

**“Partnerships for Smart Growth - “The Vancouver Model”  
Address to the Greater Halifax Partnership  
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What do you want Halifax to be like in 20 years? I know you have a long-range planning initiative underway and it's very timely to be undertaking that.

In doing this, you have more choices than ever before. No longer are cities straight jacketed by circumstances. The people of the world are footloose like never before and, with the right kind of urban character, you can draw them to your city with all the wealth and energy that they bring. Your existing citizens are better informed and have more resources than ever before, so they can bring great prowess to bear in the interest of your city - and they can also work effectively against trends that they abhor.

And I dare say, under these circumstances the enterprise of inventing your civic future should be focussed on one prime objective - quality of life - to achieve many purposes: to achieve the competitive advantage of Halifax and the economic development that comes with that; to achieve

satisfied citizens and the personal and community tranquility that comes with that; and, to achieve a productive response to the imperatives of the natural environment and the long-term sustainability - both locally and for our species - that comes with that.

The fact is that there is a new urban formula that is sweeping the culture of urbanism that brings together disparate propositions into a powerful strategy for positive change:

Quality of life = economic development = smart growth.

You see, for as long as anyone can remember, the shape and future of North American cities has been the result of just economic activity and politics and the shifting of social groups; frankly, the city exploited as a commodity. But now we are moving to a time when we will actually design our cities again as an explicit act of creation - not just architecture but grand civic design (the whole city as a work of art); where our cities will manifest our greatest dreams and hopes, not just be accidents; where our cities will strive to differentiate themselves not accept cookie-

cutter replications of what's being done everywhere else; and where a collaboration will be essential among all the environmental design professions, all the development industry, all the citizens and government to build urban centers and smart urban products that are attractive to consumers on their own terms - our civic history of confrontation will be exposed for what it is: our most profound liability for moving forward in an effective, creative way.

You know from your history in Halifax that this is very much about survival and it's also a reaction to globalization. Smart cities are seeing themselves within the context of other places and they are seeing themselves within the mirror of their own citizens attitudes and levels of satisfaction. And when they don't like what they see, they need to fix it.

There is a simple acid test that will cue you here in Halifax or in any contemporary North American city as to whether or not you are moving in the right direction - and most of the dimensions of this test suggest that the counter-

intuitive answers for your city are actually the right answers for the future.

-Are you separating out land uses and populations rather than mixing and diversifying development and community?

-Are you retrofitting everything and expanding everything to fit the car by applying imperative street and subdivision standards rather than emphasizing alternative modes and the patterns that go with those modes?

-Are you implementing gross architectural standardization and accommodating corporate building formulas and brands rather than drawing out the architectural and urban development solutions that derive from your historical patterns and indigenous economy and unique ecology and setting?

-Are you covering the landscape with the thinnest, lightest possible development over the broadest possible footprint rather than engendering intensity

and preserving historic districts and natural places?

-Are you pressing home a single-purpose agenda of development or are you fostering social learning, reconciliation of interests and a pluralistic agenda for your city?

Well, it's a hard test for any city but maybe the question of your civic intention is as important as anything else. And the big variables here are really what I want to talk about today:

-what is the extent of your urban vision?

-what are the mechanisms that have been put in place to achieve your vision?

-what is the state of consensus about this vision and how much cooperation and collaboration is happening because visions don't happen within an environment of discontent and strife.

So to tease out these variables for Halifax as you think about your future, I want to use Vancouver as an example - hopefully offering some lessons; some inspirations; and some warnings.

And I thought today we could have some fun with the images. As this panorama shows, Vancouver has changed fundamentally in a very short time. Almost everything in all the pictures I will show you today did not exist just 15 short years ago. I want the images to wash over you - I will use several hundred pictures to show you the city we have created. I want them to focus and emphasize my points - but, also, taken together, I want them to give you a composite picture of the new Vancouver.

But I do want to emphasize right up front that I don't show you these pictures with the idea that Vancouver's form might work for Halifax. I don't want to see Vancouver in Halifax, or vice versa. Every city needs its own unique solutions - cities need to work at staying vividly different - that's how we avoid globalization. Every city has its own DNA - in terms of needs and scale and history and community tolerances and the working of the economy. I

commend to you to look behind the images to the principles that are at work - it is these principles that I think can be shared.

Starting with very modest beginnings only 125 years ago; living tenuously on the extractive industries in our hinterland - mining, lumber, fishing - until the 1970s when these industries shifted, being mechanized and globalized out of our hands so they could no longer sustain a growing city; and facing a very uncertain future even after the greatly successful Expo 86 gave us the momentary limelight of a world stage; Vancouver decided in the late 80's to expressly reinvent itself; to turn away from conventional answers; and to build upon its unique assets for survival.

And the result of our work has led to this {a picture of the Vancouver Sun newspaper headline: "We're Number One (Again)"}.

-Vancouver is now finding itself right up there among the acknowledged most liveable cities in the world - and exploding with growth and energy and promise because of that.

-And what strikes me as most fascinating about this is that there would be a front page headline anywhere about a city's status as "just a good place to live"; and that a whole strategy for growth and economic development can be built around such a simple proposition. Because that's just what happened in Vancouver; that's what has transformed an uncertain situation into a confident future for the city.

It's now call the "Vancouver Model".

So what is the "Vancouver Model" all about?

The biggest idea is focussed on the inner-city and its an intensive, residentially based growth plan, which we call our "living-first" strategy. We're working within a very tight geographic context (the Downtown sitting on a small peninsula surrounded by water and the region hemmed in by mountains, water, the U.S. border and protected agricultural land); but we've had wonderful sites - large sites mostly on the waterfront - that have become

available in the inner city and their development has allowed us to make our ideas real and to create our new image on the ground.

- Our strategy is about intensity of development - fostering high-rise, high density development that gets lots of people and activities close together.
  
- We're now the fastest growing residential downtown in North America with our inner-city population having grown from about 45,000 to 85,000 plus in 15 years - and on its way to 120,000.
  
- We say "density is our friend." But this form of city is popular with our citizens, our consumers, our developers and our politicians - we rarely discuss or debate density any more in the city.
  
- Our strategy is about diversity and mixed-use in buildings and areas.

- A mix for social integration. We're targeting all kinds of households to live in the city - singles, young marrieds, adults, seniors but especially families with children. Our approach is all about kids and we now have nearly 4,000 children living downtown with 25% of high density units specifically designed for families. We have over 1000 row houses downtown now, which offers a completely new housing form for families.
- And a mix for economic integration. We're including low-income people in every neighbourhood - at least 20% of all units must be developed for social housing of one kind or another.
- This is about neighbourhoods with all the services and facilities needed on a day-to-day basis, including community amenities and a local shopping "high street" in every neighbourhood usually newly built as the rest of the neighbourhood is constructed. Here is the list of what we expect in every developing area.

- This is about an alternative approach to transportation, featuring walking and biking and transit and even ferries, all as alternatives to the private car - de-emphasizing the car, letting it's congestion work in our favour (we like to say that "congestion is our friend" so we're limiting auto capacity into the city and we actually have less cars coming into town now than we did 15 years ago, even with all the growth I've described).
- This strategy is about design . We emphasize all aspects of design, including building form ( the street walls for domesticity; the towers for affordability), quality materials, landscape, public art - and we unashamedly regulate design. The formula works like this: the quality design allows the density to work and be attractive to consumers; the density generates great economic value and profits; and this value also pays for amenities and facilities - all of which can entice people out of the suburbs to a truly urban lifestyle - and a truly sustainable lifestyle.

This second panorama emphasizes just how pervasive the change in the inner-city has become. The transformation is almost complete in one generation and it have give us a popular new civic image that is presenting us well to the world.

The second biggest idea is targeted to the suburban areas of the city. We call it our “Neighbourhood Centres Strategy”, which will ultimately express itself in 15 or 20 locations throughout our built-up suburbs.

- This strategy will bring nodes of intensity and mixed use to augment existing suburban neighbourhoods with more housing and more housing choice. It will also insinuate more housing within the suburban fabric. It continues the theme of diversity but brings the scale down to place new development gently among existing development: granny flats and rear yard infill; row houses on some streets;

a revival of the 3-6 storey building clustered on and near the local commercial “high street”; the “shophouse” form on retail streets.

-It includes clustering of community facilities and tying delivery of those facilities to parallel new housing construction. It emphasizes measures to meet the suburban anxiety about traffic impacts on the local street system.

-And it deals with NIMBYism in a respectful way, acknowledging that people are against development for good reasons, since much of it has been so bad and so impactful on people who receive few benefits. It’s a very consultative process. It facilitates development on neighbours’ terms and tied to fulfilment of residents’ needs, such as where they will live locally when they are older and want out of the big house; or where will their children live locally if there is no new housing opportunities; or how can they get facilities if there are not enough people to support those facilities.

-This strategy is just starting to show it's potential. We've had three major successes that suggest to us that this approach can work successfully in other neighbourhoods all around the city.

Now, this picture has been about a proactive agenda. But even when successful there are still the collateral problems that must be dealt with or the new city will still be cut off from many citizens. Let me give you several quick examples.

- All the development energy, unbridled, can be just another pressure to destabilize existing vulnerable communities leading to displacement and victimization. Beware the effects of land speculation and beware of ignoring the endemic social problems such as addiction and mental illness and poverty. Social dysfunction on the street is not compatible with a healthy street life that would be attractive to most people on a day-to-day basis. We've just started to attack this and it takes radical solutions - such as our heroin safe injection site in the Downtown Eastside.

- New development inherently puts pressure on heritage areas. But these heritage areas are absolutely vital to a city's character, not to mention that they carry the city's memory in brick and stone. You can't let new development patterns and heritage come into conflict; and to the extent they interface as they do in Vancouver, we had to offer a potent incentive program for heritage conservation that puts the heritage development on an equal economic footing with the new development. And when you bring the new development and heritage into harmony, you then have a wonderful medium for economic and cultural development, especially related to tourism.
- Inevitably, a successful city also exacerbates affordability problems for housing. While we've attacked the low-income lack of housing, the middle-income demands are growing and are harder to solve. We're now trying every idea we can think of to foster middle-income affordability

- like live/work and suites-within-suites and rental incentives.

- And then there's the problem of residential use outbidding all other uses. This cuts people off from regular jobs and it can homogenize the city and make it economically unsustainable. We're finding that land use designations have to be carefully calibrated and re-calibrated over time. We're in the middle of doing that right now.

Well, this is the face of the new Vancouver - hopefully growing in a smarter way.

So now let's turn to how we make smart growth work: the process to manage development and change. Frankly, we had to re-invent City Hall and our development ethic and we call the result the "cooperative planning approach."

Here are its key elements:

- We have a strong well-articulated vision, sponsored by the municipality, that is vested in a highly discretionary regulatory framework - emphasizing guidelines and incentives over hard regulation. This discretionary zoning constantly reinforces the vision but also fosters experimentation and allows new and better ideas to come into play. We like to say “regulation is our friend” when it’s done fairly, efficiently and transparently.
  
- We have a very deliberate planning process and a strong, proactive Planning Department. We go from the large and conceptual to the specific in stages - solving issues early, building consensus as we go, involving public consultation at each stage. This involves an aggressive commitment by the City to reconcile differences among interest groups and broker compromises and accords that allow change to occur with all the necessary quids pro quo in place.
  
- We join public and private forces around a table in the actual design exercise - we prefer strong architectural collaboration between city staff and development

proponents, rather than having to “react” to proposals after the fact.

- We look to new development to pay for the public infrastructure that is demanded by that development - in the context of a coherent plan for financing growth without putting a heavy and unacceptable burden on existing tax payers. This way, infrastructure is delivered as people occupy the community, acknowledging the reality that a municipality simply cannot carry all the burden of new amenities.
- We are developing a service-oriented bureaucracy to manage development applications: this includes everything from project facilitators within the bureaucracy to the use of “good neighbour agreements” to respond to local community concerns.
- Our development approval system is apolitical. Politicians make the decisions on policy and zoning but development approvals are done by appointed officials, who are experts in their fields, advised by a professional design panel and citizen’s panel. We put a lot of

emphasis in peer review and huge emphasis on wide public review.

And all of this puts smart growth, sustainability and quality of life at the top of Vancouver's civic agenda and our development agenda. It's truly making a difference and it's helping us realize solid stability founded on both a traditional and a new economy.

You'll also notice that this approach is all about partnerships and cooperation and mutual assistance. Vancouver has evolved from a time of strife - battles between citizens and developers, between developers and the City, and among interest groups - to a time of bringing people together. Our process is designed to focus on interests rather than positions and then to work toward reconciliation of those interests. That's why we have such rich public involvement and development advisory processes - we want everyone to own up to the problems we face and to own the solutions we discover together. So the municipality has to take a strong leadership role. Developers have to put projects together differently with an eye not only to profits but to solving public concerns as

well. And citizens have to engage, learn about the imperatives of development, take part in negotiations and accept that results often hold compromises for all concerned. You can imagine the intensity of social learning that we've had to sustain over many years to give this approach a fighting chance of success.

And there is a simple reason for all this. In the complexity of the modern city, true excellence can not be generated and sustained by just one force and everyone has a way and means to stall or kill initiatives.

- Developers can deliver new buildings, but they need the City and its powers to deliver community infrastructure and to manage that infrastructure over time.
- Citizens can't solve problems without municipal assistance and the wealth that comes through the development process - traditional tax sources are plainly inadequate.

- A business community can facilitate economic development, such as tourism for example, but needs up-to-date facilities that only developers can offer and cities can manage.
- And everyone needs the good will of others because the battles scare off consumers and capital and business.

We're all interconnected and mutually dependant in the contemporary city. There's no way around that and the way we do business simply has to acknowledge that.

Don't get me wrong, in Vancouver we still have our battles from time-to-time but we also have a bedrock of civility that tends toward mutual solutions rather than winners and losers.

So there it is. In Vancouver we didn't go the way of freeways or the commercially dominated core or deregulation. We haven't shied away from dense development; and we haven't "given away the shop" just to get development to happen. We like to say "yes" to

development; but we're ok, when the situation calls for it, to say "no" if the development is contrary to our collective vision - if it's not very smart for the community. Based on our assets and limitations, we've designed the kind of city we want - to both satisfy our existing citizens and entice the kind of new citizens that are helping us build the robust diversified economic and social base that we need. Because success is finally dependent upon their commitment and dedication to the place; their innovation and investment, their passion.

But it is really these people that we all have to be thinking about, whether we're talking about Vancouver or Halifax or anywhere else. If the city we create is well grounded in the place that these young people intuitively know and care about and if it is fulfilling for them - if it works for this little guy as he takes his place as an adult in the community - then people will gladly offer it their powerful affection; and from that affection, everything else for greatness will surely follow.

Thank you very much.

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