

“Greenest City” mostly greenwash (Elizabeth Murphy, in Common Ground)

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“Governance through branding and spin is not a sustainable practice.”

The article ” [‘Greenest City’ mostly greenwash](#)“ is in the August 2014 print edition of the [Common Ground](#) magazine, hitting news stands now.

In it, Elizabeth Murphy refers to the **City of Vancouver’s Greenest City Action Plan** and the City staff policy update to Council this July. She says, “Although there are some successes in the plan, the **majority of the city’s development policies are greenwash and are actually increasing the city’s environmental footprint rather than reducing it.**”

She mentions a few positives, but explains how the big picture reality is quite the opposite from the green image the City is trying to present. For example, “demolitions of mostly older character buildings increased to over 1,000 last year, with about 100 tons per average 2,200-square-foot house going to the landfill.” She says the “city’s environmental footprint is increased by the systemic bias toward new towers. Glass wall and concrete construction with elevators is the least energy efficient form of development. Vancouver is now ninth in the world for cities with the greatest number of skyscrapers...”

She says that “Vision [Vancouver's] Greenest City has incorporated and rebranded the NPA’s EcoDensity, which favours tower forms of high density...Bike lanes are not Vision’s initiative, though Vision has rebranded bike lanes as its own.” And **“Bike lanes are not a significant issue in this election; the pace, scale and form of development in the city and affordable housing are the big issues.”**

Attached below



Read the full article here:

<http://commonground.ca/2014/08/greenest-city-mostly-greenwash/>

Elizabeth Murphy is a private sector project manager and a former Property Development Officer for the City of Vancouver's Housing & Properties Department and for BC Housing. info@elizabethmurphy.ca, www.elizabethmurphy.ca

CityHallWatch comment: All claims made by the City and Vision Vancouver need to be scrutinized in this highly charged political environment, with a high-stakes election on November 15, 2014 deciding who runs Vancouver til 2018. Media and citizens need to ask for data to back up the green claims. We have covered the problem of greenwashing with coverage by Jon Petrie's '[Our Post-Truth Culture and Greenwash](#)' in which he challenges the statements and numbers presented in four case studies, one being emissions from the City of Vancouver. Stay tuned for more on that. Here is the link for the [Greenest City Action Plan](#), with links to the update Murphy refers to dated July 9, 2014.

“Greenest City” mostly greenwash

Posted by [Common Ground](#) in [Activism](#), [August 2014](#), [Current Edition](#), [Ecology](#), [Politics](#) | [3 comments](#)

by [Elizabeth Murphy](#)



- The City of Vancouver’s Greenest City policy update was presented to council in July. Although there are some successes in the plan, the majority of the city’s development policies are greenwash and are actually increasing the city’s environmental footprint rather than reducing it.

Probably not if full cost accounting is done! - cjk

For example, the weekly food scraps pick-up has diverted some landfill to compost, which is a positive thing. However, demolitions of mostly older character buildings increased to over 1,000 last year, with about 100 tons per average 2,200-square-foot house going to the landfill. During the first six months of this year, the city approved an all-time record of \$1.12 billion in building permits. Most of those permits will require the demolition of an existing building, leading to another record year of demolitions.

In addition to building material waste, each demolition usually results in clear-cutting the lot of mature trees and landscaping with a further net loss to the urban forest canopy.

Key findings and analysis in a report by Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservations included the statement: “Building reuse almost always yields fewer environmental impacts than new construction when comparing buildings of similar size and functionality.” In our climate type, it takes 50 years for a new, single-family home of similar size to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative climate impacts related to the construction process. And it takes 80 years to overcome urban village mixed use redevelopment.

Further, the city's environmental footprint is increased by the systemic bias toward new towers. Glass wall and concrete construction with elevators is the least energy efficient form of development. Vancouver is now ninth in the world for cities with the greatest number of skyscrapers, which is shocking given that Vancouver's population is listed at 616,537, making it the only one of the top 10 cities with fewer than 1.6 million.

What has not been given enough consideration is how the adaptive reuse of existing houses with secondary suites, lane houses and infill can accommodate growth. For example, the increased population from 1941 when the West End was mostly single-family houses to when it was substantially built out to apartments in the 1991 census was only 70%. This growth could easily have been achieved through adaptive reuse and shows what could be possible in other neighbourhoods.

Instead, Vision's Greenest City has incorporated and rebranded the NPA's EcoDensity, which favours tower forms of high density. Adriane Carr and the Green Party of Vancouver understand the limits to growth while Vision ignores this fact, as they ramp up unlimited growth to reward the support of partners in development.

Bike lanes are not Vision's initiative, though Vision has rebranded bike lanes as its own. In fact, bike lanes have been part of the city's transportation plan since 1995 under the NPA. Fred Bass, a former COPE councillor, was the early champion of bike lanes on the Burrard Bridge, well before Vision. Bike lanes are not a significant issue in this election; the pace, scale and form of development in the city and affordable housing are the big issues.

Governance through branding and spin is not a sustainable practice. The city has a global reputation as a leader in community planning. We should get back to the proven practices of honest community involvement in neighbourhood planning and incorporate real sustainability principles rather than greenwashing.

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Elizabeth Murphy is a private sector project manager and a former Property Development Officer for the City of Vancouver's Housing & Properties Department and for BC Housing. info@elizabethmurphy.ca, www.elizabethmurphy.ca

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