



a **MANIFESTO**
 on public space policy
 ...for the years 2008-2011

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2008 Vancouverites will go to the polls to elect a new Mayor, City Council, Parks Board and Educational Trustees. For some residents of the city, dealing with a recently announced provincial by-election, this will be the third trip to the polls in just over 30 days.

Some members of the local media have leapt to the occasion to talk about 'election burnout' – creating a psychological ailment to further rationalize our often-poor turnout at the polls (in recent years Vancouver's municipal contests have averaged a 35% participation rate among eligible voters).

Do we really burn out that easily? It takes about as long to go to the polls as it does to stop in at a coffee shop for a morning coffee. The polls also come with the potential of three years worth of benefits – longer than even the strongest caffeine buzz.

In other spaces one also finds reference to the purported 'lack of relevance' (that is, to 'average citizens') of the municipal contest. Where this falsehood emerged is hard to know. Perhaps the Council table lacks the grandeur of the faraway national capital, or the stature of our provincial government. Whatever the case, one thing is for certain: as surely as one can stroll the sidewalk, visit a neighbourhood store, send kids to play in the park or community centre, or put the recycling out, the governance of the city of Vancouver is part and parcel with innumerable facets of our everyday experience of the city. If that's not relevant, we don't know what is.

Let us hope that the myths of burnout and irrelevance are banned from the lexicon and that the upcoming civic election has the healthy levels of engagement that it deserves. The present municipal contest is a truly important affair – maybe even more immediately important than any of the other contests this year. What's at stake is big: key decision-making powers over the quality of life and liveability of the city in which we live.

A Manifesto for Public Space Policy

The following document contains some modest policy proposals that are aimed at enhancing and improving the public spaces of Vancouver. It is intended to be read and used by policy-makers, aspirants to political office, city staff, the private and non-profit sectors, and residents and citizens at large. In short: everyone who has a stake in the design and use of our urban landscape.

'Public space' in this regard is used in a fairly broad fashion, encompassing various aspects of the public realm of the city. The focus reflects the interests and initiatives of our organization, the Vancouver Public Space Network, and its individual and organizational members.

The Vancouver Public Space Network was formed in 2006 with the mandate of working on issues of advocacy, education and outreach pertaining to Vancouver's public realm. In furthering this mission, we undertake a variety of activities – from workshops to consultations, competitions to celebrations – all aimed at animating the importance of public space to the health and well-being of the city and its inhabitants.

The policy suggestions contained herein were developed in consultation with our members as well as the public at large. We believe that it reflects a sense of what people want to see over the next few years in terms of the policy directions that pertain to public realm.

One final note: Vancouver has some extraordinary public spaces, but it also has many places that need attention. If the tone of this document seems at all urgent or critical we hope that this will not diminish the overall intent of the piece. This 'Public Space Manifesto', as we have called it, is meant in the spirit of other vision documents, platforms and manifestos. The chapters and layout of the book, as such, are meant to address the two-part question: "how do we envision public space and what do we want to achieve with our public-realm policies."



A CITY OF NEIGHBOURS

As the population increases, our need for good, neighbourly relations – an enhanced sense of community – will become ever more acute.

Vancouver has the potential to create numerous spontaneous interactions between new neighbours while increasing tolerance and knowledge sharing. Vancouver can provide public spaces where diverse groups of people are welcome to gather for a variety of reasons and share space together. These places come in the form of local parks, a central public square, public houses and neighbourhood cafés and pubs.

Vancouver has a number of wonderful neighbourhood parks with a variety of programming that encourages people to act and interact in different ways. One of the best examples of this is the recently redesigned Victoria Park in East Vancouver. The park offers public washrooms, water fountain, picnic tables, benches, shade (trees), a large open lawn, a creative children's playground for different ages, and a Bocce pitch. There are opportunities to expand these possibilities throughout the City. However, Vancouver must strengthen its regulatory, funding and spatial capacity in order to to encourage greater opportunities for neighbourly interaction.

We believe the City must enhance the capacity of its residents to interact in variety of ways within settings that are safe, comfortable and interesting. Residents should have a greater array of instances in which to meet their neighbours - be it a formal park or a bench on the street. Visitors and residents should have a place to gather to experience local and large events within their community or in other areas of the city. Informal gathering should also be encouraged such as at a street-side patio at a local café or restaurant.

Proposed policy directions:

- Provide public gathering spaces within walking distance of every home;
- Acquire land, design and build a large public square that is crafted to be adaptable for a wide range of activities and scale of events that is accessible to all residents. The Vancouver public square has the potential to be the civic focus of the city;
- Expand the practice of developing commercial patios with liquor licences, cafés, bars, book stores, community centres - places that encourage encounter - adjacent to public streets, lanes, parks and plazas.



A GREENER, CLEANER CITY

Greenspaces define this city - starting with the majestic Stanley Park, winding along the linear parks that grace False Creek, the Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River, incorporating people-moving habitat reserves such as the Central Valley Greenway, dropping through the Renfrew ravine and following the natural contours of the Vancouver geography.

Greenspaces are more than just parks, though. They are green streets, community gardens, beaches and more. Green is more than just grass and shrubs and trees... it also means a new environmental consciousness. It's about ensuring that the urban environment is attended to with progressive parkland, urban agriculture, and waste reduction policies.

Our Greenspaces Policy proposals attend to three distinct areas: parks, community gardens and community composting.

More parks, no loss of park space

As the City's EcoDensity consultations revealed, the public is concerned that an increasing population means that the over-all ratio of parkland to people is shrinking. This concern comes to bear on a landscape in which some areas of the city are "park deprived" compared to others. The Parks Board recognizes this latter concern and has made efforts to attend to it within their limited budget. However, more needs to be done – and the longer we wait, the more the population increases, and the more difficult that will be to accomplish.

To remedy this, we believe two policy interventions are needed. The first is an **enhanced program of parkland acquisition** to bring all neighbourhoods (and "sub areas") up to the Park Board's proposed ratio 1.1 hectares per 1000 people – followed by the development of a plan to exceed this ratio in areas that will be experiencing increased population density.

The second is the adoption of a **policy that enshrines the notion of no net loss of greenspace**. Currently, if parkland is lost because there is an expansion of a community facility, or the installation of a parking lot, etc. there is no mechanism to require that the "lost" greenspace will be replaced. In a similar fashion, there is also no mechanism to attend to the relative loss of greenspace that occurs from an increasing population (the more people there are, the less greenspace there is per person).

A “no net loss” plan would ensure that any land removed as park and used for development would be replaced by land of equal biological and community value.

Community Gardens – the need for a proactive policy

Community gardens provide space for building intergenerational and intercultural relationships. They also provide green space, a connection to the environment, local food security, nutritional and health benefits, and community development. They're so valuable, in fact, that we'd love to see garden space accessible to any Vancouverite that wants it.

Currently every community garden in the city has a long waiting list, especially in high density neighbourhoods. The City and community groups are currently unable to work fast enough in developing new gardens to meet this demand. As food and energy prices increase, and more emphasis is put on local food systems, the demand for garden space will increase.

For community groups that are starting gardens on City land, there is no Community Gardens Policy that applies to all City lands, and there are not enough resources allocated to helping community groups get gardens off the ground. The City's sole current policy around community gardens only concerns Parks Board land – and doesn't cover the significant holdings of either the Real Estate or Engineering Departments.

It's time for the City to get serious about community gardens. **We need a proactive community garden policy that commits to a goal of expanding the number of gardens across the city**, and ensuring that they are available in all neighbourhoods. Moreover, we need to ensure that the

policy is stronger and more broadly based than the current Parks Board model.

The new policy would:

- Apply to all City Departments with significant land-holdings; and
- Go beyond the current “how-to-set-up-a-garden” policy and embrace hard goals and targets for the development of new sites;
- Provide support and funding for a minimum of two new gardens per neighbourhood, with a plan for more as needed;
- Employ sustainable design principles, including permaculture;
- Ensure clear communication through resources and outreach materials to encourage the development of community gardens;
- Provide additional infrastructure via water hook-up and soil testing on all city-owned community garden sites.

Less green waste

Imagine the City of Vancouver as Canada's municipal leader in enabling community composting and organic waste diversion.

Currently somewhere between 35 - 50% of solid waste going to our landfills is comprised of organics. This material could be composted, providing a rich resource for gardens in our cities. Instead it decomposes under anaerobic conditions only to create toxic leachate and methane - a powerful greenhouse gas 27 times more harmful than CO2. Port Coquitlam launched a curbside organics pickup program in June 2007, and there has, to date, been no commitment

on the part of the City of Vancouver to a start date for a similar program.

The City of Vancouver can easily **initiate a simple community compost program with an initial focus on the high-density neighborhoods found in Vancouver's Downtown Peninsula**. Apartment and condo-dwellers who are currently unable to easily compost could be given options for diverting their own organic waste at the source - by dropping off kitchen scraps at their local community compost station.

In fact, a community-based solution to organic waste diversion may be the most economically viable option available to the City. Cutting out the capital cost investment (and the transportation emissions) in trucks for pickup and curbside collection containers, funding could instead be applied to a widespread public education program about composting, installing neighborhood “compost stations” throughout the city, and employing staff to manage and administer the program as needed. And what to do with compost once it has been made? Feed it to the hungry expanding community gardens across the city.

Three steps to community composting:

- **A capital investment in neighborhood compost stations**, installed throughout the city and at the various community gardens;
- **A widespread public education program** utilizing various media, such as radio, TV, internet, newspapers;
- **Employment of staff to manage the program** and ensure “healthy” compost, with the assistance of community volunteers (like the Green Streets program).

A CITY OF GOOD DESIGN

The streets, laneways and parks of Vancouver ought to be planned, first and foremost, with an emphasis on the pedestrian environment and experience. They should be exceptional in craftsmanship, quality and constructed for permanence. Urban form and infrastructure should be consistently developed to complement and enhance the public realm.

At present, as with the issue of shrinking greenspace, Vancouver's public realm doesn't meet the varied needs of the rapidly growing population. As Vancouver's population grows and resulting density intensifies, the demand and use of the city's public streets and spaces will continue to increase and diversify. Street design (including the provision, distribution and maintenance of street furniture) is currently unable to meet the growing demand for safe and convenient public gathering within the city.



Image, right: View of Harbour Centre Tower from Victory Square, Vancouver.

The need for better design.

Vancouver's public realm should be designed for the comfort of pedestrians with enough space, places to sit and protection from the elements. Pedestrian infrastructure such as wide sidewalks, tree lined streets with benches, public washrooms and recycling containers must be created and be properly maintained. The adoption of universal design principles needs to be front and centre, providing access for the many different residents and visitors of the city. Bicycle infrastructure must also improve: we should have well-distributed bike locking facilities and secure storage on every city block in commercial, employment and entertainment areas.

A deliberate focus on the pedestrian environment with a high quality and accessible public realm will make our streets and spaces a source of pride. At the neighbourhood level, quality spaces allow people to travel comfortably to the local store, park or school, and offer places to relax and chat to a neighbour. These highly desirable and safe public spaces provide opportunities for encounter and encourage people to gather and celebrate Vancouver on a daily basis.

First-rate public spaces are possible for Vancouver with these simple strategies:

- Design urban form of Vancouver around the public realm (and not vice versa);
- Design from the perspective of the pedestrian who has a varied level of mobility and ability;
- Utilize materials of the highest quality in new and redeveloped public spaces so as to ensure that they will be built to last;
- Increase the budget and staff to support and maintain public spaces. As more people use public spaces in the future, more attention is required to maintain the safety, function and aesthetic of place;
- Ensure that that gathering places are bounded by a mixture of uses - so that there are a variety of reasons for people to make use of the space, and at different times of the day;
- Provide convenient and functional seating, waste/recycling containers and other street furniture;
- Install secure bicycle storage on every city block with commercial, employment or entertainment uses;
- Plan and design Vancouver's streets for people and reduce the current emphasis on the private automobile.



A CITY OF MOBILITY; A CITY THAT KNOWS WHERE IT'S GOING

We envision Vancouver to be a city in which it is safe to walk and cycle for residents of all ages and abilities, including children. Public transit should be efficient and convenient, and prioritized over automobile traffic. Where automobile traffic needs to take place it should be a "last option" and should be undertaken in a fashion that encourages vehicle-share (such as car co-ops) and respects existing traffic and noise by-laws.

Prioritizing public transit, cycling, and pedestrianism in practical terms would enhance public space and quality of life. Investing in this infrastructure will help facilitate a shift towards the mainstream acceptance of sustainable transportation as a means of mobility.

Vancouver is a city built largely around the needs of the automobile. The City continues to support vehicular traffic demands, while residents who opt to use sustainable modes of transport must contend with inadequate infrastructure. Increasingly apparent limitations of automobility, (including rising energy prices, growing concern for the environment and health issues) are resulting in more residents getting around Vancouver by walking, cycling, and taking public transit. As such, it's crucial that Vancouver scale up its sustainable (non-automotive) transportation infrastructure, amenities, and systems. This investment would support the city's plans for sustainability by attracting new residents to adopt these modes of transport.

What should be done?

We propose a few modest solutions that could be funded through reallocating existing capital expenditures, annual budgets and partnerships.



*Image, above:
Skytrain platform at
Stadium Station.*

- **Separated pedestrian, bike, and car lanes.** A program of targeted lane reallocation is needed to create more pedestrian and bike space on city streets, and in particular, Burrard Bridge. A more effective use of road space would incorporate adequate room for cyclists and pedestrians into its design. Separated paths are needed to ensure pedestrian safety and reduce sidewalk hazards, as well as ensure cyclists are kept a safe distance from automobiles. When cyclists feel threatened by cars, they typically move into pedestrian space. Physically separated spaces for each would alleviate this problem.
- **A policy of wayfinding so that Vancouver becomes a city that knows where it's going.** Cities such as Victoria and Portland have programs of civic wayfinding that provide maps and directional tools to help residents and visitors alike find their way around town. One idea might be to have maps on every utility box to orient people with neighbourhoods and amenities.
- **Prioritized upkeep and enhancement of bike lanes and sidewalks.** Prioritizing these modes of passage will help ensure walking and cycling is safe, convenient and appealing.
- **Enforced Bylaws to ensure quieter traffic.** Focus on reducing noise pollution from transportation-related sources and enforcement of vehicle noise bylaws – principally to reduce the nuisance created by modified "pimped" car and motorcycle mufflers and errant car-alarms.

A CITY OF SAFE & JUST SPACES

Surveillance and Security

As the Olympics approach, there is considerable pressure to allow more intrusive security and surveillance measures in our city's public spaces. It is a trend that has been observed in every Olympic city, and Vancouver will not be an exception. While public spaces need to be safe, Vancouver needs to think hard about the kinds of measures taken by governments and the private sector.

Public spaces must be safe for everyone – which means that all people, including the disadvantaged, should be free to enjoy them without being constantly monitored by police, cameras and security guards. The feeling of being constantly watched reduces everyone's sense of freedom and joy in using the public realm. Often, the security measures chosen are very expensive, and have little or no effect on crime, or on people's perception of safety.

Vancouver needs to strike a balance that will ensure a safe city for everyone.

Private security in public space

The city should stop spending public funds on private security to patrol our streets. The Downtown Ambassadors, or similar proposed programs in other neighbourhoods, are private security forces that should not be supported by public money. Making our streets safe is the job of watchful residents in partnership with police, who are accountable to the public. While the Ambassadors claim that they provide directions to tourists and outreach to people living on the street, they are not trained tourism professionals or trained outreach workers.

Security guards are not an appropriate way for the city to connect vulnerable people with services and shelter. There is evidence that these security agents have been targeting homeless people and panhandlers, pressuring them to move along. This makes the streets less safe for those who are the

most vulnerable. **Public funds dedicated to private security should be redirected to outreach programs for people involved with the streets, and possibly, to Vancouver's Community Policing Centres.**

Visual surveillance in public space

Visual surveillance with cameras in public space, sometimes called "CCTV", should be discouraged.

At best, cameras should be an option of last resort. There

is no evidence that surveillance has an impact on crime, or that it enhances residents' feelings of safety in downtown areas.

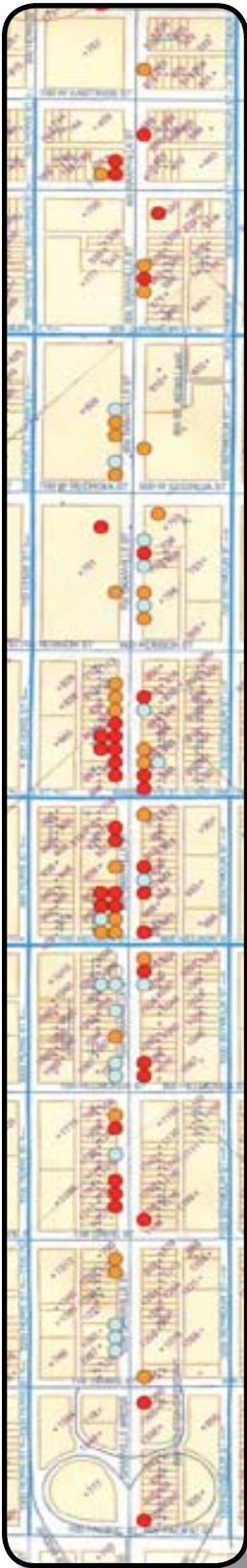
Camera surveillance is also extremely costly with no evidence of a return on the public's investment. Residents should be free to enjoy public space without the fear of having their every move constantly monitored and recorded by the authorities.



Not only does visual surveillance threaten residents' sense of freedom to use streets and public places without interference, it also threatens their privacy. In other cities, cameras have been abused in targeting visible minorities, homeless persons, and youths. The personal information gathered by cameras can easily be subject to abuse, especially as visual surveillance technology becomes more advanced. In no case should the city use advanced technologies such as face recognition, loudspeakers (for camera operators to communicate with surveillance subjects), and microphones.

No camera surveillance should be used in public space without first having extensive consultation with the public. When it is used as a very last resort, there must also be strong and effective oversight of its use, rigorous protection of personal information gathered, and robust restrictions on the purposes for which the gathered data may be used.

Image, left: Approximate locations of CCTV cameras on Granville Street (VPSN).



A CITY OF COLOUR, TEXTURE & SOUND

Public art helps define how an urban environment is perceived and experienced, and can help animate one area over another. We think of Public Art as a broad term – something that reflects art that is truly available to, created by, and representative of the residents of the city. This includes everything from a high-culture white-on-white canvas or the splash of a creative piece of graffiti that adorns an otherwise grey and troublesome alley wall.

Although public art has long been a part of civic landscapes, it remains a tool whose full potential has yet to be realized by the City and all of us who live here. The question we all must ask is what is the vision we want for public art in our city?

Vancouver, in many respects, has a public art landscape similar to most cities: there are a number of programs, grants and partnership opportunities for artists to develop works for public places. The work of the city's arts community, however, is much larger than what we see frozen in the odd statue, infrastructure art, fountains, murals, park installations - or in the artistic contributions that come out of new development projects.

Ways for the City to move forward:

- Utilize a broader definition of "public art" - one that includes a range of artistic expressions, such as (but not limited to) temporary installations, interventions, projections, a wider variety of phenomena;
- Include better processes and support for spontaneous, temporary or short term



Image, above:
Chalk Heart Stamp-ede, February 14, 2008.
On the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery.



art projects. Public art which is intended to have a shorter life should be held to a different standard, with the major criteria of the permission process linked to (1) safety; and (2) ensuring that the artists/ participants follow through in taking responsibility on the timely cleanup and deconstruction;

- Create and support temporary outdoor spaces for public art that can be managed by community-based art galleries / artist groups;
- Ensure that public arts programming and opportunities are accessible to local artists.

Specific targets and goals for this program might include:

- a 50% increase in public art programming (funding, opportunities, sites, and installations) in the next 10 years;
- Revised Office of Cultural Affairs policies and procedures - to make it simpler for artists to obtain permits for temporary / brief / ephemeral/ spontaneous installations that only last a few days or weeks;
- City support for the Office of Cultural Affairs efforts to encourage developers to support cultural *projects* rather than art *objects* as part of the development process;
- The development of a formal public art / sculpture park;
- The creation of 5 - 6 temporary outdoor spaces curated by local artist groups to host public art installations;
- A plan to ensure the space currently used by the Vancouver Art Gallery remains a public space when and if the gallery moves to a new location.

A DEMOCRATIC CITY

Local democracy means more than just voting. It is about the nature of civic engagement writ broadly – everything from the simple accessibility (linguistic, technological, etc.) of municipal policy to the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in the decision-making that occurs at City Hall.

In short, the democratic health of the City is of utmost importance for the well-being of residents, the civic bureaucracy and elected officials alike. But please: less hand-wringing about apathy and more action here would be a plus. Let's improve citizen engagement with a few small steps that might actually get us somewhere. How might we accomplish this?

Online voting

We can establish online voting registration to increase voter participation and the amount of Vancouverites who receive election related information. Currently Vancouver has been left behind in this regard. Where Federal and Provincial governments have embraced web-based technology to advance the cause of voter registration, making it easier for people to sign up to engage in that most fundamental of democratic acts, the City lags behind... using a cumbersome, in-person, paper-based process that requires people to navigate a complicated bureaucracy.

In providing online registration for voting the City would remove a significant barrier to the election process. It would also improve the quality of the voters list and enable the City to provide information about upcoming elections to more residents.

This wouldn't be difficult to do. The City has an award-winning website. Set it up to win more accolades by developing an online registration system that would allow eligible residents to add, change or confirm their electoral registration through the Internet. And did we mention this could also save money too?

Bring people into the process

We can enhance the consultation process by bringing people into dialogue earlier on, ensuring that information is easy to find, and providing a variety of ways for information to be shared between the city and its residents... and vice versa.

Currently, one of the laments we hear from people is that they often feel that they don't hear about city consultations until after the fact, aren't given many ways – or much time – to contribute their ideas, or worse, feel that they don't get asked until the end stages of a given civic process, leaving the impression that consultation is a formality and outcomes are predetermined. Our research into public consultation in the city indicates that the process itself is not undertaken in a consistent fashion, and that there are a number of improvements that could be made.

A commitment to improved public consultation could include:

- **Enhanced Communications:** (a) Instead of scattering tiny 1/16 page public notices throughout the local papers, notices of public consultations could be consolidated into a standard "Municipal Notices" page. This page could also report on upcoming Council and Parks Board activities and other matters of interest. (b) Utilize an email sign-up/list-serv to let subscribers know about public consultations. (c) Utilize an easily accessible web-based map to highlight neighbourhood-based consultations / information sessions as they occur around town.
- **Enhanced Process:** The consultation process should be front and centre in the planning and development process, as well as municipal issues in general. In addition to strengthening the outreach component, efforts must be made to determine how the existing process could be expanded to be more accessible and inclusive. Is a week long enough for people to submit input on a proposed by-law change? Are three questions enough to get all the information? An evaluation of the municipal consultation process has not been undertaken in a number of years. We are overdue for an examination of this sort.
- **Increased Presence:** Consultation, despite the element of implied dialogue, comes at the behest of a given issue or planning decision. It is rarely, if ever, undertaken for its own sake. And yet, wouldn't it make sense to see the City engage with its citizens in a greater array of information fairs and town hall meetings? Not only would that give the civic government and its officials a chance to explain what they do, but it could be done around town – taking government out of the confines of City Hall and bringing it down to street level... in neighbourhoods across the city.

A CITY OF HAPPENINGS

Vancouver is often described as a no-fun city. This isn't wholly true of course, but there's no use protesting or denying that there is some merit to the statement. Early closings, a trend away from public gatherings and celebrations, and a range of spontaneity-killing security, regulatory, permitting and insurance-related barriers all limit the opportunity for Vancouver to experience a vibrant collective social life.

Of course, there are a range of "special events" planned throughout the year, and the city has taken the opportunity to consolidate a variety of neighborhood based clubs and bars into one or two 'entertainment districts', but the fun here is limited, and doesn't manage to do much for the diversity of citizens in the city. We need more opportunities to gather collectively, both in big celebrations and small happenings. Vancouver needs to embrace the lively, prosaic, quality of the bazaar.

How did Vancouver become uneventful?

On one hand, Vancouver has – for one reason or another – been overly wary of spontaneity and suspicious of a more decentralized, neighbourhood based activities... particularly when they occur after-hours. The decision to create a Granville Street entertainment district is one example of an attempt to over-manage these sorts of things. Rather than have entertainment integrated in every neighbourhood, the notion of creating a separated place of entertainment won out. The result is every bit as chaotic and exclusionary as one might have predicted.

There are other examples of the municipal mindset that reinforce this "what's entertaining is not normal" mindset. The "Special Events" office of the municipal Engineering Department is charged with managing what are supposed to be extraordinary events. The problem? These events largely come to define the programming of public space in the city – leaving little support and resources for the type of lively every day happenings and small-scale public space programming. And what defines special events? Even that isn't all that representative or radical - a half dozen marathons, a major fireworks display, a handful of outdoor concerts and festivals... and media commentary from Events staff hinting that a cap on more events may be in the works.

What we need is less "special event" thinking and more "everyday vitality." Vancouver needs to be more than a city of big arts festivals and marathons (though those,

surely, are okay too). It needs to be a city that has an accepted, normalized culture of happenings that are rolled out with smaller audiences in mind. Such occurrences need not be "events" in anything but the nominative sense; rather, they ought to be created "behind the scenes" – as if they have always existed.

A few ways that the City could help to create a livelier Vancouver:

- **Establish an arms length public body for public space programming.** This group will be charged with creating everything from art markets to street hockey tournaments to spontaneous arts projects. This agency should have the opportunity to engage with every public space in the city and should have the ears of the major departments and bodies overseeing these areas.
- **Enable people or community groups to be social space users.** Ensure that people can plan and hold celebrations, protests or markets by making a variety of adaptable spaces in convenient and accessible locations available for public use without onerous costs and process, or overly restrictive liability considerations.
- **Decentralize the idea of an "entertainment district."** Every neighbourhood should have the opportunity have lively pubs, small-scale music venues, and other places of fun. Planning for neighbourhood celebration and conviviality will allow people to have more fun in their own neighbourhoods. It will also ensure our main streets stay lively, vibrant (and safer) for a longer stretch of time each day. And planned well, this will enhance, rather than contradict residential living.



Image: Pirates on the Seabus, a party in public space, 2008. Waterfront Station, Vancouver.



Image: Critical Mass, "June is Bike Month", 2008. Lion's Gate Bridge, Vancouver.

A CITY OF PUBLIC SPACES THAT ARE PUBLIC

For too many years the outdoor advertising industry has managed to avoid any substantive challenges under the City's Sign Bylaw. It is estimated that one in every six billboards in the City of Vancouver is non-compliant, and that a range of new advertising forms and technologies – equally noncompliant – are circumventing existing outdoor advertising bylaws. This blatant disregard for the City's by-laws, sadly, comes at the expense of the public realm, which becomes less public and more corporate with each new form of invasive advertising. A concerted effort at bylaw enforcement as it pertains to outdoor advertising is needed to keep this in check.

The City has approximately 1000 billboards – excluding new and often non-compliant forms of advertising such as vinyl fascia, projection signage, construction hoarding, mobile billboards, and window advertising such as the giant six-story Nike ad that recently towered over Robson Square. The City's Sign Bylaw provides explicit direction on how signs such as these are to be regulated. In short: many of them shouldn't be where they are. Many others shouldn't be here at all.

Making signage policies work

A more disciplined and systematic form of response to non-compliant outdoor advertising needs to be taken. The existing regulatory tools are, in fact, well crafted - just not well-enforced. We should be further wary of any proposals to "legitimate" non-compliant billboards and signage – particularly where this is proposed as a funding option for progressive initiatives. The blight of excessive signage should not be a sin tax that gets thrust on the citizenry.

Signs of change? Let's advertise the fact that, as a city, we should:

- Remove all non-compliant billboard advertisements by 2010;
- Have stricter enforcement of new, non-compliant forms of advertising;
- Consider a dedicated bylaw enforcement officer for outdoor advertising and billboard sign issues.





CONCLUSION

The preceding pages contain some brief sketches for public space policy in Vancouver. There are, undoubtedly, additional areas of policy development relating to the public realm that we have missed. The intent with our Manifesto was not to be exhaustive, but rather, to stimulate discussion and thinking around what we perceive to be critical opportunities for the enhancement of the public realm.

In doing so, we have offered suggestions that run the gamut from small-scale endeavors to larger undertakings. In all cases, however, we selected projects that we felt would realistically be “do-able.”

What does this mean? To us, it means, quite simply, that these policy projects aren’t ‘pie-in-the-sky’ ideas – but are practical, sustainable, in some cases *essential*, for the growth of the city. That is, if this inevitable growth is to be managed with a view to maintaining our quality of life.

It also means that we believe that there are ways and means of funding these projects in a cost-effective manner, of establishing the partnerships that will advance them, and of working with the community-at-large to ensure that every project fits with the needs of those that will ultimately be benefiting from it.

Of course, it takes a collective effort to advance these matters –to move conceptual ideas into the more refined process of public policy development, and then from policy to land them back in the ‘real world.’ We all have a part in this, which is why the Manifesto is meant as a public document. That being said, good leadership is a critical ingredient, which is why the Manifesto is also an election document. In both respects, we hope it was useful.

Please vote wisely.

For Further Information:

Check out our website to find out more about the VPSN and its various initiatives and projects.: www.vancouverpublicspace.ca

Questions, comments and other feedback on this document can be directed to us via email: info@vancouverpublicspace.ca.



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