was published in BC Place Report no 3 during the spring of 1983.<sup>16</sup> Arthur Erickson is on the record as arguing in favor of extending the pattern of high rises seen at the West End into the new development at BC Place, on the grounds that this was essentially necessary and inevitable to complete the larger urban pattern of development for the downtown peninsula (Boddy 1984; Buchan, April 30, 1983; Godley, February 4, 1989). At a crude level this might be seen as describing the general pattern of what was proposed in the 1983 plan, yet this argument also overlooks the rather significant

<sup>16</sup> The document itself has no date, but the first newspaper account appears on April 30, 1983 (Buchan).



ways in which the 1983 proposal departs from the pattern previously established in the West End. Instead of continuing the urban pattern seen in the West End, the 1983 plan actually represents a hybrid, a new urban fusion that draws from and combines elements seen in the South Shore of False Creek and also the earlier work of Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies in their proposals for Marathon Realty. The extent to which it replicates anything seen in the West End is minimal, except perhaps in terms of the skyline profile (see figure 9.20).

The Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan, like the West End, features the profuse use of well-spaced high rise point towers, but there the similarity ends. At the West End the tallest towers are actually slab towers and these occur at the edges of the development area. In the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan, by contrast, there are no slabs; only point towers. Towers closest to the water's edge tend to be shorter, while those further inland get progressively taller. This massing pattern appears to respond to the view preservation concerns that had previously been articulated by Ray Spaxman, indicating a desire to go beyond the pattern seen in the West End, in pursuit of a new approach to high density urbanism that took into account the potential impact it would have on the rest of the city (see figure 9.21).

The treatment of the urban space at the ground level is notably different as well. In the West End the spaces at the ground level between towers are leftover empty spaces frequently occupied by parking spaces or expansive empty lawns, neither of which adds life to the street. In contrast, the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan uses a variety of strategies to create a lively and varied streetscape at ground level that is at once urban and pedestrian friendly.

As in the case of the 1969 plan for False Creek by Ron Dies and Zoltan Kiss, the 1983 plan features a combination of residential point towers and low rise apartments, overlooking a pedestrian oriented waterfront. Similarly, the area is conceived of as being divided into multiple neighborhood groupings. The scale of these tower clusters has been reduced by Erickson however, with the land divided into 10 smaller neighborhoods where Kiss and Dies had proposed a smaller number of larger neighborhoods.





Figure 9.21: Model of Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan (Fisher Friedman website, BC archives).

There are also aspects of the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan which have significant precedents in the earlier design work for the site, especially the work of Downs Archambault (D/A), indicating that this design continued to be an effective collaboration despite the new leadership provided by Arthur Erickson. For example the circular forms in one study model appear to have inspired two circular street forms in the same location in the more recent plan (see figure 9.22). In terms of general building morphologies, D/A explored a number of tower variants including a tower with a cascading terraced base that again is unlike anything seen in the West End. Cascading midrise



apartment blocks built alone or in conjunction with point towers are another less common, yet recurrent building form used in recent projects in Vancouver (see figure 9.23).

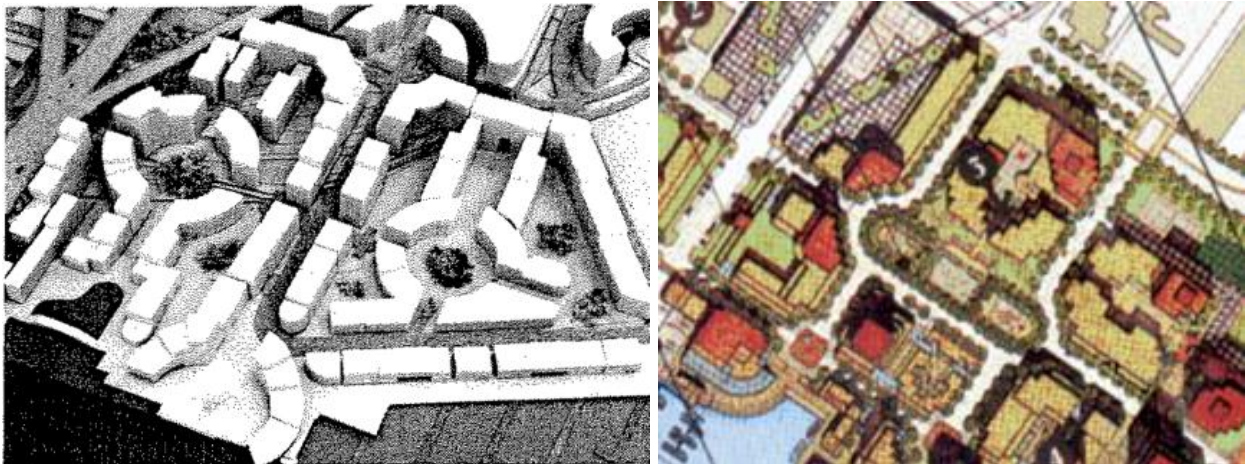


Figure 9.22: Influence from the 1982 design studies of D/A on the 1983 design (D/A, Erickson).

The 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan incorporates features seen in the previous plans for the large track at the North Shore of False Creek, including the use of high rise towers and low rise infill, the development of a pedestrian oriented waterfront, and the establishment of well-developed action-oriented landscape. Yet something more is also happening that sets this apart from the prior efforts: the use of these different elements in combination to produce a new urban fabric that could be described as the formation of grand urban places or outdoor urban rooms. Previously when towers had been proposed for the site they had been placed with an emphasis on providing excellent views for their occupants, while reducing view obstructions from strategic public locations looking across the site towards the distant mountains; here, however, Erickson has added something new to the mix: the grouping of towers to mark out large scale urban volumes transforming the site into a linked network of urban experiences, urban places.

This represents the introduction into the building culture of Vancouver of the fifth essential element, the outdoor urban room. In addition to operating at the larger neighborhood scale, the urban outdoor room element can also be seen at work here at the smaller scale of the individual urban block, low rise structures and high rise point towers working together to carve out volumetric spatial zones in the larger urban fabric that give different places a more coherent sense of local identity (see figure 9.24).

The similarity between what was proposed in 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan and the development which would eventually be built is noteworthy, even though Erickson has not been credited with achieving the breakthrough in his design that helped lead the way to the eventual development. While the characteristic elements of Vancouverism would eventually become further refined and made even stronger in subsequent plans, it is this plan in which all five elements are used together for the first time, making this the defining moment during which Vancouverism first appears (see figure 9.25).



Figure 9.23: Towers with stepped bases: details from figures 9.17 and 9.21, and view of The Governors Tower at Concord Pacific (Gutstein 1982, BC Archives, Judy Shih).



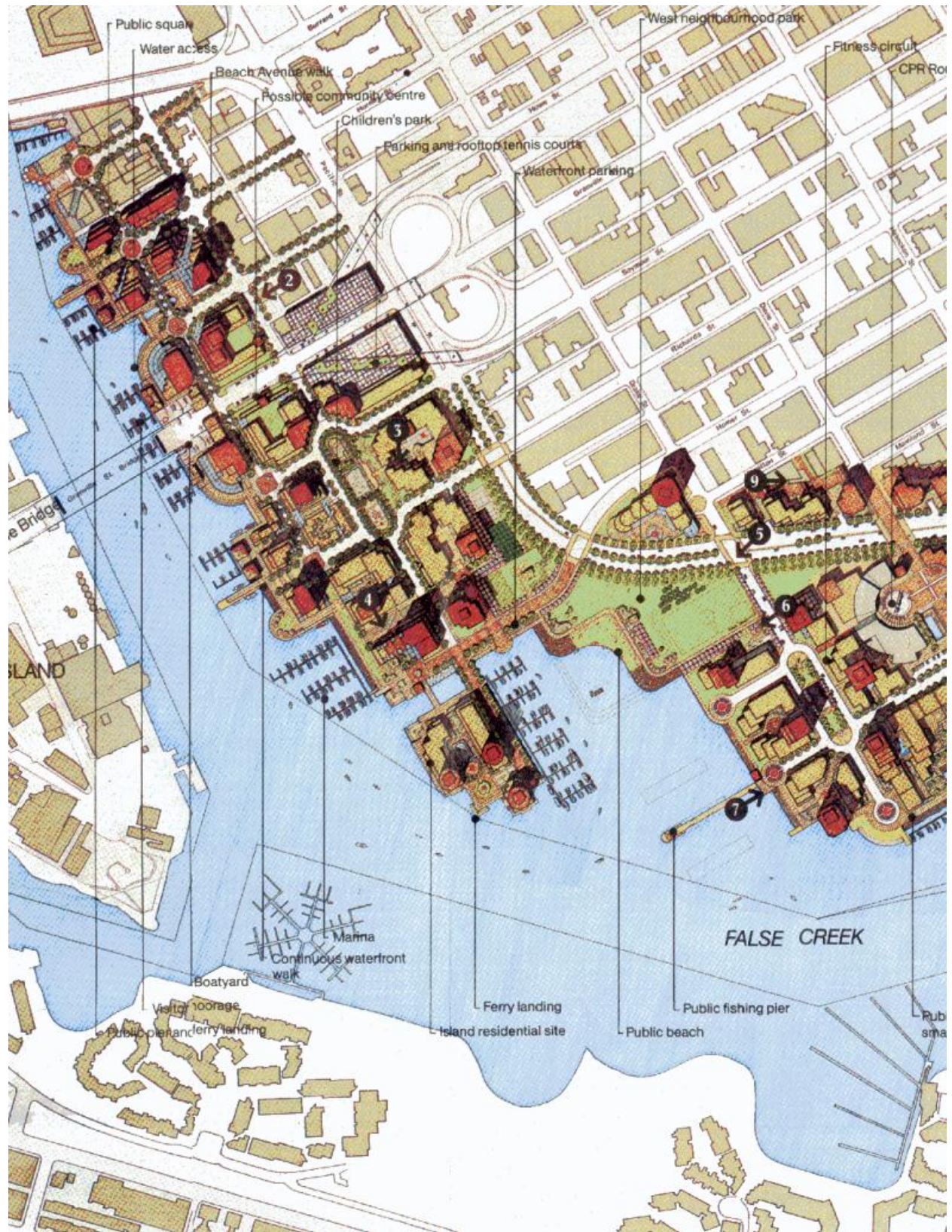


Figure 9.24: Detail: BC Place 1983 Plan (BC Place Ltd., 1983; Color correction: Robert Walsh).





Figure 9.25: Three views of Vancouver: the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan of 1983 (BC Place Ltd., 1983), Vancouver in 1985 (Berelowitz 1985), and Vancouver in 2010 (City of Vancouver).



### **Confusion, mistrust and obscurity: the strange fate of the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan**

One of the more peculiar aspects of the story of Vancouverism is how quickly the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan appears to have been abandoned and relegated to relative obscurity. When this key piece of the puzzle is removed, the arrival of Vancouverism in Vancouver becomes harder to explain.

From this point forward, the story of Vancouverism is a tale of loss, rediscovery and ultimate redemption of a sort. Other recent accounts have closely examined the final implementation of Vancouverism, the details surrounding how the new vision for the city was finally realized in physical form, yet these accounts only briefly touch on, if they mention it at all, the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan while failing to recognize the profound influence it would have on what was eventually built (Berelowitz, 2005; Punter, 2003).<sup>17</sup>

Despite the positive features seen in the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan, the degree to which this design departed from the earlier concept plan, published in 1982, appears to have puzzled the planners in Vancouver and the general public, provoking strong opposition (Sewell, 1984) A clear sense of the lack of support within the City Planning Department and the strength public misgivings surrounding the project are evident in the following newspaper report:

The importance of public input has always been emphasized by BC Place officials. Numerous meetings have been held with community groups, information has been generously circulated, and input has been received from local architects as well as a consulting panel of international architects and planners.

Since its inception three years ago, the development proposal for BC Place has displeased Vancouver's director of planning, Ray Spaxman. As a provincial Crown corporation, it has the power to act independently of Vancouver council - in fact, to operate as a planning authority that owns its own land. Even so, BC Place officials have expressed a willingness to negotiate with the city in an attempt to comply with its zoning bylaws.

The latest Concept Plan presented recently by architect Arthur Erickson reflects some of the concerns expressed by Spaxman's city planners and by the many lobby groups who have rallied in opposition. The street pattern extends the city's grid system, view corridors

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<sup>17</sup> I first became aware of this project when exploring a database of imagines maintained by the BC Archives at the BC History museum in Victoria British Columbia; information about the image, a model photograph, however was lacking and its label as a structural plan seemed somewhat mistaken. When I spoke with an archivist about the image I was told that this was probably a photograph of the Arthur Erickson plan for False Creek, as if to dismiss this as both obscure and unimportant.

are protected, overshadowing by tall buildings has been avoided, and low buildings have been placed next to the city's three downtown bridges.

Other principles of the Concept Plan were not welcomed so heartedly. Seeing the plan for the first time, Spaxman likened it to "buying a compact car shown with a five-foot guy behind the steering wheel." To him, the presentation looked convincing but something was not quite right.

The issue of density has long troubled Vancouverites. Erickson maintains that the choice for high density has already been made in the west end, and "there is no alternative" but to continue it. The city feels it needs more pedestrians and more people living downtown.

- Anna Buchan, (April 30, 1983). "Confusion and mistrust shroud BC Place."

The reception by the city planners of the earlier 1982 BC Place Concept Plan had been mixed, endorsing some aspects while at the same time attempting to reduce the proposed density, thereby, enabling the planners to maintain an impression of having at least some relevance and authority. By departing from the 1982 plan with the radically revised 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan, however, BC Place Ltd. had effectively, though perhaps unintentionally, shattered the illusion that the city planners had any control over the course of development the project would take (see table 9.2).

Policies and major proposals for the North Shore of False Creek: 1969 - 1990						
Date	Source	Number of Living Units	Residential Population	Commercial* (sq. feet)	Max Height (storeys)	public space (acres)
1969	Marathon: Zoltan Kiss	11,780	20,000	140,000	35	
1974	Marathon: Zoltan Kiss	4,500	7,900	1.5 million	30	28
Dec-80	Cumberland Realty	6,000-12,000		8.3 million		
Mar-82	BC Place Ltd. : five architects	12,000	19,000	8.7 million	30 (+)	
May-82	COV:** BC Place Guidelines	8,000	16,000	3.2 million		50
Aug-83	BC Place Ltd. : Erickson/ F. F.	11,752	20,000	7.8 million	42	50
Oct-87	COV North Shore Dev. Policies			3 million		50
Apr-88	Concord Pacific: Lagoons	10,000	20,000	3.1 million	45	49
May-89	Concord Pacific: Bays	9,400	17,400	3.1 million	45	42
Apr-90	COV Official Plan	9,843		3.7 million	42	42

\*Totals include office space, hotel rooms, service and retail

\*\* COV is an abbreviation for "City of Vancouver"

Table 9.2: Proposals and City Planning responses: North Shore of False Creek 1969-1990.

Interpretation: By suggesting that this scheme was a continuation of the pattern of development seen in the West End, Arthur Erickson may have been attempting to win the support of the large

private developers who BC Place was planning to lease or sell development rights to, developers who had profited from the transformation of the West End (Boddy, 1984; Gutstein, 1982). However, by invoking the West End, Erickson seems to have also provoked substantial opposition to the 1983 plan, from people who were opposed to high rise development of any kind. Had Erickson instead emphasized the ways in which the new proposal was an improvement over the West End, and offered that valuable lessons from the West End experience had been learned and were being applied, it is possible that a very different dynamic might have evolved. Instead, Erickson couched his argument in terms of an inevitable development that was too late to alter, without delving into the many positive features of his design that made this a substantial improvement over the West End; this was a questionable tactic to employ in a city where the public had become adept at derailing large development initiatives, particularly those which featured numerous high rise towers.

These two factors, the unexplained radical change from the either 1982 proposal and the misguided suggestion that this represented a revival of the West End approach, had the combined impact of arousing mistrust and suspicion by the city planners and the general public. This does not fully explain why the plan was both rejected and largely forgotten, however, which also involved subsequent events.

### **The Vancouver City Planners respond: Coreplan**

The City Planning Department responded to the new plan for BC Place by presenting its own planning agenda for the entire downtown core of Vancouver, of which the BC Place property was only a part. This effort, named *Coreplan*, attempted to present the future development of the downtown core as consisting of issues of importance to the rest of Vancouver and the surrounding area. The Coreplan emphasized the need for action and proposed four basic categories for action:

1. Limit or deflect core employment growth
  2. Increase housing opportunity near the core
  3. Increase transportation capacity
  4. Provide environmental improvements
- City of Vancouver, Coreplan, 1983, 12-14.

In each of the four categories the city presented a review of the relevant issues, the actions taken to date and a list of recommended future actions. The biggest difference between this planning



effort and recent planning efforts by the city and by BC Place was the larger scale at which the City Planners attempted to address the major issues. Indeed, the scope of the Coreplan is quite extensive, with its closest parallel having been the prior work of Harland Bartholomew. It incorporates numerous maps and studies that document present conditions for a wide range of city-wide issues including commercial development, residential development, provision of public amenities and much more. The primary difference between this and the work of Bartholomew is that it refrained from offering concrete recommendations, but instead was intended, at least at first, to generate public interest and frame the development debate in a way that was relevant to the citizens of Vancouver.

The ultimate target, however, appears to be the Expo lands development. The Coreplan treats the Expo lands as an unexceptional part of a larger set of connected issues and it is not even identified or named in most plans, portraying the Expo lands instead as a seamless part of an interconnected set of urban issues impacting the entire city.

To further stimulate public interest in the Coreplan, the city published a document it titled: *“Quarterly Review: A look at trends and their implications for Vancouver.”* Volume 10, issue 3 features on the cover a cartoonish rendering, also appearing in the Coreplan itself, exaggerating the height and density of development proposed in the 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan, superimposed with the ominous warning: *“Is this the city you want?”* (City of Vancouver, July 1983) (see figure 9.26).

Although this may not be apparent to outside viewers, one issue that the cover image is focusing attention on is local public anxiety over increasing traffic congestion, in a city that lacked both freeways and an adequate transit system. One reason the planners opposed additional office construction downtown was the concern that this would flood the surrounding residential areas with commuter traffic. To highlight these concerns, numerous vehicles dominate the foreground of the image, depicting suburban streets overtaken by traffic jams, while faceless towers loom in the background. A second relevant concern is the threat of encroachment by the proposed development into cherished views of the mountains. Rather than engaging in a dialogue about the Erickson/Fisher Friedman proposal, the planners instead have attempted to reboot the entire process, rejecting the solution while initiating a new public dialogue intended to bring community interests back into the foreground.

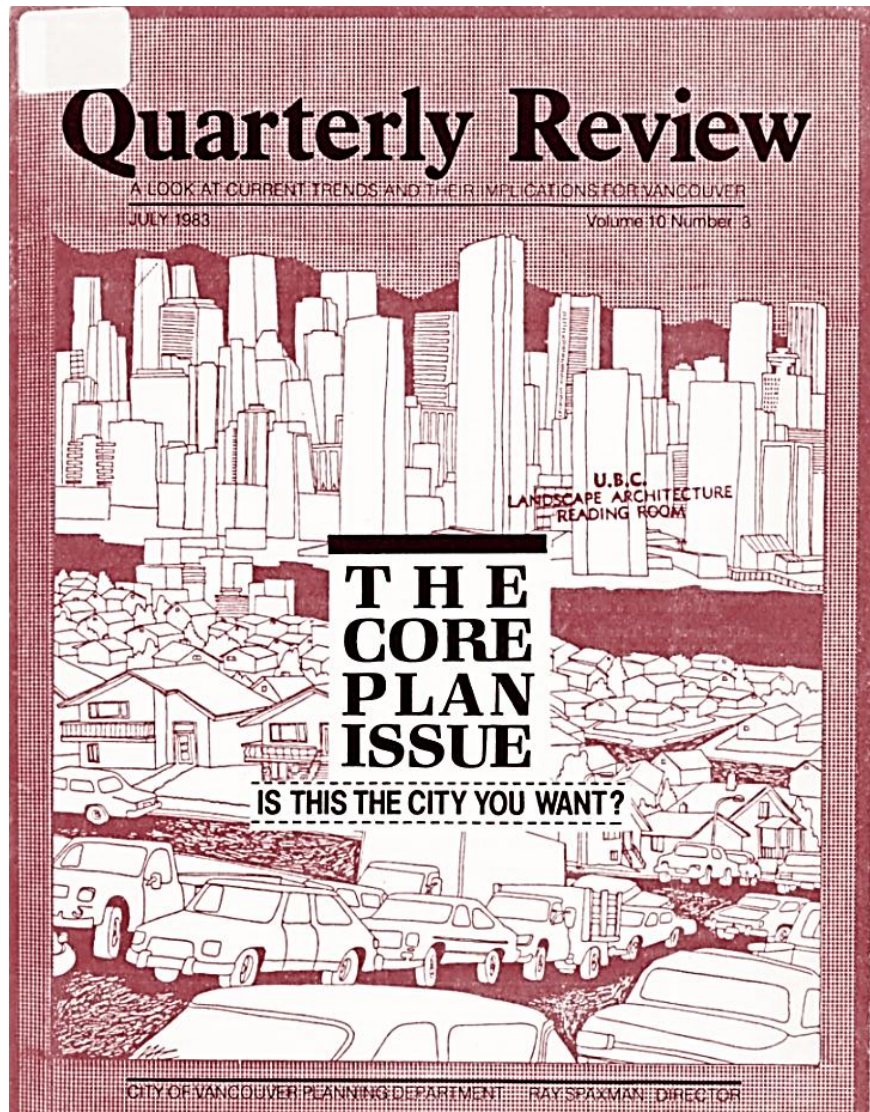


Figure 9.26: Cover of July 1983 Quarterly Review. Produced by City of Vancouver Planning Department, Ray Spaxman director (Note: the original document is printed on newsprint and has faded, this image has been altered using Photoshop to better approximate the original).

Meanwhile, as BC Place Ltd. struggled to confront these issues, the continuing fallout from a recent tragedy began to make an impact of a different sort. On March 26, 1983 the CEO of BC Place Ltd., Alvin Nairod, had suffered a fatal heart attack while at work (The Globe and Mail, March 28, 1983). The untimely passing of Mr. Nairod left a void in the leadership at BC Place Ltd. just at the time when the 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan was encountering public criticism, making effective response to this challenging situation even more difficult. These circumstances precipitated a reorganization of both the Expo 86 effort and the planning effort of BC Place Ltd., When the dust had settled the previously divided responsibilities for the Expo 86 and subsequent redevelopment effort had been effectively combined under the leadership the

new CEO, Jimmy Pattison. Pattison then promptly fired the BC Place Ltd. President Gil Hardiman, and in his place, promoted architect Stanley Kwok who had been serving on the BC Place Ltd. board of directors.

From this point forward, Stanley Kwok would play an essential role in the protracted process of development at False Creek, remaining with the project in a leadership role, first as the President of BC Place Ltd, and subsequently as the leader of a new design effort when the property later changed hands.

### **Stanley Kwok and the North Park collaboration:**

To appreciate the impact that Stanley Kwok has had on the development of Vancouver, it helps to know something of his background and how he came to make Vancouver his adopted home.

While living and working in Hong Kong, Stanley Kwok was prospering as a successful commercial architect, designing and overseeing construction of over 200 buildings. By all accounts he was well connected and highly regarded. Married and the father of four children he had begun to consider his future prospects if he remained in Hong Kong and in 1968 he concluded it was time to leave. He was 40 years old (Price, 2008).

Born in China in 1928, Kwok had in his youth relocated to Hong Kong with his family to escape the civil war that had eventually resulted in the establishment of a communist government in China. Although he had flourished in Hong Kong as an architect, Kwok had grown concerned that Hong Kong faced an uncertain future, as it was scheduled to revert to Chinese control in 1997. So he decided that it was best to leave while he still time to become professionally reestablished elsewhere. The question facing him was where to go? To decide Stanley Kwok established several criteria (Price, 2008).

Stanley Kwok determined that he wanted to live in an English speaking country where he could build on his already impressive professional portfolio. His destination, he decided, had to be a democracy, a country where his children would be able to get excellent university educations, and it had to be a country open to immigration. He decided that Australia was too far away, and New Zealand was not accepting immigrants; the United States was embroiled in the Vietnam War and he did not want to see his children drafted into that conflict. Therefore by process of elimination in 1968 Stanley Kwok chose to make his new home Vancouver BC (Price, 2008).

Upon moving to Vancouver, Kwok was able to quickly find work on the basis of his portfolio and his connections with international developers. Nevertheless, like many other architects who had chosen to relocate to Vancouver, as he began completing significant projects in Vancouver and the surrounding region, Stanley Kwok began to see himself too as a Vancouver architect. His prior experience in Hong Kong, however, would also prove essential to the eventual development at False Creek (Price, 2008).

Jumping forward fifteen years, upon becoming President of BC Place Ltd. in 1983, Stanley Kwok faced a complex and conflicting set of circumstances. On the one hand the new proposal by Erickson/Fisher Friedman had many positive attributes, in a design that seemed to satisfy many of the city's chief concerns, while also appealing to the developer. At the same time, by surprising the city with this new direction, prior suspicions surrounding large scale residential high rise development had again been aroused and BC Place found itself encountering opposition to the entire development effort. Time pressure was also mounting because development had to be ready to commence as soon as the six month run of Expo 86 had concluded in November of 1986, and much work remained to be done.

Stanley Kwok quickly recognized that the relationship between the city and the developers of BC Place needed to be restored if there was to be any hope of the project moving forward and so he made the establishment of a productive working relationship with the city a top priority. To set the stage for improved relations, he began by announcing that the prior design, the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan, was being set aside,<sup>18</sup> and that instead he was starting over with the design process (Price, 2008).

Stanley Kwok's next move was contacting Mayor Mike Harcourt. As Kwok explained years later, in his discussion with Harcourt it was agreed that development needed to happen at False Creek and Kwok wanted to work with the city in determining what would be built there. Instead of proposing yet another master plan that the city would then be forced to respond to only after it had been completed, Kwok suggested that a collaborative team be established in a single office, where the developer's team of local architects and a number of Vancouver city planners could work together collaboratively to develop a proposal that met their combined needs. The

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<sup>18</sup> This also is an important reason why the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan drifted into obscurity.



developers even offered to pick up the cost. The city agreed and the design process began to move forward again (Price, 2008).

Certainly this was an unusual arrangement, perhaps appearing to pose a conflict of interest because in collaborating with the developer, the city made its own normal role of independent evaluation of the developer effort more difficult. On the other hand, since the developer in question was linked to the provincial government, there was the option of viewing the arrangement as cooperation between the two levels of government. Furthermore, for a team of city planners who had seemed marginalized during the prior design efforts this invitation to participate must have been a welcome change of circumstances. Additionally, Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels of government had all had a hand in the successful recent development of the South Shore of False Creek, providing a precedent for a cooperative approach. Despite any reservations, the project moved forward on a collaborative basis.

### **North Park**

Stanley Kwok decided that the most useful way to proceed was to develop a plan for only a portion of the entire Expo site as a first step, resolving the design of one area before revisiting the rest of the immense site. This would enable both sides to develop an effective working relationship, while testing working methods and basic design solutions that could be used for the rest of the project. One reason for pursuing this approach was that this worked within the development timetable presented by the impending Expo 86; having part of the project ready to begin construction was important in terms of momentum, even though the entire development was expected to take place over a twenty five year span.

A plausible additional reason for using this more constrained approach could have been that by focusing attention to a smaller portion of the development, incorporating only a handful of new high rise towers, the development process could expect to encounter less opposition from the city and the residents than another comprehensive plan presenting at once 40 or 50 new high rises covering the entire site.

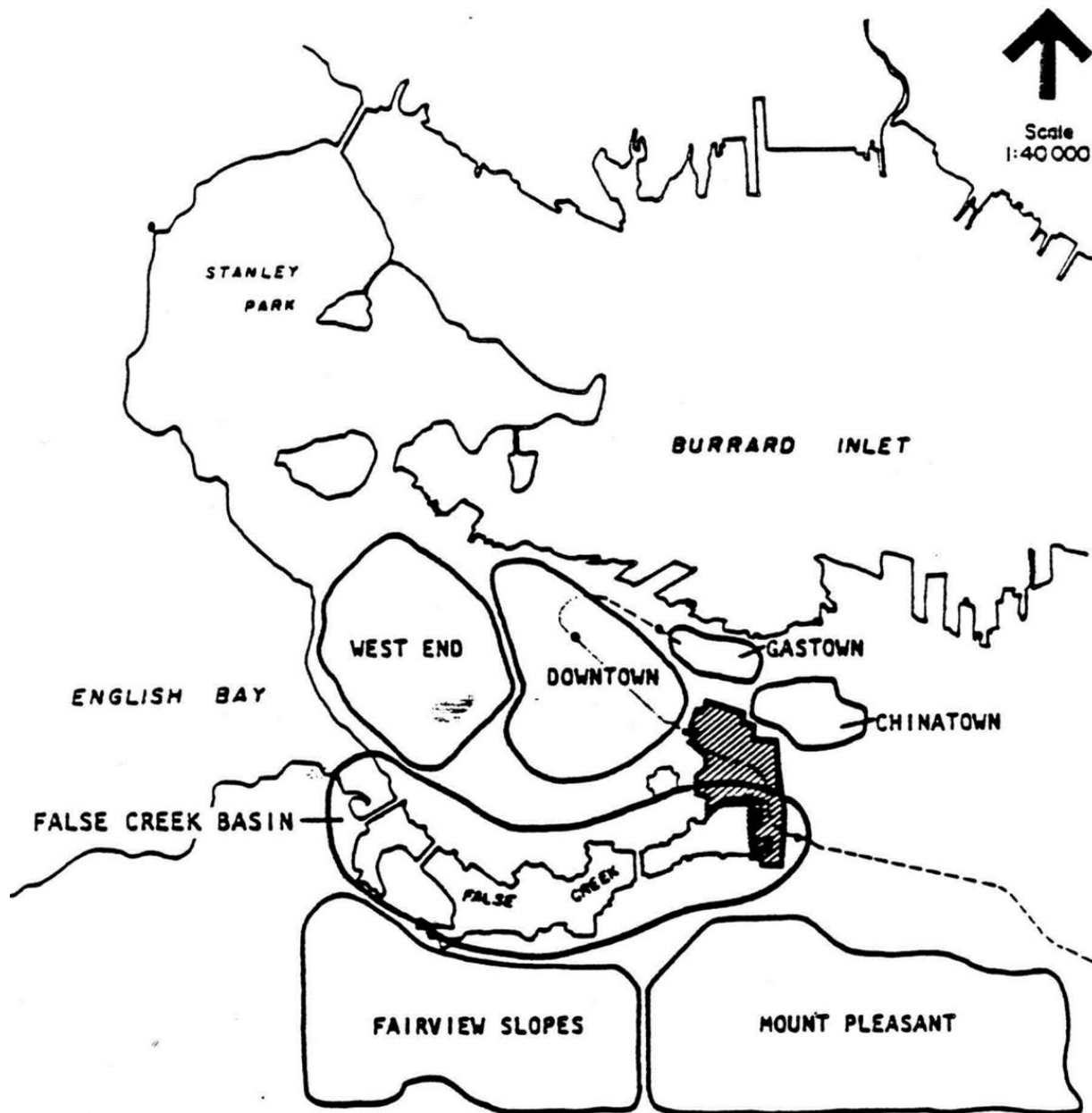


Figure 9.27: North Park: site context (City of Vancouver, March 12, 1986 appendix diagram 2).

The location Kwok selected as the starting point was the north east end of the site, an area that was known as North Park.<sup>19</sup> In some respects, this is an exceptionally challenging site. Situated between the stadium, False Creek, Strathcona and Chinatown, the North Park site is also traversed by a section of divided elevated roadway: the Georgia Viaduct. This land encompasses an area in the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan that had been subjected to particularly focused criticism; the plan had proposed for this area several large office towers, the tallest in the

<sup>19</sup> More recently this site has come to be known as the International Village.

Vancouver. The city instead wanted less office space, and more housing. Stanley Kwok began therefore developing at North Park a mixed use proposal that replaced the office towers with several more modestly scaled residential towers (see figures 9.27, 9.28).

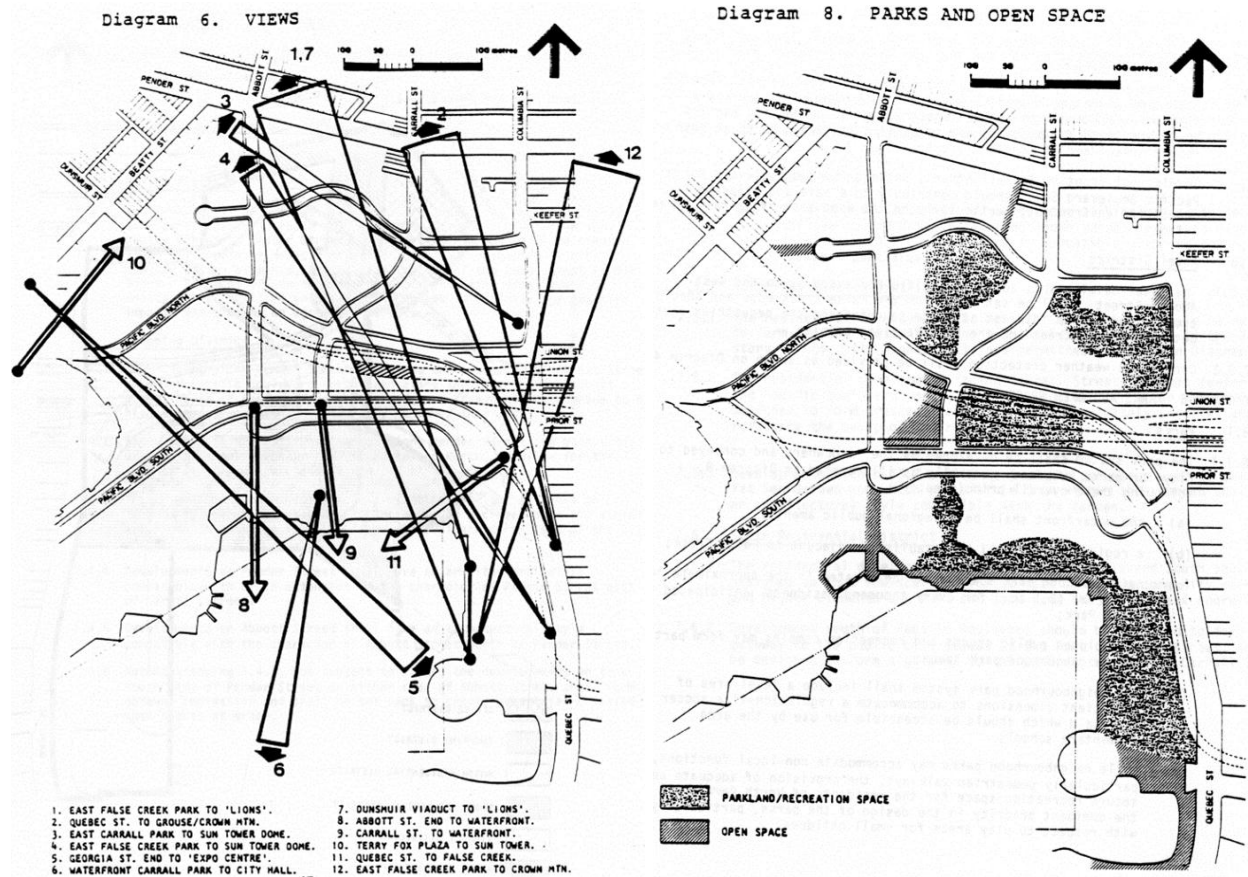


Figure 9.28: North Park Official development Plan: View Protection; Parks and Open Spaces (City of Vancouver, March 12, 1986, 9, 13).

To assist in this process, Stanley Kwok brought in two local architecture firms: Downs Archambault, and Davidson Yuen.<sup>20</sup> Both firms had prior experience working together at the South Shore of False Creek, while Downs Archambault also had knowledge of the Expo site from their work as one of the five local firms that had developed the 1982 plan and continued assisting Erickson and Fisher Friedman. Recently I had the opportunity to discuss the North Park project with Barry Downs. He described a working process in which the city planners and the architects would gather around a large model consisting of a base of cardboard and paper, while small wooden blocks were used to represent portions of buildings. When a taller building was

<sup>20</sup> Davidson Yuen has become the Vancouver architecture firm DYS, short for Davidson Yuen Simpson.

desired more blocks would be added, and the blocks could also be used to design low rise street fronting structures. One incident that captures the dynamic nature of this working relationship involved a discussion including Vancouver City Planning Director Ray Spaxman and Stanley Kwok. Spaxman reportedly concluded that one of the buildings under discussion was too tall so he removed several of the blocks, lowering the building by several stories, setting the offending wood blocks aside. As this was taking place Stanley Kwok did not object, but immediately set about picking up the removed blocks, discretely replacing them elsewhere in the model. A back and forth ensued during which the city and the developer struggled to find a mutually acceptable outcome, while learning to understand each other's interests more clearly.



Figure 9.29: Detail of North Park model (O'Brien, 1986, 37).



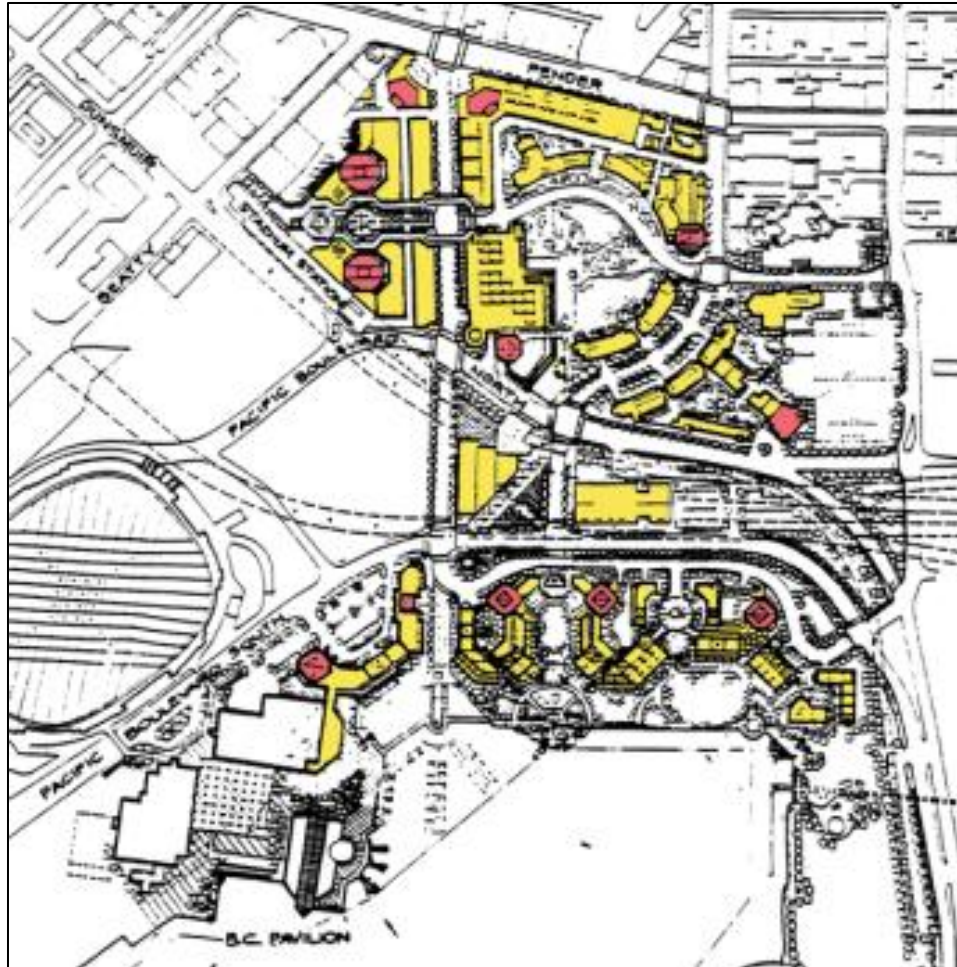


Figure 9.30: North Park Plan (City of Vancouver, March 12, 1986 p 25). Color added to improve legibility: Dark Orange indicates high rise towers, yellow indicates low rise infill.

This process evidently made a lasting impression on all participants. Stanley Kwok offered his own account of it in a radio interview. According to Kwok, this approach made it clear to the city planners that building heights could be reduced, but such reductions came at a price because the removed building mass had to be placed elsewhere on the model. The game he had set in motion stipulated a certain level of density would be maintained. A reduction in height in one place therefore meant that the remaining park spaces would have to be made smaller, to accommodate additional low rise buildings. Working in this way a design gradually emerged in which Spaxman was able to resolve the height issues and improve the public spaces, while Kwok was able to maintain the level of density needed to ensure that the project remained profitable (Price, 2008). No longer presented as a question of suppressing building heights, the question of the use of the residential high rise towers was reframed by Stanley Kwok as a building form that also presented potential significant benefits to the city in the form of improved public space at ground

level and more land for park space, resulting in a public domain that appeared improved over what had been previously proposed for this section of the site.<sup>21</sup> Through this process the city began to be won over to the new plan, even though it embodied many of the same qualities and characteristics of the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan (see figure 9.29).<sup>22</sup>

The end result of this collaborative process was a design that both the city and BC Place Ltd. each fully supported (Cruikshank, February 1, 1986). This design featured a three part division: the ground plane was mainly to be developed as commercial and retail space, above this yet still forming a continuous street face were located two story townhouse apartment units, and above this were located well separated residential point towers. As in the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan, the ground plane is a well-developed pedestrian oriented domain featuring parks, plazas, fountains trees and other amenities, and once again the design features an approach that extends the urban fabric of the city all the way to False Creek. Buildings and streets are aligned with existing streets to protect view corridors, and the waterfront remains a focus of pedestrian activity. Taller towers are located further back from the waterfront and the low-rise housing wraps around protected pedestrian oriented garden and park spaces (see figure 9.30).

City Planning documents reveal that there was extensive discussion over whether the waterfront in this area ought to perhaps be a commercial zone, with outdoor cafés overlooking the waterfront. The planners eventually rejected this concept, noting that the goal was to develop affordable housing well-suited to families, noting that Vancouver was a comparatively small city with a potential for a great deal of waterfront that could not all be developed as cafes. The two larger and taller towers located at the Northwest corner of the site were to be office towers and the space below a commercial shopping area with a major anchor tenant. The purpose of this mixed use strategy was to encourage a livable zone in the city that would be active at all times. All told the project was expected to produce 2600 new housing units, 20% of which were to be affordable housing. When asked about the anticipated construction schedule during a meeting, the city council minutes indicate that Stanley Kwok responded that between 5 to 7 years would be required to complete the entire North Park development (City of Vancouver, 1986).

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<sup>21</sup> Of course the idea of creating towers in a park was not at all a new idea, what Stanley Kwok accomplished was to present this idea in a context where the potential tradeoffs and benefits of going tall were more readily apparent within the familiar context of Vancouver.

<sup>22</sup> It was also around this time that on the other side of the Downtown Peninsula Richard Henriquez was reviving the use of residential point towers in Vancouver with his successful design for the Sylvia.

### **Evaluation: the importance of the North Park Proposal in context**

The North Park proposal features a pattern of development that is similar to the approach of other development at the waterfront in Vancouver now identified as Vancouverism. While the collaborative attitude that Stanley Kwok skillfully cultivated enabled a new process to take place in which developers and planners were able to work together, the actual forms proposed at North Park are nevertheless quite similar to those previously proposed for sections of the 1983 BC Place master plan at the western half of the site. The most notable difference is probable the inclusion of curving streets at North Park and the corresponding curving building forms that this encouraged. Otherwise, the similarities between the North Park Scheme at the earlier work at False Creek should not come as a surprise, for even though Fisher Friedman and Arthur Erickson no longer were involved, Downs Archambault had continued to work on the North Park Plan, providing continuity between the North Park design, the 1983 plan, the 1982 Concept Plan and the earlier effort at the South Shore of False Creek. Ray Spaxman was another point of continuity in the effort. Landscape architect Don Vaughan also provided additional continuity between the earlier and later projects.

Documents from around this also hint at a different, more direct explanation for the apparent similarity between the North Park design and the earlier Erickson Fisher Friedman design. A composite photo graph that appeared in a story about the North Park proposal in 1986 features a two page spread that is described as a composite photo combining the site model and an image of the city. The site model however is not limited to the North Park image, but instead also incorporates the rest of the Erickson/Fisher Friedman design that lay outside the boundaries of the North Park Site. Although it is likely that the designers who worked on the North Park Scheme were using only a piece of the much larger original model as the basis for their work, the photo appears to confirm that the original Erickson Fisher Friedman model was kept on hand for more than three years after Stanley Kwok had stated that the design was being set aside. Evidently this meant the design was being preserved in storage for potential future use. If this assessment is correct, then this suggests that Stanley Kwok may have intended to revisit the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan after first establishing a record of success at North Park, presenting another reason for beginning the development process at North Park, as well as explaining his decision to restrict design work to an isolated portion of the site (see figure 9.31).

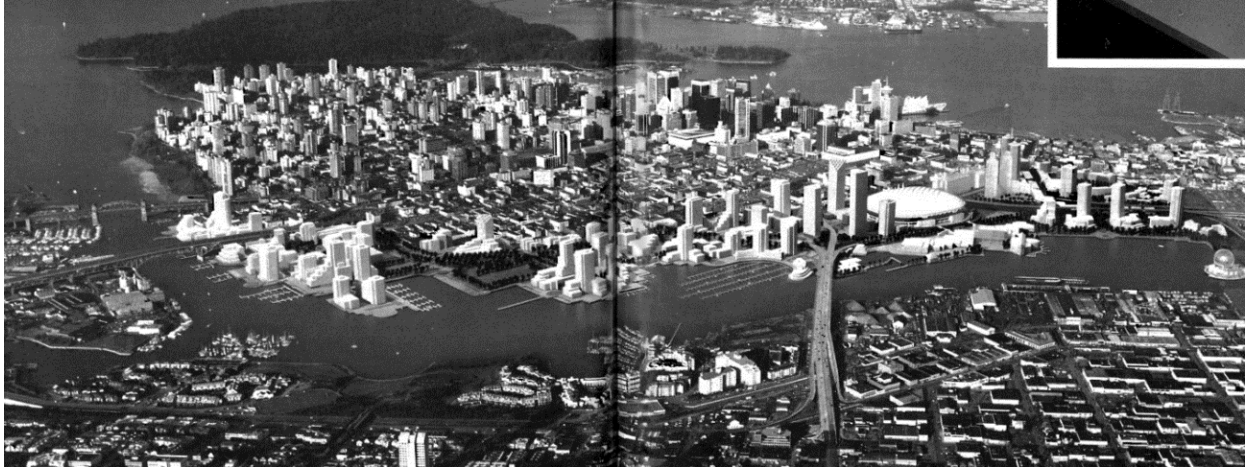


Figure 9.31: Composite model image and aerial photograph: detail (O'Brien, 1986 p 36, 37). Note this two page image appears in an article about the North Park project, yet it depicts a model combining North Park and the 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan, suggesting that the earlier plan had not been set aside, despite claims to the contrary by Stanley Kwok.

This then raises a related question for which a definitive answer may never be known: how much the design process at North Park represented an actual collaboration on a new design and how much it represented a skillful maneuver by Stanley Kwok to win the city over to what he had already wanted to do? The planners for their part may well be responsible for the improved quality of the public spaces in the final design, and overall the design seems a significant improvement over the prior work at this part of the site. As helpful as the planners may have been in this process, the most significant benefit to the entire collaborative effort, however, may simply have come from involving the planners in the process in a way where they became committed to the success of the project. Through the process of collaboration previous opposition to development at the North Shore and the fear that high rises would be bad for the city somehow began to take on a new complexion; the planners involved in the master planning process began to appreciate that there were positive tradeoffs in to be had in adding select towers to the mix; what had seemed a problem was now coming to be seen as an opportunity.

### **The sudden demise of North Park and the sale of the Expo lands**

For a time it appeared that Stanley Kwok had succeeded in repairing the rift that had grown between the city government and the Provincial government. Winning approval from the Vancouver City Council for the North Park plan, BC Place Ltd. now held the expectation that construction would commence shortly after Expo 86 closed in November of 1986.



The success however proved short lived. Politics once again entered in, this time at the Provincial level. In the aftermath of the October 22, 1986 British Columbia general election, the entire BC Place development effort suddenly lost the support of the Provincial government.

In brief, the implementation of Expo 86 had been marred by difficulties, primarily as the result of the Province insisting on the inclusion of non-union construction workers in the project, resulting in work stoppages and strikes, punctuated by threats by Premier Bill Bennett to cancel the entire Expo (Tafler, 1984). As this was going on, worries mounted that the Expo was running over budget and would in the end lose money; and despite an overall attendance of 22 million visitors to Expo 86, or double what had been projected, this negative assessment nevertheless would ultimately prove correct (Barman, 2007).

While concerns were coming to light over the likely eventual cost of the Expo, the financial viability of the North Park proposal began to be cast into doubt as well. A detailed sector by sector analysis of the financial prospects of the North Park development in the September 1986 issue of the trade publication *Canadian Builder* offered a rather grim prognosis<sup>23</sup>, suggesting that the market for office space in Vancouver was over-developed, while the housing market had largely shifted towards the suburbs. In an article that had noted that the Expo was expected to lose \$311 million dollars, and made predictions that, from a real estate development perspective, things were going to get worse in Vancouver before they got better. The article ends on an intentionally ironic note, concluding with a quote by the ever optimistic Stanley Kwok “*Expo had its skeptics too.*”<sup>24</sup> (O’Brien, 1986, 40).

At the Provincial level, meanwhile, Bill Bennett was facing dissent from within the ranks of his own party. The Socreds included amongst their members a powerful faction committed to financial austerity as a remedy to the sluggish economy, in direct opposition to the policy of increased government spending Bennett had vigorously pursued during his eleven years in office. As a result of these issues, and the public opposition he had provoked through his union busting activities Bill Bennett became increasingly unpopular on all fronts. Facing diminished

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<sup>23</sup> That a trade publication should devote four pages to an unflattering portrayal of a major pending development is actually rather peculiar, given the bias such publications typically have towards promoting development and the activities of developers.

<sup>24</sup> The implication of this quote is that the skeptics about Expo were correct, and hence skepticism about North Park might actually be entirely justified, even if Stanley Kwok might not have realized this.

prospects for winning another term in office, Bill Bennett chose instead to retire in 1986, ceding control of the Socred party to his former rivals.

The realigned Socred party managed to win the 1986 election and Bennett's replacement, William Vander Zalm, became the next Premier of British Columbia. Accordingly, in keeping with the new government policy of reducing government spending through austerity and privatization, incoming Finance Minister Grace McCarthy concluded that the North Park development was not financially feasible, deciding instead that the Province would soon be selling the entire Expo site to a private developer.<sup>25</sup> The BC government therefore began making arrangements for the sale of the vast site it had assembled at False Creek, with the exception of BC Place Stadium which it continues to own and operate today (Barman, 2007; Stainsby, 1987).

The decision to sell the Expo lands was seen as controversial because this meant that the Province would no longer be able to recoup its investment in infrastructure. The expectation had been that over the next 25 years the Expo lands would be gradually developed as the Province leased different portions to developers, reusing the infrastructure created for the Expo and finally making a profit on its investment. Instead by selling the land, the financial equation suddenly changed, resulting in a substantial loss for the Expo and by extension for the Province and the City<sup>26</sup> (Barman, 2007; Matas, June 17-21, 1989; McMartin, June 15, 1987; O'Brien, 1984).

The Province had three essential conditions for the sale, first of all the price had to be agreeable, secondly the developer had to be qualified to tackle such an immense undertaking, and finally the sale of the land hinged upon the presentation of a comprehensive development plan for the property that would be acceptable to the Province. Complicating this process was the reality that once the sale went through, jurisdiction over all aspects of planning and development policy would immediately revert to control of the City of Vancouver, meaning that no matter how much

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<sup>25</sup> The Vander Zalm administration was seen as having been plagued by numerous scandals, one of which involved efforts by the Premier to rig the sale of the Expo lands so that it would go to Peter Toigo a close personal friend of the Premier. These efforts however failed. Eventually in 1991 Vander Zalm would be forced to resign as a result of another scandal involving a conflict of interest related to the attempted sale of property of which he was the owner. As a result of the 1991 election, Michael Harcourt became the new Premier of British Columbia, as the leader of the New Democrat Party (Barman, 2007.).

<sup>26</sup> BC eventually responded to this shortfall by establishing a lottery (Barman, 2007).

the Province liked a development proposal, this was no guarantee that this would be allowed to proceed (Matas, June 17, 1989).<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, although Stanly Kwok vigorously insisted that the two matters were unrelated, shortly after he learned that the North Park development would not be moving forward, he resigned as President of BC Place (Hamilton, April 10, 1987). This however would not mark the end of Stanley Kwok's involvement at False Creek, if anything, his work was just beginning.

While this process was going on, efforts continued by the Provincial government to court Asian investment in British Columbia, and this effort was showing results, especially in the area of real estate investment and redevelopment (Gutstein, 1990). Li Ka-Shing, a self-made billionaire, businessman and real estate developer based in Hong Kong had begun around this time to further diversify his holdings in foreign markets. In addition to investing in other properties in Vancouver, Li began to take an active interest in developing the Expo property. In establishing a

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<sup>27</sup> Katharyne Mitchell has argued that the decision of the Province to sell to foreign developers the North Shore of False Creek was motivated essentially by "revenge" against the liberal government of Vancouver, which had previously impaired the ability of large scale developers to fully exploit the apparent development potential of land in Vancouver (Mitchell, 2004). While this is in many ways an intriguing argument, several relevant points weigh against it. By the time that Province decided to sell the property, Michael Harcourt was no longer the Mayor and the conservative Pro-developer NPA party had regained control of the local Vancouver government (Punter, 2003). The City Council had approved the North Park proposal and was ready to go ahead with development. Vancouver Newspapers were openly predicting in 1987 that Ray Spaxman would soon be stepping down as planning director; he surprised his detractors by lasting two more years (McMartin, May 7, 1987). If revenge was the motive it is unclear just whom this revenge was to be directed against, since the people at fault were either gone or expected to soon be leaving and the City had once again adopted a pro-development position. Secondly, if the desire was to help powerful development interests who had government connections to exploit (Mitchell, 2004), it makes very little sense to orchestrate a sale targeted at a wealthy foreign investor, since this course of action would also prevent the local or even regional developers from profiting. A more plausible explanation is that if there was any revenge involved it was being aimed at former Premier Bill Bennett, who had pursued this development at a time of economic stagnation as a massive public works project intended to boost the economy, over the objections of factions within his own party who believed that austerity measures would do more to alleviate the economic malaise. Selling the lands also prevented Bennett from achieving a lasting legacy in built form (Barman, 2007). When the austerity minded faction of the Socreds gained control of the government in 1986, they orchestrated the sale of the Expo lands not to force development onto Vancouver, as is argued by Katharyne Mitchell, but because the new leadership had decided it wanted out of the development business, even though this would come at a heavy cost. Instead of a revenue stream that would be perhaps able to offset some of the cost of the Expo 86 development, the Socred government sold the land at what is generally regarded as a very low price, reputedly \$320 million dollars with a down payment of only \$50 million (Gutstein, 1990). The government of British Columbia had been actively marketing their province to affluent potential immigrants in Asia and the sale of the BC Place property to an Asian developer accomplished two fundamental goals: freeing themselves of the legacy of Bill Bennett and increasing the flow of foreign capital into the Province. As it turned out, the new Socred administration was marred by scandals, some of which were related to the handling of the Expo lands sale, creating the opportunity for the New Democrat Party (NDP) under the leadership of Michael Harcourt, to win the next Provincial election in 1991. Meanwhile, the control of development reverted back to control by the Vancouver government, which continued to be active in supporting the development process. For more information on the scandal plagued Vander Zalm administration; see also: *Breach of Promise: Socred ethics under Vander Zalm*, by Graham Leslie, 1991.

team to pursue the bid, he turned to Stanley Kwok who of course had recently become available. After checking with BC Place to ensure that his participation in the bid process would be permissible, Kwok accepted the offer and began working for Li Ka-Shing and the company he had established to pursue the development: Concord Pacific (Hamilton, 1987; Price, 2008).

To prepare the new masterplan required as a condition for bidding on the project, Stanley Kwok once again assembled a team of local architects, combining the services of three different firms. As before he once again chose to work with Downs/Archambault, and Davidson Yuen and to this mix he added Vancouver architect Rick Hulbert. Hulbert was an American architect who had relocated to Vancouver after marrying a Canadian and there he had grown his practice. His international award winning practice had come to Kwok's attention due to a substantial body of work that included Sanctuary Cove, a 2000 acre oceanfront resort development in Gold Coast Australia featuring a complex program including a hotel, townhouses and two golf courses,<sup>28</sup>

### **The Lagoons Scheme:**

The bidding process for the Expo lands was an intensely competitive high-stakes process, with a project worth several billion dollars at stake; accordingly the design team assembled by Stanley Kwok pursued their work in an atmosphere of utmost secrecy. Although his team could have produced something resembling their earlier work at the site, Stanley Kwok charged his designers with producing something new and visionary, a design capable of impressing the Province and winning the bid to develop the land at False Creek; by all accounts, the team delivered. Working long hours on the secret project,<sup>29</sup> the team completed a new and compelling vision for False Creek and Vancouver that is now known as the Lagoons Scheme; the design succeeded in winning the bid for Li Ka-Shing (Hall, 1988; Price, 2008; Vaughan, 2011).

One effect of the secrecy surrounding the design effort was to magnify the impact the proposal sparked when it was finally unveiled for the first time, an impact that was intensified further still by the extraordinary level of detail to which the model itself had been developed. While each of

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<sup>28</sup> These comments are informed by discussions with Barry Downs and Rick Hulbert.

<sup>29</sup> One anecdote about the Lagoon Scheme work recounted by Stanley Kwok years later, in a recorded radio interview with Gordon Price, is a story of how Kwok had to call the wife of one of his architects to reassure her that indeed her husband had been working long hours late into the night on a secret project of considerable importance. Evidently the architect in question had been coming home late with such frequency and without being able to account for his whereabouts that his wife had come to suspect that he was having an affair. Ever the skillful mediator, Kwok calmly reassured her and then sent her a huge bouquet of flowers with a note of appreciation for the work her husband was doing, thereby resolving the incident (Price, 2008).



the earlier proposals for the North Shore Property had featured well-crafted massing models that effectively illustrated the general concept being proposed, in the Lagoons Scheme the model builders, and presumably the designers, had taken things a major step further. Instead of just using painted wooden blocks to represent the new buildings as before, this time the presentation model depicts new buildings with windows as well as suggesting plantings, materials and other details. Surviving photographs suggest that many of the new buildings were actually illuminated from within (see figure 9.32). In the era of model building prior to digital fabrication, producing this model would have required a staggering amount of skilled work, all in pursuit of a project which the developers had not yet been awarded.



Figure 9.32: Detail of Model (Hulbert, 1988, in Price, October 13, 2004).

Discussions with Rick Hulbert and Barry Downs have confirmed that while the Lagoons Scheme evolved through a dynamic collaborative process in which all participants contributed worthwhile ideas, Rick Hulbert was clearly the team leader of this design effort. The potential value in choosing a fresh architect who had not been involved in the prior efforts at False Creek can be seen in the new approach taken in the plans for the Lagoons Scheme. While different aspects of earlier design proposals can be discerned in the plan, including the combined use of high rises and low rise structures, and the division of the site into different neighborhoods each



with its own distinctive character, in other respects the Lagoon Scheme represents a highly original new proposal for the North Shore of False Creek.

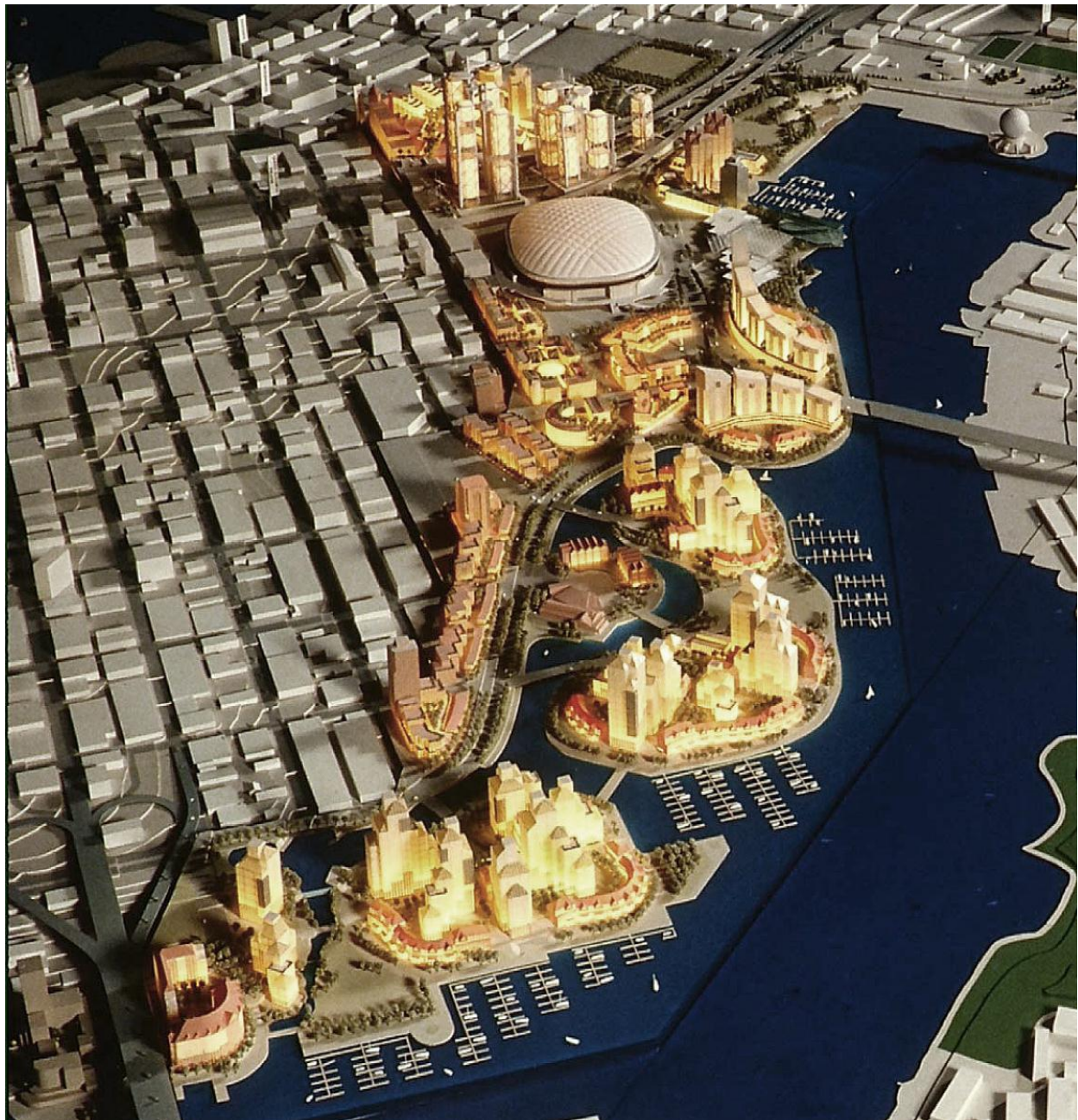


Figure 9.33: Lagoons Scheme, model photograph (Hulbert, 1988 in Price, October 13, 2004).

On the new islands a new form of high rise tower is proposed that defies easy classification, being neither a slab nor a point tower. Unlike the extruded prismatic shapes seen in the West End, or the prior plans at False Creek, the high rises proposed here are asymmetrical, multifaceted, stepping, sculpted forms. At the Cambie Bridge, a different strategy featuring



towers of increasing height is used to frame a view that expands as one approaches the stadium (see figure 9.32). At the north eastern portion of the site where the North Park Scheme had been located, a third novel high rise strategy has been proposed using a modular component strategy of a more industrial character (see figure 9.33).

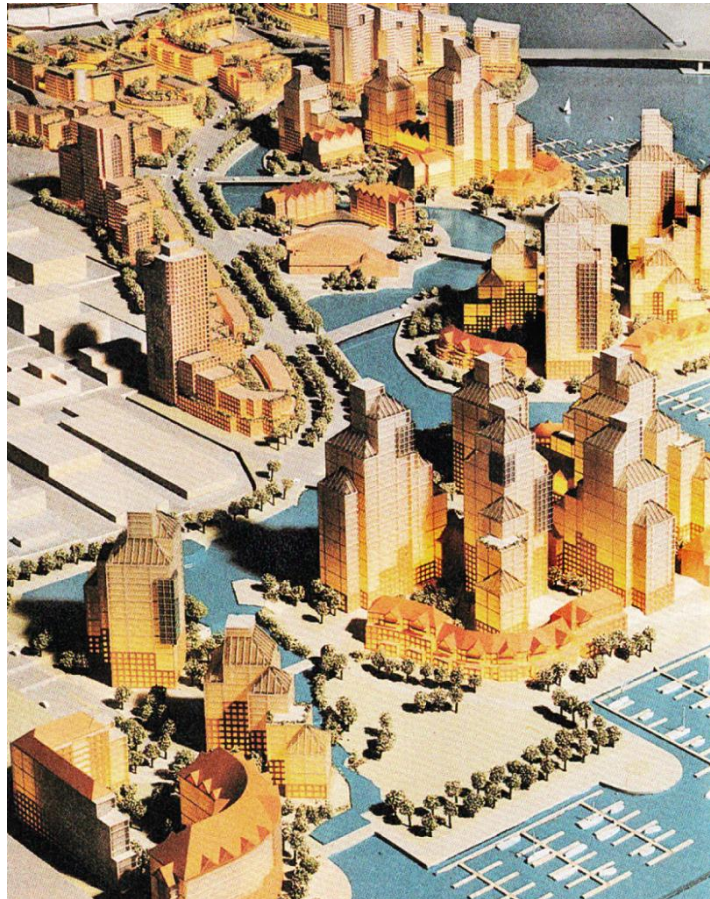


Figure 9.34: Lagoons Scheme, model photograph (Hamilton, April 28, 1988a).

Meanwhile at the ground level, this project takes the design of pedestrian based experience even further than prior schemes. Instead of using the low rise buildings as either infill or as platforms onto which to place towers, low rise townhouses instead are arranged with greater freedom and flexibility to define the foreground, visually pushing the towers into the background.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the Lagoons Scheme is the feature that also gave it its name. While the team of architects who developed the Lagoons Scheme clearly recognized the desirability of maintaining the water area of False Creek, they also understood that by extending the finished shoreline northward while developing several new islands, the resulting public shoreline would be doubled in length. The Lagoons concept was therefore not just about

expanding the access to waterfront views; it also was intended to improve pedestrian access to the waterfront (see figure 9.34).<sup>30</sup>

### **The rise and fall of the Lagoons Scheme**

The Lagoon Scheme and the bid by Li Ka-Shing were accepted by the Province and the sale of the Expo Land was completed, for a price of \$320 Million, to be paid over an extended period of time. Officials in the Provincial government were impressed and pleased by the Lagoons Scheme; Economic Development Minister Grace McCarthy even went so far as to suggest that Pacific Place represented a model "*for the rest of the world to watch and envy.*" (Hamilton, April 28, 1988b).

Initial public reception of the Lagoon Scheme was also generally quite positive; newspaper reports describe the new proposal in overly favorable terms, as a "*West Coast Venice*" (Hamilton, April 28, 1988a). Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell was clearly pleased with the proposal and the acceptance of the design by the Province, commenting: "*finally something we can deal with.*" And then further elaborating: "*The model is clearly breathtaking and I'm pleased the City of Vancouver will be in control of planning.*" (Hamilton, April 28, 1988b).

However, despite the accolades the design received, there also were indications that further refinements or concessions might be needed before the project could go ahead. Jim Green, a spokesman for the Downtown Eastside Residents Association expressed concern that the scheme did not appear to include affordable housing, but instead featured buildings targeted towards high income uses. The islands themselves were seen as being elitist even though they helped increase the availability of public waterfront. These concerns were also echoed in remarks made by Bob Williams, an economic development critic for the New Democratic Party (NDP), the main rival to the Socreds (Hamilton, April 28, 1988b; Hunter, 1988; Krangle, 1988).

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<sup>30</sup> In a discussion with Rick Hulbert I was informed that the Lagoon Scheme had also been designed with the goal of improving the health of the False Creek inlet itself. One of the considerations given to the layout of the islands was how interactions with tidal flows would contribute to the elimination of old pollutants that had built up over the years through the use of False Creek as a center for industrial production. Accordingly, the Lagoon Scheme was expected to clean the water way, restoring the inlet in the process. I am not qualified to affirm or refute the validity of this claim, but it is revealing that the designers were considered with issues related to cleaning up accumulated pollution and the enhancement of False Creek basin when proposing their novel design.



On the whole, the project appeared to be off to a promising start. Proposing a new master plan for False Creek to be used by a private developer represented a double challenge for Stanley Kwok and his team of architects: they not only had to produce a design that would secure the sale of the land by pleasing the Provincial authorities, they had to also then win the approval of the City of Vancouver. That this came in the immediate aftermath of a falling out between the two levels of government is significant. Once the sale of the land was completed, administrative control of development permits reverted to the City of Vancouver, and the city was under no obligation to accept a development proposal, no matter how much the Province may have liked the proposal. In this light, the support by both the Province and the Mayor seemed encouraging. This positive state of affairs, however, would not last.

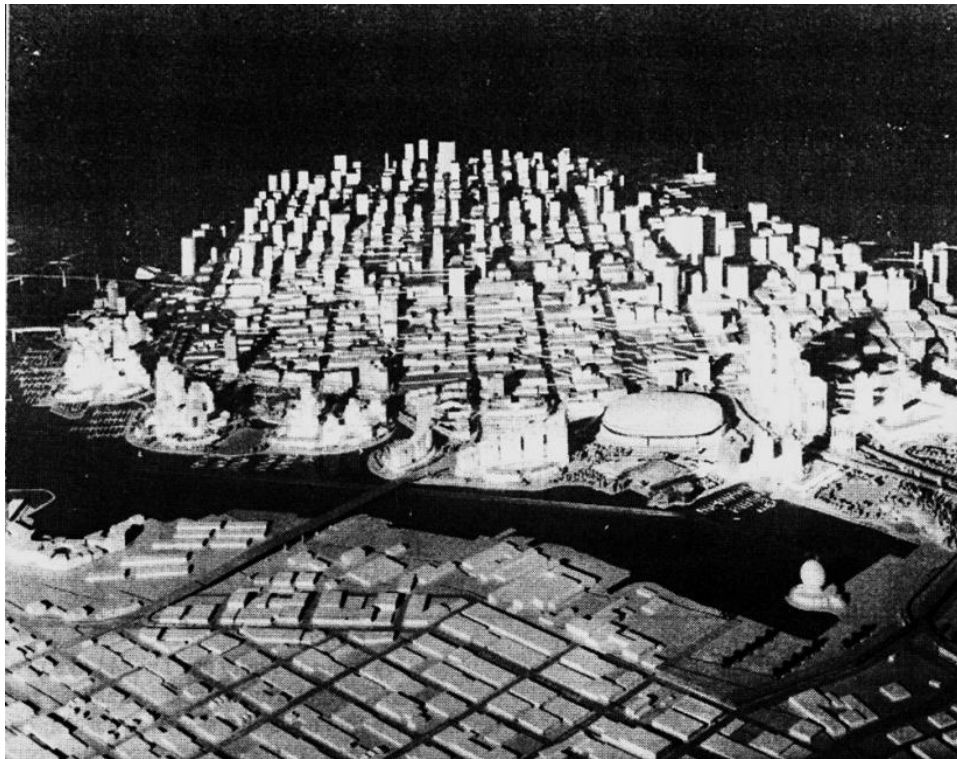


Figure 9.35: Lagoons Scheme. From this angle, the model reveals potential disruption of the street grid and views (The Creek Slopes Magazine, October 1988, 10).

### **The replacement of the Lagoons Scheme with the final design: the Bays Scheme**

Relations between the City and the Province began to sour when it was learned that Provincial authorities, as part of the terms of the property sale, had entered into a secret bargain with Concord Pacific, the contents of which they refused to reveal (Hamilton, May 7, 1988). When it subsequently came out, nevertheless, that part of the bargain was an increased payment to the

Province if the City could be forced to agree to a higher density of development, city officials were understandably outraged. Once this aspect of the deal was made public, the Province suggested that it would be willing to share with the city some of the reported \$180 Million<sup>31</sup> it expected to receive if the higher density approach went forward, but the city was not impressed (Cox, May 11, 1988 a and b). The very next day the City Council voted to reject the offered deal (The Globe and Mail, May 12, 1988).<sup>32</sup>

There is a bit of confusion regarding what actually happened next, and how the Lagoons Scheme came to be replaced by the Bays Scheme which in the end went ahead and became the official basis for the development of Pacific Concord Place at False Creek.

The official account of events as portrayed in newspaper reports suggests that Concord Pacific learned of public concerns over the Lagoons Scheme through the course of five public meetings to discuss the proposal, and in response to these concerns had taken the initiative to develop a viable alternative plan intended to resolve these issues. Both design schemes were then presented to the public, and people were invited to express their preference for which scheme they liked the best. Eventually the new scheme, the Bays Scheme, received the resounding support of the city, and on this basis the project was approved to go ahead (Kavanagh, 1989; Lee, May 17, 1989).<sup>33</sup>

When asked whether he approved of the outcome, ever the diplomat, Stanley Kwok replied: *"From our point of view, either one would work very well within the city. While I can make more money with a lagoon scheme, I have to say I'm happy with the bays scheme* (Lee, May 17, 1989)." Presumably he was happy because this meant that after years of effort the project was finally moving forward.

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<sup>31</sup> This figure may not have been accurately reported by Sarah Cox; Robert Matas (June 20, 1989) reported a much smaller amount was at issue, somewhere between \$7.5 million and \$32.5 million dollars. Matas however appears to have been relying upon word of mouth claims offered by BC Government officials, at a time when they were trying to save face after what was seen to have been a poorly managed negotiation process and these sources would have therefore had strong motivations for understating the scope of the proposed density payoff. Because this was leaked information regarding a secret agreement, establishing the accuracy of either claim is impractical.

<sup>32</sup> This situation may also explain how the City of Vancouver was eventually able to extract large concessions from the developer as development progressed, as well as undermining the Lagoons Scheme. The secret agreement revealed that the developer had more money and was willing to pay for the opportunity to develop at increased densities. By rejecting the Lagoons scheme and then negotiating concessions on a case by case basis, large payments went to the City of Vancouver instead of to the Provincial government that had actually owned the land.

<sup>33</sup> I have obtained copies of the questionnaire distributed at these meetings and it is clear that the public were offered a choice between the two schemes and the opportunity to comment on either design.

An alternative account offered by the landscape architect for the design team, Don Vaughan, indicates however that there was more going on than is addressed in other published sources.<sup>34</sup>

The team of designers developing the Lagoons Scheme had been working for over a year on the project, and throughout this time they were trying meet the demands of the city, under the expectation if the current hurdle could be crossed then the project would finally be allowed to move forward and construction would begin. Instead, what seemed to be happening was that as each obstacle was addressed a new one would appear in its place. Stanley Kwok wanted to know if the city would ever approve the Lagoons Scheme. As reported by Don Vaughan:

After several attempts to resolve the City's concerns Stanley [Kwok] met with the City Manager and asked what he would have to do to get the project moving forward he was told: "You have created a great project, now try to create a project that will make this a great city."

The Guiding Principles that Stanley was given at that meeting were:

1. Keep the existing shoreline as it is.
2. Extend the street grid through the project<sup>35</sup>
3. Place the towers to align with the streets.
4. Give parks a priority on the waterfront.

Stanley came back to the design team and told us we had two weeks to create several new schemes. He asked us to break into individual groups with each architect and Don to lead the teams. Davidson Yuen chose to manage the process leaving three teams; Hulbert Group, Downs Archambault and Don Vaughan Ltd. After the two weeks we all gathered in the board room with the drawings posted on the walls.

Don Vaughan (<http://donvaughan.wordpress.com/landscape-architecture/urban-design/concord-pacific-place-vancouver-b-c/>).

After the two week time period had elapsed, a meeting was held when all of the new schemes were presented. Rick Hulbert began the discussion with a plan emphasizing axial planes and views, Barry Downs then followed this with a presentation that provided not one, but three new alternative schemes. Because Davidson Yuen acted as the leaders of this design process, this left one remaining team, working under the direction of Don Vaughan. Vaughan's team proposed a plan that he called the Bays Scheme, which as he described it, was based upon the plan proposed

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<sup>34</sup> This section is based upon discussions with Don Vaughan and also his written recollections of these events published in his online blog (source).

<sup>35</sup> To see why the issue of street alignment was problematic in the Lagoons scheme, see figure 9.35.

by Paul Merrick for the South Shore of False Creek in which parks and paths were used to enliven the waterfront (Vaughan, 2011).

Specifically, the point that Don Vaughan picked from the Paul Merrick South Shore Master Plan was that by siting the building groups at the portions of the site that projected out into False Creek and locating parks and public spaces at the places where the bays carved into the site, several positive results were attained. First of all, this approach heightened the waterfront experience, making False Creek seem larger and the site itself deeper. Placing buildings closer to the water at the points also heightened the experience of a changing and unfolding scene as one progressed around the seawall path. Furthermore this arrangement meant that the park spaces were flanked by buildings which gave the parks definition, improving both the parks and the buildings around them.

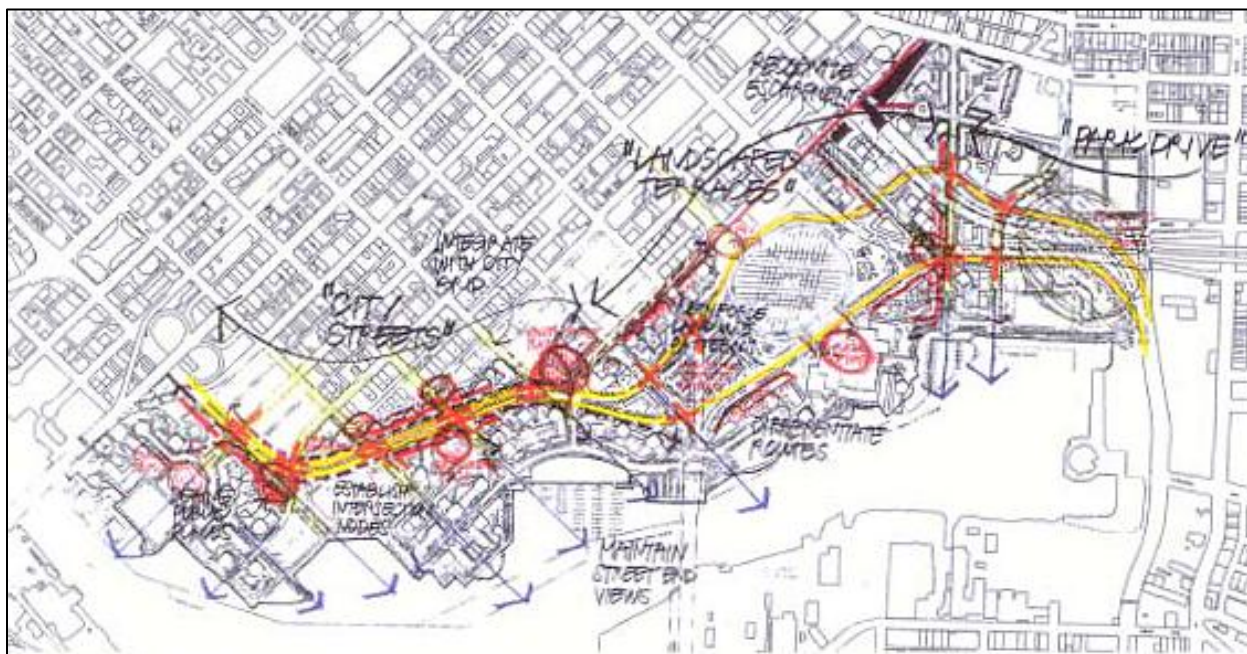


Figure 9.36: Don Vaughan's original sketch of the Bays Scheme (Don Vaughan, 1988).

In translating these site design insights to the larger site at the North Shore of False Creek, Don Vaughan was dealing with a larger site, but it presented the opportunity for south facing outdoor events that looked towards the waterfront, an advantage that the South Shore lacked. Vaughan began by locating the major outdoor spaces that would animate the waterfront: the Beach Crescent, David Lam Park and the Marinaside Crescent. Next he set about arranging the buildings in a manner that would complement the landscape while connecting the site to the



existing fabric of the city. In this effort he drew on three sources of inspiration: the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan, the prior work that Norman Hotson had done for BC Place investigating the reuse of the old railroad Roundhouse, and the earlier work of Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies at False Creek.<sup>36</sup>

After the design proposals were presented and discussed, Stanley Kwok and the group decided that the solution the group would focus on developing would be the Bays Scheme. Stanley Kwok was particularly pleased by the way that the arrangement of buildings proposed by Don Vaughan had the benefit of providing all of the towers with excellent access to views of the waterfront, which of course increased their market value. The scheme also had the advantage of providing a diverse range of opportunities for outdoor recreation, increasing the appeal of the plan as a potentially family friendly development, and finally the plan satisfied the four conditions that had been laid out by the City Manager (see figure 9.36).

Accordingly the team further developed Bays Scheme, developed another impressive scale model and then won over both the city officials and the general public with this new design, which with further adjustment, became the basis for the development people live in and enjoy today (see 9.37, 9.38).



Figure 9.37: Photograph of the Bays Scheme model (DYS website).

<sup>36</sup> Don Vaughan had worked for Arthur Erickson as a landscape architect for his SFU Campus design, a project which Zoltan Kiss also worked on. Vaughan designed the courtyard garden for the academic quadrangle at SFU for which Kiss was the architect, and understandably took interest in Kiss's subsequent proposals for Marathon.



Figure 9.38: Photograph of the Bays Scheme model (DYS website).

Interpretation: The account of these events offered by Don Vaughan is revealing, offering valuable insight into how the final version of the master plan for False Creek came into being. After trying for over a year to win the approval of the Lagoons Scheme only to see this project rejected, it is impressive that Stanley Kwok could quickly adapt to the changed circumstances, and in the same meeting reframe the issue in a manner that made ultimate success attainable. By asking the city outright what they needed to see for the project to move forward, Kwok was given a set of specific conditions which, when satisfied in the next scheme, would be substantially harder for the city to reject, having already agreed to these terms. He thus turned failure into a better chance for success, just as he had previously at the North Park project.

The way that the final design itself developed is also revealing. While the bulk of the design effort and evaluation of the numerous proposals for the North Shore of False Creek had focused primarily on the form and configuration of the proposed buildings, the eventual solution was



initiated by skillfully considering the design in terms of the landscape and how this landscape then interacted with the buildings to produce an overall combined result well related to the larger context. Rather than being a convenient byproduct or appealing extra, the elements of Vancouverism most directly concerned with the landscape, and its relationship to the larger urban fabric, appear to have been essential to finally implementing this new form of Urbanism. While the active urban landscape element played a significant role in most of the projects proposed for both sides of False Creek, the Outdoor Urban Room pattern was introduced in the Erickson/Fisher Friedman plan, but became more fully developed in the Bays Scheme, where it emerged as a more explicit organizing principle (see figure 9.39).



Figure 9.39: Comparison of the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan and the Bays Scheme: Detail view. Upper image shows 1983 plan. Lower image adds the waterfront profile of the Bays Scheme in dark blue, the two major park spaces and main axes of the Bays Scheme in bright green. There are both differences and similarities between the two schemes. (Robert Walsh, based on Vaughan, 1988 and Erickson/Fisher Friedman, 1983).

The one remaining difficulty presented by the account offered by Don Vaughan is that his detailed glimpse into the inner workings of the urban design team seems to contradict newspaper accounts, which portrayed the Bays Scheme as having been presented before the Lagoons Scheme was formally rejected by the City Council. Vaughan's account indicates that it was the City Manager's rejection of the Lagoons Scheme that precipitated the effort that produced the Bays scheme.

One way that these differences can be effectively reconciled is if the public presentation of the two schemes actually amounted to a carefully choreographed bit of political theater meant to confer public support to decisions that had already been reached in private between the City Manager and Stanley Kwok. If this is what indeed took place then it proved highly effective; offering the public the choice between the two competing schemes enabled the developer to mobilize public support for the new scheme while letting the brewing controversy die with the Lagoon scheme. Giving the public the illusion of authority in this manner by offering them a choice between the original design and the one based allegedly upon their stated concerns also appeared to put them in control of the situation, thereby helping the developer win the public support needed for the project to win approval.

### **The project moves forward**

Although public opposition to the development proposed for False Creek was largely overcome, it never entirely abated. As the project moved forward, questions regarding affordability of the new housing continued and questions emerged concerning sales of living units to foreign investors before Vancouver residents had an opportunity to buy (Bryson, September 23, 1988; Hamilton, November 27, 1990; Vancouver Sun, November 4, 1989). This opposition however had become less effective; one factor was the return to power of the NPA party in Vancouver politics with the election of Mayor Gordon Campbell in 1986. Meanwhile the former opposition to the NPA seemed to be waning. Even Walter Hardwick had expressed an opinion largely in favor of the final Bays Scheme design, stating that the proposed heights and densities of the project did not worry him, emphasizing that instead the essential need was housing (Godley, October 8, 1988). Michael Harcourt was busy focusing his attention on Provincial politics and the NDP party. Two months after Hardwick offered his endorsement of the Bays Scheme, Ray



Spaxman tendered his resignation, later acknowledging that communication with the City Council had been problematic (Lee, December 9, 1988).<sup>37</sup>

The Official Development Plan for the North Shore of False Creek was formally submitted in April, 1989 and was eventually approved in November 1989 (City of Vancouver 1989; Ferry, 1989). This was followed by a more detailed official development plan approved by the Vancouver City Council April 10, 1990 (City of Vancouver, April 1990). Much work still needed to be done in terms of detailed design of buildings and other aspects of the design, but for the first time in a process that had begun decades earlier, development at the North Shore of False Creek was finally moving forward, and on the basis of a new urban approach that later would come to be known as Vancouverism.

### **Conclusion: Seen and Unseen**

Two commonly held views regarding the origins of Vancouverism are that it was invented in 1989 with the design of the masterplan for Concord Pacific Place or alternatively, it was invented in smaller projects<sup>38</sup> which were taking shape at around this same time (Berelowitz, 1998, 2005; Punter 2003; Soules, 2010). If one relies upon the visible evidence provided by actual construction, then this perspective seems to make a great deal of sense, since the development of Concord Pacific Place has indeed represented something new and unprecedented, at least in terms of the built forms visible today in Vancouver.<sup>39</sup> A serious problem inherent in this perspective, however, is that it leaves the question of where this form of urbanism originally came from still unexplained, since it seems unlikely that it could have just spontaneously arisen at Concord Pacific or other projects dating to around this time. The insistence on portraying the tower and townhouse enclave combination as a Tower and Podium (Bogdanowicz, 2006) further confuses the issue because there actually are relevant precedents in Hong Kong for tower and

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<sup>37</sup> Spaxman's resignation took effect three months later, in March of 1989.

<sup>38</sup> These projects are examined in the next chapter.

<sup>39</sup> These issues are addressed in greater depth in the next chapter which also addresses the chronology of the other smaller projects that are sometimes credited with inventing Vancouverism even though they were initiated after Concord Pacific Place and are clearly derivative; their earlier completion dates, which reflect their smaller size and relative lack of complexity, have perhaps contributed to confusion over this basic issue.

podiums projects, supporting yet another common misconception that Vancouverism could have been imported from Hong Kong (Boddy, 2005; Bogdanowicz, 2006).<sup>40</sup>

The events described in this chapter, with the exception of the Stadium and the final Bays Scheme, do not describe work that was constructed, yet without understanding this unbuilt work and the struggle which took place between developers, planners and politicians, it may not be possible to accurately understand how Vancouver came to be the city that it is today. Or why Vancouverism as a unique response to an unusual set of circumstances may make sense for Vancouver, but not necessarily be appropriate in other urban settings.

Throughout this research an approach has been taken which considers not just the final built results seen in Vancouver, but the less evident yet still important impact of unseen factors, including zoning regulations, approval mechanisms and unbuilt designs. The basis for this perspective is the observation that even if the general public might be relatively unaware of these unseen factors, they still exert a strong influence on planners, developers and architects, who by the nature of their work tend to have a thorough awareness of both regulations and project precedents, including unbuilt designs. This unseen work changes the building culture even if it does not leave direct evidence in built form. When this broader perspective is adopted, a new pattern becomes apparent in which it is possible to trace the gradual development of Vancouverism through a surprisingly long and at times intensely conflicted and messy process.

In interpreting the events encompassed by the current chapter, examining the role of unbuilt design proposals on the development of Vancouverism has several significant consequences. First of all this approach calls attention to the important influences of developer interests and the competing agenda of the city planners, as these played out against one another during the fitful and protracted development of Vancouverism. Had Ray Spaxman not continued to assert the importance of housing, neighborliness, an accessible pedestrian oriented waterfront and the preservation of view corridors, it is unlikely that Vancouverism would have developed in the manner that it ultimately came to take. Yet, it could be argued that these issues were already

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that in recent years Trevor Boddy has moved away from this position, and instead has taken to actively promoting the notion the Arthur Erickson invented Vancouverism in his apocryphal Project 56. This issue of the non-existence of Project 56 is briefly addressed in part in Chapter 6, and is the subject of a paper presented in October of 2012: *Urban Legend, Arthur Erickson's Project 56 revealed* (Robert Walsh). Despite having himself apparently moved away from the claim Vancouverism was imported from Hong Kong, the impact of this earlier claim nevertheless continues to persist (Bogdanowicz, 2006).

well established before BC Place began their work, because Spaxman and others had succeeded in transforming the building culture of Vancouver in which the current generation of Vancouver architects and landscape architects were operating. For this reason, the decision of BC Place and then Concord Pacific to work with experienced Vancouver architects may have in the end meant that neighborliness, livability and the experiential approach to pedestrian friendly planning that Spaxman had long advocated were informing the process, even if the planners themselves had been by this point relatively marginalized; by changing the building culture they nevertheless still had made an impact. Although the invention of Vancouverism took place under the influence of conditions that were established by the planners over years of effort, the credit for the actual invention itself belongs to the developers, and their design teams.

Studying the unseen work also presents the opportunity to establish a clearer starting point for the design breakthrough upon which Vancouverism is ultimately based. While it would be convenient to claim that what resulted in Vancouverism was an effective collaboration between these two opposing sides, the city planners and the developers, strictly speaking this is not entirely accurate. Instead, this research argues that the ultimate origin of Vancouverism, the point at which all five essential elements first came to be incorporated in a single comprehensive design proposal took place in 1983, in the Erickson/Fisher Friedman Plan. Subsequent design proposals and collaborations, including the North Park Scheme and the Lagoons Scheme were important because they helped to further explore and refine concepts presented in the 1983 plan. But in a sense the role of these subsequent efforts can also be interpreted as a process of patiently winning over city officials to a new urbanism that was embodied in the original Erickson/Fisher Friedman scheme. While the planners may have contributed ideas that refined concepts previously introduced during the North Park collaboration, this came only after the planners had rejected Erickson's original design.

What explains this initial opposition to the new form of urbanism that would eventually transform Vancouver into one of the most livable cities in the world? While it is hard to know for certain, it appears that lingering resentment towards residential high rise development may have been a factor. While the 1982 Concept Plan that preceded the Erickson Fisher Friedman plan had many substantial shortcomings, including a lack of overall coherence, its one apparent positive characteristic as far as the planners and some of the public were concerned appears to be that it

had few if any high rise buildings. This was especially important because by 1982 the city planners had been receiving accolades for their part in the transformation of the South Shore of False Creek, and the high point of that entire development, its single most successful feature, was the way that it had developed a variety of housing able to enjoy views, including views of the mountains to the North. At the time these views passed over the largely abandoned industrial land at the North Shore of False Creek. The planners and the South Shore residents had reason to be concerned that they would lose these cherished views if the pattern of development used at the West End was repeated at the North Shore. When Arthur Erickson proudly unveiled the new scheme in 1983 and tried to suggest that the design represented the inevitable continuation of the West End pattern of development, this was not at all well received, as perhaps should have been expected (Godley, December 8, 1988).

Yet by 1986 when the North Park scheme was approved, the attitude in Vancouver towards residential high rises at False Creek had clearly changed. One factor was the revival of the residential high rise tower in the West End taking place while these events were unfolding at False Creek. The work of Richard Henriquez and also Paul Merrick succeeded in reviving the point tower residential high rise in several award winning West End projects. That these projects proved commercially viable for developers also contributed to the revival of demand for new residential high rise development. The work of Henriquez is especially significant because his Sylvia tower design had responded creatively to neighborhood concerns; demonstrating that a point tower could have advantages over other lower building types by blocking less daylight and providing better view access. Paul Merrick's Tudor Manor, though now regarded as perhaps somewhat Kitschy, nevertheless showed that point towers could be used in conjunction with low rise housing to produce density without feeling crowded. In reinventing the high rise in the West End, these local architects showed that the prior West End pattern was not the only option available, that residential high rises could be visually appealing in ways while maintaining a pedestrian scaled streetscape while allowing continued access to views and sunlight.

Another factor were the lingering consequences of the collaborative effort orchestrated by Stanley Kwok for the North Park development, a process of engagement which helped the city planners and later the City Council to better appreciate the virtues of combining high rises, low rises and parks spaces. It would seem that the process also benefitted the developers because Ray



Spaxman in particular had developed an outstanding reputation for effective planning concerned with public places, and this aspect of the design improved at North Park and for each of the successive designs that followed after it. When the apparently successful results of this effort were rejected by the Provincial Government, the City Council was outraged, contributing to a desire by the city government to see the development process move forward; the city had gone from resisting development at the North Shore to actively promoting it, undergoing a remarkable change in attitude (Cox, May 13, 1987).

A related contributing factor was the emergence of a reinvigorated NPA Party, which regained control of the government in Vancouver. A new attitude more sympathetic to large scale real estate development brought a more agreeable reception to the work of Stanley Kwok and his designers. The waning influence of the TEAM Party also meant that the local government was no longer dominated by politicians who had begun their careers as opponents on the frontlines of the Strathcona protests; unlike the TEAM members, the new generation of (NPA) politicians had no need to maintain a stance opposed to large development as a guiding political principle. The NPA however still faced a changed environment party upon returning to power. Community interests had become legitimate central concerns in the planning process, transforming the role of planning in Vancouver, making it stronger and more proactive. Once planning began to go down this path there would be no returning to the technocratic approach previously used by Gerald Sutton Brown. This did not reduce the fundamental interest the NPA held in supporting business and real estate development; the NPA leadership adapted by recognizing that the creation of a high quality public domain could nevertheless also be highly profitable for developers.

With a public more open to residential high rises and a City Council that had been won over by the North Park design, and a new mayor with a more favorable attitude towards development, over a fairly brief span of time, conditions had dramatically changed in Vancouver. Having previously rejected the earlier 1983 Erickson/Fisher Friedman, by 1989 Vancouver had reversed its stance and was ready to move forward on the basis of a similar plan, setting the stage for the transformation of the North Shore of False Creek and then the rest of the downtown peninsula.

Whether this effort would succeed or fail would hinge upon the challenge of implementation, the topic of the next chapter.

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**Chapter 10: False Creek and beyond: the implementation of Vancouverism**

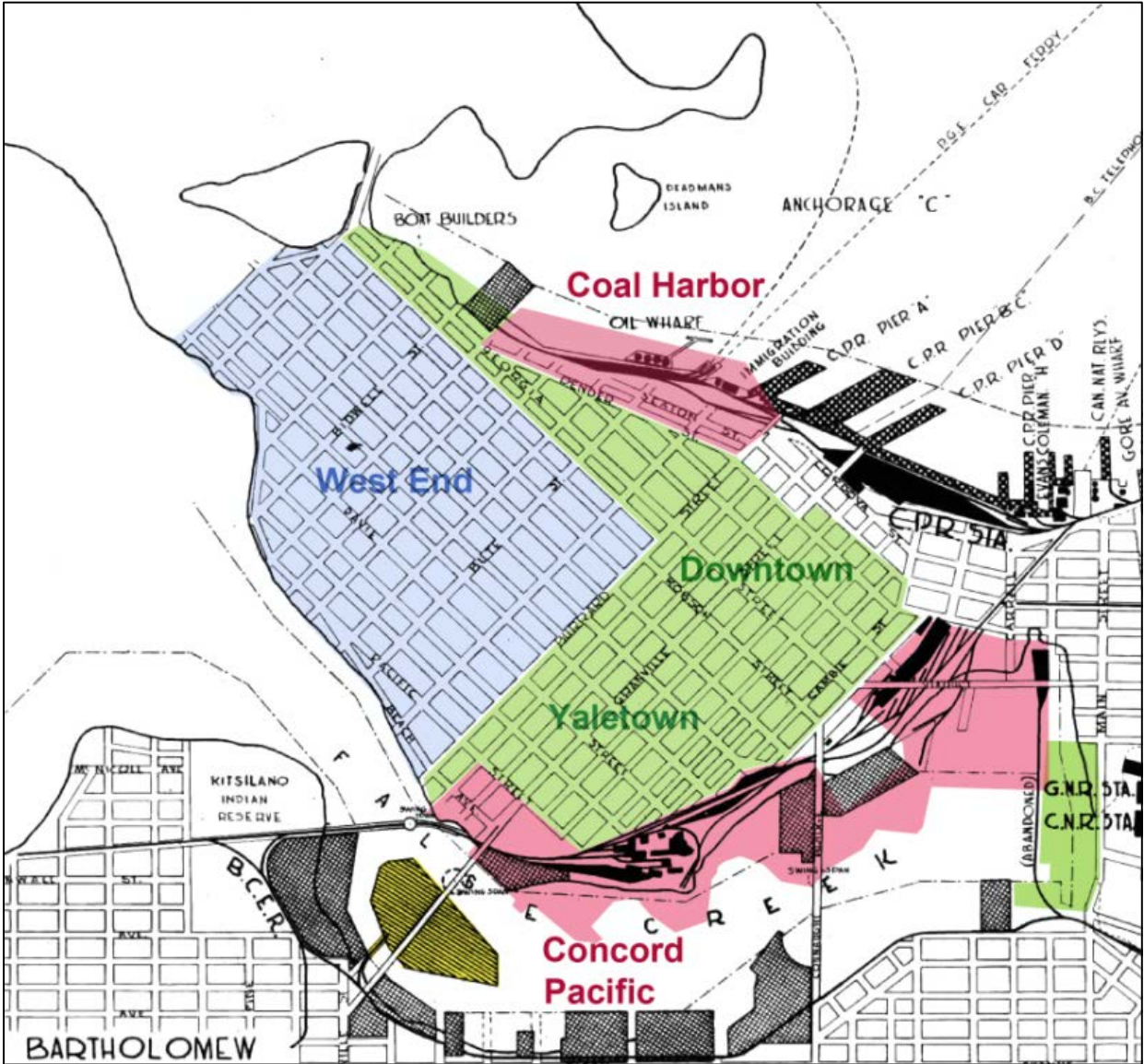


Figure 10.1: Vancouver megaprojects and related development areas: close up of figure 1.2: 1927 Harland Bartholomew Plan (Color tint and labels added by Robert Walsh). Vancouverism first developed at BC Place, at least conceptually. As it was being deployed at Concord Pacific, Vancouverism spread to the Coal Harbour megaproject, also red and to the adjacent areas shown in green.

This chapter concerns the culmination of Vancouverism in built form and the larger consequences that arose as versions of Vancouverism developed and spread throughout the downtown peninsula of Vancouver, British Columbia. Although Vancouverism originated in the unbuilt Erickson / Fisher Friedman scheme of 1983, the lens through which Vancouverism is most typically viewed is primarily based upon the evaluation of the built work which came later. Accordingly, one purpose of this chapter is to examine how the concepts previously developed came to finally be realized in physical form. During this process, Vancouverism continued to change and evolve resulting in three essential strategies that have been used in Vancouver with varying degrees of success, impacting the city in different ways. Far from being an urban ideal, in the conclusion of the chapter it is argued that Vancouver missed out on the chance to develop a fourth variety of Vancouverism that could have yielded substantially improved results over those which were built, a variety of Vancouverism that would be potentially more useful in other contexts than the varieties of Vancouverism that are actually being exported today.

#### **Increasing demand spurs a new wave of high end development:**

One major advantage in selling the land at Concord Pacific Place to Hong Kong based developer Li Ka-Shing was that Li had acquired a well-deserved reputation for being a developer that other major developers would follow, potentially enlarging to scope of the impact of the Concord place project. And indeed this came to pass. By placing a big bet on Vancouver, Li sent a strong signal to the market, sparking further foreign investment in real estate development throughout the downtown peninsula of Vancouver. Although these additional projects were smaller, their cumulative impact was greater, at least in terms of the total amount of construction. As stated in the introduction, 51 residential high rises have been constructed at Concord Pacific since the land was sold in 1988, which is certainly significant, yet this is just a fraction of a larger wave of construction overtaking the entire downtown peninsula involving 234 new residential high rises over the same time period. If office towers and hotels are also included in the tally, then this latest wave of construction has added a total of 317 new high rises to the downtown peninsula, as of June 2012 (emporis.com, 2010; Ley, 2010; Olds, 2002; Punter, 2004).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The total number of high rises, buildings ten stories in height or greater, in the Downtown peninsula is currently 682, a number that continues to increase (data compiled from emporis.com and cross checked against skyscraperpage.com database).



Private for-profit real estate development only succeeds if it satisfies actual market demand;<sup>2</sup> the recent wave of construction in Vancouver would not have been feasible were it not for a correspondingly huge increase in demand for expensive high rise apartments in the heart of Downtown Vancouver. When the 1983 Erickson / Fisher Friedman Plan was originally proposed by BC Place Ltd., the expectation was that the project would be gradually built over a 25 year span, with the new construction satisfying the projected combined demand for both new commercial and residential space in much of Downtown Vancouver. However, by the time the plan for Concord Pacific was approved, the project had shifted to being mostly residential, to be developed over a compressed time frame of only 15 years. This narrowing of focus and the anticipated acceleration of the pace of development reflected changing social and economic conditions which were expanding the demand for new high density housing in Downtown Vancouver.

Efforts of the Provincial and local government to promote immigration, along with political events impacting the future of Hong Kong, together began making immigration to Vancouver increasingly attractive, especially for wealthy families living in Hong Kong or elsewhere in Asia. With these changing conditions came a tremendous increase in demand for new apartment housing, from families that were both affluent and already accustomed to living in high rise tower apartments (Gutstein 1990; Ley 2010).

In 1984, the British Government had negotiated an agreement with China confirming that Hong Kong, would be reverting to Chinese sovereignty as scheduled in 1997. In the eyes of some Hong Kong residents this expected transfer came to take on an ominous character on June 4, 1989, with the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Uncertainty about the future economic status of Hong Kong was of particular concern for the more affluent families living in Hong Kong, prompting many to leave. Like Hong Kong, Canada had been part of the British Empire, and as Canada's largest pacific coast city, Vancouver, British Columbia came to be seen by increasing numbers as a better alternative than remaining in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Vancouver and

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<sup>2</sup> A basic real estate development principle is that when a market has more product available than current demand, prices drop, along with developer profits. Effectively anticipating future market conditions is challenge facing both developers and city planners that becomes more difficult as projects increase in scale due to their typically longer completion window, and the greater uncertainty surrounding changing market conditions.

British Columbia governments also recognized the value in attracting affluent Asian immigrants, and began actively promoting themselves as a destination ready and eager to accept affluent Asian immigrants. At the federal level, the Canadian government did its part, streamlining the immigration process for wealthy families willing to invest substantial resources in Canada. The accelerated visa process was available to those willing to invest a minimum of 250,000 Canadian dollars in a qualifying Canadian business, which included real estate investment (Ley, 2010; Mitchell, 2004).

In addition to immigrants coming from Hong Kong, at the same time, Vancouver also attracted significant numbers of immigrants at this time from other Asian countries. Between 1986 and 1996 a total of 150,000 ethnic Chinese immigrants landed in Vancouver (Ley, 2010, p 257).<sup>3</sup> Of these recent immigrants, many chose to satisfy the financial investment requirement by investing in real estate. Soon demand for property in Vancouver by Asian purchasers became so great that not only did developers begin opening sales offices in major Asian cities, but these offices began to charge more for these properties, increasing the price by as much as 25% over what was being charged in Canada, resulting in increased developer profits on the basis of what came to be known as the Asian premium. Even at these inflated prices, entire developments were known to sell out within hours of going onto the market, often for buildings that had not yet started construction. This tremendous demand for real estate in Vancouver facilitated the rapid development of Concord Pacific while supporting additional development beyond its boundaries, spreading throughout the Downtown Peninsula and transforming Vancouver in the process<sup>4</sup> (Ley, 2010; Mitchell, 2004; Olds, 2002) (see figure 10.1).

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<sup>3</sup> It is less certain how many of these chose to remain in the Vancouver metropolitan area, although other statistics suggest that the number was significant. The population of residents living in Canada who are of Chinese origin is concentrated in only two areas with the Toronto metropolitan area and Vancouver accounting for 82% of the population, roughly half of whom live in Vancouver. (Ley, 2010, p 13). However, because Vancouver is a likely point of entry for not just those who would choose to remain in the Vancouver area, but also those destined to settle elsewhere in Canada, the 150,000 who landed in Vancouver does not represent the actual number of recent immigrants who remained Vancouver.

<sup>4</sup> The influx of foreign investment capital and affluent Asian immigrants had substantial impacts on other aspects of the Vancouver real estate market as well, including changes in the ownership of existing apartment buildings and impact on the suburban housing market. See *Millionaire Migrants* by David Ley (2010) and *The New Landlords*, by Donald Gutstein (1990) for additional information.

While foreign investment and foreign immigration had a tremendous impact on the redevelopment of Vancouver, the actual planning and design of the rapidly evolving city nevertheless remained in the hands of local architects and city planners. Even as foreign developers began investing in new projects in Vancouver, they undoubtedly understood how important to project success could be local knowledge of building codes, construction methods, and city approval processes. Or perhaps they were simply following the example of Li Ka Shing, who himself had chosen to hire local architects for his development. Either way, as the transformation of the downtown peninsula continued, the new developers overwhelmingly chose to work with local Vancouver based architecture firms, including many of the same firms who were already designing buildings at Concord Pacific.

The Canadian real estate developer Marathon Realty also jumped into the fray, choosing at this time to develop its extensive holdings along the northern edge of the Downtown peninsula, resulting in the Coal Harbour megaproject. And like the other developers following the lead of Concord Pacific, Marathon also hired local architects who designed first a master plan and then individual buildings all of which were clearly based upon the precedent established at Concord Pacific Place. As it spread across the downtown peninsula, fueled by foreign investment, Vancouverism nevertheless continued to be a form of urbanism designed by Vancouver architects, repeating forms and basic urban morphologies that had first been investigated refined and finally accepted at the North Shore of False Creek.

### **Planning impact on Vancouverism**

Although Ray Spaxman's tenure as planning director for the City of Vancouver had ended in 1989, his fifteen years at the helm continued to have an impact on Vancouver through the new planning processes and priorities he introduced and also due to the local planning talent he helped to nurture.

Vancouverism today has emerged as global phenomena not just because it represents a different idea of how to produce a livable, neighborly, relatively higher density city, but because this new idea has been very well implemented. A relevant indication of the positive impact Ray Spaxman made on planning in Vancouver is that people he had trained in Vancouver became new planning

leaders there. Unlike Harland Bartholomew who had been brought in from the United States, or Gerald Sutton Brown who had been hired from England or even Ray Spaxman who had been recruited from Toronto, the next city planner to exert a decisive influence on planning administration and core values in Vancouver was not an outsider but a talented planner who had studied planning locally and then worked his way to the top within the Vancouver Planning Department. This protégé of Ray Spaxman was city planner Larry Beasley.

Although originally from the United States, Larry Beasley nevertheless was educated and trained as a planner in the Vancouver metropolitan area, making him a product of the local Vancouver planning culture. At the age of 23, in 1971 Beasley had immigrated to Canada, completing his undergraduate education at Simon Fraser University, earning degrees in Political science and Geography in 1973, followed by a Master's Degree in City Planning at the University of British Columbia. He then embarked upon a career in planning for the City of Vancouver that would last over 30 years.

In a career that began during the TEAM era, by 1987 Larry Beasley had become the planner responsible for development in the Central District of Vancouver in 1987 (see figure 10.2). In 1994 Beasley was officially promoted to Co-Director of Planning, a position he would hold for the next 13 years.

During the two decade span during which Larry Beasley had oversight of development taking place in the Central District of Vancouver, the dramatic transformation of the City was taking place, eventually resulting in Vancouver becoming recognized as one of the most livable cities in the world. The role played by Beasley in facilitating this process was multifaceted, involving a the development of effective planning policies and participating fully in the urban design process, solving problems as they arose and defining clear values and planning goals used to refine development throughout the Central Area. He also contributed to the spread of Vancouverism to Coal Harbour and beyond, helping to translate the achievement at False Creek into a process that would revitalize the entire downtown peninsula (Punter, 2003). Accordingly, the contributions Larry Beasley made to this process, and the benefits that his work has brought to the City of Vancouver has been recognized through a wide range of awards and accolades, the



most unusual of which perhaps might be the decision of Amacon, a Vancouver based developer, to name a recently completed apartment high rise after the former planning director, marketing “The Beasley” as “a tribute to urban excellence.”<sup>5</sup> (See figure 10.3).

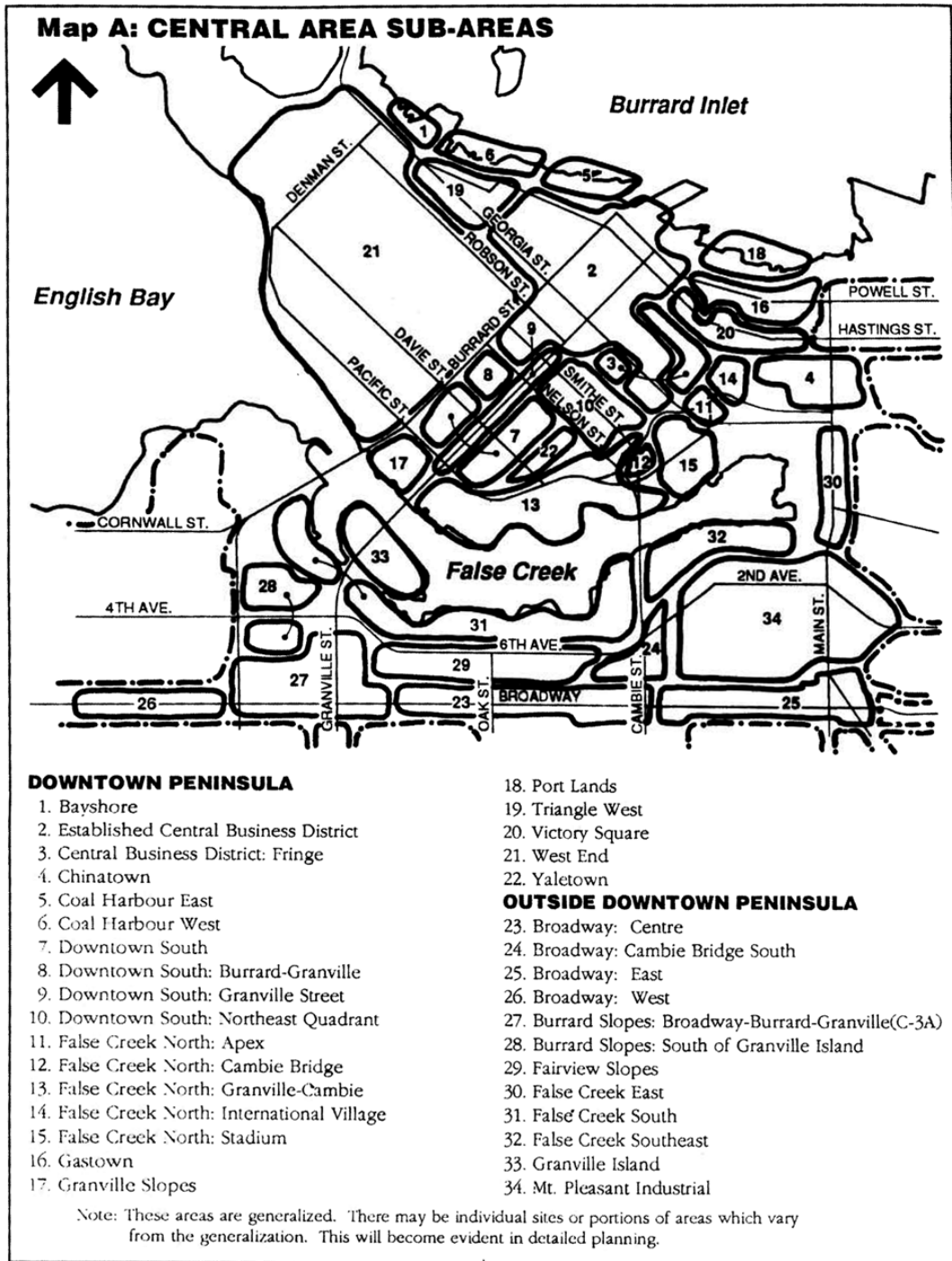


Figure 10.2: 1991 Central Area Plan (City of Vancouver 1991, 2).

<sup>5</sup> Larry Beasley continues to be active in private practice as a consult and urban designer, working on a variety of projects, including a large development in Abu Dhabi.



Figure 10.3: The Beasley: advertisement (2008) and artist rendering of the recently completed tower (Amacon 2008, 2011).

Larry Beasley and Ray Spaxman shared similar planning values and objectives. Both advocated regulating development in pursuit of an enlivened public domain and each achieved the development of vibrant new neighborhoods around False Creek. Like Spaxman, Beasley considered view corridor protection important and he expanded upon the protections previously established by Spaxman, using computer technology to produce an interactive model that makes translation of the view cone restrictions more uniform in their application to development proposals, and hence more effective.

By 1991, office development in the downtown was overdeveloped, resulting in high vacancy rates and a sluggish commercial real estate market. Recognizing this, Beasley focused development policy in the downtown towards the creation of a diverse and appealing range of housing, in effect expanding the physical extent of the residential redevelopment agenda already established at Concord Pacific Place. This policy direction was advanced in his Central Area Plan (City of Vancouver, 1991) and has since come to be known as “Living First” (Punter, 2003; Wong, 2004). Beasley defined seven “Goals for the Central Area,” (City of Vancouver, 1991); these became the foundation for planning policy under his leadership:

**THE ECONOMIC GENERATOR**

Provide a focus for the region's special economic growth--head offices and their services and tourism--associated with the centre of a major metropolitan area, recognizing

downtown Vancouver's pre-eminent role in the region and its international importance to Canada and the Pacific Rim.

#### AN ALIVE DOWNTOWN

Create a central area that has a mix of activities, with quieter neighbourhoods where people live close to more active areas where people shop and play as well as work; and where the public streets are the primary scene of public life.

#### FOR ALL PEOPLE

Ensure that the central area is a place to live and visit for all people; for all income and ethnic groups; accessible to the disabled; and for all ages, from children to seniors.

#### A SPIRIT OF PLACE

Strengthen the unique qualities and symbolism of the central area as a special place -- its skylines, heritage resources, character areas, livable neighbourhoods, and active public spaces.

#### A CENTRAL AREA IN NATURE

Ensure a central area reflecting nature, with a strong connection to the magnificent natural setting; maintain and improve environmental quality.

#### A WALKABLE CENTRAL AREA

Enhance the central area as a place where pedestrians move safely, easily, and comfortably on all streets and where walking, supplemented by transit and bicycles, is the primary means of moving around.

#### AN ACCESSIBLE CENTRAL AREA

Enhance the accessibility of the central area, while ensuring that its growth does not place an unacceptable transportation burden on central area streets, outlying neighbourhoods, or the environment.

-City of Vancouver, 1991 Central Area Plan, 3.

Larry Beasley follows his statement of Goals with an observation acknowledging the continuity that these goals have with earlier planning values in Vancouver, while at the same time arguing for the need for new methods for reaching these goals:

What is striking about these goals is how similar they are to the values that motivated the plans of the early and mid-70s. However, even though there remains a general consensus on overall goals, there are many adjustments and choices to be made on how to address issues and continue to work toward achieving these goals.

-City of Vancouver, 1991 Central Area Plan, 3.

“Living First” defined an intention to produce not just housing, but thriving new neighborhoods with public amenities, making it an updated and more urban version of the agenda that had been applied previously at the South Shore of False Creek. By 1991, however, political and economic circumstances in Vancouver had radically changed from what they had been during the TEAM Era. While planning tools and mechanisms introduced by Ray Spaxman continued to be relevant, such as the detailed neighborhood guidelines and the Urban Design Panel, in one key aspect the his approach had ceased to work due to a changing political landscape: he no longer had the full backing of the City Council. When Ray Spaxman began as planning director in 1974, after a citizen led revolt against the pro-development agenda of the previous planning administration, Spaxman was in a position to demand that developers conform to his new planning agenda because it was within his ability to reject development applications that failed to satisfy his vision of a better city. This however was only possible so long as the City Council was willing to back Spaxman’s decisions and this support had eroded as the NPA regained a foothold and then effective control again of the City Council and the Mayor’s office.

By June 1988 the City Council, under the direction of Mayor Gordon Campbell, was making headlines for snubbing the recommendations of the Planning Department, overruling Ray Spaxman and choosing instead to support developer interests (Cox, June 15, 1988). The significance of the new political climate for Larry Beasley was that a different method clearly had to be found if the planners’ aspirations for creating a livable city were to stand a chance of being realized. The method Beasley established was both ingenious and effective, building on the cooperative strategy devised by Stanley Kwok, but with several key distinctions.

In 1990 the Vancouver City Council succeeded in obtaining from the Provincial government permission to change the Vancouver Charter, granting Vancouver the right to negotiate and impose development levies on individual properties as part of the development process. This policy already existed for the megaproject sites, but the City wanted to expand this so that fees could also be collected from smaller projects as well. The approach that has since developed in Vancouver involves a two part system involving Development Cost Levies (DCL) and Community Amenity Contributions (CAC). The DCL fees apply to all new developments and are based upon a flat rate for various types of usage in particular areas. For example the current



rate for residential development at a density over 1.2 FAR (or FSR) is \$11.33 per square foot, except in designated neighborhoods where this rate is lower.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the DCL fees, a separate CAC fee is imposed in special cases where a developer applies for rezoning (<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/how-rezoning-works.aspx> see also City of Vancouver, *Community Amenity Contributions-Through Rezoning, 1999-2011*).

In applying for rezoning, a developer is seeking permission to renegotiate the development limits for a particular parcel, for instance in order to be allowed to develop a project for a different use, or at an increased density or height. The entire process to rezone a parcel can take an entire year, which in itself is a deterrent for many developers; the process only makes sense if the result will be a substantial increase in eventual profits. Part of this negotiation involves the establishment of a CAC fee in addition to the DCL fee that still applies. Parcels that are rezoned receive a new zoning designation, CD-1 and the extent to which this has been used in the Central district is fairly extensive. The development of Concord Pacific Place is the most significant among the projects to which this expanded negotiation process has applied, but many smaller projects have also opted for rezoning (see figure 10. 4).<sup>7</sup>

The collected from DCL fees and CAC fees are used for slightly different community oriented improvements. DCL fees partially fund: parks, childcare facilities, replacement housing and engineering infrastructure, while CAC fees help pay for: community centers, libraries, daycare centers, park improvement and neighborhood houses. Regulations stipulate that the funds collected are to be spent in the neighborhood in which they are collected, with the exception of affordable housing which is sometimes constructed in other sections of the city (<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/dcls-vs-cacs.aspx> ).

The introduction of DCL and CAC fees for new development gave the planners working for Larry Beasley a combination of powerful tools which could be used to influence the development in the downtown. In some respects this realigned the planning process from consisting solely of restrictions, as had been the case during the first high rise boom in the West

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<sup>6</sup> This rate is scheduled to increase on September 30, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> This information is based upon discussions with Vancouver city planners.

End (1956-1973), to a new approach in which developers responded to City interests and made concessions in exchange for other tradeoffs that increased the value of their projects.

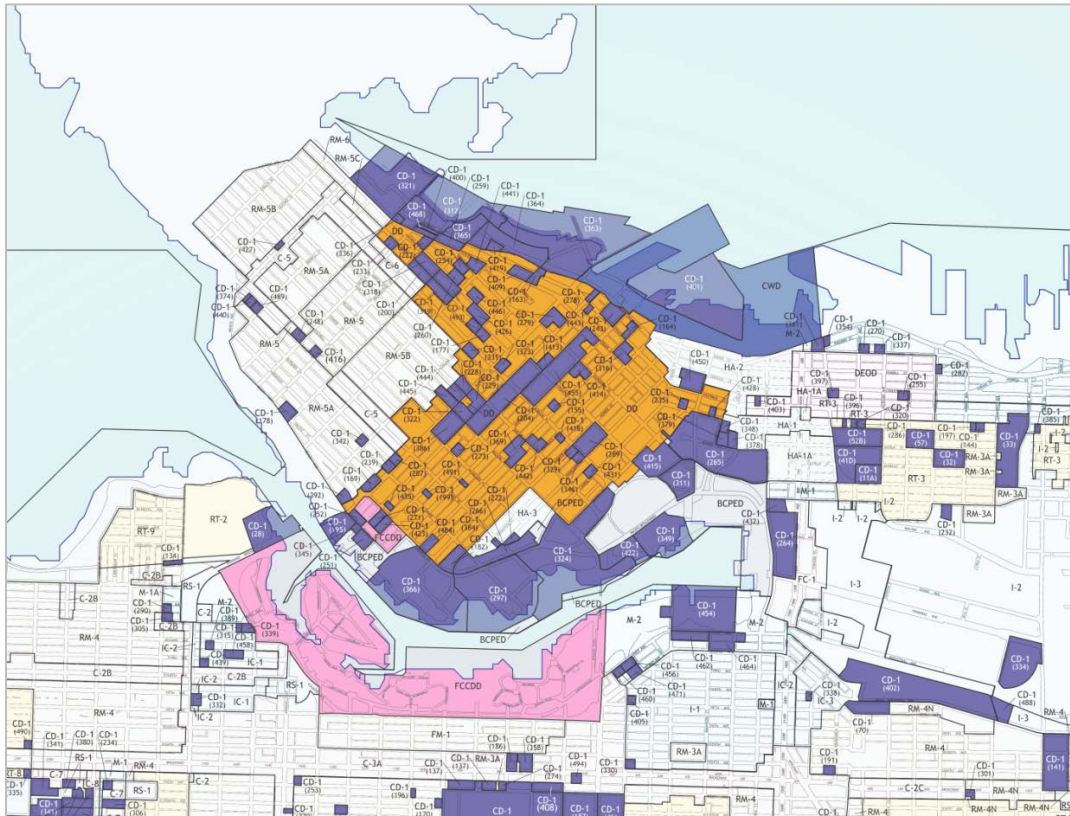


Figure 10.4: Select Vancouver Planning designations: Violet depicts CD-1, for comprehensive development. Orange depicts DD for downtown development. Pink depicts FCDD or False Creek Development District. Note: numerous other zoning designations have been converted to white for this image to improve legibility of the CD-1 designations (Robert Walsh).

The nature of the concessions that could be negotiated for any particular project could be quite varied, and bonuses could be awarded in exchange for improved architectural designs, for historic preservation measures, for the provision of particular public amenities such as art exhibition spaces, and in exchange for the negotiated CAC fees.

Larry Beasley made use of the DCL and especially the CAC negotiations related to rezoning to transform city planning administration into a negotiated process; the interests of the community were introduced into the process via the goals in his Living First agenda, and then brought into sharper focus through negotiations with developers during the design development process. The designers I spoke with about working with Larry Beasley characteristically describe him as highly effective, quick to arrive at workable decisions and willing to compromise in the interest of improved outcomes for the community.

Some of the ways that this new negotiation based method played out will be considered as specific examples are examined more closely. In general planning contributed to the architectural results attain throughout Vancouver via an approach that began by asserting basic planning objectives and then negotiated with developers on everything from issues of general building placement and massing on down to even the detailed design of construction details. For the moment one example of how this process worked will help to illustrate how planning contributed to the attainment of the notable results for which Vancouver today is celebrated.

### **Improving the seawall path at the North Shore**

One of the features for which the development at the North Shore of False Creek is now known is the sea wall path, a much used public promenade at the water's edge. Path of the appeal of the path involves the trees, benches, plantings and public art that occurs along its length, yet is also appeals because it is divided into separated lanes, with the flow of bicycle traffic occurring on one path and pedestrian traffic occupying another. This divided approach requires more space and represents an improvement over configurations used at prior sections of the pedestrian path constructed along the Vancouver waterfront. Achieving this improved result however required a negotiated compromise in which both the developer and the City made important concessions. During an extended interview, landscape architect Don Vaughan revealed that the seawall paths at the North Shore of False Creek have their current configuration, in part through the contribution that Larry Beasley made to the process of refining the plans during implementation; without Beasley's collaborative involvement the paths would have been narrower, less pleasant and perhaps less safe.

Originally the design of the seawall paths at the North Shore of False Creek had been modeled after the seawall path at Stanley Park, a single asphalt walkway approximately 21 feet wide, with ten feet dedicated to bicycle traffic, ten feet dedicated to foot traffic and only a white paint stripe down the middle separating the two. After the design of the buildings and related utilities had been established at Concord Pacific Place, however, a tragedy occurred at the Stanley Park seawall involving a toddler who was struck by a bicycle. The cause of the accident was attributed to the design of the path itself and this raised concerns at Concord Pacific because the new path

that was to be built there was expected to follow this apparently flawed configuration. It was too late to change the location of the buildings at False Creek and this presented a problem: the seawall path at False Creek needed to be widened but the only feasible way to accomplish this was to redraw the edge of False Creek but to do so would require violating a long standing planning mandate to avoid further encroachments into False Creek. Ever since Ron Walkey had developed his system of Patterns for the development of False Creek, planning policies in Vancouver had held firm to the principle that the size and area of False Creek was not to be reduced. Facing this dilemma, Don Vaughan was sent by Stanley Kwok to meet with Larry Beasley to see what could be worked out.

As described by Don Vaughan, several challenging issues were at stake, including the detailed configuration that the seawall itself would take and how the edge of False Creek would appear over the course of changing tide levels that rise and fall by as much as fourteen feet. In his meeting with Larry Beasley, Don Vaughan proposed a solution that cleaned up the edge of False Creek, while widening the seawall walkways to a combined total width of 33 feet. After discussing the issue, and considering possible alternatives Larry Beasley quickly arrived at his decision and approved the widening of the path, even though this required relaxing the prohibition against encroachment into False Creek.

Interpretation: Larry Beasley cannot be considered to have designed the seawall as it presently exists; credit for that belongs to Don Vaughan.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Vaughan deserves credit for having understood how to frame his design proposal in a manner that would satisfy the interests of Beasley and the City. Nevertheless, the example reveals that even as planning director, Larry Beasley was interested and engaged with enacting policies that had a tangible impact on the quality of the built environment under development at False Creek, and that he was someone that the developers and designers felt they could work with constructively. The expanded walkway was possible because Beasley was willing to relax a long standing policy restriction, but the result also meant that the developer actually paid more to construct the wider and more complex

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<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that Don Vaughan also improve the appeal and safety of the seawall path in other ways, including his decision to use smooth asphalt pavement for the bicycle lanes while using concrete pavers for the walkway. The problem that occurred at Stanley Park had arisen as a result of a single paved surface, but Vaughan recognized that while walking on pavers is fine, cyclists and rollerbladers would find this bumpier surface unacceptable thereby reinforcing the separation of uses that was intended.



seawall path boundary. That Larry Beasley reached his decision quickly was also important for keeping the project moving forward. In this case both the city and the developer gave something so that the community benefitted.

While Larry Beasley and the Vancouver planners undoubtedly contributed to the attainment of the visible qualities that have helped Vancouver earn its reputation as a livable city, this work also is an undercurrent running through and connecting the work of a diverse and talented group of local architects and landscape architects who were ultimately responsible for actually designing the parks buildings and public spaces that now constitute the urban fabric of Vancouver.

### **The first projects to test Vancouverism: City Gate, Cambridge Gardens and 888 Beach St**

Once the design concept for Concord Pacific Place was approved in 1989, negotiating and coordinating the detailed design for Concord Pacific Place remained a monumental undertaking requiring several years of work before construction would commence on the first buildings, completed in 1993 and 1994. Nevertheless by the time this construction work had begun, the same basic design principles that had been approved in the North Park proposal and the later Bays Scheme were already being put to the test in three separate early projects outside the boundaries of Concord Pacific Place. The first of these projects, Cambridge Gardens, was designed by Vancouver Architect James KM Cheng and represents his entry into the development of Vancouverism. The second of these projects to get underway is the Citygate Project by John Perkins, while the third early example of Vancouverism is another James Cheng project, a pair of towers and a row house enclave at 888 Beach Ave (see figure 10. 5).

Although these three early projects were made use of the design strategies previously developed through years of effort at the North Shore of False Creek, they are nevertheless still significant to the development of Vancouverism because they constitute the first examples of built structures to be completed using the new approach. Had they proven to not be cost effective for their developers, or unappealing to the real estate market, then it is possible that the development of Concord Pacific Place and the rest of downtown Vancouver would have changed course, resulting in a different outcome from that which is seen today. The significance of these early

projects is occasionally overstated, due to their early completion date and the impression this has created that these projects served as the inspiration behind, Vancouverism, at least when the prior process of design development at False Creek is ignored. These early projects did not invent Vancouverism, yet still constitute an important proof of concept.



Figure 10.5: Steps towards implementing Vancouverism: 1. Cambridge Gardens (James Cheng, 1990) 2. 888 Beach Ave (James Cheng 1993) 3. Citygate (John Perkins, 1992-1996) (Google earth, color added by Robert Walsh).

### **James K. M. Cheng and the rise of Vancouverism:**

Vancouver architect James Cheng has done more than perhaps any other architect to translate the urban design concept of Vancouverism into appealing and well made architecture. Although Cheng was not involved in the earlier stages of development of Vancouverism, at the South Shore of False Creek or the subsequent work for BC Place, he has nevertheless emerged as the most prolific of the many architects who have had a hand in the implementation, and interpretation of Vancouverism.

James Cheng is yet another architect to have been born and raised elsewhere before ultimately choosing to make Vancouver his home. Born in 1948, Cheng was originally from Hong Kong, relocating with his family while he was still in high school to the State of Washington. After attending Washington State University in Seattle, he completed his master's studies in architecture at Harvard University, where he studied closely under Richard Meier and developed an affinity for the work and theories of Le Corbusier. Upon graduating, he moved to San Francisco, where he lived and worked for three years. Relocating to Vancouver, BC he then found work in the office of Arthur Erickson,<sup>9</sup> where he worked from 1973 until 1978, starting his own firm upon winning a competition for the design of the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver (Whysall, 2001).

A 1986 interview by James Cheng provides a unique and vivid insight into his work and his view of architecture in Vancouver just as he was beginning to win commissions for taller buildings. Cheng demonstrates a well-honed understanding of Vancouver's architecture and the emergence of a west coast aesthetic, and the significance of this tradition in relation to a changing culture:

I think that Vancouver still has a very strong Oriental base in our design approach because of Erickson and Ron Thorn<sup>10</sup> and the [Richard] Neutra and the Frank Lloyd Wright School from which the West Coast architecture was derived. We don't have the kind of Roman base or the Greek base from which the East Coast architecture is derived. However, because of this Oriental influence, I think the West Coast architects are still more sensitive to nature and landscape and the softness of the light we have up here, say compared to the East Coast.

- James Cheng, (Cheng, 1986, 33).

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<sup>9</sup> James Cheng was working for Arthur Erickson at the time Erickson prepared his 1974 scheme for the north east end of False Creek, which also happens to be the site for Cheng's 1978 winning Chinese Cultural Center design. Erickson's 1974 design and Cheng's 1978 design both feature similar extensions of False Creek, linking it to Chinatown; similarities in the rendering style also seem to suggest that Cheng probably had a hand in the earlier design attributed to Erickson as well as the design of his own 1978 scheme.

<sup>10</sup> Ron Thom (1923 -1986) was an important and highly regarded Canadian Architect who initially studied painting before apprenticing at Thompson Berwick & Pratt in Vancouver, becoming a partner there in 1958. In 1963 Thom opened his own office in Toronto, where he completed major commissions for a wide variety of project types that include college campuses, churches, houses and a zoo. A Modernist who cited Frank Lloyd Wright as a major influence, Thom was known for his use of simple geometric forms and his skillful siting of buildings in the landscape. (Shadbolt, 1996).

When asked about the influence of San Francisco on Vancouver, James Cheng acknowledges that this influence was indeed significant, but then he goes on to explain how this nevertheless was reinterpreted by Vancouver architects producing unique results:

For example, a lot of the Fairview Slope<sup>11</sup> urban design guideline is based on some of the housing types in San Francisco. However, that is like a policy statement from the bureaucrats. But as you look at how architects are responding to those policies, that's where you see a regional approach perhaps about to emerge. For example, you use a lot more skylight and natural light than, say, most other provinces. For several reasons, we do have more grey days here and also our climate is much milder. We can afford to use more glass. A lot of it you don't use in Alaska or Winnipeg, where you have 30 below. Also, a lot of West Coast architects, I believe, are sensitive to the colours. For example, you will very seldom see the West Coast architects use bright primary colours, whether they're in or not, just because of the quality of light we have here, the vibrant colours just don't come off. You can't do it like you do it in Mexico or in the Mediterranean. Also, more importantly, for me anyway, in my own work, I'm more interested in a balance of diffused light rather than a direct input of huge quantities of sunlight, because, especially on grey days, that kind of light is not very pleasant if it just comes in from one side of the room. It's very important to balance it on two sides. So we tend to have, for example, a South-facing window on the opposite end of the room, to introduce a wash of natural light, so that you don't have a dark cave-like effect. And sometimes that becomes a generator for the ordering principle of the house. Then you deal with structure and integrating it with light admitting devices that penetrate a sort of internal order that in turn could be expressed on the exterior or form of the building. And perhaps this kind of an investigation could lead to a stronger personal style or regional style, depending on how you look at it.

- James Cheng, (Cheng, 1986, 34).

The 1986 interview foreshadows the dramatic turn that his work was about to take. In this interview, Cheng explains his view that one must learn to design a room, before one can design a city and he then goes on to elaborate his view that a room is made primarily by three things: columns, walls and windows. Cheng also notes that while most people cannot afford to have a custom house designed for them, his work designing homes for affluent clients has proven to be a fertile testing ground for new ideas that were then finding their way into his multi-family residential projects. He also speaks at length about the inspiration he derived from Frank Lloyd Wright, whom he considers the strongest influence on his work, even though this connection is not visually apparent; instead it is Wright's philosophy, his commitment to architecture having an important role in society that matters for Cheng (Cheng, 1986).

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<sup>11</sup> Fairview Slope is a Vancouver neighborhood that runs along the slope south of False Creek.



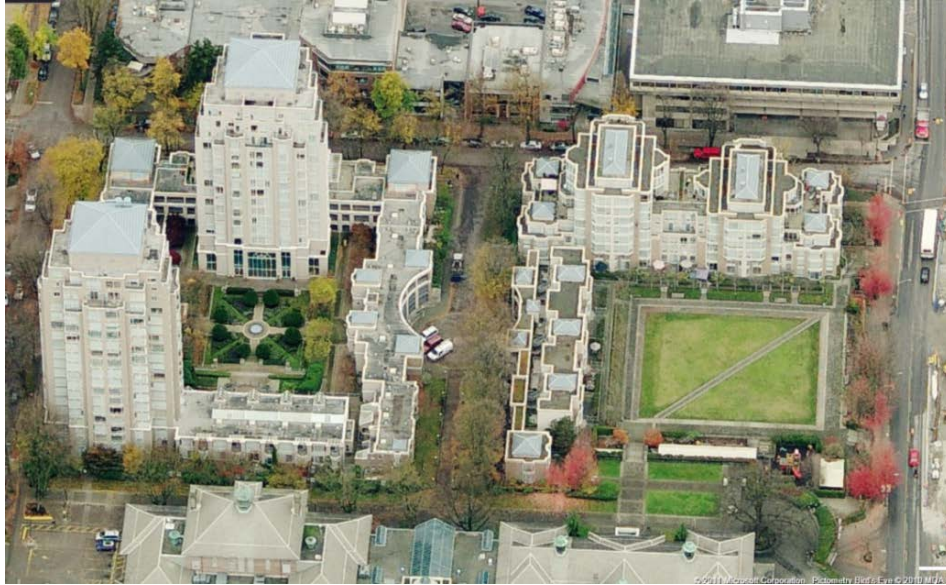


Figure 10.6: Cambridge Gardens: James Cheng 1990 (bing 3-d)

Not long after giving this interview the work of James Cheng would shift from focusing on teaching design at UBC and designing single family homes to become primarily concerned with urban residential projects, resulting in work of increasing scale and complexity. His observation concerning making rooms before cities would prove surprisingly prescient; making use high rise towers as giant columns and townhouse infill at grade to function as walls Cheng would produce comfortable building complexes that enliven their surroundings through their creation of large outdoor urban rooms (Cheng, 1986).

The work of James Cheng came to the attention of Victor Li, the son of Hong Kong Billionaire Li Ka Shing, resulting in a commission to design Cambridge Gardens (1990)<sup>12</sup>, an influential apartment complex located on land near the Vancouver City hall, about a half mile south of False Creek, in the Fairview Slopes neighborhood. Cambridge Gardens represents the first completed project in Vancouver to feature two point towers and townhouse enclave surrounding a central garden (see figure 10.6).

In addition to successfully testing the marketability of the tower townhouse concept in Vancouver, James Cheng himself can be considered to have passed the test that the Cambridge Gardens commission represented. The project was quickly followed by a major commission by Concord Pacific, for a parcel they owned on land adjacent to the Concord Pacific site. The pair

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<sup>12</sup> The name Cambridge Gardens is a clever choice, a reference Cambridge England, Cambridge Gardens is also the name of a housing development in Hong Kong, making this a name that would also appeal to immigrants.

of towers and the courtyard enclosing townhouses that Cheng designed for at 888 Beach Ave is often seen as an important milestone in the development of Vancouverism, as an early indication of the buildings yet to come along the rest of the North Shore of False Creek. This project was also pivotal in the career of James Cheng because the success of 888 Beach Ave led to numerous additional commissions at Concord Pacific Place, throughout Vancouver, and now in many other cities (see figure 10.7).



Figure 10.7: 888 Beach Ave, James Cheng, 1993 (Robert Walsh and Bing 3-d).

### **City Gate: the first multiple-city-block application of Vancouverism**

One of the advantages arising from the decision to sell the Expo lands to Hong Kong Developer Li Ka Shing was his reputation as a developer whom other developers would follow, and indeed this is just what happened. As news spread of the big bet Li was placing at Concord Pacific, additional major developers began pursuing projects in Vancouver, sparking a wave of development that extended into other parts of the downtown peninsula. While these projects were smaller in scale than Concord Pacific Place, they nevertheless typically used aspects of the



same basic urban design strategy that was proposed in the Bays Scheme, featuring a combination of low rise housing infill combined with well -spaced point towers.<sup>13</sup>

One of the first developers to get involved in the new development was Bosa Development, purchasing in 1988 a 9.5 acre site at the eastern end of False Creek, for a development that would eventually be named Citygate. Designed by Vancouver architect John Perkins, Citygate features a combination of uses that include commercial space and an elevated commuter rail station; the main use however is residential. A total of 1000 housing units would eventually be developed at Citygate, distributed between eight separated towers, linked at ground level by low rise infill buildings six stories tall.



Figure 10.8: Citygate: view from the Cambie Street Bridge (Robert Walsh).

The master plan for Citygate was finally approved by the City of Vancouver in October of 1990, eleven months after the initial masterplan for the much larger Concord Pacific Place development was initially approved. Although it would not be until November of 1990 that more detailed and comprehensive plan for Concord Pacific would then also be approved by the City Council, it is important to understand that by the time Bosa obtained their approval for Citygate, a crucial planning precedent had already been established by Concord Pacific for the type of development that Bosa was proposing (City of Vancouver, April 1989, October 1990,

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<sup>13</sup> This pattern of foreign development investment also extended beyond the boundaries of Vancouver, impacting the neighboring municipalities of North Vancouver, Burnaby and other communities. This impact, however is beyond the scope of this research.

November, 1990). Nevertheless, Bosa was quick to get going and completed its first tower, the aptly named “Tower One” in 1992, with four more towers to follow in quick succession, bringing the total to five completed by 1997. After this initial period of development, the project was expanded, adding three more towers which were completed between 2004 and 2007 (see figures 10.8, 10.9, and 10.10).



Figure 10.9 Citygate: in 2009 (Robert Walsh) and in 2007 (Bing 3-d). Note: the left hand tower in each image is the same building; in the earlier satellite image it is still under construction.



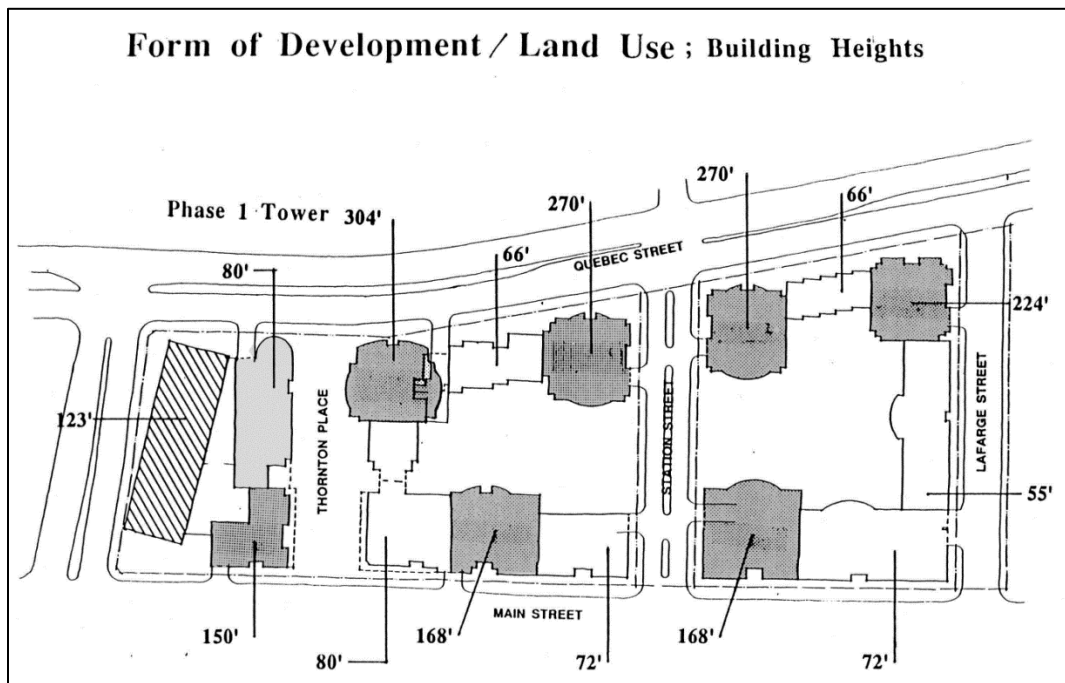
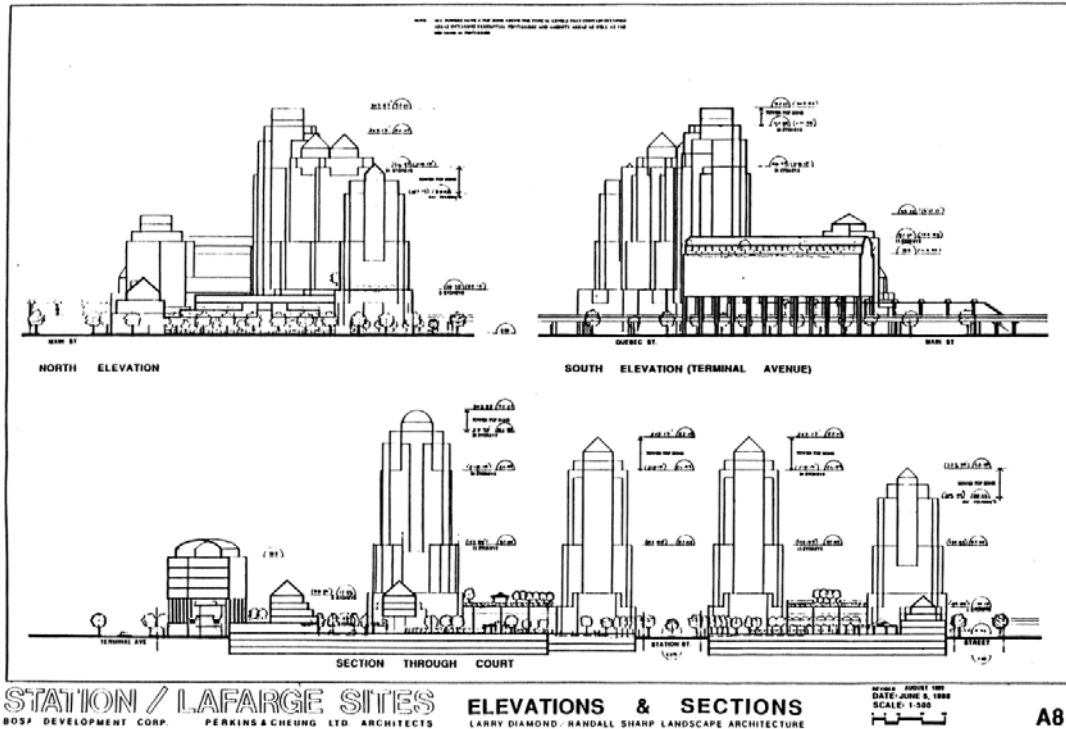


Figure 10.10: Citygate elevations and plans from official guidelines (City of Vancouver, 1990).

Analysis: Citygate was undergoing the development approval process at the same time as the Bay Scheme that would eventually be built at Concord Pacific Place and makes use of very similar design strategies, however both of these projects were preceded by the first presentation of the Bays Scheme, the North Park Proposal and the 1983 Erickson / Fisher Friedman plan.

Although Citygate might be viewed as a test case confirming the validity of the strategy being explored and developed at Concord Pacific Place, it actually is more significant to the development of Vancouverism in other respects that as of yet have not received attention. Citygate is the first case in which several city blocks in Vancouver were developed using the basic tower and low rise enclave approach by a developer and an architect who were not affiliated with the Concord Pacific Place effort. This was important for confirming that the strategy proposed at Concord Pacific could work on other sites, even when applied by independent developers. John Perkins was amongst the first to recognize that the point tower and low rise strategy represented not a continuation of the development pattern seen at the West End, but something both different and significantly better. So while the basic concept of Vancouverism first developed at the North Shore of False Creek, the Citygate project was important for demonstrating that this strategy had broader application, viable for use in other areas of the downtown.

As a collection of towers in a part of the City that had not seen high rise development before, architect John Perkins also faced a number of interesting design challenges that have been admirably resolved in the design he developed. One issue was that this project could not avoid redefining the skyline of this portion of Vancouver. Another issue was achieving enough residential density in an area of Vancouver that was surrounded by parking lots, industrial property and low income housing. A third issue concerned devising design that took full advantage of desirable views available in multiple directions.

At first glance, these issues seem to have been approached by designing group of perhaps nearly identical towers, yet a more careful look reveals the towers increase in height as one moves from north to south. One impact of this is that it improves access to the valuable views of the Burrard Inlet and the mountains to the north. It also results in a more interesting skyline. Meanwhile, the inclusion of several shorter towers along the eastern side of the property results in a layering of space that enables more units to access distant views while giving the site a sense of greater visual depth. Had these secondary towers instead been constructed at the same height as the towers closest to the water the result would have been more like an impenetrable wall. Although the Citygate project is set back from the water's edge, it nevertheless bears a strong visible

relationship to False Creek, introducing a substantial urban intervention between the waterfront and the large wide open tract of land to the east occupied by train yards and light industry.

The first three attempts at developing a somewhat more simplified version of Vancouverism at Cambridge Gardens, 888 Beach Ave and Citygate have proven to be visually and economically successful developments. These three early developments did not however contend with the larger urban issues involved in establishing a system of waterfront parks linked to new urban blocks where none had existed before. As a result they might best be considered the first examples of “Partial Vancouverism,” as opposed to the more complete cases of urban transformation that redefined the urban identity of Vancouver at the Concord Pacific and Coal Harbour mega projects, projects which can be characterized as examples of “Full Vancouverism,” involving the combination of all five essential elements.

#### **From urban design to building design: architects at Concord Pacific:**

As Concord Pacific Place moved forward from urban design to building design, several Vancouver architecture firms who had participated in the prior master planning and urban design work at BC Place and the Lagoons Scheme now found themselves enjoying commissions for substantial buildings and building complexes. These firms included: Downs Archambault, the Hulbert Group, Davidson Yuen Simpson (DYS), Hughes Condon Marler, Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden, Henriquez Partners, and Arthur Erickson. Landscape Architect Don Vaughan also continued to work at Concord Pacific Place.

Concord Pacific further expanded the pool of design talent used to realize new building designs, bringing in several additional local firms, including: James K M Cheng, Peter Busby + Associates, Hewitt + Kwasnicky, Walter Frankel, the firm of Lawrence Doyle Young and Wright, and the firm of Hancock Bruckner Eng and Wright (see table 10.1).<sup>14</sup> The impact of James Cheng is especially noteworthy, accounting for 15 of the 51 towers built at Concord Pacific thus far. Many of these same firms have also designed new tower projects for the Coal Harbour project and elsewhere in Downtown Vancouver.

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<sup>14</sup> The North Parks site was sold before development and the towers built there are not included in this table.

#	tower	architect	stories	date	complex
1	The Erickson	Arthur Erickson	18	2009	Beach Crescent
2	ICON	Busby + Associates	23	2005	Beach Crescent
3	ICON II	Busby + Associates	11	2006	Beach Crescent
4	Quayside Family Housing	Concord Pacific	10	1999	Marinaside Crescent
5	Sidney Manor	Concord Pacific	10	1996	Roundhouse
6	Pacific Plaza I	Concord Pacific	15	1994	Yaletown Edge
7	Pacific Plaza II	Concord Pacific	15	1995	Yaletown Edge
8	Pacific Plaza III	Concord Pacific	14	1995	Yaletown Edge
9	Governor's Tower	Davidson Yuen Simpson	31	1996	Yaletown Edge
10	Parkview Gardens	Davidson Yuen Simpson	26	1994	Yaletown Edge
11	Parkview Tower	Davidson Yuen Simpson	26	1993	Yaletown Edge
12	Governor's Villas	Davidson Yuen Simpson	12	1996	Yaletown Edge
13	Governor's Villas II	Davidson Yuen Simpson	12	1996	Yaletown Edge
14	Landmark 33	Downs/Archambault & Partners	35	1998	Marina Pointe
15	Waterworks	Downs/Archambault & Partners	31	1998	Marina Pointe
16	CrestMark II	Downs/Archambault & Partners	22	1997	Roundhouse
17	Crestmark I	Downs/Archambault & Partners	10	1997	Roundhouse
18	West One	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	38	2002	Beach Crescent
19	Coopers Lookout	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	31	2008	Coopers Quay
20	Peninsula	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	32	1996	Roundhouse
21	Columbus	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	21	1998	Roundhouse
22	Concordia II	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	21	1996	Roundhouse
23	Concordia I	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright	18	1996	Roundhouse
24	The Concord	Henriquez Partners	21	2003	Roundhouse
25	Waterford	Hewitt + Kwasnicky	28	2003	Beach Crescent
26	Flagship	Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden	24	2008	Coopers Quay
27	Mariner 1	Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden	24	2008	Coopers Quay
28	Mariner 2	Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden	24	2008	Coopers Quay
29	Aqua at the Park	Hughes Condon Marler	33	2005	Beach Crescent
30	Azura 1	Hughes Condon Marler	33	2003	Beach Crescent
31	Azura 2	Hughes Condon Marler	32	2003	Beach Crescent
32	Park West	Hulbert Group	32	2004	Beach Crescent
33	Two Park West	Hulbert Group	31	2004	Beach Crescent
34	King's Landing	James KM Cheng	25	2005	Beach Crescent
35	King's Landing II	James KM Cheng	18	2005	Beach Crescent
36	QuayWest Tower 1	James KM Cheng	35	2002	Marinaside Crescent
37	Aquarius I	James KM Cheng	33	1999	Marinaside Crescent
38	Aquarius II	James KM Cheng	33	1999	Marinaside Crescent
39	193 Aquarius Mews	James KM Cheng	32	2000	Marinaside Crescent
40	QuayWest Tower 2	James KM Cheng	24	2002	Marinaside Crescent
41	1077 Marinaside	James KM Cheng	23	2001	Marinaside Crescent
42	Aquarius III	James KM Cheng	13	1999	Marinaside Crescent
43	Aquarius Villas	James KM Cheng	13	1999	Marinaside Crescent
44	1099 Marinaside	James KM Cheng	12	2000	Marinaside Crescent
45	Spectrum 4	James KM Cheng	32	2007	Spectrum
46	Spectrum 1	James KM Cheng	30	2007	Spectrum
47	Spectrum 2	James KM Cheng	26	2007	Spectrum
48	Spectrum 3	James KM Cheng	23	2007	Spectrum
49	The Max 1	Lawrence Doyle Young & Wright	32	2005	Marina Pointe
50	The Max 2	Lawrence Doyle Young & Wright	26	2005	Marina Pointe
51	Coopers Pointe	Walter Francl Architecture	15	2008	Coopers Quay

Table 10.1: Architecture firms and their high rise buildings at Concord Pacific Place.



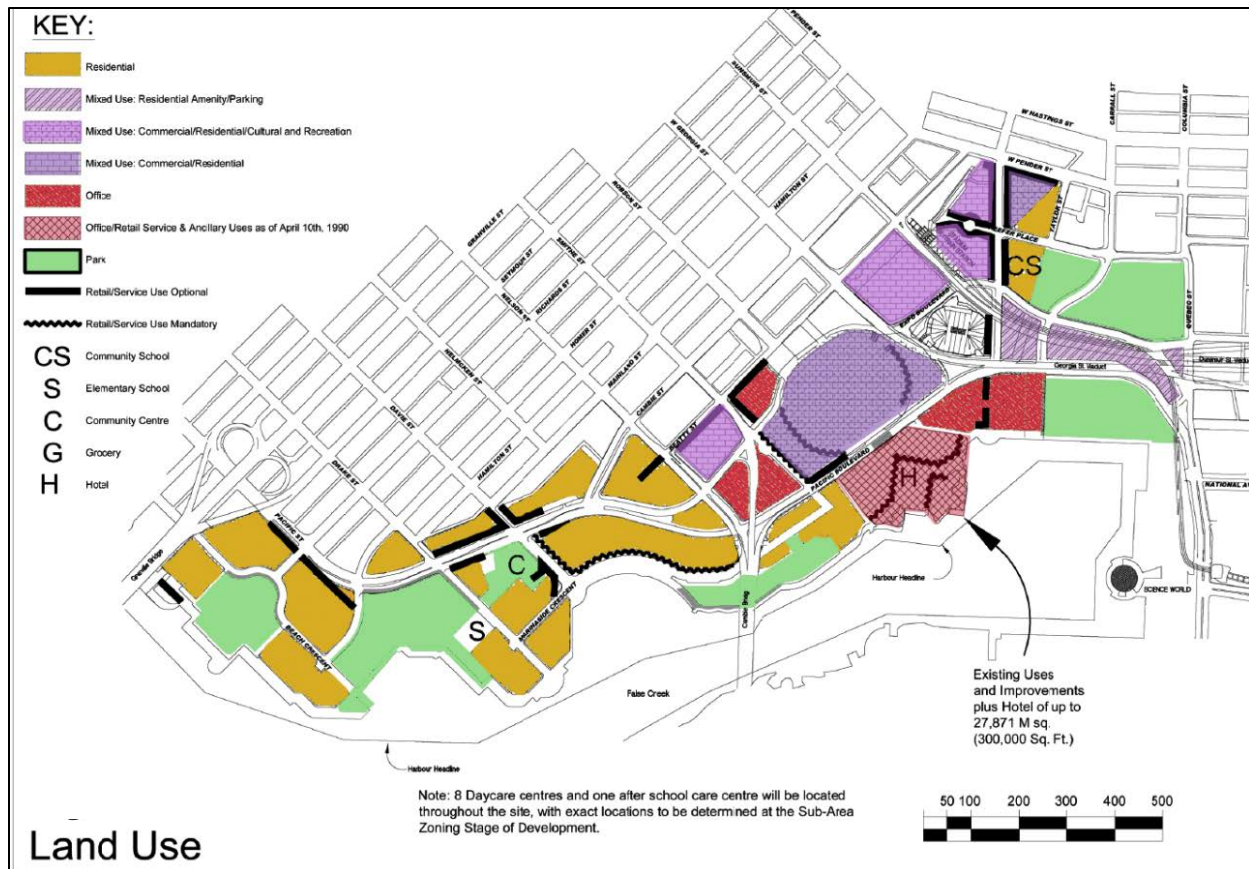


Figure 10.11: Site plan for Concord Pacific Place: 1990 (City of Vancouver, April 1990). Color added by Robert Walsh: ochre depicts multifamily residential, red is commercial, violet depicts several varieties of mixed use and green depicts park space.<sup>15</sup>

The Concord Pacific Place Development is important at both the scale of urban design and as the site of multiple architectural projects. During the last chapter the extend process by which the master plan for this project developed was examined in detail, yet when it came to implementation further design, adaptation and revision took place throughout the project at a smaller scale. Some of the new neighborhoods involved the work of multiple firms, while others featured the work of firms working alone. This variety in itself is important because it meant that as Vancouverism began to be fully implemented at False Creek multiple architectural expressions were explored and pursued, providing different precedents for projects beyond the boundaries of Concord Pacific.

<sup>15</sup> The source for this color scheme is based upon: Jeer, Sanjay AICP, *Traditional Color Coding for Land Uses*, American Planning Association, 1997. <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/gis/manual/style/ColorConventions.pdf>

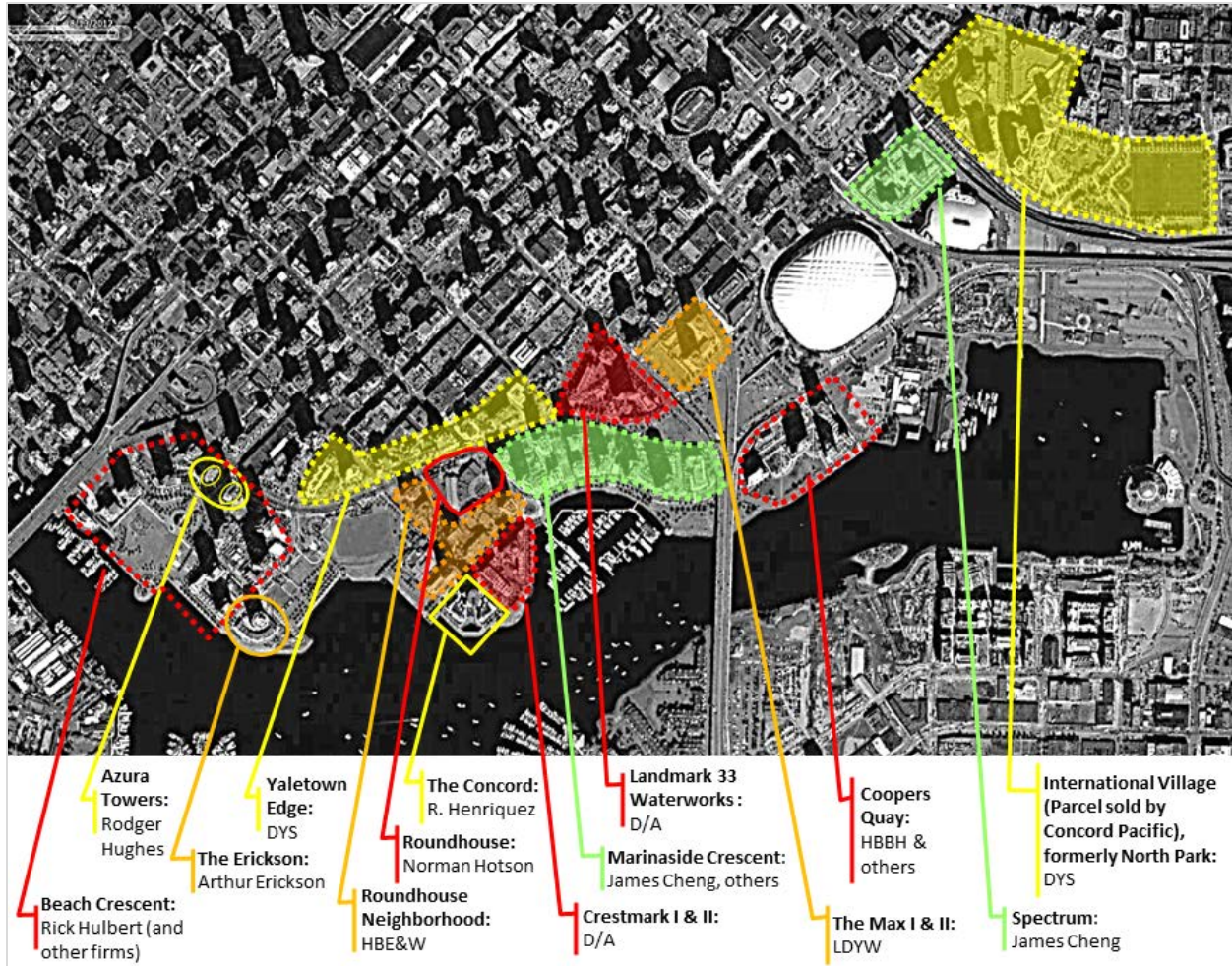


Figure 10.12: Architects and new neighborhoods at Concord Pacific Place (Robert Walsh).

To understand the architecture of Concord Pacific Place requires a closer look; what follows is a more detailed study of the major components of the mega project as it exists, beginning at its western end and moving eastward, neighborhood by neighborhood (see figures 10.11, and 10.12).<sup>16</sup>

### **The Beach Crescent: Concord Pacific's grand outdoor urban living room.**

A particularly striking example of the urban outdoor room element at Concord Pacific Place is a cluster of high rises and low rise infill that together form a neighborhood known now as the Beach Crescent, located at the western end of the megaproject.

<sup>16</sup> In the interest of speed and clarity this review relies on the profuse use of images and generally brief explanations, only occasionally engaging in more detail discussion where warranted.



The fundamental impulse of placing a large park here, overlooking the waterfront and surrounded by towers originated in the design of Landscape Architect Don Vaughan; the important task of then translating this portion of the site into a viable housing development was entrusted to architect Rick Hulbert. The basic plan for the Beach Crescent features a dense array of similar yet distinctive towers, requiring the work of eight different architecture firms, each responsible for one or more towers. These towers are then united at their base by a ground level infill of three story row houses which together form a sweeping arc that defines the northern end of the park. The fenestration of the row houses has been organized to establish a consistent rhythm of stone and glass vertical bands, resulting in the feeling of a grand colonnade. Because the towers are slightly set back from this ground level edge a dynamic balance is achieved in which the horizontal sweep of the base is effectively counterbalanced by the dramatic vertical thrust of the towers (see figure 10.13).



Figure 10.13: Beach Crescent: Aerial photograph from 2007. Note building construction of The Erickson is just beginning in the lower right hand corner (Vancouver Archives)..

In discussing with Rick Hulbert the process of developing, refining and coordinating the overall effort to produce the Beach Crescent neighborhood I learned that one of the challenges he faced was getting the different architects to agree to a uniform streetscape making the tower bases part of a single urban composition. He also had to contend with height limits and the desire of the

developer to go as tall as possible, while being restrained by the density limit established for the site. Particularly of interest was his observation that the sense of place and enclosure experienced in the park space would have perhaps been strengthened had the base been permitted to go taller, perhaps as high as eight stories instead of the three that were eventually built. The lower height had to be used, however because to raise it would have required shortening the towers drastically, adversely impacting the final sale price of the units. A comparison of the original model used to secure project approval and the final model which more closely matches the eventual construction clearly indicates that the base of the tower has gotten smaller, perhaps by 2 or three stories, meanwhile the towers themselves have become taller, wider and more numerous to be better able to exploit access to the natural views (see figure 10.14).



Figure 10.14: Beach Crescent: original site design model (Don Vaughan).

Evaluation: The Beach Crescent succeeds in creating a sense of place, a grand urban living room that on sunny days becomes a well-used and much enjoyed oasis of green in an otherwise intensely developed section of the City. As an outdoor urban room it represents the largest and most clearly defined example of this urban element of Concord Pacific Place. If it has one fault,



it is that an actually colonnaded edge with shops and street cafes could not be developed at ground level, providing a way to animate the space even during the frequently inclement Vancouver weather. A space this grand is a space worth lingering in but this actually has been only minimally provided for in a development that puts perhaps too much emphasis on residential development alone, instead of balancing this with additional commercial development such as shops, restaurants and cafes that might further animate the park (see figure 10.15) (City of Vancouver CD-1(366), 1996).



Figure 10.15: Beach Crescent: daytime (Robert Walsh, 2009) and night (Google Earth 360).

### **Strategic Buildings at the Beach Crescent: Azura I and Azura II**

Hughes Condon Marler (HCMA), the architecture firm founded by Roger Hughes was responsible for the design of three of the Beach Crescent Towers, including Azura I and Azura II the matched pair of towers that flank the entry to the Beach Crescent, bracketing a view across the downtown of the nearby mountains. (see figure 10.16).



Figure 10.16: Azura Towers: Roger Hughes (Photo by Robert Walsh)

### **Strategic Buildings at the Beach Crescent: The Erickson**

At the edge of the Beach Crescent, where the seawall promenade makes a sharp turn can now be found The Erickson, a recently completed project named in honor of the renowned architect. Arthur Erickson joined forces with a long time former employee Nick Milkovich for the design of this curving eighteen story tower / townhouse complex, making this one of the last projects that Erickson had a hand in. Although when viewed alone this tower may seem uncharacteristically short for such a prestigious building, like other towers closer to the southern edge of False Creek, the height of this tower is especially restricted by relevant view cone protections; the impact of the rising angle of the view cone projections can be seen in comparison to nearby towers located further from the waterfront, where their allowable height increases as the get further from the waterfront (see figure 10.17).





Figure 10.17: The Erickson: Site model, Rendering, and the recently completed tower (Building by Erickson and Milkovich, images by: Don Vaughan, Gotman Simpson, Google 360).

### **The large park in the middle: David Lam Park**

While the Beach Crescent frames a geometrically formal park, George Wainborn Park, immediately to the East of the Beach Crescent sits the more flexible and expansive David Lam Park. This six acre park is organized to provide playing fields useful for a wide range of informal recreational sports and to provide space for outdoor music festivals or other civic events. From an urban design perspective, the scale and location of the park opens up vistas of the waterfront



for the three neighborhoods that flank the park: the Beach Crescent, Yaletown Edge and the Roundhouse Neighborhood. This relationship to the surrounding context is further intensified through the highly developed and well executed designs for the features and pathways that line the edge of the park (see figure 10.18).



Figure 10.18 David Lam Park: Landscape Design and details by Don Vaughan (upper images by Don Vaughan; lower image by Robert Walsh).



## Yaletown Edge: the urban face of Concord Pacific

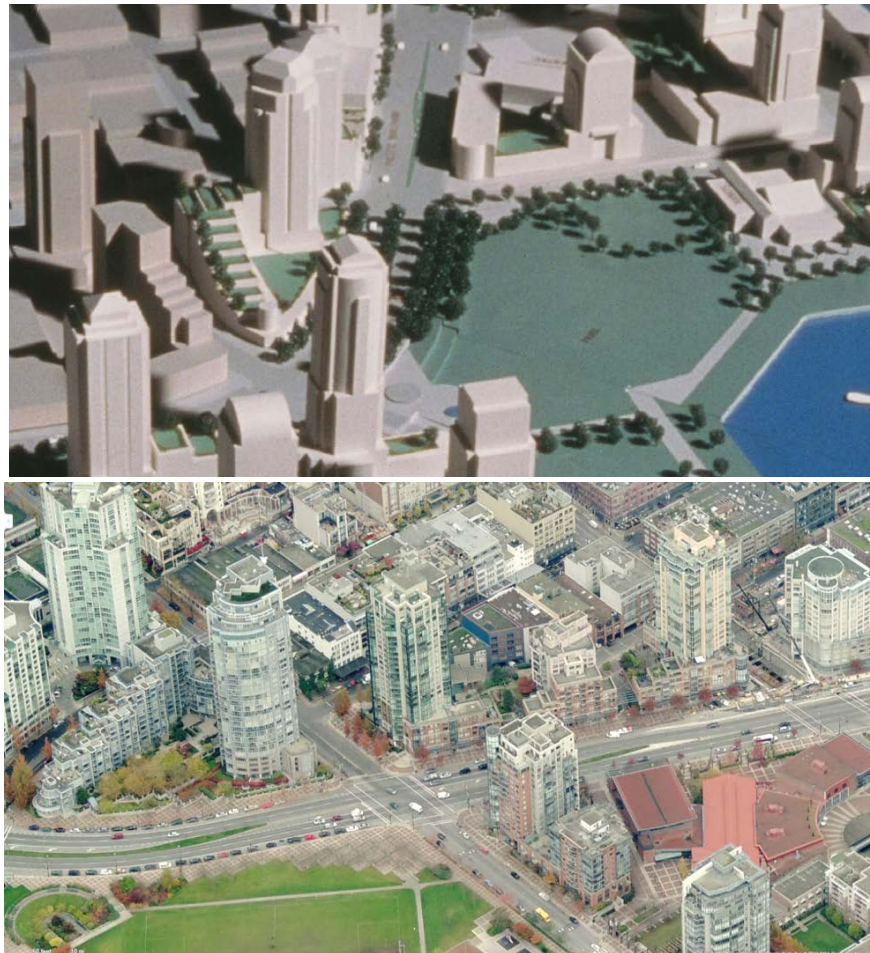


Figure 10.19: The Western end of Yaletown Edge: Original site model (detail) and satellite image (Vaughan, 1988, Bing 3-d, 2009).

Yaletown Edge is a neighborhood occupying a narrow strip of land between the nearby Yaletown warehouse district on one side and the major traffic artery Pacific Boulevard on the other side. During the earlier design work for BC Place Ltd., Roger Hughes explored a variety of possible approaches to this challenging site, but the solution that was eventually settled upon most closely resembles the design proposed in the Erickson / Fisher Friedman Plan. This approach features a fairly continuous street wall of low rise infill about six stories in height, punctuated by a row of well-spaced point towers of varied height. After the Bays Scheme was approved, the masterplan for Yaletown edge was refined by Davidson Yuen Simpson, (DYS), who were responsible for five of the eight towers in this neighborhood including the stepping terraced block and point tower combination featured at the Governors Tower (see figure 10.19 and figure 10.20).



Figure 10.20: Pacific Boulevard at Yaletown Edge (Robert Walsh).

The impact of the neighborhood planning guidelines also can be seen reflected in the choice of materials and colors used in the Yaletown Edge neighborhood, and the adjoining Round house area, helping to relate new construction in these areas to the older structures of the nearby Yaletown district, while also differentiating Yaletown Edge from other sections of Concord Pacific (Punter, 2004, City of Vancouver, 1989) (see figure 10.20).

### The Roundhouse Neighborhood

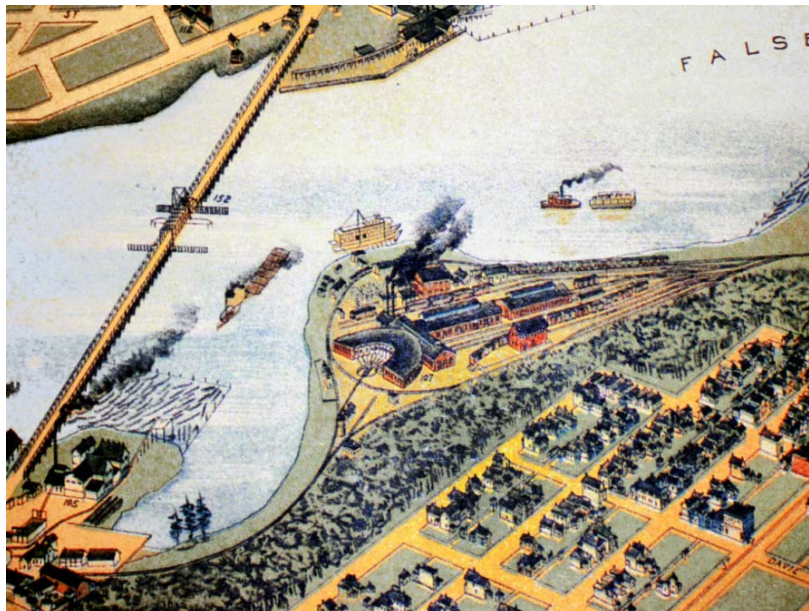


Figure 10.21: Roundhouse at False Creek: detail of larger plan from 1898 (Hayes, 2005).



Named after the historic railroad roundhouse structure that has been a fixture in the landscape here since 1887, the Roundhouse neighborhood has both an inward and outward focus. The original roundhouse building has now been restored to serve a variety of commercial and community oriented functions, resulting in a natural focal point as a center of community activity. Meanwhile, the site also is poised to take advantage of spectacular outward facing views due to its position overlooking David Lam Park, False Creek and the Marinaside Crescent (see figures 10.21, 10.22).



Figure 10.22: Roundhouse Neighborhood (Robert Walsh and bing 3-d).

### **Strategic Buildings at the Roundhouse neighborhood: The Concord**

The Concord by Richard Henriquez functions as a visible fulcrum marking a turning point at the edge of the waterfront, occupying a point that flanks two intersecting axial lines at the point where the city grid protrudes out into the waterfront. In a dialogue with The Erickson, which is visible in the distance the Concord serves a similar function of marking a point and also defining the arrival at a new neighborhood along the False Creek walkway (see figure 10.22, and 10.23).





Figure 10.23: The Concord, by Richard Henriquez (Robert Walsh, Bing 3-d).



### **The Marinaside Crescent: a James Cheng masterpiece**

One of the finest examples of Vancouverism is the collection of towers and townhouses that together form the sweeping arc of development known as the Marinaside Crescent. Designed by James Cheng, this neighborhood features ten towers, combined with row house enclaves to define discrete courtyard garden spaces serving individual tower clusters, together overlooking the marina it frames.

When he began the process of developing a refined design for this site, James Cheng attempted to work within the parameters previously established by the master plan proposed for the site. However it soon became apparent that this was less than an ideal configuration and so Cheng developed an alternative urban plan which still adhered to the density requirements; this improved proposal was accepted by the City after further negotiations (City of Vancouver, iCD-324, 1993-2003) (see figure 10.24).



Figure 10.24: Marinaside Crescent by James Cheng (Robert Walsh)

At the urban scale the towers in the Marinaside Crescent work together as massive columns tracing out large urban figure in a manner roughly analogous to the Beach Crescent, except, this time the central organizing element is the marina and the view of False Creek beyond. The edge of the waterfront has been developed and activated, transforming this into a vibrant and active urban place. Overlooking the waterfront are comfortable pedestrian spaces, including cafes and a restaurant that make this an easy place to enjoy lingering. Townhouses located above street level create the impression of being a podium for the towers, but actually conceal garden spaces for the enjoyment of the residents (see figure 10.25).



Figure 10.25: Marinaside Crescent: Satellite view and site plan (bing 3-d, City of Vancouver 2008, 32). Note: Color has been added to the site plan to improve legibility.





Figure 10.26: The Marinaside Crescent by James Cheng (Robert Walsh).

The choice of materials is significant; the white finish somehow brings a feeling of lightness to the Marinaside Crescent, giving it a unifying identity that is heightened by contrast with the nearby Yaletown Edge neighborhood. As his earlier interview demonstrated, James Cheng has a well-developed sense of light and color in reference to the particular atmosphere and climate of Vancouver (Cheng 1986). Although Cheng has demonstrated skill with handling a variety of different color schemes and material pallets in other projects, the decision to keep this simple at the Marinaside Crescent contributes to a changing play of light and shadow that evokes different moods under different conditions. The contrast of this white color scheme also heightens the sense of contrast with the nearby developments at Yaletown Edge and the Roundhouse neighborhood (see figure 10.26).



The Marinaside Crescent also has the good fortune of being located near to the Cambie Bridge, which happens to provide an excellent vantage point from which to take photographs that show the project to best advantage, making this project one of the most often photographed examples of Vancouverism.

### Marina Pointe: Four towers at the edge of Concord Pacific Place

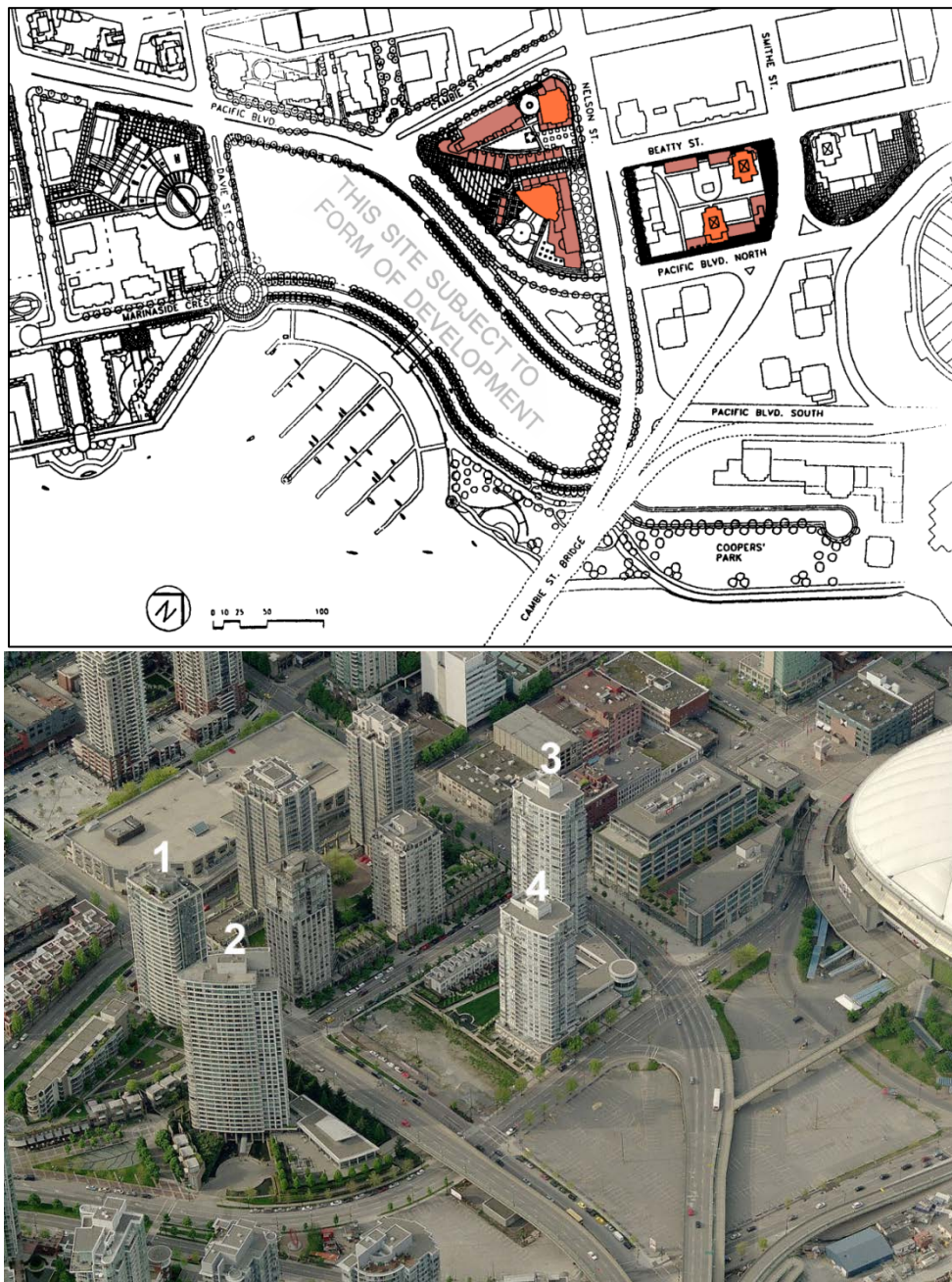


Figure 10.27: Waterworks (1), Landmark 33 (2), The Max I (3), and The Max II (4) (City of Vancouver 1990, bing 3-d). Color added by Robert Walsh (orange: towers, maroon: low rise).



The Marina Pointe section of Concord Pacific Place occupies two irregular city blocks that are the byproduct of the interface of: Pacific Boulevard, the entry ramps for the Cambie Street Bridge, and the existing downtown street grid. Four Towers make up the Concord Pacific development here. The Landmark 33 Tower and its companion tower, Waterworks occupy a triangular block, while The Max I and the Max II occupy a neighboring block to the north east (see figure 10.27).

As can be seen from the False Creek North Official Development Plan (see figure 10.28), the plan for the adjacent Marinaside Crescent was being redesigned at the time that the final plans for the Landmark 33 Tower and Waterworks Tower were given approval. This is significant because the designers working at Marina Pointe were faced with the difficult challenge of relating their development to the City fabric on one side and the rest of Concord Pacific on the other side, yet without being able to fully account for the way this would relate to the eventual Marinaside Crescent. As the CD-1 File (iCD-324) that encompasses this part of Concord Pacific shows, great emphasis was placed upon relating the development to the vista down Pacific Boulevard towards Landmark 33, and the creation of what was anticipated to be a “*sunny plaza with restaurant and active uses.*” (City of Vancouver, 1993, 115) (See figure 10.29).

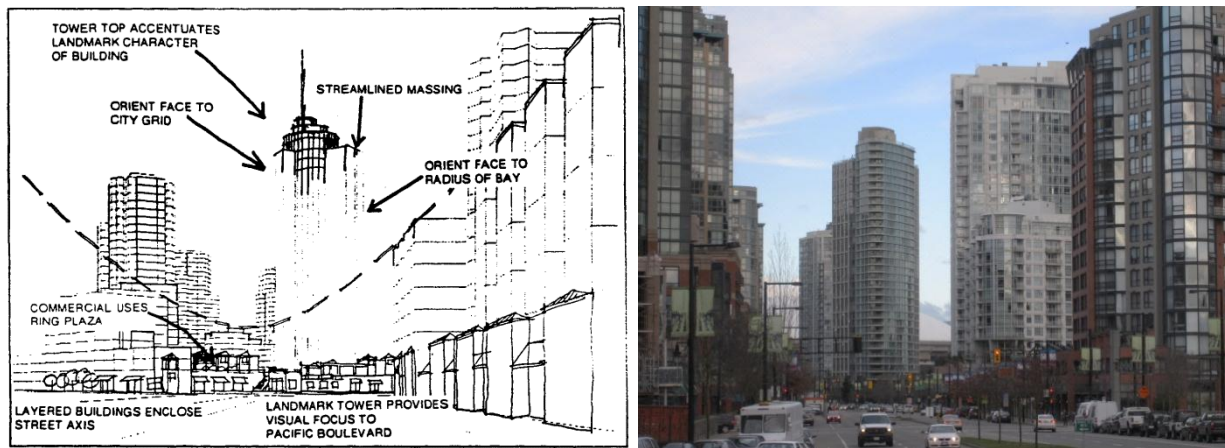


Figure 10.28: The Landmark 33 Tower: as described in the official planning guidelines (City of Vancouver 1993, 113) and as built (Robert Walsh).

The four illustrations included in iCD-324 to explain the sunny active plaza clearly indicate that the designers and planners were responding to views of the mariana that they apparently expected to continue to have access to. For example the first of these four images, a perspective

massing drawing depicts the rows of marina boat docks in the background (see figure 10.xy). The City of Vancouver clearly expected this particular outdoor plaza to be a significant public place, linked to the marina through pedestrian spaces.

The public plaza is intended to function as a pedestrian cross-roads and open space for gatherings. It is the terminus of the Pacific Boulevard commercial and special treatment areas and is central to the Quayside neighbourhood, linked to the upland sites and the waterfront by pedestrian mews.

- City of Vancouver iCD-1 (324), 1996, 117.

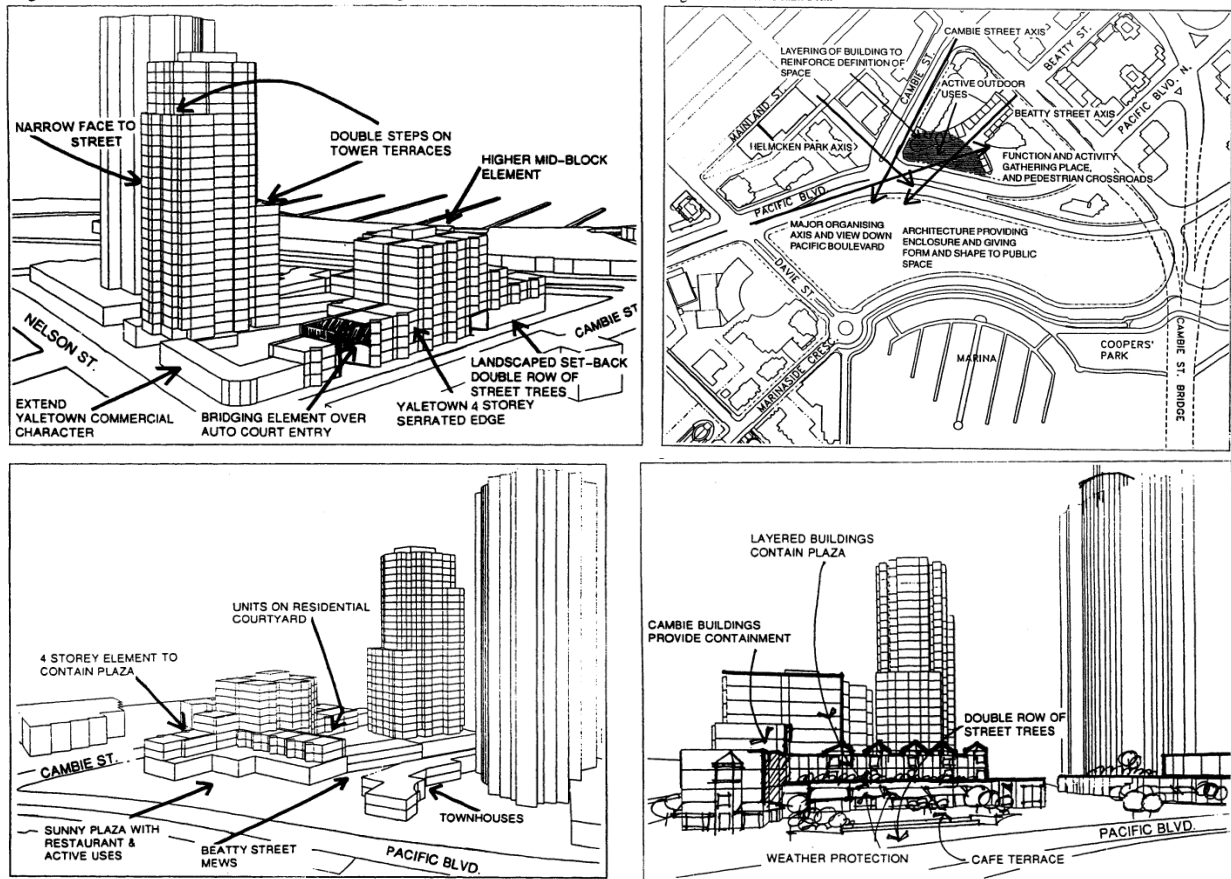


Figure 10.29: Illustrations from detailed CD-1 negotiated requirements: Landmark 33 and Waterworks Towers (City of Vancouver iCD-1 (324), 116-118).

This perspective is also consistent with how this portion of Concord Pacific had been portrayed in the original Bays Scheme model, which Downs Archambault, the designers of the Land Mark 33 and Waterworks complex had of course participated in developing. Although the available

images from this scheme are of somewhat poor quality, it is still possible to see that at the time the design was proposed, there was a significant gap in the Marinaside Crescent which would have provided a visual link to the plaza at the Marina Pointe and the actual Marina (see figure 10.30).



Figure 10.30: Bays Scheme model (DYS 1988) and Concord Pacific site in 1999.

Unfortunately, while the Marinaside Crescent as redesigned by James Cheng has many attractive features, the relationship between it and the Marina Pointe complex is perhaps somewhat less successful than the original design. James Cheng realigned the pedestrian passages in a way which reduced visual access to the waterfront by the outdoor public plaza at Marina Pointe. Instead in the configuration that was developed, an open pedestrian link to the waterfront now aligns with the Landmark 33 Tower, while the Marina Pointe plaza is overshadowed by the wall of the Marinaside complex it faces onto. (see figures 10.31, 10.32).

Evaluation: Today the plaza at Marina Pointe appears frequently deserted, while a block away the cafes overlooking the marina remain busy. The apparent lack of urban vitality in the public space at the base of Landmark 33 does not necessarily reflect poorly on the architects, who given the numerous constraints they faced nevertheless succeeded in designing a project that seemed to fit well in the landscape while taking advantage of available views and the anticipated course that nearby development was expected to take. The plaza at the base which forms the central organizing principle around which public space has been organized appears to have been well conceived when it was originally proposed as a part of a larger masterplan. Perhaps because James Cheng had not been part of the team that had originally developed the Bays Scheme, he may have been less attuned to the impact that changing his portion of the plan would have on the



surrounding area, but the developer might also be faulted for going ahead with the Marina Pointe construction while the Marinaside Crescent scheme was not yet resolved. Had development waited at Marina Pointe, a better response to the Marinaside Crescent surely could have been devised, such as relocating the plaza further to the east, where it would have enjoyed a visual connection to the marina.



Figure 10.31: Landmark 33 and Waterworks: two towers in the shadow of the Marinaside Crescent: Downs Archambault (Robert Walsh).

The apparent missteps that took place at the Landmark 33 development reflect a larger emerging challenge of how to pursue the new form of urbanism taking shape in Vancouver in cases where the site is a self contained urban block without the advantages of an adjacent waterfront park or a functioning master plan. Like the first attempts outside the Concord Pacific boundary to realize a more limited or partial form of Vancouverism, the development at Landmark 33 and the rest of the Marina Pointe neighborhood has made good use of a more limited set of essential elements that did not include the same type of active urban landscape or outdoor urban rooms. This problem would become even more pronounced as development later moved away from the waterfront at the numerous smaller developments that soon began to spring up in the vicinity of



Concord Pacific Place. If it appears that there was a breakdown in the master planning of the site, the blame for this surely resides with the developer who chose to simultaneously pursue the original plan at Marina Pointe while failing to recognize the profound impact that revising the Marinaside Crescent could potentially have on the original plan.



Figure 10.32: Google Earth Street View: Landmark 33 Plaza and Marinaside Crescent. Note: both images are facing in the same direction, taken within minutes of each other.

### **Coopers Quay: a new waterfront neighborhood of slender slab towers**

Proceeding east along the waterfront from the Marinaside Crescent leads first to a protected playground space lurking in the shadows of the Cambie Street Bridge and then past the bridge to the newest waterfront neighborhood at Concord Pacific Place: Coopers Quay. The five slender towers that make up Coopers Quay work together to frame a larger outdoor room overlooking the False Creek waterfront. One possible interpretation of the wider and thinner profiles of these

towers is that point towers may be falling out of favor in Vancouver, perhaps to be replaced by asymmetrical sliver towers. In the case of Coopers Quay however, the use of these towers represents a skillful response to a challenging site. This portion of Concord Pacific enjoys access to an excellent waterfront view, tempered by the nearby and somewhat overbearing Cambie Street Bridge to the immediate west. To the north is an empty asphalt landscape occupied by Pacific Boulevard, parking areas, the stadium and undeveloped land. Further to the east along False Creek are another vast parking area and a casino operated by a First Nations group. The stadium itself is an impediment to mountain views, yet the space along the waterfront is well situated to make the most of available sunlight.



Figure 10.33: Coopers Quay (Robert Walsh).

The architects have responded to these awkward conditions by designing buildings that turn their backs to the bridge and the stadium, while framing and protecting the waterfront park spaces they help to define. Low rise infill apartment units are included in some places, yet at the moment they seem to have the effect not of enlivening the streetscape, which after all feels relatively barren, but instead help shield and protect the park spaces from outside encroachment (See figures 10.33 and 10.34).





Figure 10.34: Coopers Quay (Robert Walsh).



Figure 10.35: The North East False Creek Vision for 2020 (Concord Pacific, 2010).



At present Coopers Quay constitutes the eastern-most waterfront neighborhood at Concord Pacific and it has a feeling of being an isolated outpost due to its uneasy relationship to the surrounding urban context. At the same time there is talk of possibly extending development eastward and if this moves forward, Coopers Quay will most likely be the first link in a chain of new neighborhoods extending eastward past the Cambie Street Bridge, along the northern shore of False Creek (see figure 10. 35).

**Spectrum: a self-contained urban neighborhood:**



Figure 10.36: Spectrum Towers, by James Cheng (Robert Walsh, Bing 3-d).

Most of the property that had been the site of the North Park proposal was subsequently sold by Concord Pacific to another developer, resulting in a mixed use development now named International Village, featuring six new towers and a mixture of commercial and residential infill. Concord Pacific however retained ownership of the land along False Creek. Meanwhile several blocks back from the waterfront, on an isolated parcel of land between the stadium and the International Village Development, can be found the Spectrum development: a cluster of four towers and ground level row housing forming a self-contained neighborhood. This project represents one of the few Vancouver developments that might perhaps be accurately



characterized as a tower and podium structure, because tucked underneath the apparent ground level of the development is a big-box store (Cost Co), facing onto the lower side street on this split level site. The existence of this lower podium level is invisible on three sides of the project, however, and represents a creative response to a highly unusual site (see figure 10.36).

The Spectrum, although designed by James Cheng, nevertheless seems substantially different from all other parts of the Concord Pacific Place development. Although the towers have been placed to maximize access to views from the unit interiors, there appears to have been less of an effort to shape a larger outdoor urban room. For a project that is further from the network of waterfront parks this seems especially unfortunate, yet this application of the point tower and townhouse combination in the absence of the other essential elements of Vancouverism has proven to be typical of how Vancouverism has been applied in many smaller projects in downtown Vancouver.

### **Analysis: The three varieties of Vancouverism at Concord Pacific Place**

During the several decades during which different master plan options were considered for the North Shore of False Creek, the general design strategy in use vacillated between approaching the project as a collection of separately designed parts and an attempting to define and implement a single unifying vision. The first attempt by Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies began as a set of standardized parts distributed in a vast landscape and developed into a more refined design as the buildings became more differentiated and more effectively related to their particular context. When BC Place Ltd. took over the site, they again began with a fragmented approach in which each of the five firms developed local solutions without the benefit of an overall vision. This was followed by the more compelling and comprehensive vision of the Arthur Erickson/Fisher Friedman design. Stanley Kwok reverted to a piecemeal approach again with his North Park Scheme, but actually this may have been simply a clever strategy for progressing on the entire project on the unstated basis that Erickson's earlier design was still the guiding vision.

When Concord Pacific became involved at False Creek, the first approach attempted was a new comprehensive vision for the site in the form of the Lagoon's Scheme. Although this attempt to think big resulted in failure, the response was not to once again think small, but instead to think

even bigger, to attempt to not just make a project that succeeded at the scale of the immense site, but to succeed in making the city better as well.

From thinking big, Concord Pacific managed to devise a workable master plan, a comprehensive vision for the project that where it was applied resulted in success. Even though the project required expanding the field of architecture firms hired to develop the individual designs, the master plan provided a functional armature around which the entire project was able to develop. It was at this larger scale that the Outdoor Urban Rooms, the active Urban Landscape and the Protected Public Views each contributed to animating the project, relating the new neighborhoods to the waterfront, the adjacent urban fabric and the spectacular mountain views.

The impact that departing from the original plan had at the Marinaside Crescent is revealing, especially because the Marinaside Crescent is itself a spectacular project. The somewhat awkward relationship of the Marinaside Crescent to the nearby Marina Pointe neighborhood is not so much a question of design, as it is a result of problematic timing, which unfortunately was probably exacerbated by planning constraints. Because the city planning approval for the Marina Pointe development had already taken several years to attain, it is understandable that the developer would be reluctant to entertain a redesign to accommodate a new vision for the nearby Marinaside Crescent, especially when this redesign might not have been approved as designed. The result of moving forward, however, was that the project began to cease to be quite as unified, instead becoming more of a collection of standalone neighborhoods than a unified urban vision as one moves northward and eastward more the Marinaside Crescent.

Perhaps this might seem like unduly harsh criticism to be taking issue with how this portion of Concord Pacific Place turned out, but this question of the relationship to the larger urban fabric is essential to understanding how the architecture of Vancouverism relates to the urbanism of Vancouver. At this juncture published analysis of Vancouverism has tended to either focus on the architecture of particular buildings (Berelowitz, 2005; Kalman, 2012; Punter, 2003) or the net urban impact (Boddy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Bogdanowicz, 2006; Coupland, 2009; MacDonald, 2008; Punter, 2003; Soules, 2010). Instead of arriving at conclusions that are either limited to individual structures or apply to all of the urban fabric of Vancouver equally, it also is possible to

understand Vancouverism in terms of how the different instances in which it has been applied vary in their application and in the corresponding results attained. Typically this approach has been used to compare instances of Vancouverism applied in other cities, (Boddy, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d), yet actually a similar comparison is possible within the confines of Vancouver itself. When the different ways that Vancouverism has been applied at Concord Pacific Place are compared a new picture begins to emerge, revealing that there are at least three different strategies at work, three different forms of Vancouverism.

The most effective places within the Concord Pacific Place Development, those places that seem to have the strongest sense of urban vitality, appear to be those where a visible connection to the waterfront remains possible; fortunately this applies to most of the Concord Pacific Place site. In this respect, it is interesting to contrast the Spectrum and the Marinaside Crescent, two new neighborhoods designed by James Cheng. The Marinaside Crescent exemplifies Vancouverism that makes use of all five elements of Vancouverism; the space of the marina itself functions as a large outdoor urban Room, opening onto the larger space of False Creek beyond, and this helps to give focus and organization to the entire neighborhood. While the buildings frame the public space that they overlook, the spaced point towers and row house enclaves further reinforce the sense of place that through the waterfront and the waterfront parks network develop a strong connection to the rest of the city. The one weakness of the Marinaside Crescent is its comparatively weak relationship to the nearby Marina Pointe development. The Marinaside Crescent is both a building complex and a larger urban event that impacts the surrounding urban fabric, a development in which all five essential elements of Vancouverism find full expression, and which might therefore be accurately described as “Full- Vancouverism.” The Beach Crescent and to a lesser extent the roundhouse neighborhood, Yaletown Edge and even Coopers Quay are other examples of full Vancouverism at Concord Pacific Place.

In contrast to this, the Spectrum represents a self-contained complex that does not actually produce a larger urban structure; instead its impact is limited to a single urban block. The active urban landscape which serves as an organizing principle elsewhere at Concord Pacific is not in evidence at the Spectrum; neither is the Outdoor Urban Room element. This incomplete application of the essential elements of Vancouverism has resulted in a phenomenon that can be

labeled “partial-Vancouverism.” Partial Vancouverism also applies to the earlier example of Cambridge Garden, a self-contained urban block, while 888 Beach Ave and Citygate each in their own way present instances of Full Vancouverism, redefining the larger urban structure through their contact with the waterfront parks network, their constructions towards defining tangle larger urban places, and through their response to the protected public views.

The third variation on Vancouverism to come out of Concord Pacific Place is Landmark Vancouverism, the use of an individual tower in combination with row housing at the base to produce a strategically located urban focal point or landmark. Although all towers at Concord Pacific aspire to be visually distinctive, several particular towers are especially prominent as discrete, standalone urban landmarks, including: The Erickson, The Concord, Landmark 33 and The Governors Tower. An argument could also be made that the Azura I and II towers together constitute an urban landmark. One characteristic that these structures share with the earlier West End Towers of Richard Henriquez and Paul Merrick is that these towers each strive to introduce a new visual balance to the surrounding urban context. Towers that do not have this characteristic but instead appear to be fairly interchangeable, self-contained objects are surprisingly common throughout the West End. At Concord Pacific Place the potential for select buildings to become focal points in a larger comprehensive urban plan appears to have merged naturally from the design process, and reflects the larger scale at which the entire project was first conceived. At the West End, where development proceeded on the basis of a comprehensive set of planning regulations, but no actual urban design master plan, it is perhaps to be expected that each building would attempt to relate to its immediate surroundings without developing larger urban patterns of organization or an intended hierarchy between buildings.

Landmark Vancouverism is different from both Partial Vancouverism and Full Vancouverism in that it aspires not to establish a larger urban fabric or frame an outdoor urban room, but instead draws attention to itself as a marker in space set apart and distinct from the surrounding urban fabric. It still plays a role in visually organizing the urban landscape however, by marking select points in the landscape, such as points of arrival at a new neighborhood. By making critical



points visible from many blocks away, these visible landmarks help to bring s sense of visual order and hierarchy to this section of Vancouver.<sup>17</sup>

In general the role of landmark structures such as these select towers serves as a potent counterpoint to the large urban spaces that are being framed at the waterfront.<sup>18</sup> For example, the Landmark 33 tower by its particular placement and massing helps to define the urban space along Pacific Boulevard, by contributing to a sense of closure, yet this tower also serves as a destination marker. Had a more open connection to the marina been maintained, as had been originally planned instead of having the marina effectively walled off by the Marinaside Crescent, the landmark function of Landmark 33 would today be even more pronounced, marking the point at which the existing urban structure transitioned into the new domain of the waterfront mega project. Instead the surrounding context was revised and this larger relationship was disrupted, transforming an urban focal point into a tower complex that now lurks behind the main urban event that now overshadows it.

These three varieties of Vancouverism: Partial, Full, and Landmark, quickly found application at other sites in downtown Vancouver outside the setting of Concord Pacific where they first originated. Through implementation Vancouverism continued to develop, changing in response to a combination of different local factors, one of the most significant of which was the reduced size of the individual development sites. With the spread of Vancouverism beyond the bounds of Concord Pacific Place different planning methodologies come into play, depending upon which of the three different varieties of Vancouverism is involved. Drawing this distinction is significant because prior research has tended to treat all three varieties of Vancouverism as

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<sup>17</sup> There is of course an extensive body of research that has been developed to explore these issues, perhaps most significantly the work of British Townscape campaign (Cullen, 1949), and more recently, Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1981)). And excellent exploration of the role of select landmark structures to organize urban form and urban experience, utilizing the example of the strategic placement of obelisks in Rome by Pope Sixtus V is presented in *The Design of Cities* by Edmund Bacon (Bacon, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> A source that comes fairly close to articulating a similar point is geographer Yi Fu Tuan, who argues in *Space and Place* (Tuan, 1977) that the experience of place is denoted by the sense of residing in or occupying a defined enclosed urban setting, while space pertains to the process of moving from one place to another. In some respects Tuan's argument extends the earlier argument developed by Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* (Relph, 1976), by replacing the non-descript character of placelessness suggested by Relph with a greater appreciation for the defined and potentially positive characteristics of the fluid zones of movement that link urban places. While Relph notes that the sense of place in the urban environment is largely defined by the degree of perceived enclosure, neither he nor Tuan makes any claim about the role that visible landmarks play in drawing the eye or otherwise help to organize patterns of movement throughout the urban environment.

equivalent, promoting the planning regime used to attain Partial Vancouverism, while citing the substantially different results achieved using different methods at the Concord Pacific waterfront sites as an effective, yet actually inappropriate proof of concept and method.

### **Beyond Concord Pacific: the Coal Harbour megaproject**

Note: Coal Harbour is a name that is loosely used to describe an entire section of the Downtown Peninsula occupying the narrow wedge of waterfront land between the Vancouver Harbor and the West End. Coal Harbour also is used in reference to a single megaproject within the larger area, built upon land owned by Marathon Realty (see figure 10.37).

Marathon Realty previously entered the story of Vancouverism with their visionary but ultimately unsuccessful effort to develop the North Shore of False Creek on the basis of proposals designed by architects Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies; even though this effort failed and the tract of land was sold, Marathon still held another large tract of waterfront land, west of the downtown business core at Coal Harbour. Like the land at False Creek, this land had originally been developed for industrial purposes and by 1974 this had ceased to be an optimum use. The Marathon tract at Coal Harbour enjoyed an excellent view of the Harbor, while commercial shipping had shifted eastward to a newer container loading and storage facilities, making the train yards at Coal Harbour obsolete. Spectacular unobstructed views of the mountains across the Burrard Strait meanwhile added additional value for residential redevelopment, as did convenient access to the nearby downtown (see figure 10.1).

Marathon Realty appears to have been keenly aware of the changes taking place at False Creek, including the new design approach introduced at the South Shore of False Creek in 1971, and following the success of the False Creek Study Group, Marathon in 1974 hired Ron Walkey and his associates to prepare a detailed study of how to transform their Coal Harbour property into an appealing pedestrian friendly development (Walkey, 1974). Had the efforts by Marathon to develop their North Shore tract at False Creek proceeded as proposed by Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies, it seems likely that a similar process of design and development at Coal Harbour would have soon followed. Facing strenuous and perhaps unreasonable opposition to their effort at the

North Shore of False Creek, Marathon, however, chose to wait before investing effort in the redevelopment of their Coal Harbour tract, and the property remained underutilized.

When political and economic conditions began to change in Vancouver and progress finally began to take place at False Creek in 1988, Marathon was soon ready to develop its Coal Harbour land. The approach it devised closely followed the example set at Concord Pacific, albeit with several notable distinctions. Of the designers hired to develop master plans and then building designs, most had already been involved at Concord Pacific (see table 10.2).<sup>19</sup> Like at False Creek, the development process began with establishing a large overall pattern of park spaces, and residential neighborhoods, designed to extend the existing pattern of streets, and protecting the view corridors that these streets made available. As at False Creek the general armature of a pedestrian waterfront linking generous park spaces was similarly reinforced by a combination of separated point towers defined at street level by low rise townhouses, some of which form protected courtyard spaces (see figures 10.37, 10.38, 10.39, and 10.40).

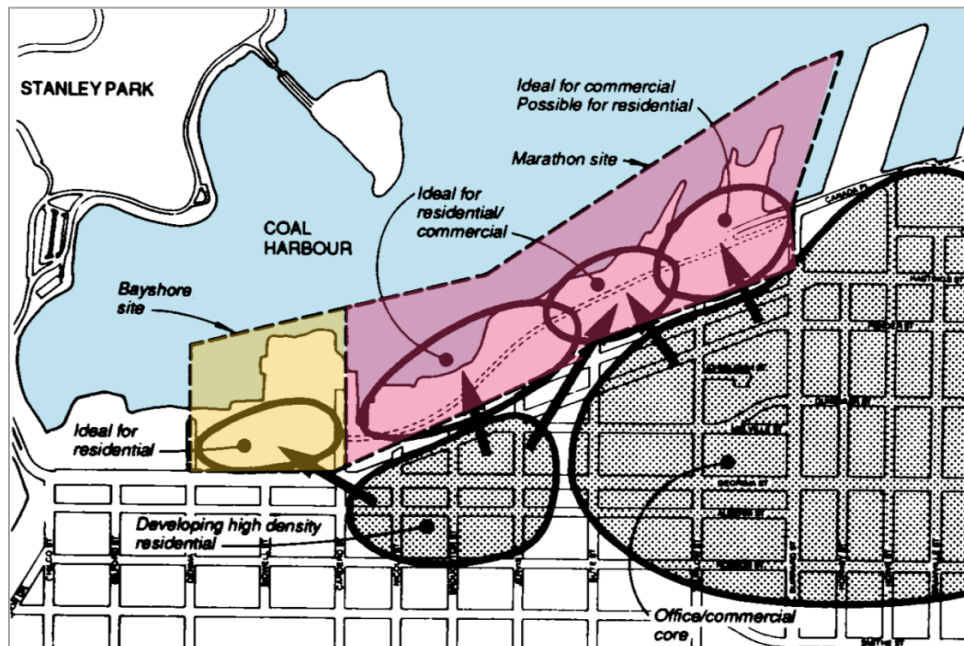


Figure 10.37: Coal Harbour: Marathon Site (pink) and Bayshore Gardens Site (orange) (City of Vancouver, February 6, 1990) Color added by Robert Walsh to enhance legibility.

<sup>19</sup> The Vancouver based Landscape Architecture firm PWL Partnership has had a substantial role in the design of the public domain at Coal Harbour and the surrounding area, At Concord Pacific their role was more limited, yet they demonstrated their talents in the final design of George Wainborn Park, which is located in the middle of the Beach Crescent development ( <http://pwlpartnership.com/>). The Seattle based architecture firm VIA was initially poised to make a larger impact, yet their design for the Shaw Tower, a large mixed use high rise, was rejected and James Cheng was hired to develop a new design.

Coal Harbour					
	Building	Floors	Year	Development	Architect
1	Shaw Tower	41	2004	Burrard Landing	James K M Cheng
2	Fairmont Pacific Rim Hotel	44	2009	Burrard Landing	James K M Cheng
3	Three Harbour Green	32	2012	Harbour Green Place	IBI/ HB
4	Callisto	35	2004	Harbour Green Place	Hancock Brukner Eng + Wright
5	Two Harbour Green	31	2008	Harbour Green Place	James K M Cheng
6	Escala	30	2002	Waterfront Place	James K M Cheng
7	Cielo	31	2007		Downs Archambault
8	Bayview	28	2002		Busby + Associates
9	C-Side	30	2002		DYS
10	Harbourside Park I	28	1997	Harbourside Park	VIA
11	Harbourside Park II	28	1997	Harbourside Park	VIA
12	Palladio	29	2002		Merrick, Lund
13	One Harbour Green	24	2005	Harbour Green Place	James K M Cheng
14	Cascina	25	2003	Waterfront Place	James K M Cheng
15	Bauhinia	25	1998	Waterfront Place	Perkins
16	Avila	21	1997	Waterfront Place	Perkins
17	Denia	20	2003	Waterfront Place	James K M Cheng

Bayshore Gardens					
	Building	Floors	Year	Development	Architect
1	Bayshore Outlook	26	2002	Bayshore Gardens	Hancock Brukner Eng + Wright
2	1616 Bayshore Drive	25	2005	Bayshore Gardens	Downs Archambault
3	1680 Bayshore Drive	24	2002	Bayshore Gardens	Downs Archambault
4	1710 Bayshore Drive	23	1997	Bayshore Gardens	
5	1790 Bayshore Drive	19	1997	Bayshore Gardens	
6	1650 Bayshore Drive	19	2003	Bayshore Gardens	Downs Archambault
7	1777 Bayshore Drive	18	1999	Bayshore Gardens	Henriquez Partners
8	1717 Bayshore Drive	18	1999	Bayshore Gardens	Henriquez Partners

Table 10.2: Coal Harbour and Bayshore Gardens (data from Emporis.com).  
 (Note: IBI /HB is a Vancouver based branch of the IBI group, incorporating: Hancock Brukner, Eng + Wright, and Lawrence Doyle Architects and Young + Wright Architects).

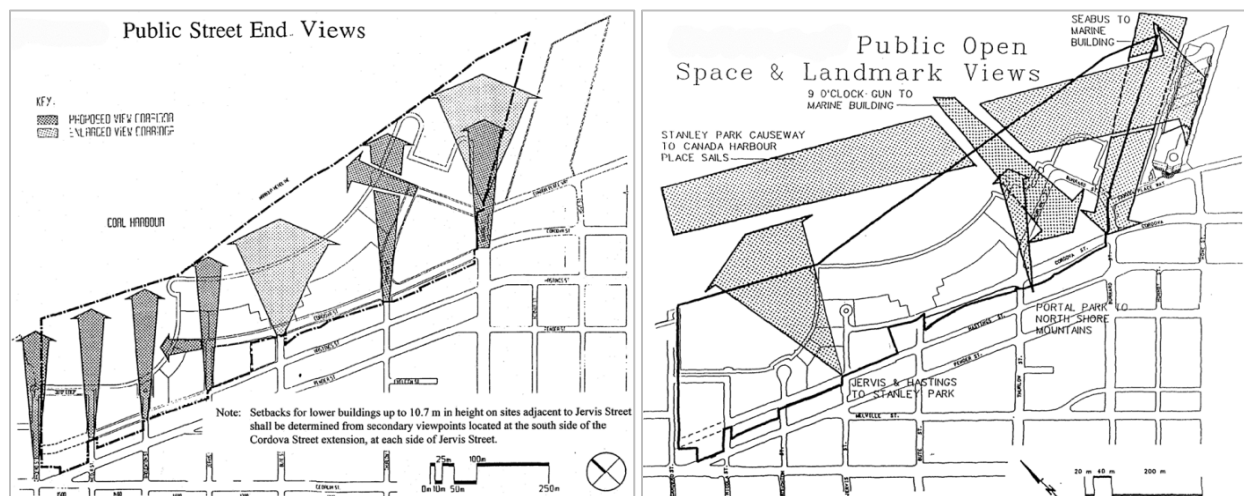


Figure 10.38: Coal Harbour Site Analysis: Public views (City of Vancouver, November, 1990).



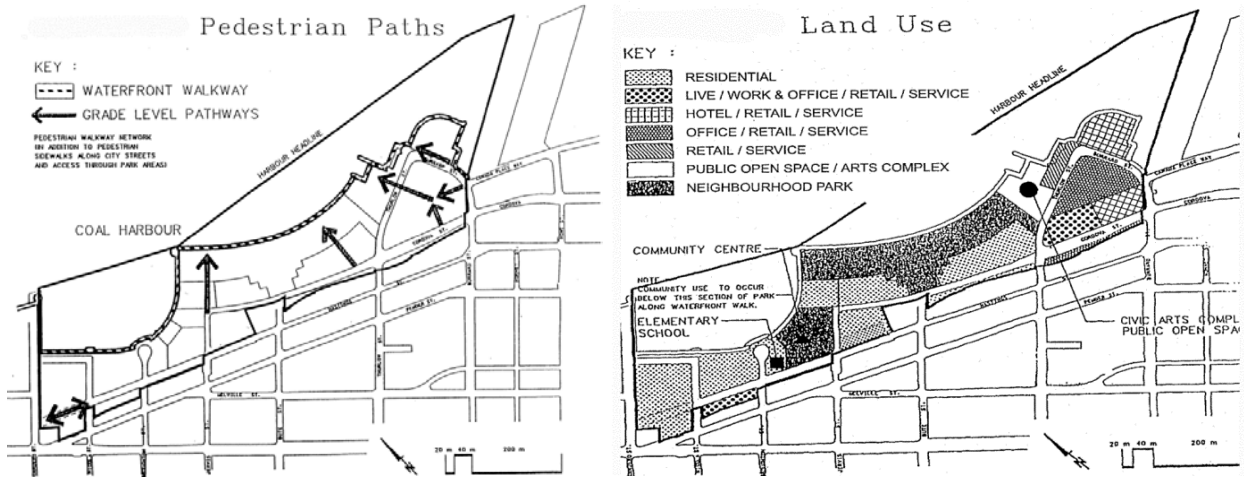


Figure 10.39: Coal Harbour Site Plans: Pedestrian Paths and Land Use (City of Vancouver, November 1990).

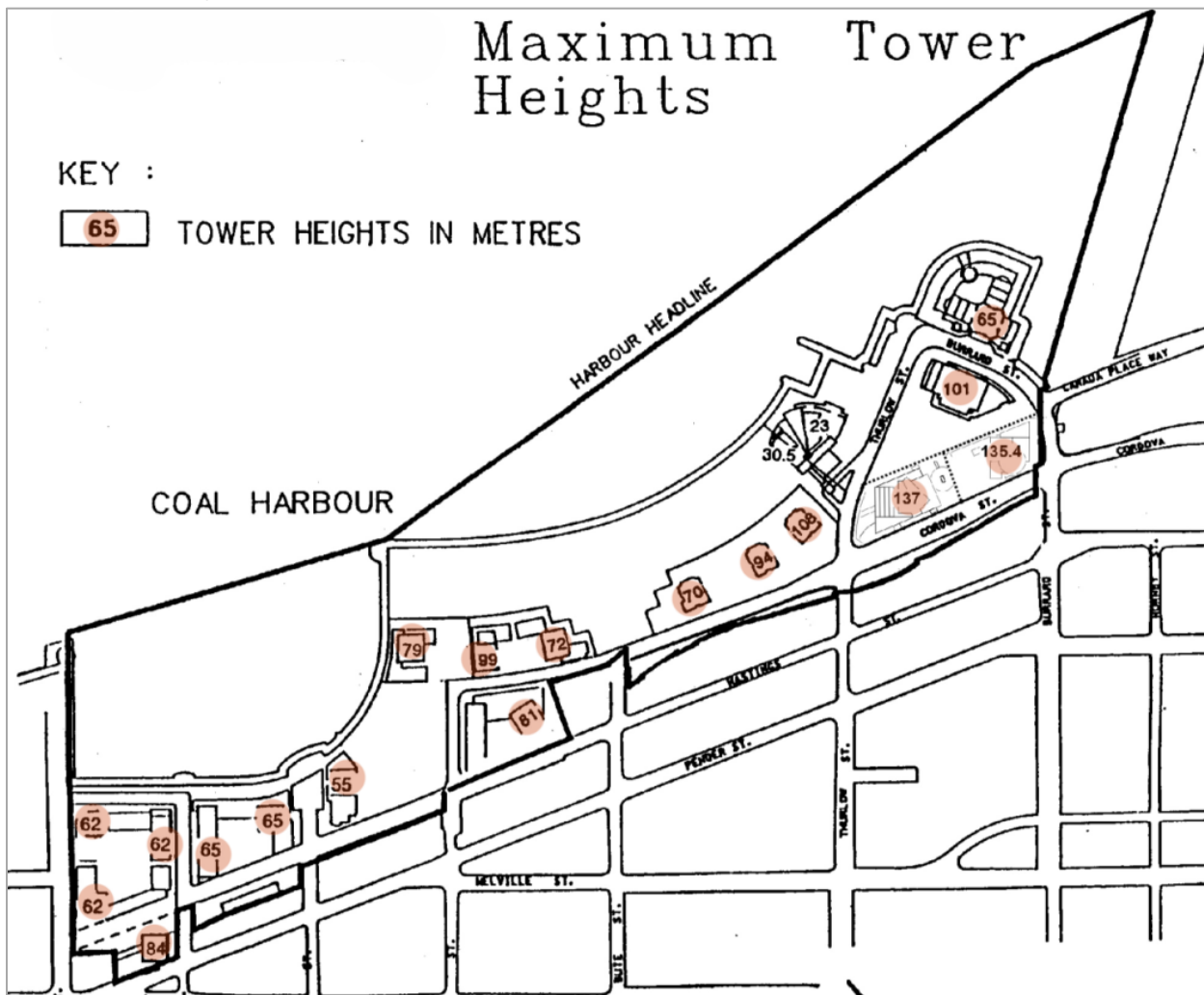


Figure 10.40: Marathon Site: development sub areas, and maximum allowable tower heights in meters (City of Vancouver, November, 1990).

The resulting pattern of development achieved at Coal Harbour makes use of all five of the essential elements of Vancouverism, in effect establishing a second major instance of full Vancouverism, transforming the skyline of the city when approached from the northwest, just as the Concord Pacific development was transforming the face of the downtown peninsula from the south and the east.

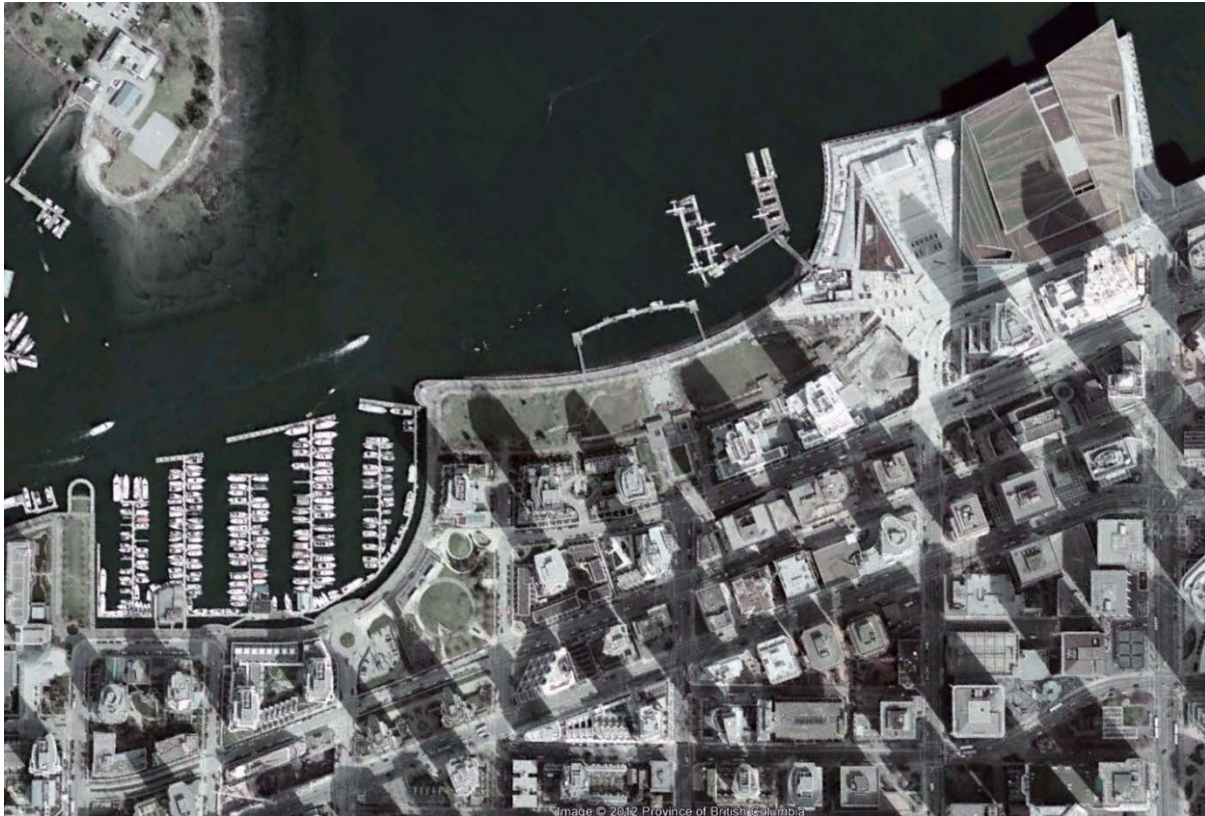


Figure 10.41: Coal Harbour: satellite image (Google Earth).

There are nevertheless noteworthy distinctions between the application of Vancouverism at Coal Harbour and at Concord Pacific Place that are worth examining. Coal Harbour has a slightly different residential population, tending to favor urban professionals who work in downtown, and retired empty nesters (MacDonald 2005). Consistent with this different pattern of usage is a slightly different form of architectural expression. Vancouver is sometimes referred to as a “City of Glass” (Coupland, 2009) and nowhere is this more apparent than it is at Coal Harbour. The prevalence of this glass is an expression of the desire to look northward, from the secure comfort of an interior environment. Although many of the new towers still have balcony spaces the pervasiveness of glass, especially green glass, dominates the environment (see figure 10.41, 10.42. and 10.44).





Figure 10.42: Coal Harbour and surrounding context, looking South, and central fountain at looking north east, in the early morning. (photographs and landscape design by PWL Partnership).





Figure 10.43: The eastern end the Marathon property at Coal Harbour (bing-3-d, Robert Walsh).

Because the towers at Concord Pacific are to the south and west of the major park space, the shadows cast across the landscape are significant throughout much of the day. Meanwhile the use of row houses, even overlooking the park space gives the park the feeling of an inhabited edge, while visually anchoring the soaring towers (see figure 10.43).





Figure 10.44: View from apartment in Calisto Tower (real estate listing).



Figure 10.45: Coal Harbour waterfront: Calisto is the third of five towers visible (Robert Walsh).



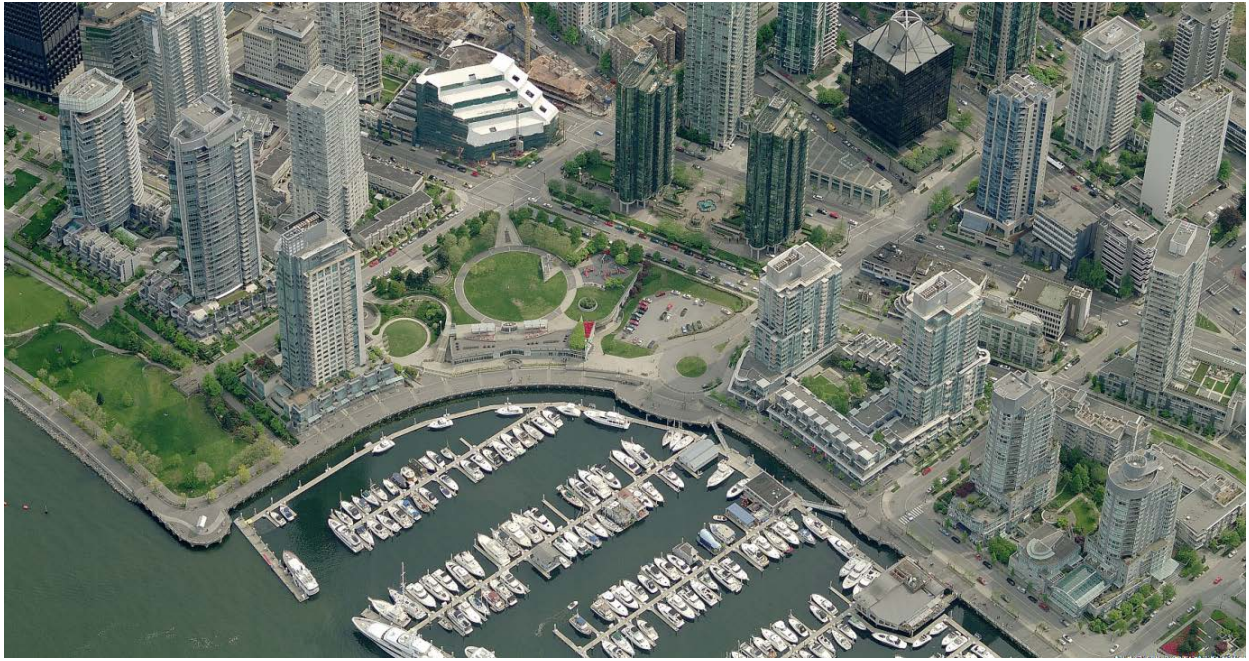


Figure 10.46: The western end of the Marathon site at Coal Harbor (bing-3-d, Robert Walsh).

The prevalence of glass at Coal Harbour has resulted in varied forms of architectural expression, including sculptural forms to create an illusion of weightlessness. The public domain meanwhile steps down from the towers, towards the waterfront where the towers quickly come to feel like a separated back drop for all but the townhouse residents (see figures 10.45, 10.46).

The landscaping of this public domain is well designed, including a central fountain overlooked by an outdoor café facing onto the harbor and the view beyond. The fountain itself invites children to play in it and the steps that lead past the cafe and the fountain to the waterfront beyond help to integrate the public park space with the rest of the city. The Vancouver based Landscape Architecture firm PWL Partnership deserves special recognition for their work enlivening this portion of Vancouver.

### **Discussion: Variations on a theme**

The marathon development at Coal Harbour makes use of a context specific approach similar to that used to produce the Bays Scheme at False Creek. The process began with a detailed analysis of local conditions, followed by a comprehensive masterplan determining parks, circulation and building massing again featuring residential point towers and ground level infill. Once the general plan was established the project was divided between multiple architects and implemented building by building. The major park space at Coal Harbour is somewhat different in character from False Creek: a wall of separated towers marches along the edge of the urban fabric of the city, but remains set back from the waterfront, behind the park space. There is a strong sense of place along this stretch of waterfront, and one reason for this may be the sense of enclosure produced by the towering mountain range rising dramatically on the opposite shore. While the view of the water itself is certainly appealing, the presence of these mountains and the way that they catch the sunlight completes the scene by giving it a defined backdrop. Standing at the water's edge, facing the mountains one is backed up first by a row of trees, then an elevated sloping lawn, overlooked by a row of three story row houses, and then finally the towers, which, acting somewhat like gigantic columns, help to delineate an immense outdoor urban room.

The experience of moving from the hard paved cityscape of Vancouver's downtown central business district towards the waterfront at Coal Harbour is not a matter of leaving the urban

interior of Vancouver behind as much as it is an experience of arrival at a great public spectacle of park and water and mountains, a major place that redefines the identity of Vancouver. While the setting of False Creek required a struggle to maintain access to the mountain views and the terrain was better suited to the establishment of several large urban outdoor rooms, at Coal Harbour the immediacy of the mountains and the shape of the land has been resolved through a single larger urban gesture. This suggests that even within the confines of Vancouver, the attainment of Vancouverism is not simply based upon the construction of towers and townhouses bases, that the response to and relationship to the larger surrounding landscape also matters greatly in the form that this urbanism takes and the degree to which it succeeds in producing a livable environment.

**Partial Vancouverism and Landmark Vancouverism: the spread of Vancouverism beyond the megaproject boundaries:**

The recently completed megaprojects overlooking both waterfronts of the downtown peninsula have had a substantial impact on the appearance and identity of Vancouver, an impact that is further magnified by their prominently visible locations. In terms of the total number of new high rises constructed recently in the downtown peninsula of Vancouver, however, more construction has taken place outside the boundaries of these mega-projects than within them (see table 10.3).

<b>new residential high rises: downtown peninsula 1988 - 2012</b>	
Concord Pacific	51
International Village (formerly North Park)	6
Citygate	7
Coal Harbour (Marathon)	17
Bayshore Gardens	8
subtotal: mega-project development	89
other new residential high rises (not mega-project)	145
combined total:	234

Table 10.3: Recent residential high rises constructed in downtown Vancouver (source: data obtained from emporis.com databases and checked against City of Vancouver records and other sources).

Consistent with his general policy position articulated as Living First, planner Larry Beasley continued to advocate for the development of vibrant residential urbanism in downtown Vancouver, yet when it came to guiding development in the downtown areas outside the mega project zones, he faced different challenges. The interior of the downtown peninsula had an



established street grid that could only be changed with great difficulty, in contrast to the megaprojects had the advantage of an open waterfront sites in expansive, loosely defined industrial area that were easily reconfigured into larger city blocks (see figure 10.47). Similarly, the scattered and divided pattern of land ownership made coordinated master planning of the more numerous smaller sites impractical, because the developer of each city block could be expected to want to maximize the return on developing their own land, even while they had no ability to control nearby development.

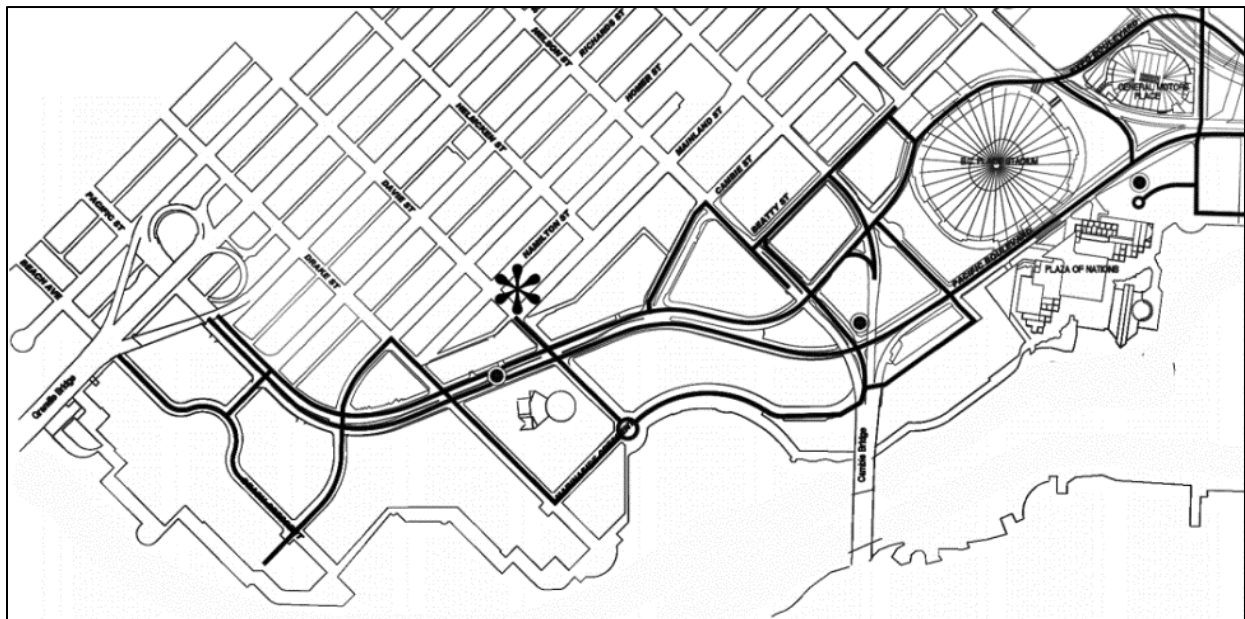


Figure 10.47: False Creek North Official Development Plan: Detail (City of Vancouver 1990, 26).

In response to these conditions, Larry Beasley devised what amounts to a two tiered planning system for these smaller properties incorporating a default set of planning restrictions and then an optional opportunity to negotiate new zoning terms on a case by case basis. Developers who wanted to pursue an ordinary development project with the shortest approval process timeframe were encouraged to stick with the established uniform guidelines, while those who wanted to depart from established rules and perhaps expand the range of permitted uses, or construct a higher density project than would otherwise have been permitted were allowed to engage in the same negotiated rezoning process that had been used at the mega project sites. Developers opting for the rezoning route faced an extended approval process that could be expected to take an additional year to complete, and they also faced the imposition of additional special fees in the form of Community Amenity Contributions (CAC) negotiated with the City.

The default baseline requirements established by the city encouraged the development of residential high rise point towers, in conjunction with street edge defining row house infill. The desired general approach was presented in the planning guidelines through influential illustrations that defined two ways to combine point towers and townhouses (see figure 10.48).

The image in the official guideline depicts street-edge row houses and two similar yet different point towers, one of which is taller and thinner than the other. As depicted in the diagram, the towers are nearly square in plan, and bilaterally symmetrical. As they get taller the towers make use of setbacks to result in vaguely art deco style towers roughly similar in character to the towers that had been proposed in the original Bays Scheme Model and had been constructed at Citygate and Cambridge Gardens.

The recommendation by the City appears to have been intended to convey a general principle, subject to further interpretation and refinement by the architects and to demonstrate this, the diagram also includes images of two recent residential towers, neither of which conforms especially closely to the geometry shown in the diagrams. Whether this distinction was actually understood by most developers, however remains unclear because many of the new towers constructed throughout the downtown are consistent with the basic geometry illustrated in the diagrams. In essence what this meant was that throughout the downtown peninsula new development was consistent with the more limited variety of Vancouverism that has been described in this chapter as “Partial Vancouverism.”

While Partial Vancouverism came to define the background default pattern of redevelopment throughout the downtown peninsula, the alternative option of pursuing a more distinctive project through the CD-1 rezoning process expanded the range of options for select projects. In some cases developers went through the CD-1 process in pursuit of projects that still appear to conform to the model defined by the default option, yet more significantly, the CD-1 process also facilitated the development of special projects throughout the downtown. Practically speaking, for many developers the added economic cost of extending the construction process and the anticipated additional CAC fees to be paid to the City were a deterrent to utilizing the rezoning process. But in special cases where added height or density held the promise of producing enhanced profits, the rezoning process was utilized and resulting in many of the finest

recent buildings constructed outside of the mega project zones, balancing the uniformity of Partial Vancouverism with a scattered distribution of cases of Landmark Vancouverism.

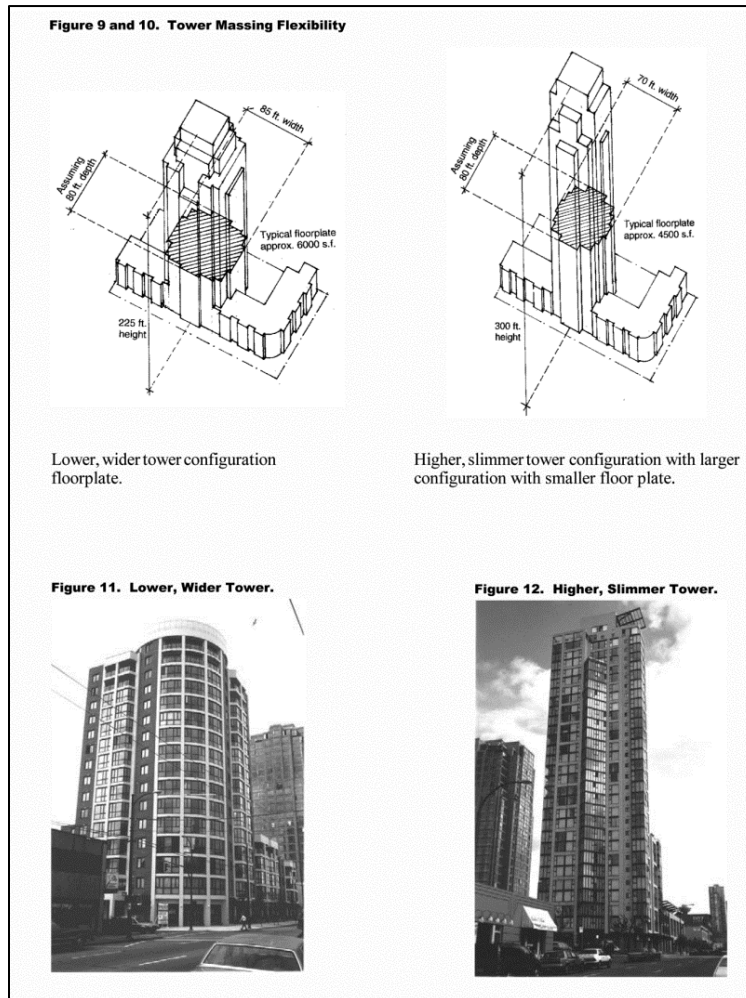


Figure 10.48: Downtown South Development Requirements (City of Vancouver, 1994, p 12). Note the tower at the lower right is the City Crest Tower, completed in 1993, design by VIA.

In order to better visualize this overlapping double system, a detailed view of the zoning map for downtown is included below. The three areas highlighted in green are keyed to area photographs from sections of Vancouver with a high concentration of new point towers. In these satellite images, the towers that were the outcome of a CD-1 rezoning negotiation are marked with a red dot. While it is perhaps to be expected that the unmarked towers, the towers developed under the default guidelines would tend to adhere to the image indicated in the zoning diagrams, what is potentially surprising is the extent to which CD-1 projects also conform to this standardized model, including the use of square symmetrical towers and street level town housing partitioned at a similar scale (see figures 10.49, 10.50, 10.51, 10.52, and 10.53).

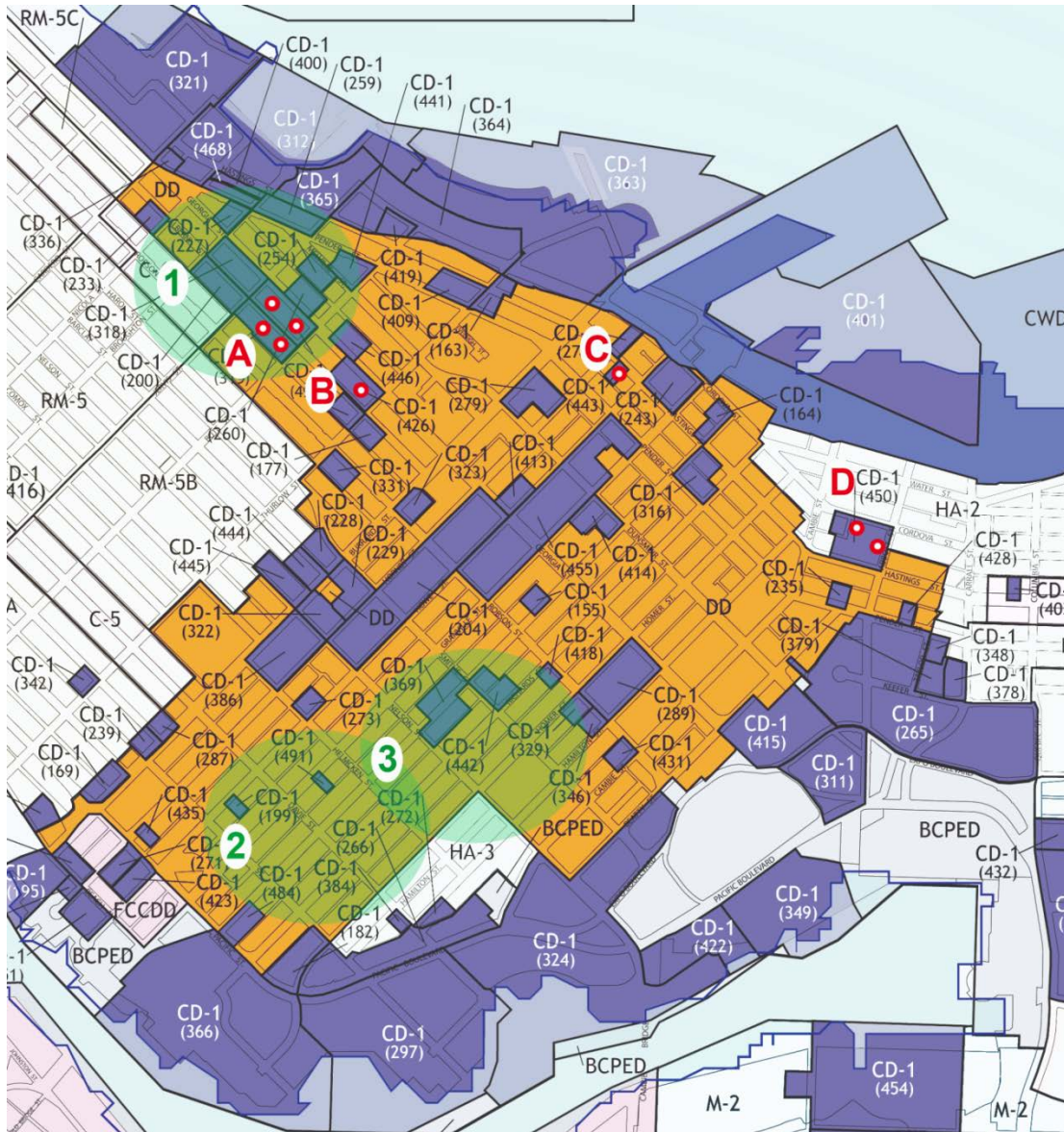


Figure 10.49: Details of Downtown Zoning: CD -1 in violet, and Downtown (DD) in orange, other zones have been turned white. Green tinted zones 1, 2 and 3 indicate areas shown in oblique satellite images below (bing 3-d). Red/white circles A, B, C, and D each indicate locations of four landmark developments discussed below: A) the Palisades and the Residences on Georgia, James Cheng. B) Living Shangri-La, James Cheng. C) Jameson House, Norman Foster. D) Woodward's, the Henriquez Partnership.

The Zoning map has also been marked to indicate four projects that used the cd-1 rezoning approach to produce landmark structures. As the zoning map plainly demonstrates these are far from being the only projects constructed through the CD-1 approach; the projects chosen have been selected as representative of being amongst the best of the recent projects completed outside the megaproject zones. Further information is provided below in brief discussions about each of these exemplar projects.



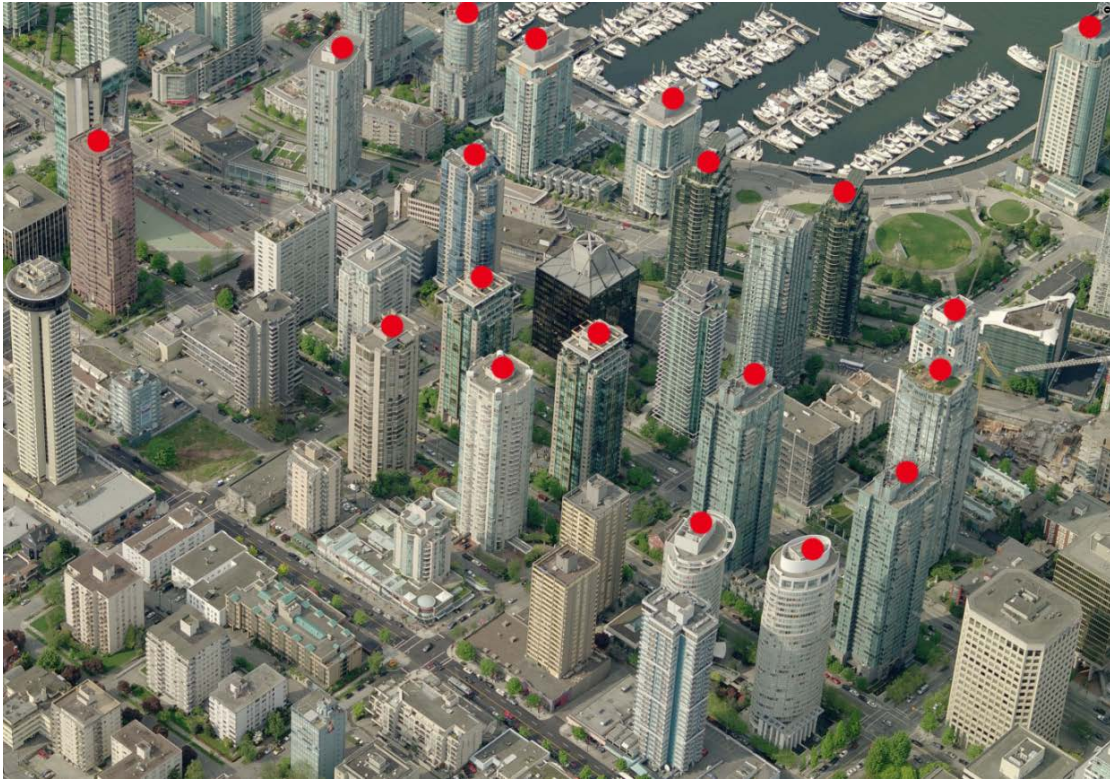


Figure 10.50: Image 1 from figure 10.49: Triangle West neighborhood, adjacent to Coal Harbour. Red Dots added to towers developed under the CD-1 Guidelines. Many of the non-CD-1 projects in this image date back to the first high rise boom of 1956-1973 (bing 3-d).

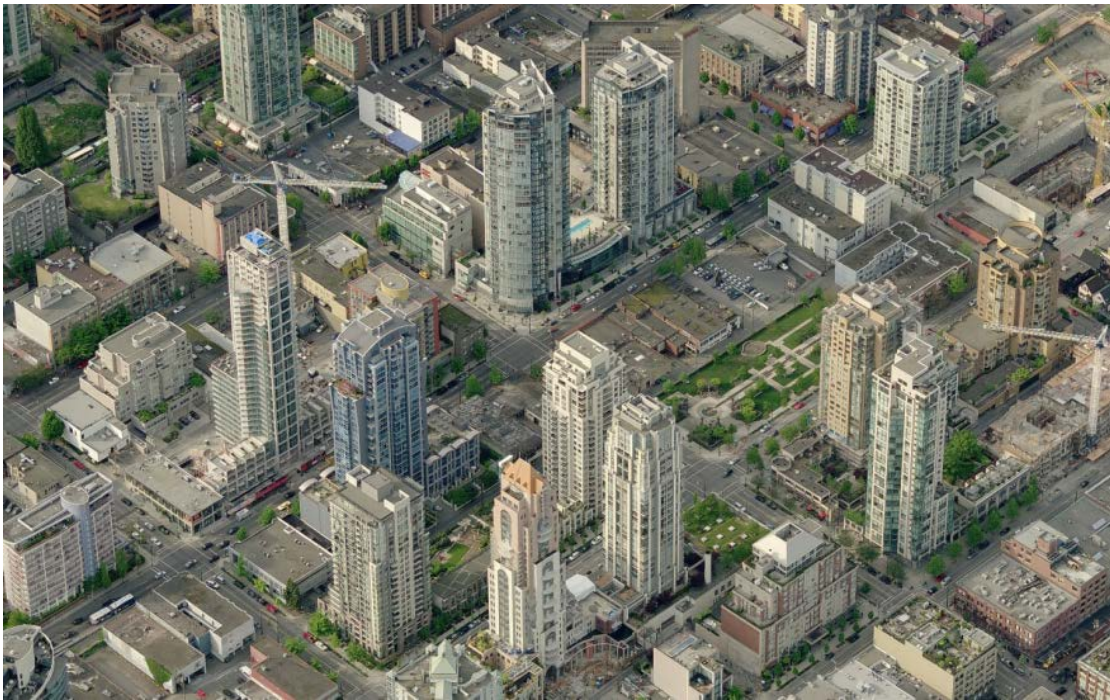


Figure 10.51: Image 2 from figure 10.49: Downtown South neighborhood, adjacent to Yaletown and Concord Pacific. Two towers under construction are CD-1 projects but all finished towers shown in this image were constructed without rezoning, using default guidelines (bing 3-d).





Figure 10.52: Image 3 from figure 10.49: Downtown South neighborhood, adjacent to Yaletown. Tower under construction and other towers with red dots are CD-1 projects; all other towers shown in this image were constructed without rezoning, using default guidelines (bing 3-d).



Figure 10.53: Two context photos from area shown in figure 10.52. (Robert Walsh).



## Two tower pairs by James Cheng: the Palisades and the Residences at Georgia



Figure 10.54: CD-1 development example 'A' from image 10.49. The Palisades and the Residences at Georgia: two tower pairs by James Cheng (Robert Walsh, Google Earth, Bing 3d, Robert Walsh).

The Palisades and the Residences at Georgia by James are often cited as being amongst the finest examples of Vancouverism, at least of examples from outside the megaproject developments (Boddy 2005; Matuk, 1999; Punter 2003). By designing pairs of towers of contrasting materials and geometries Cheng has produced an effective urban composition, bracketing a pedestrian scale street space defined by the row housing and the street trees. At the larger urban scale the four towers work like large columns or book ends to frame an urban event (see figure 10.54).



## Living Shangri-La: A landmark in the heart of downtown



Figure 10.55: Example 'B' from image 10.49: Living Shangri-La, by James Cheng: Vancouver's tallest tower (Robert Walsh, Robert Walsh, Vancouver Sun - Glenn Baglo Google Earth 360).

The mixed use development Living Shangri-La by James Cheng is a sliver shaped tower of glass whose triangular plan geometry is informed by flanking view corridors. As Vancouver's tallest tower the building contains apartments, a hotel, a restaurant and other commercial functions. CAC requirements included provision of a public art space at the sidewalk level and the planting of 40,000 trees offsite (Vancouver Sun, 2004) (see figure 10.55).



## Norman Foster in Vancouver: Jameson House

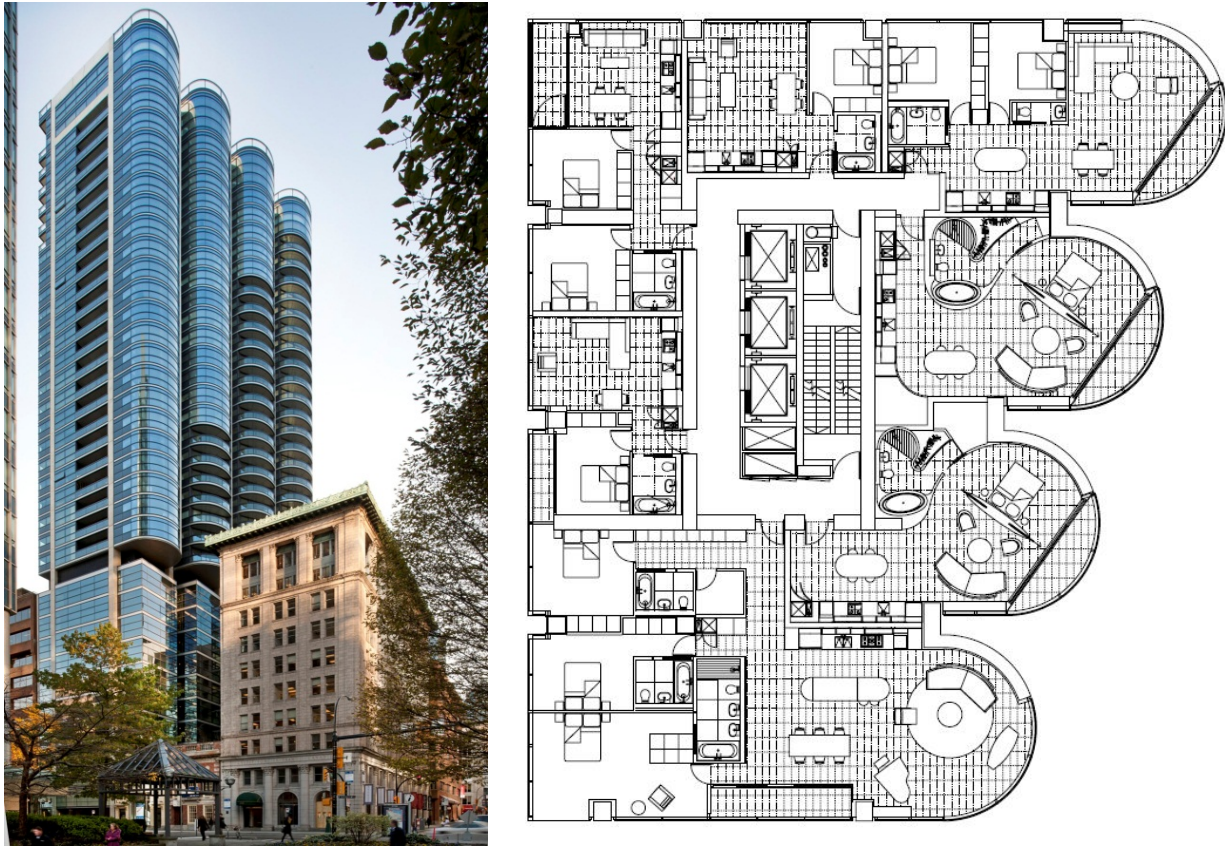


Figure 10.56: Example 'C' from figure 10.49: Jameson House (Foster and Partners, 2011).

One noteworthy Vancouver apartment tower project recently completed on a small CD-1 site is Jameson House, a building designed in by British architect Norman Foster for Bosa Properties.<sup>20</sup> Located on a tightly constrained site at 838 West Hastings Street in downtown Vancouver, Bosa Properties opted to pursue rezoning for the project, eventually gaining permission to construct a much taller building. By using a combination of strategies that included purchasing local historic preservation development credits, the developer acquired rights to develop this parcel at a density of 27 FAR, resulting in this 38 story apartment tower (see figure 10.56).

The approval process for the Jameson House Project lasted nine months after the proposal was submitted to the City, and the project required an additional six years to complete. For a building designed to serve the high end of the luxury market the value of having an original design by Norman Foster perhaps offsets the added expense of a protracted development time frame but not all developers are able or willing to opt for the CD-1 rezoning approach, if it can be avoided.

<sup>20</sup> Emporis.com also claims that this is Foster's first project in North America.

### **Woodward's: The changing face of Vancouverism?**

Gregory Henriquez is now the Managing Partner of the architecture firm his father, Richard Henriquez originally established, the Henriquez Partnership, and the Woodward's complex is his most noteworthy achievement to date. The direction that Gregory Henriquez has pursued in his work has emphasized the combination of social activism and architecture, producing a body of work that includes community centers and affordable housing projects at a time when the high end residential market in Vancouver has been the center of action and attention. This background appears to have suited him well in the design and oversight of the production of the Woodward's redevelopment project, after winning the multi-stage design competition for this \$300 Million development. Completed in 2010, the 1.2 million square foot complex combines: 536 market rate apartments, 200 non-market apartments, a grocery store, a café, a daycare center, office space, and facilities for the SFU School for Contemporary Arts (see figure 10.xy) (Baker, 2007; Chodikoff, 2007; emporis.com; McLaren, 2010).

As a project that is on a site that faced the risk of driving out existing residents via gentrification, Gregory Henriquez went to great lengths to ensure that there would be space and facilities for lower income residents as part of the completed project. This strategy represents a significant departure from other large scale developments in Vancouver which have tended to make contributions to housing provision at sites that were not always in the same neighborhood as the original development, let alone as part of the same building complex. The diverse program of community oriented facilities also holds the promise of contributing to the vitality of the surrounding community without displacing the current residents (Baker, 2007; McLaren, 2010).

Just as Richard Henriquez help to spark something new in his Sylvia Project, in which he responded creatively to neighborhood concerns about daylight and views, his son Gregory Henriquez has succeeded in the Woodward's Redevelopment by redefining the residential high rise complex in Vancouver in response to the challenge presented by the particular needs and interests of the surrounding community. While it is too early to tell if this effort will ultimately prove successful, by combining affordable housing and community oriented functions, with market rate housing and on site retail, this project may represent a new step towards urban revitalization that is transformative without being quite so disruptive, or without displacing the current residents.



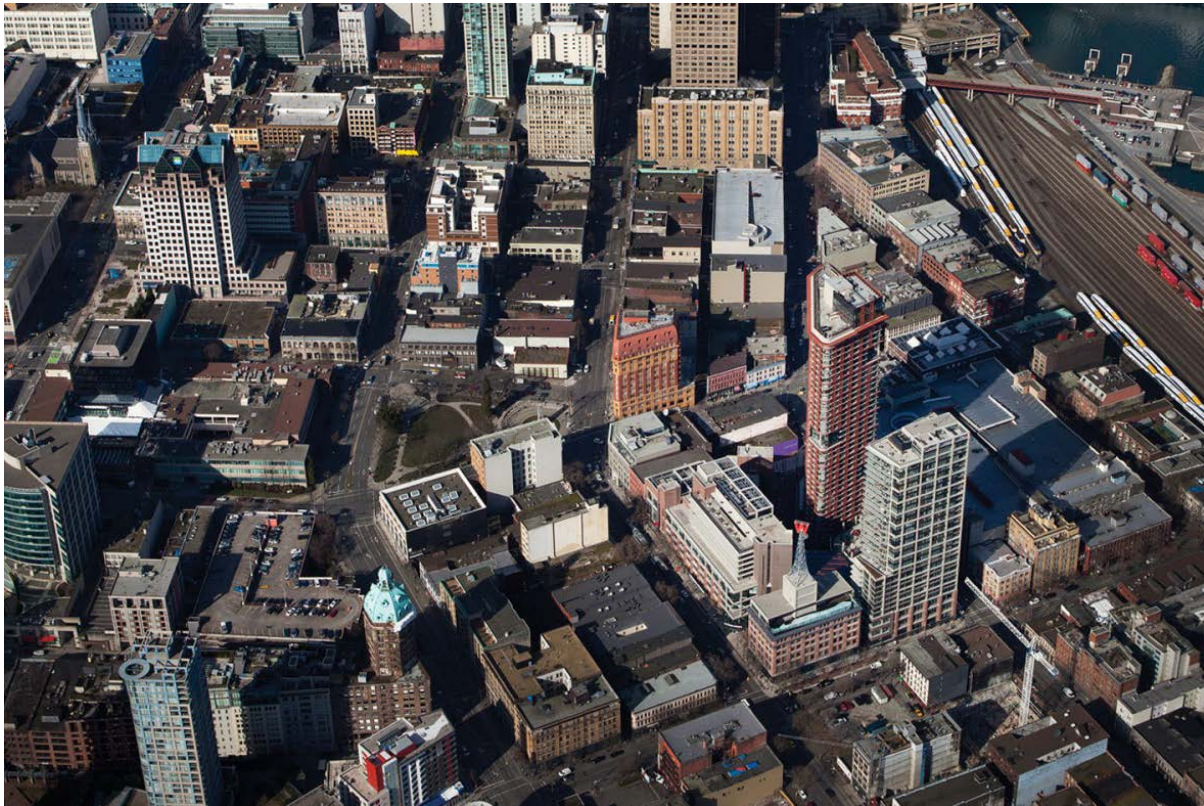


Figure 10.57: Example 'D' from figure 10.49: Woodward's Tower: Henriquez Partnership (upper left image: Robert Walsh, other two images: Henriquez Partnership website).

Whether the Woodward's redevelopment represents the beginning of a new trend in which Vancouverism begins to spread outside the downtown peninsula to other nearby sections of the city remains to be seen. Partially this may depend on whether demand for new housing near the downtown remains high, even as the availability of downtown sites becomes increasingly scarce. Another factor is the fairly recent emergence of the leftward leaning Vision Vancouver political party which now controls the City Government. Earlier this year City Planning director Brent Toderian, who had been hired while the government was under NPA control was abruptly fired, an indication that planning priorities are once again changing in Vancouver, away from a pro-development orientation towards a more community-centered agenda. In this respect the Woodward's development could perhaps represent the beginning of a new trend as much as it represents the end of the prior trend that had polarized the community, provoking worries that downtown Vancouver was becoming a resort for the rich (Boddy, 2006). By combining housing for people of different financial means in the same building complex, along with commercial amenities and community features able to serve the needs of a wider demographic mix, the strategy implemented by Gregory Henriquez has the potential to become the basis for continuing redevelopment and densification of the central area of Vancouver in a way that will work for different groups that had previously tended to be divided by competing and frequently incompatible visions of the future of Vancouver. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue.

### **The road not taken: Full Vancouverism away from the waterfront**

To date, Vancouverism has been particularly successful when applied at the waterfront brownfield sites that had previously defined Vancouver as an industrial city. As the economy of Vancouver evolved, these waterfront sites ceased to be the driver of economic growth and prosperity of the city, instead becoming underutilized wastelands badly in need of rejuvenation. From sites that had become a liability, new opportunities to transform the city eventually emerged through a combination of sustained effort and fortuitous happenstance. The immense scale of the redevelopment sites at False Creek and Coal Harbour meant that preservation of public access to scenic views could play a substantial role in informing the pattern of new development as these areas were reconfigured as new residential neighborhoods. The resulting wide open spaces park at these waterfront sites serve the dual purposes of protecting access to scenic views and providing major outdoor places for the enjoyment of the general public, yet their very existence



became possible more or less as the result of a lucky accident. The current success today of these mega projects has only been possible because these large tracts were set aside and then kept intact by the Canadian Pacific Railway, until the changing economic conditions made their redevelopment as housing a more attractive option.

Although Vancouverism has often been portrayed as a result of a planning agenda, it is important to realize that development has proceeded on the basis of private developers hiring designers who developed comprehensive urban design master plans, subsequently evaluated by the city planners. In terms of actual planning activities, the city planning department stopped proposing actual master plans after the failure of the East End redevelopment process pursued by Gerald Sutton Brown.<sup>21</sup> Instead of producing new plans, the city planners produced thorough policies, in the form of guidelines and general recommendations. Actual urban design has been left up to private developers, with the City Planners serving as critics.

This failure to actually produce any plans has been curiously ignored by prior research into Vancouverism, perhaps because the immense scale of the waterfront mega projects seems to suggested that these projects must have been planned. The city planners have been involved in refining and negotiating adjustments to the designs proposed by the developers, but it is the developers and their architects who developed the plans that reconfigured the city.

Understanding that the city planners in Vancouver were not actually producing plans is significant for understanding why the results at the waterfront were so much better than the results throughout the rest of the downtown peninsula. It was only at these larger scale urban sites that there was an opportunity to engaging in large scale urban design, and this is purely the accidental result of the pattern of ownership.

One troubling implication that this raises is the idea that perhaps the only way to attain equivalent positive redevelopment results elsewhere in the city might have been to pursue the aquisition and consolidation of large sections of the city as a prelude to urban design and

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<sup>21</sup> The one exception to this was the North Park Scheme, and yet even here the developer clearly initiated and controlled the urban design process.

redevelopment. Yet this ignores other viable options that could have been pursued instead, such as actually developing a comprehensive urban design master plan for the central area of Vancouver.

Although great public and private benefit was derived from redeveloping the waterfront sites in accordance with well designed masterplans, the fabric of the downtown itself was not subjected to a similar analysis and or planned reorganization, not even for areas like the Yaletown district, which was a functionally obsolete warehouse district expected to be soon undergoing redevelopment. Perhaps this may simply have been a problem which the city planners did not even perceive; while they had demonstrated an ability to collaborate with architects in the urban design process at the mega project sites, initiative for these projects was driven by the developers and pursued by their architects. Although the city seems to have lacked the capacity to produce new urban design master plan, it had previously hired outside design consultants to study urban issues and devise actual urban design master plans, why it chose not to do so again remains unclear (Baird/Simpson, 1982).

Although the City failed to explore this option, a version of Full Vancouverism might still have been possible at sites disengaged from the waterfront. To propose such an option, however, immediately presents a range of new obstacles, including the difficult constraints imposed by the cramped urban street grid, and the complicated pattern of land ownership. Given that the NPA party, after having been ousted in the aftermath of the Strathcona problems, had now returned to power, it perhaps is not surprising that in redeveloping the downtown they would choose to pursue a model that more closely resembled the approach successfully applied to the West End, an approach relying upon uniform rules to produce a consistent result.

Rather than accept the default condition presented by the existing city street grid, however, the city still had other options. One such option is suggested by a design proposal for a city project that represented a new interpretation of Vancouverism appropriate to a non-waterfront location. While this design was not implemented, it was commissioned by the city, and its potential implications ought to have been apparent. This project is worth considering here because of the

perspective it provides for understanding what was actually achieved in Vancouver, and how perhaps it might have been better.

### **Bing Thom and the missing urban option**

Vancouver architect Bing Thom is another Hong Kong native who relocated to Vancouver, in this case in 1950 with his family at the age of ten. After completing an undergraduate degree in architecture at the University of British Columbia in 1966, he earned his master's degree in architecture at the University of California at Berkeley. Beginning his career in the office of Fumihiko Maki in Japan in 1971, in 1972 Thom returned to Vancouver to work in the office of Arthur Erickson. Thom eventually started his own firm in 1980. Today, an international architect with many impressive projects and awards to his credit, Bing Thom has designed successful projects large and small ranging from exhibition pavilions to community centers and residential apartment towers to the design of urban master plans.<sup>22</sup> As one of Vancouver's most well-known and highly respected architects,<sup>23</sup> Bing Thom is often mentioned in the context of the development of Vancouverism even though his own particular contribution to Vancouverism is limited to three projects: the Pointe - a 29 story residential tower at 1305 West Georgia St. (1998), a 13 story residential point tower in the West End at 1550 West 15th Street (1995) and a 20 Story tower at 855/899 Homer Street (1992) (<http://www.bingthomarchitects.com/#>; Bing Thom Architects, 2011; Boddy, 2009; Emporis.com,).

In addition to an impressive body of built work, Bing Thom has also produced designs that have not been realized; it is one these unbuilt projects that is most relevant to understanding how Vancouverism could have developed more fully on sites not on the waterfront. In 1995 the City of Vancouver was considering three different sites for the construction of a major new convention center. Bing Thom was asked to develop a masterplan for a site that ultimately was not selected, yet the urban design strategy he devised and how this compares to the approach that was eventually used to develop this land is instructive. The site in question incorporates the land

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<sup>22</sup> Bing Thom also was critical to a recent effort to preserve and make available the extensive collection of documents produced by Harland Bartholomew during both of Bartholomew's major planning engagements; access to this body of work greatly aided my own research, especially the work for Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> In 2011 Bing Thom was the recipient the prestigious RAIC Gold Medal.

that would be later developed into the four-tower Spectrum complex, as well as two additional adjacent blocks (see figure 10.58).



Figure 10.58: Convention Center Proposal by Bing Thom, 1995 (Bing Thom) and the Spectrum by James Cheng, 2007 (bing 3-d).

The specific programmatic requirements of the convention center complex are less central to the potential this project has as a new urban precedent for Vancouverism; the main conventional hall itself was to be located underground with a vast open park space at ground level located on top of it, and as an urban design strategy it is easy to therefore imagine pursuing a similar pattern, without needing to incorporate vast subterranean element. What is relevant is how Thom has used the combination of point towers and infill to flank a substantial public green space: eastern and western perimeters of the large site are defined by parallel rows of low rise buildings which frame the large park space in the middle, while serving as the base for several well-spaced point towers. The towers work together as columns to demarcate a large outdoor urban room. The existence of this central space has obvious benefits for improving access to distant views from the towers while potentially improving views at ground level as well. There also is the advantage of a potentially useful park space at the middle of the site, presenting a stark contrast to the more compact development that now occupies the site.

As a model for a centralized urban variety of Vancouverism, there are several lessons to be learned from the convention center design. First of all, there were significant advantages gained by consolidating several city blocks, including the ability to establish a large centralized park space flanked by ground level infill and tall towers. The resulting urban space is similar in scale



to George Wainborn Park, at the center of the Beach Crescent. Because of the careful placement of the towers, these structures can easily be made quite tall, without producing shadows like those that encroach on the Coal Harbor park space.

While the City was not necessarily in a position to require the consolidation of city blocks in the downtown, policies still could have been adopted that might have encouraged this, such as developing zoning restrictions that allowed for taller residential towers on sites that used a strategy like this or perhaps proposing a rezoning process that actually accelerated the approval process instead of adding an entire additional year to the development timeline. And finally, the city could have actually devised master plan for the areas downtown that seemed likely to be undergoing redevelopment, using perhaps a combination of transferrable development rights to facilitate the development of an intentional pattern of urban development able to sustain a vibrant public domain.

### **Conclusion: three varieties of Vancouverism**

The mega projects at False Creek and Coal Harbor represent Vancouverism at its best and it is these projects which are most typically used as illustrations of Vancouverism, at least in photographs. Yet while it is this complete version of Vancouverism that has drawn the attention of planners, architects and developers, somewhat paradoxically it is the less inspiring yet much more easily modeled Partial Vancouverism of the interior of the downtown that is being most frequently emulated in other cities. One factor contributing to this confusion may be the increasing prevalence of Landmark Vancouverism in downtown Vancouver; Landmark Vancouverism shares aspects in common with Full Vancouverism and Partial Vancouverism, while at the same time becoming associated with the most visually distinctive structures now being built in Vancouver. Although the example of the tower and townhouse models that the city has been promoting through its own guidelines are routinely cited in descriptions of Vancouver (Boddy, 2005; Punter, 2003), the examples of Vancouverism taken from the waterfront and also the interior sections of the city involve projects that did not use these guidelines, but instead made use of cd-1 rezoning (Macdonald, 2005; Matuk, 1999) (see table 10.4).

Although the developments pursued through Partial Vancouverism, Full Vancouverism and Landmark Vancouverism each involve different strategies and even different planning approval processes, leading to notably different urban outcomes, prior studies of Vancouverism have generally failed to distinguish between these different urban strategies, obscuring potential significant implications. The framework of point towers and row housing used by the City of Vancouver as its default position for the downtown has the advantage of being a simple yet lucid explanation that fits much of the recent development in Vancouver. The suggestion that these structures can be understood by a simplified planning formula has the distinctive appeal of making the success of Vancouver seem easy.

<b>Variety</b>	<b>Planning Mechanisms</b>	<b>Locations applied:</b>	<b>Characteristics:</b>
Full Vancouverism	Urban design master plan, area guidelines, CD-1 rezoning negotiations Urban Design Panel	At large formerly industrial tracts at the waterfront	Comprehensive, combines: circulation, major public spaces and building clusters. responsive to regional, urban and neighborhood context
Partial Vancouverism	area guidelines, zoning regs.	Interior city lots i.e. Non-waterfront	Confined to individual city blocks, formulaic or generic
Landmark Vancouverism	area guidelines, CD-1 rezoning negotiations Urban Design Panel	Both waterfront and interior	Iconic, local individual object buildings with a larger impact in mind

Table 10.4: Summary of the three varieties of Vancouverism.

Many of the architects I discussed my research with were acutely aware that the development which has taken place further back from the waterfront has frequently been less appealing than the new buildings typical of the waterfront megaproject developments. More than once it was suggested to me that perhaps Vancouverism itself was a dubious term, a categorization that did not reflect reality; instead Vancouver simply had a mixture of good architecture and bad architecture. I believe that this view probably reflects frustration with a local architectural press that has often failed to distinguish between the excellent results attained at the waterfront and the occasionally mediocre results attained on sites at a distance from the waterfront. In this respect Vancouverism has come to serve as a label that treats good and bad results equally, an attitude

with which leading architects would be especially inclined to take issue. If one is unable to find any grounds for differentiating between superior and inferior outcomes, then these doubts about the validity of Vancouverism as a useful identifying attribute seem well founded.

Wrestling with this problem contributed to the decision to approach Vancouverism as taking place in not just one form, but in three basic forms visible throughout the downtown. One relevant factor was the need to find a way to explain the difference between projects that make use of all five essential elements and those which only involve a few. From this followed the observation that what differentiates the three varieties of Vancouverism from each other is not just their results, but also the process by which those results were attained; different planning mechanisms are used resulting in substantially different development timetables.

Once it becomes apparent that these three varieties of Vancouverism are different both in what they are, and in how they are made, new and potentially significant questions begin to become relevant. For example, who is to blame for the relatively less impressive characteristics of Partial Vancouverism, especially when compared against the celebrated results achieved at the waterfront mega projects? One view holds that it is the architects who are ultimately to blame for the high number of formulaic structures that have overtaken the Downtown, a position that has been consistent with a perspective that attributes the success of Vancouver to the excellent quality of its urban planning (Bogdanowicz, 2009; Punter, 2003). However, having now revealed through this research that the urban form of Vancouver was the result of a process in which architects, developers, the general public and politicians all had a hand in producing, in addition to the city planners, it seems more realistic to conclude that both credit and blame for what has been built in Vancouver belongs to no single group of participants.

The Vancouver city planners deserve a share of the blame for the overly uniform application of Partial Vancouverism that has made parts of the downtown dull and monotonous. Perhaps these buildings are too similar to one another due to a lack of design imagination on the part of the architects, yet they also conform to the specific visual image established in the City guidelines. By defining a standardized architecture that the planners would find acceptable, this diagram takes on new significance, especially in the context of Vancouver's overly complex and time

consuming planning approval process. Shortening the total project timeline rewards developers with increased profits and reduced risks. By establishing a design template or a preferred solution, the City established a clear path for approval benefitting developers who choose to curtail the search for novel solutions, rewarding those developers who chose the standardized city sanctioned approach. It is a bit unfair to blame architects for complying with the wishes of their developer clients; the main goal of a competent commercial architect is a satisfied client and if the client is happier with a competent, standardized product that generates larger faster safer profits, then they are going to hire architects able to effectively deliver just that. The developers are also not entirely to blame because they are responding to the market conditions that have been substantially informed by the planning restrictions established by the City.

Furthermore, the extent to which the planners were unable to prevent this outcome may be attributed to the planners unwittingly limiting their own options at the outset. By publishing an image that amounts to a pre-approved template the City Planners effectively curtailed their own capacity to subsequently reject proposals that conformed to their espoused model.

Fortunately there are still architects and developers working in Vancouver today who see value in a design that represents a more unique response to a particular setting, resulting in projects that are neither boring nor oppressive. A critical question is whether the city planning regime nevertheless impaired the spread of innovation throughout Vancouver? Ordinarily the ongoing infusion of new ideas presented by Vancouver's leading architects would have the potential to yield a positive continuing source of inspiration that other perhaps less adventurous architects and developers could draw from. However, by establishing a fixed recommended building morphology included in official planning regulations, the game has been radically changed: the planners have encroached upon the domain of design by promoting conformity with a recommended building form. This decision represents a potentially serious mistake, as well as a departure from prior planning practice in Vancouver. While planners in Vancouver had very effectively applied and reinterpreted design principles originally presented as Patterns by the False Creek Study Group, the Patterns invariably illustrated critical design relationships and problem solving principles. The Patterns typically did not specify the specific form that solutions should take; patterns were proposed with the expectation that actual design would follow as



architects worked to devise appropriate context specific responses. Building morphology was understood to be in the hands of the architects. The planners however then changed this dynamic; they began to propose particular idealized forms, bypassing the design process. By proposing a pair of idealized solutions with a clear and defined building morphology, combining point towers and townhouses in a particular way, the design process has shifted away from the interpretation of principles in relation to a particular context, to a less responsive mode of design development in which the shortest path to success is the one that deviates least from the model established by the planners.

Although this may seem a rather harsh critique to be leveling at Vancouver's planners, this is tempered by the open acknowledgement of the important role that the city planners have also played in the success of the waterfront projects. Nevertheless because the standardized approach to Vancouverism, i.e. Partial Vancouverism is the least successful variety of Vancouverism, it remains important to dispel the notion that with better architecture this problem would go away. The problem is primarily the result of a lapse in planning. Partial Vancouverism is the most easily exported variety of Vancouverism precisely because it is the most standardized, the easiest to define from a planning perspective and yet unfortunately also the least capable of producing an excellent outcome, simply because it tends to trivialize the relationship buildings have to their larger context. Partial Vancouverism is frequently lacking in architectural merit not because Vancouver has a lack of design talent, but because this predefined solution actually tends to discourage originality. In contrast to this, tremendous originality was displayed at the mega project sites and the planners, architects and developers who participated in the achievement of these results have every reason to be celebrated for their accomplishments. These cases of Full Vancouverism have succeeded not because they have applied a simplistic tower and podium model, but because they have responded effectively to the challenges and opportunities of their larger urban contexts. That this work makes use of all five elements of Vancouverism is of course significant, yet it also matters that these elements were appropriate to the particular settings in which this work was taking place. This then begins to suggest that rather than exporting the overly simplified version of Vancouverism, other lessons might be learned from the case of Vancouverism less dependent upon the issue of building morphology; it is to these questions that attention turns for the concluding discussion chapter.

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## Chapter 11 Conclusion: Learning from Vancouver



Figure 11.1: A futuristic conception of Vancouver: 1938 advertising material from Shelly's Bakery (City of Vancouver Archives).

To conclude this study of Vancouverism, attention now turns to the question of what lessons the case of Vancouver BC might have to offer, relevant to the wider challenge of producing effective, attractive livable environments not just in Vancouver but elsewhere as well.

As this research has revealed, the set of local conditions and circumstances that played a role in the development of Vancouverism is both diverse and highly complex. Geographically, the relative scarcity of land at the downtown peninsula, combined with the shipping and white collar businesses that had developed there, presented ideal conditions for the development of a higher

density urban fabric. From a technological perspective, advances in cast-in-place and precast concrete construction methods contributed to the emergence of economically viable high rise housing around the globe and this also impacted development in Vancouver. Meanwhile, the availability in Vancouver of spectacular natural views and the economic returns to be gained by developers able to exploit these natural assets provided additional incentive for going tall. Also significant are the benign climate and frequently overcast skies that made the use of balconies and large expanses of glass in the design of new dwellings appropriate in Vancouver, even if such a strategy might be less practical in other cities where thermal gain from too much sunlight or excessive heat loss to a cold exterior could be problematic.

Cultural and social factors also played a strong role in the development of Vancouverism. The tremendous recent influx of affluent immigrants from Asia was a major factor contributing to the accelerated transformation of the downtown peninsula. Other aspects of Vancouver's local culture, however, have also been significant. Outdoor recreation and environmental protection are important aspects of the Vancouver character, which has found urban expression in the cultivation of a lush and verdant public domain, in the protection of natural views as a public asset, and in a strong preference for buildings that maximize view accessibility. The local history of organized community protests that stopped freeways and large scale housing developments from proceeding, and the political changes that these protests provoked, also made a lasting impact on the form urban development that has taken in the city.

From an economic perspective, the influx of foreign capital through recent immigration has been important, yet this is again just one of several factors driving up the cost of land and increasing the demand for new development in the downtown peninsula. An early influence in this process was the establishment of an immense and wholly unnecessary park at Stanley Park, at a time when Vancouver itself was little more than a clearing in a vast wilderness; the founding of the park was motivated by real estate investors who wanted to protect the value of their nearby holdings. Other aspects of the local economy relate directly to the unique setting itself, with mining, forestry, fish packing, shipping and tourism contributing to the growth of the city; more recently business management, filmmaking, banking and computer technology have emerged as major contributors in the economy. As the economy has evolved, large tracts of derelict

industrial land have become available for redevelopment in key waterfront locations and this in itself has been of tremendous significance in the development of Vancouverism.

The role of government, both in terms of local politics and locally developed planning mechanisms, has also had a substantial impact on the development of Vancouverism. The profound differences in methods and priorities pursued by Gerald Sutton Brown and Ray Spaxman also can be viewed as reflections of the divergent priorities of the governing parties that brought each of these planning directors to Vancouver. The business and development oriented NPA party that brought Gerald Sutton Brown to Vancouver pursued a very different agenda from the TEAM party that replaced them in 1972. Meanwhile, the slow pace of progress at the vast site on the North Shore of False Creek provoked the involvement of the Provincial government of Bill Bennett, who succeeded in building a stadium and mounting an Expo before finally seeing his redevelopment effort brought down by political squabbling from within his own party. In a political context in which power shifted back and forth between administrations that favored or opposed redevelopment, Vancouver planners, and especially Larry Beasley, devised new mechanisms for leveraging public benefits out of the private development process.

In summary, as the story of Vancouverism has unfolded, this dissertation has attempted to address the interaction of six different types of factors: physical context, technology, social / cultural factors, economic issues, government, and architectural aesthetics. These six types of influence are not isolated from one another, yet still provide multiple vantage points through which to view the complex development of Vancouverism. Meanwhile, as an organizing structure for the entire analysis, a model of Vancouverism was proposed that defined Vancouverism as a form of urbanism combining five essential elements.

The identification of these five essential elements enables a comprehensive analysis to be undertaken tracing the origins of each element and their eventual combined use. This has resulted in a new narrative of the origins of Vancouverism that has yielded new insights, while at the same time correcting prior claims that Vancouverism had been a recently imported preexisting typology. Instead, as this research has clearly demonstrated Vancouverism was primarily a locally developed phenomenon in which the main drivers of innovation ultimately were local architects and the developers they worked for (see figure 11.2).

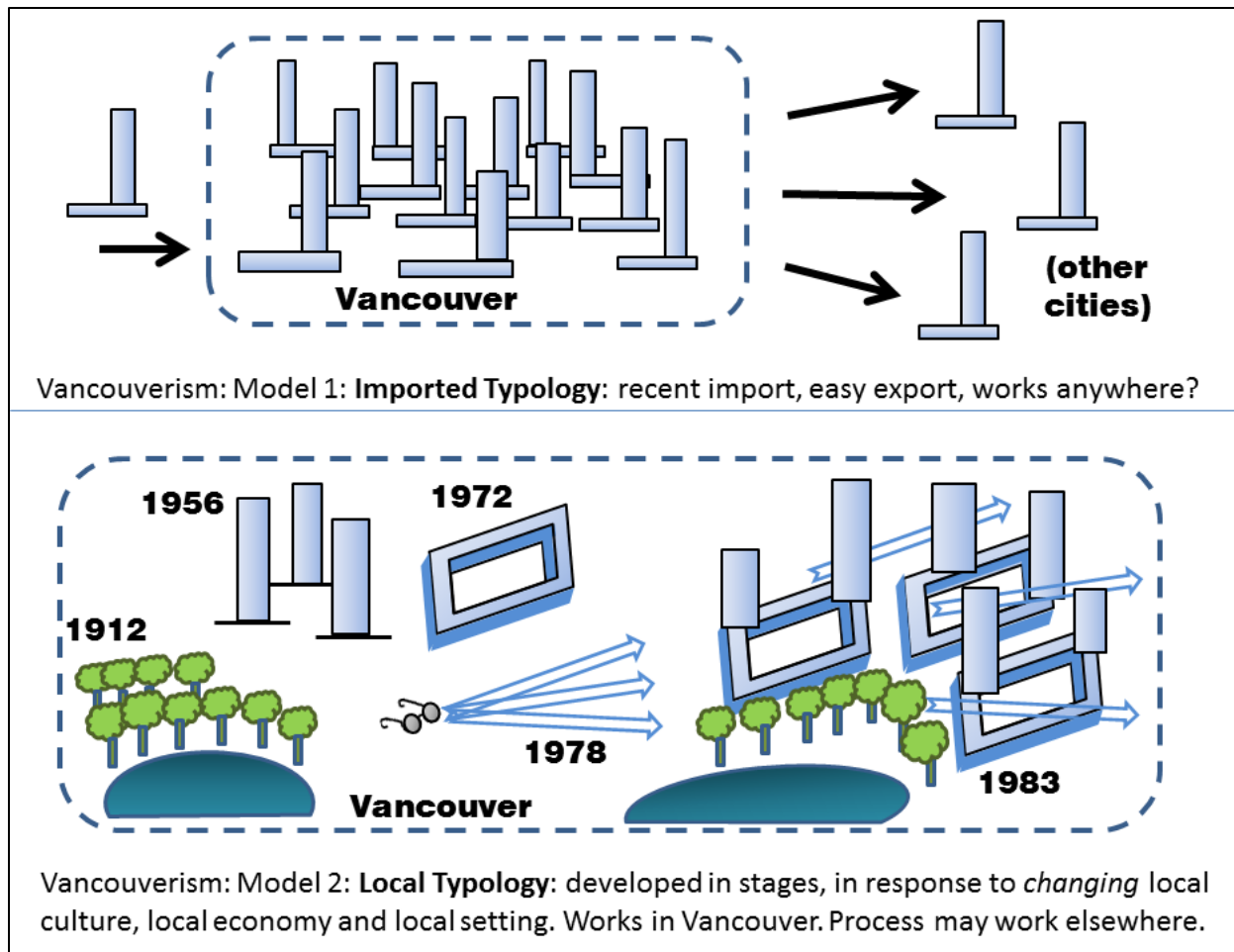


Figure 11.2: Conceptual diagram of two models of Vancouverism: Model 1 summarizes the view of Vancouverism that existed at the inception of this research effort, while Model 2 summarizes the new understanding that this model reveals (Robert Walsh).

The new understanding that Vancouverism is a locally derived and locally relevant urbanism has important implications for how it might be effectively applied in other contexts. From the two different models of its origins arise opposing conclusions about the transferability of Vancouverism. If Vancouverism is believed to be the result of an imported typology, as depicted in model 1 (see figure 11.2), then it stands to reason that the same process of translation ought to be expected to result in similar success elsewhere, because, as this perspective implies, the success of Vancouverism apparently had little or nothing to do with the unique context of the city. The alternative perspective argued for by this research, as depicted in Model 2, indicates that Vancouverism is more than just towers and podiums and that Vancouverism developed



locally, in response to local conditions, making effective transplantation to other contexts a far more challenging and uncertain prospect.<sup>1</sup>

Vancouverism matters. As a high-density form of urban redevelopment that has resulted in an appealing, livable and economically viable urban environment, this form of urbanism has combined the advantages of high rise related density with other desirable urban characteristics not often associated with high rise urban development. It is as if the high rises in the park of Le Corbusier have been combined successfully with the domesticated walkable urbanism of Jane Jacobs, resulting in a bizarre new hybrid that somehow has managed to combine the best characteristics of urban agendas that would otherwise seem to be diametrically opposed. Presented in this way, it is understandable that planners, architects and developers working in other cities would turn to Vancouverism for inspiration, and yet it is here that a curious problem has begun to emerge: for all its advantages and impressive achievements, the physical form of urbanism that has transformed Vancouver may not necessarily make much sense in other cities where conditions are different. Or put another way, to focus attention exclusively on the form of Vancouverism overlooks what may be a more significant lesson concerning how Vancouverism came to develop in the specific context of Vancouver: a matter of urban design process instead of just a particular urban design outcome or morphology.

There are valid reasons for concluding that Vancouverism does not warrant replication in other urban settings, such as in cases where the climate might be less benign, or the natural terrain does not yield scenic views. Likewise, few cities can expect to be subjected to a massive wave of millionaire immigrants accustomed to compact high rise apartment towers. Therefore, even in cases where postindustrial cities are facing the challenge and opportunity of rehabilitating abandoned industrial tracts along strategically located waterfront sites, adopting a development strategy that attempts to physically emulate results seen in Vancouver is no guarantee of success. Understanding the urban elements that have succeeded in transforming Vancouver is somewhat helpful, perhaps, but what holds significant far reaching potential is understanding the process by which these elements came to play a role in Vancouver, so that similar processes might yield other locally appropriate elements well suited to other urban settings.

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<sup>1</sup> Even when Thomas Mawson came to Vancouver, although he brought with him a lifetime of experience as a leading landscape architect and urban designer (Mawson, 1911), his influence on the building culture of Vancouver was the result of his attempts to respond to the unique local conditions that he found in Vancouver.

### **11.1 The five essential elements of Vancouverism: final conclusions**

Given the extent to which the development of Vancouverism took place as an ongoing engagement with the particular urban issues faced in Vancouver, the question that naturally follows from this research is: to what extent is Vancouverism a relevant model with a potential for valid or productive application in other urban contexts?

Unfortunately as Vancouverism has spread to other cities this has largely been on the basis of the Partial Vancouverism model typical of the interior of areas of downtown Vancouver. By utilizing a truncated model that emphasizes only the Towers and Townhouses, while ignoring the role of the other elements in the formation of a larger urban structure, an incomplete and superficial image of Vancouverism has become widespread whereby the relationship of the urban form to the original context has become almost completely obscured. Instead of learning the value of context driven urbanism, a reversed cartoonish idea is spreading based upon the mistaken belief that context did not play a role in the development and success of Vancouver.

Fortunately, there are aspects of Vancouverism that may still be relevant to architects, planners and developers working in other settings. One aspect of this concerns understanding more explicitly the five elements themselves and how each relates to the unique circumstances of the downtown peninsula of Vancouver. A second aspect concerns understanding whether these local elements embody more general principles in some form. While the entire dissertation explores this issue, the concluding discussion will consider select aspects of particular relevance to the challenge of learning from Vancouver.

#### **Element 1: Active Urban Landscape:**

##### Introduced to Vancouver:

1912 Thomas Mawson: urban plan, work at Stanley Park, lectures and Street tree regime

##### Refined by:

1969: Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies at Marathon Proposal: pedestrian waterfront, waterfront parks

##### Local factors of the Vancouver context contributing to the success of this element:

Access to dramatic mountain views, availability of extensive tracts of underutilized waterfront land, location within a moderate yet moist climate that encourages a wide range of plant growth,

and finally a local culture that places a high value on environmental stewardship and outdoor recreation all contribute to the success of the active urban landscape in Vancouver.

Lucky accidents that played a contributing role:

Abandonment of industrial uses in the downtown peninsula and at the South Shore of Vancouver provided an unusual opportunity to redevelop vast tracts of waterfront land as a shared public amenity of considerable value. The appealing climate and spectacular natural landscape also are fortuitous local attributes that magnify the value of this element. The uniqueness of these attributes compared against other major Canadian cities serves to further increase the perception that the urban landscape of Vancouver is now an essential defining characteristic of the city. The establishment of Stanley Park has proved to be of ultimate benefit, despite its origins in real estate speculation, while the perceived remoteness of Vancouver from other Canadian cities made the pursuit of new urban design strategies more feasible.

Generalizable principles relevant to other urban settings:

Provided that this element reflects the values of the local culture, the provision of a parks network that takes advantage of the natural terrain, natural views and available waterfront access is probably a sound general principle. However, the particular form that this should take ought to reflect local conditions including availability of funding for public space maintenance, as well as more obvious constraints such as relationship to climate, cultural preferences, availability of water and availability of land itself.

**Element 2: Row House Enclaves**

Introduced to Vancouver:

1971 False Creek Study Group, and then applied at South Shore of False Creek<sup>2</sup>

Refined by:

1988 - 1996 James Cheng at Cambridge Gardens, 888 Beach Street and Marinaside Crescent

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<sup>2</sup> It is tempting to credit this innovation to Zoltan Kiss and Ron Walkey who were the first to propose combining low rise courtyard housing in conjunction with residential point tower high rises, however the designs proposed by them for the Marathon property appear to be different in several key respects. First of all they were proposing low rise apartment flats, not row houses. Furthermore, these developments face onto centralized public courtyard spaces, not the more private and protected spaces typical of the row house enclaves as they have come to be used. Perhaps most significantly, the row house enclave defines the public environment by giving the streetscape a hard edge scaled to pedestrian experience with windows and doorways that open directly onto the street, in contrast this, the proposals by Ron Dies and Zoltan Kiss feature low rise apartments that are set in an open landscape.

Local factors of the Vancouver context contributing to the success of this element:

The climate in Vancouver combines mild temperatures with frequently overcast skies, together resulting in conditions which favor the development of housing with abundant access to natural light. This is especially critical in units closer to street level, where daylight availability is lower than it is in high rise units. For this reason having units of relatively shallow depth with access to daylight both from the street side and from an interior courtyard is advantageous, even though this results in a lower net residential density, as compared to an approach that replaces the perimeter ring of townhouses with an actual podium. Having sites where space in the middle is deep enough to preserve the privacy of opposite ground floor units also appears critical.

Lucky accidents that played a contributing role:

As initially developed at the South Shore of False Creek, the first row house enclaves were expected to result in an urban vitality due to informal interactions to take place in the semi-private courtyard spaces. Instead, these courtyard places proved relatively unsuccessful. The outward facing street elevations, however, encouraged positive social interactions along the public oriented street elevations, and especially along the pedestrian waterfront walkway, making the row house enclaves successful nonetheless. This can be considered a lucky accident in that the original driving impetus of the internal space proved relatively inadequate while the street edge defining outward directed aspect proved valuable and appreciated. As a result, variations on this element can be successful due to the positive impact of facing the adjacent streetscape, even when a fully enclosed courtyard is not practical.

This element has proven most successful in the waterfront projects where the existing development pattern allowed larger urban blocks, and again this is largely a matter of fortuitous happenstance. The undifferentiated industrial landscapes at False Creek and Coal Harbor made it possible to simultaneously define row house enclaves and the streets that they overlook, while at the interior sections of the downtown where the city is defined by a narrow street grid pattern, development was more constrained, preventing the development of enclosed garden spaces in many instances. Even in these limited cases, however, the strategy of defining the street edge by street facing row houses continues to contribute to the vitality of the urban landscape.



### Generalizable principles relevant to other urban settings:

The row house enclave element may have application in other urban settings where it is desirable to have a streetscape defined by housing overlooking the street. Important features include: shallow units with street facing windows, numerous street facing doors, an additional daylight access at the interior of the block. Awnings, cornice details and relatively low building heights of four stories or less seem to help scale the streetscape to pedestrian experience, although in some settings taller street walls may actually be more appropriate.

There are also aspects of the row house enclaves in Vancouver that are not entirely successful. In some instances the units suffer from a lack of privacy arising from the unit ground floor height being too close to grade. This can be observed in the large number of townhouse units which have their blinds drawn at all hours, curtailing the sense that these windows might represent eyes on the street, and replacing this with a feeling that residents are trying to keep the street life from encroaching on interior privacy, even at upper levels.

The parking pattern has both advantages and weaknesses. By locating the parking in a shared underground space, typically accessed through an entrance off the alley or side street, the streetscape comes to be less dominated by parking or garages for individual units. Underground parking for row house units alone may be cost prohibitive, but these units were typically constructed in conjunction with point tower high rises, which could help offset the cost, simply because high rises construction typically requires large scale excavations below grade anyway. However the shared below grade parking also has the practical impact that arrivals and departures occur primarily through the unseen garage entries to units; entry through the street entrances is less common than might be expected. As a result while these units are arranged like townhouses, on a practical level many still function more like apartment blocks.

Architects and developers in Vancouver experimented with a range of different apartment configurations and the row house enclave came to be popularized partially because this was seen as more family friendly, due to improved access to the street, larger unit sizes and potentially less expensive construction. The appropriate orientation and massing for ground level apartments varies from place to place: on some commercial streets, row houses are located above a ground level commercial level; on the busiest streets apartment blocks seem to work better. One lesson relevant to other urban settings may be simply to consider developing housing that combines

low rise developments at street level with select high rise structures to increase development density; for this strategy to succeed, appropriate local rules need to be explored and developed that define this relationship between high rise and low rise, and in other settings a row house point tower combination may not be the optimum strategy.

### **Element 3: Spaced Point Towers**

#### Introduced to Vancouver:

1962 Harbour Park design proposal: CBK Van Norman

1965 Beach Towers Complex: CBK Van Norman

#### Refined by:

1969 North Shore at False Creek, Zoltan Kiss and Ron Dies for Marathon Realty

1983 BC Place master plan, Arthur Erickson and Fisher Friedman

1984 The Sylvia Tower, Richard Henriquez

1986 North Park Project at BC Place, Stanley Kwok

1987 Eugenia Place, Richard Henriquez

1987 Tudor Manor, Paul Merrick

1988 Cambridge Gardens, James Cheng

1988 Bays Scheme at Concord Pacific Place, Stanley Kwok and Don Vaughan

1989 Presidio Tower, Richard Henriquez

1992 Citygate development, John Perkins

1992 888 Beach Ave, James Cheng

#### Local factors of the Vancouver context contributing to the success of this element:

The existence of desirable views in multiple orientations is an important factor in making the spaced point towers a viable strategy for downtown Vancouver. This strategy initially gained momentum with the construction of the Beach Towers complex, where accessing views and reducing obstruction from neighboring buildings both mattered to a developer seeking to maximize the profits in this multi-tower complex. When Richard Henriquez subsequently began to design his West End towers, similar issues arose in relating the new structures to the existing context, yet it also mattered that he was responding to an existing pattern of high rise development. The combination of maximizing view access while minimizing view obstruction continued to make separated point towers a viable strategy in Vancouver, especially at both

waterfronts. The use of green glass and cast-in-place concrete contributed to the development of a distinctive variety of residential skyscraper well suited to maximizing access to daylight and views in a climate where skies are foggy or overcast much of the time.

Lucky accidents that played a contributing role:

The presence of spectacular mountain views to the north and ocean views in nearly all directions made separated point towers an especially useful building approach for downtown Vancouver. The relative scarcity of downtown land, arising from natural geographic constraints further contributed to the increase land value that made high rise construction economically viable. Whether the earlier precedent of the first West End high rise boom ought to be considered a lucky accident is a matter of interpretation; however the precedent this established and the lessons learned through this effort did make a substantial impact on subsequent developments.

Generalizable principles relevant to other urban settings:

The construction of similar glass sheathed point tower high rises in a setting not beset by frequent clouds and fog seems potentially problematic, resulting in buildings that may be subjected to excessive cooling requirements in warmer climates or excessive heating requirements in cooler ones. However, the example of the West End indicates that a zoning code that allows the construction of well-spaced small footprint high rise towers has the potential to radically increase the residential density of a neighborhood even if most of the residential structures remain low rise buildings. One of the byproducts of the zoning regime enacted in the West End governing the first high rise boom was that developers were permitted to build taller towers if they tore down the entire existing fabric on their land, even in cases where the net result was an empty landscape between towers. The recent success of the ground level infill \required in new residential high rise projects seems to suggest that a better strategy might be to allow developers to acquire development air rights for adjacent parcels, provided that the existing housing stock was maintained or improved instead of being demolished.

The point tower itself may not represent an ideal form in other settings; the increasing use of longer thinner sliver towers in Vancouver today is an indication that the point tower might not necessarily be ideal in Vancouver either. The requirement that new towers be located a minimum distance from other existing or approved towers, however does seem to have the potential to be

beneficial in other cities. Spaced towers allow more daylight to reach the street level, while street level wind seems less of a problem than it does around slab towers or in cities of closely packed buildings. Determining an effective spacing requirement, however, seems to be influenced by multiple local factors that include the maximum allowable height, the city block configuration, the availability of distant views, climate and the availability of natural light.

#### **Element 4: Outdoor Urban Rooms**

##### Introduced to Vancouver:

1971 False Creek Study Group and subsequent developments at the South Shore of False Creek

##### Refined by:

1983 BC Place Master Plan, Arthur Erickson and Fisher Friedman

1986 North Park Plan, Stanley Park

1987 Lagoons Scheme at North Shore Creek

1988 Bays Scheme, especially Beach Crescent by Rick Hulbert

1993 Marinaside Crescent by James Cheng

##### Local factors of the Vancouver context contributing to the success of this element:

Geographer Edward Relph has argued what distinguishes the urban experience of “place” from “placelessness” is defined by a sense of enclosure: an enclosed urban space registers as a place while a more open setting left undefined or unbounded is experienced as placeless (Relph, 1976).

This attribute of being in a place in the urban environment is achieved at several scales in the context of Vancouverism, with the very largest outdoor urban rooms being defined by a combination of built structure and natural terrain. Smaller instances of urban place making are also common, with groups of buildings working together to produce a sense of enclosure. The natural topography existing at False Creek already results in something of a larger natural basin suggesting a sense of enclosure and this is further accentuated by the Burrard Street Bridge Granville Street Bridge and the Cambie Street Bridge. It is perhaps not especially surprising that the stretch of False Creek between these three bridges is the area that has been the first to be redeveloped on both the North Shore and South Shore of False Creek, while moving further eastward, where a strong sense of place is inclined to dissipate, redevelopment has been slower to take hold. Likewise, the natural terrain of the land overlooking Coal Harbor provides a ideal location for an outdoor civic room of grand proportions, further enhanced by the procession of



towers marching along the waterfront to the South and the enclosure provided by the dramatic coastal mountains to the North.

At a slightly smaller scale, the Outdoor Urban Room concept can be seen at work in the Beach Crescent, the Marinaside Crescent, while it becomes somewhat less evident at David Lam Park, which seems too broad and ill-defined to produce the sense of bounded enclosure necessary to function as an urban room. Meanwhile, at the urban block level, urban rooms can be observed in many recent Vancouver projects where a row house enclave defines a courtyard that has been given added definition by corner point towers. At all of these scales an essential aspect of Full Vancouverism has been the development of these larger enclosed and defined urban places, which at their best become the defining urban experience, giving a neighborhood a sense of coherence and identity.

Lucky accidents that played a contributing role:

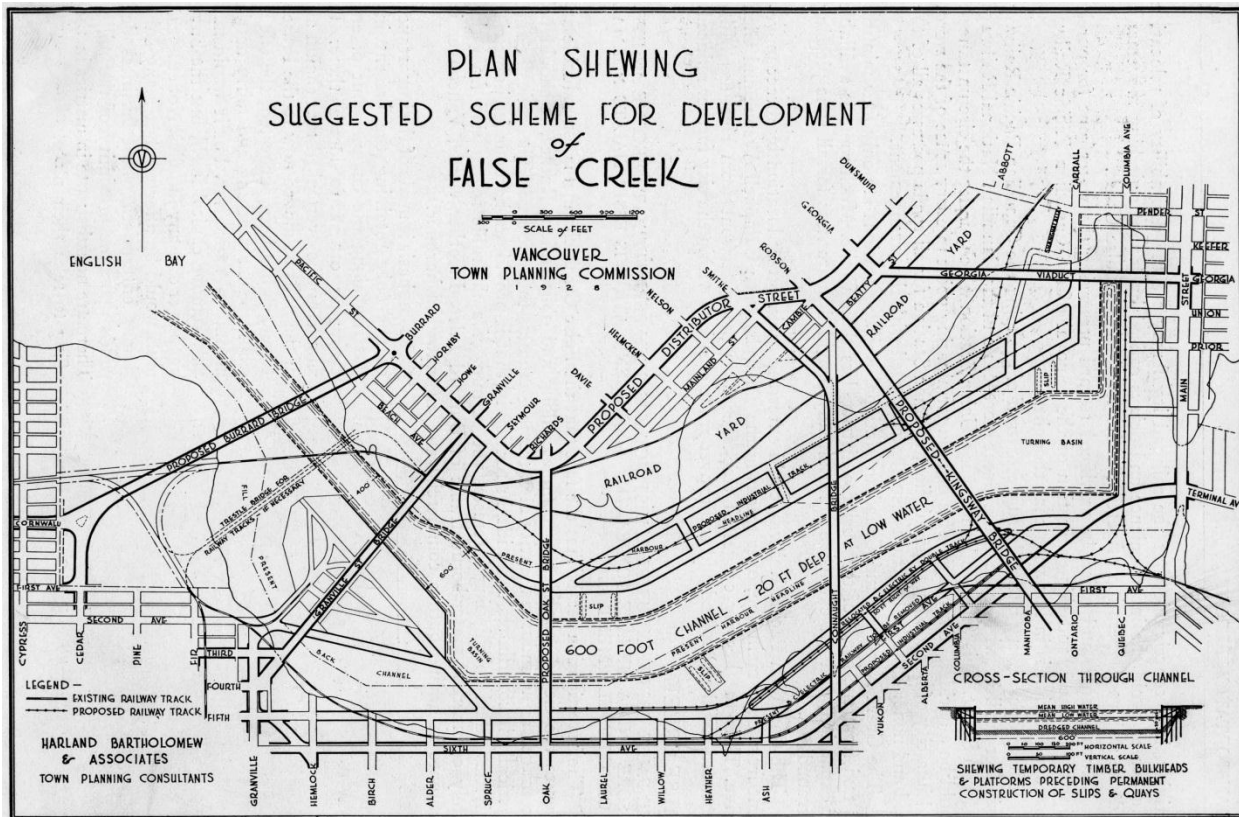


Figure 11.3: Harland Bartholomew Plan for False Creek: 1929 (Vancouver Archives).

It is somewhat ironic to consider the Great Depression to have been the cause of good luck, yet this sudden economic catastrophe helped prevent the City of Vancouver from pursuing a feature of Harland Bartholomew's 1929 Plan that had called for filling in much of what was left of False Creek and converting it into a narrow shipping channel. Had there been no Great Depression and this project had instead proceeded in accordance with the recommended plan, the entire landscape of downtown Vancouver would have followed a different development trajectory, making the future development of waterfront housing grouped around large urban rooms far less likely to have developed (see figure 11.3).

Generalizable principles relevant to other urban settings:

The Outdoor Urban Room concept is based on a sense of fit to context in which the existing terrain can potentially play a substantial positive role. Whether it is advisable to attempt to recreate this effect by copying the large outdoor rooms as seen in Vancouver remains doubtful, however, Instead it probably makes better sense to study the existing lay of the land and then identify naturally occurring zones, or areas of existing built construction, that already begin to suggest a sense of enclosure that might be further reinforced through the addition of locally appropriate built forms. The decision that Vancouver made to avoid waterfront freeways also contributed to the capacity to develop its waterfront zones as public outdoor rooms.

**Element 5: Protected Public Views**

Introduced to Vancouver:

1971 False Creek Study Group

1976 by Ray Spaxman, Planning Director

Refined by:

1994 Larry Beasley, Planning Director

2010 Brent Toderian, Planning Director

Local factors of the Vancouver context contributing to the success of this element:

Thomas Mawson and Harland Bartholomew both understood that the access to Vancouver's natural views could be effectively exploited through planning and landscape design, yet neither

did much to encourage policies specifically intended to preserve public access to these views. Gerald Sutton Brown enacted policies in the West End that indirectly had the result of improving access to views; the design review process he conducted further supported this policy, at least in terms of developer interests. The patterns proposed by Ron Walkey and the other members of the False Creek Study Group changed this dynamic by suggesting that access to distant views ought to be regarded as a community asset. It was through the efforts of Ray Spaxman that actual planning mechanisms finally became established that legally protected public access to views in Vancouver. The local culture places a high value on accessing and enjoying the natural environment, making this element locally important.

Lucky accidents that played a contributing role:

The scale of the dramatic Coastal Mountains to the north of the City has meant that the view protection measures persuade in Vancouver have helped to shape and define almost the entire downtown skyline. The availability of sufficient land to be developed without encroaching upon views of the nearby mountains is one fortuitous factor contributing to the success of this element.

A substantial yet unintended benefit of the view protection regime is that the development along these protected view corridors also ensures protected view access from buildings. As a result, the view corridor ordinance is understood not only as something that restricts development, but also as a means to increasing the value of development. Although created to provide a public benefit, it succeeds at least in part because developers benefit as well, and this has helped the protected view cone system to persist through political changes that have altered planning priorities.

Generalizable principles relevant to other urban settings:

The view protection measures used in Vancouver could be reinterpreted in many ways and need not only be used to protect access to views of mountains. Protecting defined public views of significant monuments, buildings or other noteworthy features also may be worth considering in other cities attempting to apply this principle. The view protection regime in Vancouver was informed by an extensive public survey and subsequently came to be vastly improved when established as a three dimensional computer based map of the city. To get this right appears to require good photographs taken on location from an explicitly defined public vantage point.

It is also possible that similar forms of protection might be defined for settings where access to daylight, direct sunlight or perhaps even wind might also be considered a public amenity worth protecting. Ultimately the Protected Public Views element represents an attitude towards relating the detailed structure of development at a fine scale to the larger structure of the urban environment.

Finally, imagination is needed to see value in views worth protecting, well in advance of development. Imagination is also important in the development and combination of the other urban elements that gave rise to Vancouverism. A vivid imagination was needed to see the potential of polluted semi-abandoned waterfront areas in Vancouver to become new park spaces, outdoor urban rooms and the center of some of the most sought after residential real estate in the city. Rather than simply trying to be like someplace else, Vancouver succeeded largely by doing what seemed right in its own particular context. Recognizing that the local community of designers may well have well-honed instincts that are not going to be shared by star architects less familiar with a particular place, those urban planners, developers and architects working in other cities who want to learn from the example of Vancouver would be well advised to challenge one another to find new, imaginative, locally appropriate solutions.

## **11.2 Breaking with Convention**

The City of Vancouver BC is worth studying for its distinctive urbanism ultimately because people in Vancouver chose to depart from the developmental trajectory typical of other North American cities, in pursuit of something different and original, something perhaps better attuned to their unique cultural, geographic, political and economic circumstances (see figure 11.4).

This research has demonstrated that Vancouverism was not invented recently, nor was it imported from elsewhere; instead Vancouverism is the result of a protracted process of design and development which took place in Vancouver over the course of an entire century. While numerous major milestones in this process were explored in detail, this dissertation has argued that the key moment at which Vancouverism was definitely conceptualized and presented to the public took place in 1983 with the Erickson / Fisher Friedman Plan for False Creek. This marks the climax of the extended search for a viable new form of urbanism for Vancouver; this new form of urbanism was further developed and beautifully implemented, resulting in the city that is



celebrated today as being amongst the most livable in the world. Nevertheless the question remains as to when this search for a new form of urbanism began?

This question matters because if the most relevant aspect of Vancouverism to a wider audience is not its particular urban morphology, but the fit of this morphology to that particular context, then understanding how and why Vancouver chose to defy convention and pursue the search for anew locally appropriate urbanism has relevance for other cities interested in devising their own locally appropriate solutions.

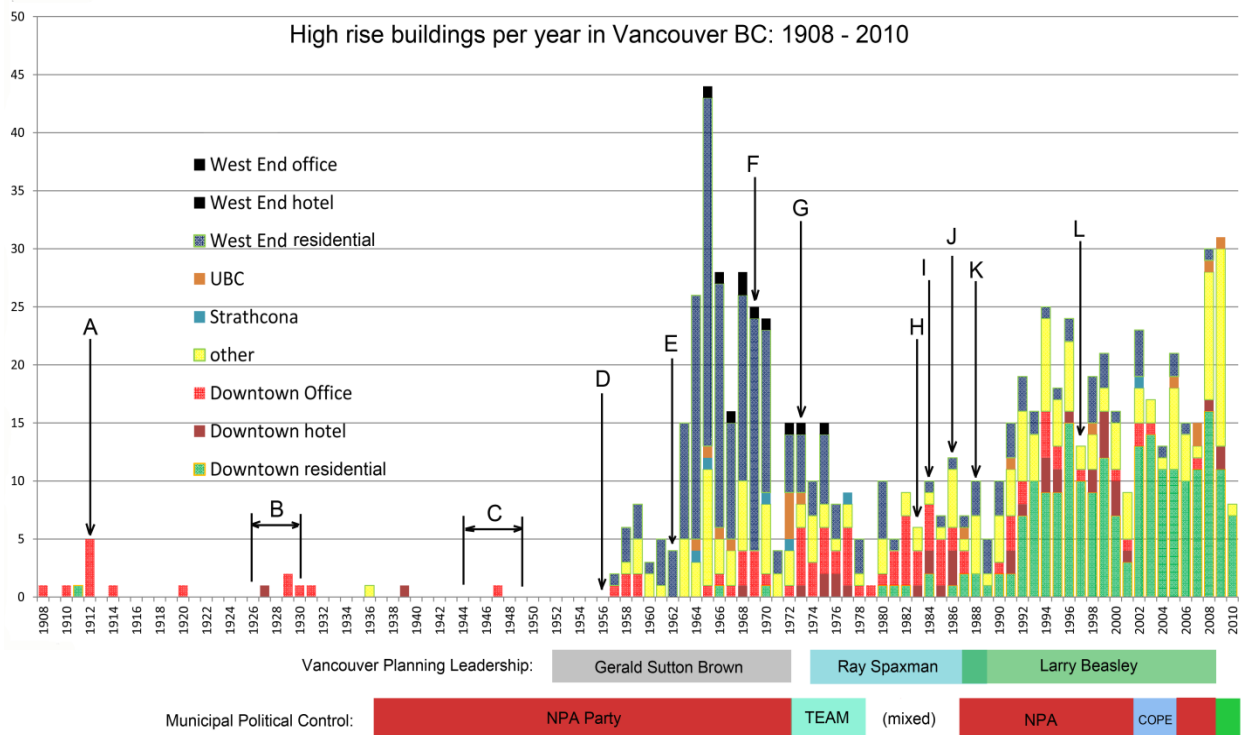


Figure 11.4: Timeline of high rise development in Vancouver, with key Vancouverism milestones noted:

- A. Thomas Mawson arrives in Vancouver
- B. First period of Harland Bartholomew in Vancouver
- C. Harland Bartholomew's second planning engagement
- D. Establishment of new zoning code allowing high rises in the West End
- E. First point tower mega Project proposed: Harbour Park by CBK Van Norman
- F. Freeway fights, Strathcona fights, establishment of TEAM party
- G. Team election, Work begins at South Shore, False Creek Study Group patterns.
- H. Erickson / Fisher Friedman Plan; Stanley Kwok initiates North Park process
- I. Richard Henriquez Sylvia Tower Project is approved
- J. BC Government decides to sell expo lands, eventually selling to Li Ka-Shing.
- K. Lagoons Scheme is replaced by Bays Scheme, which is approved.
- L. Hong Kong is transferred from British control, to Chinese control.

Determining when and how Vancouver chose to embark upon its own path is not a straightforward task; throughout its history competing groups have attempted to pursue different visions of a future for Vancouver, visions that have been startlingly innovative at times and oppressively conventional at other times. Fortunately the perspective provided by this dissertation makes answering this complex question now more manageable.

While the story of Vancouver began with the CPR and the first land speculators to acquire property rights in the area, the story of the search for a new form of urbanism for Vancouver begins with the effort of Thomas Mawson to improve the public domain of Vancouver in 1912 when the city was a thriving yet polluted industrial city lacking much of a public domain. Although Mawson's ambitious urban designs were mostly unrealized, the rigorous and effective street tree regime that the city now enjoys was established during Mawson's time in Vancouver and closely follows the detailed recommendations he had published in 1911 (Mawson 1911). Mawson's other urban design proposals for Vancouver, although presented during a time of economic prosperity full of hope and promise, nevertheless were soon overtaken by an economic slowdown, followed by the First World War, which Canada had entered in 1914. Vancouver would wait until 1926 before once again engaging in a master planning process, this time hiring the American city planner, Harland Bartholomew.

Harland Bartholomew and Associates worked diligently for four years to produce a comprehensive plan incorporating numerous reports, studies and detailed recommendations. Bartholomew's 1930 Vancouver Plan had only minimal impact, again due to adverse economic conditions, this time brought on by of the Great Depression. Fortunately, Harland Bartholomew and Associates returned to Vancouver to address the very different set of urban issues emerging by the end of World War II, and this time the planning made several significant impacts. Perhaps the single most influential recommendation during this second planning engagement from 1944 - 1949 was the suggestion that the residential development density of the Vancouver's West End district be doubled in an effort to stave off economic decline of the adjacent central business district, due to the rise of the automobile. Also significant, if less well known, was Bartholomew's apparent change of heart regarding the issue of urban redevelopment for the East End; reversing his initial stance, Bartholomew rejected wholesale replacement of existing blocks of housing, in favor of a less extreme policy based upon selective rehabilitation and

improvement of existing structures. Whether Harland Bartholomew's changed position in the East End was the actual cause for the abrupt termination of his services in 1949 may never be known with certainty, but it is interesting that prior to terminating Bartholomew's services, the Vancouver City Council had already commissioned a separate report by Leonard Marsh, a report the City clearly intended to use to support its East End urban renewal agenda.

Harland Bartholomew also made other recommendations which went unheeded such as his suggestion that an anticipated expressway link to the downtown core be sited along an existing railway route through a largely uninhabited industrial area, thereby reducing its impact on residential developments. Bartholomew also was instrumental in promoting the establishment in Vancouver of city planning as an ongoing civic function of the municipal government.

The prior planning work of Harland Bartholomew was to prove critical to both the success and the failure of Vancouver's first Planning Director, Gerald Sutton Brown, who arrived in Vancouver in 1952. In accordance with Bartholomew's recommendations, policy changes were enacted that resulted in the transformation of the West End from a moderately dense district of wood frame houses and walk up apartments into a high density district featuring several hundred new residential high rises. This change succeeded in helping Vancouver to avoid the fate suffered by many other North American cities, of seeing the downtown decline and crumble as a result of suburban flight. A careful examination of the complex regulatory regime established by Sutton Brown and his planners for the West End reveals that development patterns, massing, building orientation and even such mundane details as the presence or lack thereof of balconies, were all tightly controlled by the city planners. Although the West End has had its share of detractors, Sutton Brown deserves credit for having enabled the residential high rise to help transform the West End revitalizing the declining downtown peninsula, also establishing a crucial precedent that would remerge elsewhere in the downtown several decades later.

Unfortunately, Sutton Brown did not heed all of the advice that had been offered by Harland Bartholomew, and in particular he ignored Bartholomew's suggestions that the East End be improved through the rehabilitation of existing structures, or that a new expressway link be located in an industrial area, enabling it to bypass older inner city neighborhoods. Instead Gerald

Sutton Brown initiated a massive effort to tear down and redevelop nearly the entire East End district through urban renewal, in conjunction with a freeway proposal intended to run right through several of Vancouver's oldest and poorest East End neighborhoods. As bulldozers leveled houses and dislocated hundreds of families, community opposition mounted to a crisis point, eventually resulting in the replacement of nearly the entire municipal government in the election of 1972. By winning control of the City Council, the Parks Board and the Mayor's race, the TEAM party succeeded in ending 35 years of uninterrupted municipal control by the pro-business NPA Party that had first brought Gerald Sutton Brown to Vancouver. This change precipitated the termination of Gerald Sutton Brown and several of his associates.

The resentment provoked by the freeway effort and the urban renewal process has had lingering consequences in Vancouver, some of which do not seem to have received much attention. Opposition to the policies of Gerald Sutton Brown was not restricted to his vilified effort to remake the East End, but instead provoked a wider backlash against further high rise development throughout the entire downtown peninsula, provoking zoning changes that curtailed high rise construction in the West End in 1973. Citizen opposition also succeeded in derailing large scale waterfront redevelopment projects at Harbour Park, Project 200 and at the North Shore of False Creek. Meanwhile, the construction of highways anywhere within the City limits became unthinkable, resulting in an entrenched anti-freeway attitude persists to this day.

### **The decisive turning point in the urban development of Vancouver:**

Even as the influence of Gerald Sutton Brown had begun to wane towards the end of his time in Vancouver, a remarkable new master planning approach began to take shape, beginning in 1971 at the South Shore of False Creek and the work of the False Creek Study Group (1971). The South Shore project marks a crucial turning point in which the control of urban master planning and urban design in downtown Vancouver, for it is here that the roles played by the planners and the architects become inverted. Prior to this point in time, the development of Vancouver had proceeded on the basis of architects responding to restrictions and regulations initially defined and enforced by the planners, yet this hold on control and initiative was waning, perhaps somewhat ironically as a result of Sutton Brown's failure to heed the demands of developers and business leaders.



When it became apparent to business leaders that the declining industrial areas on both shores of False Creek would be better used as new residential development, the city planners working under the leadership of Gerald Sutton Brown had seemed unable to act, choosing instead to cling to the obsolete notion that this portion of the city could remain a center of industrial production. This lack of initiative by the city planners, and the resulting loss of confidence in them by the local business community, created an opportunity for new leadership to emerge, this time at the hands of a collaborative team of local architects and other local experts. Working as the False Creek Study Group, this team defined a new vision used to develop on a large tract of city owned land at the South Shore of False Creek, while proposing new planning and urban design patterns intended to eventually transform the entire False Creek basin. This change did not mean that planners ceased to have a significant impact on built outcomes in Vancouver; the architects and their developers still needed to secure the approval of the planners, and the planners continued to wield considerable authority. Yet the nature of planning and the prominent role played by architects in defining the form that development would take in Vancouver was permanently altered with the work of the False Creek Study Group. From this point forward planners were responding to major urban proposals, goals and principles primarily initiated by the architects.

Prior to the work of the False Creek Study Group planning and development within Vancouver had proceeded on the basis of fairly conventional methods consistent with planning and development methods already in use throughout North America. Paul Merrick, Ron Walkey, and the other participants in the False Creek Study Group, however, radically realigned the planning agenda of Vancouver through their use of local *patterns* to define planning and design. This approach was grounded in locally derived design principles and community aspirations for a livable urban environment, with special emphasis on the public domain. The establishment of locally appropriate urban design norms, the articulation of community aspirations and the development of a robust and highly appealing pedestrian oriented public domain have all remained essential to city planning and urban design in Vancouver ever since.

In accordance with this shift, the new generation of planners who came after the False Creek Study Group and after the departure of Gerald Sutton Brown also became more directly concerned with the experiential characteristics of the places being developed. The city planners under the direction of Ray Spaxman and then Larry Beasley began to develop effective methods

for collaborating in a process where contextually attuned design was eclipsing planning as the main determinant of urban form. It is significant that the work of the False Creek Study Group preceded the arrival of in Vancouver of Ray Spaxman by several years. Spaxman made substantial contributions to improving planning and revitalizing Vancouver, but the urban agenda had already changed in Vancouver before he arrived, an agenda that was defined by local architects.

Just as the patterns based approach promoted by Ron Walkey represents a highly effective method for challenging assumptions, identifying critical local considerations and exploring new solution strategies, but primarily has value as an effective prelude to actual design work, planning in Vancouver has come to be about defining and prioritizing the process of urban design. Responsibility for the contents of the actual urban design process has been left in the hands of the developers and their architects. The goals of *neighborliness* and *livability* came to inform the planning and design process, due to the efforts of Ray Spaxman and Larry Beasley, but the planners not been the initiators of urban design master plans. Where the planners did get involved in defining urban form, through the suggestion of two idealized point tower and row house configurations, the result was a proliferation of blandly similar developments.

In the context of larger lessons to be learned from Vancouverism, it seems rather noteworthy that the two most successful applications of Vancouverism, Coal Harbour and False Creek both benefited from comprehensive studies involving Ron Walkey, completed before design commenced. Although the work of the False Creek Study Group (1971) was followed by implementation at the South Shore of False Creek, the purpose of the study itself incorporated both shores of False Creek, and the development of the designs that were subsequently proposed for the North Shore benefitted substantially from this work. Coal Harbour also benefitted from an extended pedestrian oriented study, by Walkey and his associates at Britannia Design.

Rather than repeating the mistake that the city planners made in abstracting from False Creek an idealized building model combining point towers and high rises, planners and architects attempting to revitalize or redevelop other urban settings might instead be well advised to learn from the process used at the outset by the members of the False Creek Study Group to see their own city with fresh eyes, as an important and necessary prelude to devising innovative locally

appropriate solutions. This has the notable disadvantage of not being a readymade standardized solution, but it also holds the promise of revealing new forms of locally attuned livable urbanism. The pattern based approach utilized by Ron Walkey also had the advantage of promoting community input at an earlier enough stage that local values and needs could more effectively inform the design process. In examining the role that this work played in redirecting the development of Vancouver it is also essential to understand that the patterns proposed by Walkey were not intended to represent universal solutions, or even regional solutions, but instead were crafted to respond to the local conditions as they were experienced in Vancouver. It was precisely because this process initiated a search for locally viable solutions that a new form of urbanism began to emerge in Vancouver. This was not the point at which a new solution emerged, for that to happen, years of further experimentation, refinement and design exploration would still be necessary, before finally culminating in the Erickson / Fisher Friedman plan of 1983. The work of the False Creek Study Group however still represents the turning point at which the building culture of Vancouver began its search for its own form of livable urbanism.

Instead of being a universal solution, this suggests that the most important lesson to draw from the success of Vancouverism may be that vibrant, livable urbanism ultimately is about finding local solutions. In the larger context of studies in urban design and architecture, this view of the success of Vancouverism suggests that in addition to considering urbanism in terms of larger trends that apply to many or most cities, there is also value in understanding successful urbanism in terms of the fit to context that must be part of any successful urban environment. This shift in thinking is not necessarily obvious or apparent; architecture primarily focuses on the visual characteristics of the built environment and this orientation tends to emphasize the importance of buildings as self-contained entities, as objects in space that embody universal principles.

However, if fit to context is also a significant factor in successful urban architecture, as this research has shown, then the study of *process* holds potential to reveal productive insights that the study of form alone is incapable of accessing. Even if there may be no other urban setting where Vancouverism should be expected to be successful, aside from Vancouver BC itself, the success of Vancouver suggests that any other city can still thrive if it is willing to do the work and engage in the process of finding its own locally appropriate combination of urban elements, its own local urban design patterns, its own form of livable urbanism.

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