

# Downtown Eastside must embrace all funding options

## Development will continue with or without a collaborative approach

BY JON STOVELL, SPECIAL TO THE SUN    MARCH 7, 2013

To participate in discussions about the future of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is both an interest-and challenging experience.

The City of Vancouver has worked tirelessly with local community leaders in the neighbourhood to establish a Local Area Planning Process committee that has a mandate to determine collective goals for the future growth and development of the area while at the same time attempt to resolve the complex social challenges such as drug use, crime, homelessness, mental health issues, unemployment and the loss of businesses in the community.

The planning committee certainly has some lofty challenges ahead - challenges, which in my view, will require the financial support and expertise of the urban development industry. Seemingly recognizing this reality, the planning committee approached the Urban Development Institute to take part in discussions and offer some solutions. The nature of my participation has been as the representative of the institute.

Institute members are truly interested in finding ways to partner with groups in the area and to meet community objectives through development. In essence, we believe the development industry can work with the local community to create win-win solutions that can help address the many problems of the Downtown Eastside. This can be done through a combination of good urban planning, development outcomes, and with the financial contributions development provides through Community Amenity Contributions and Development Cost Levies charged by the City of Vancouver.

Woodward's was a prime example of the development industry and local community partnering to achieve mutually acceptable social and economic outcomes in the Downtown Eastside. All involved ended that planning process believing it was a formula for success to meet community objectives without waiting for all-too-rare government funding.

However, in recent years, the term "gentrification" has become a dirty word for many of my colleagues involved with the area's planning committee.

Yet I cannot help but notice the irony of sitting in the "condo"-funded community W Room at Woodward's trying to figure out how to get the social services and amenities the community needs without any market development or market participation.

Is there no room, no place for market housing and other market development to provide

solutions for the Downtown Eastside? Are community leaders really going to conclude that circling the wagons and waiting for government funding will be the solution to the neighbourhood's housing and other social issues?

Could levies from developments in Gastown, Chinatown and other surrounding areas not be requested to flow to social housing and amenities in the neighbourhood?

I am positive that there are any number of ideas on how this money could be spent.

The planning committee requested that the Urban Development Institute participate in this process, and we have been taking part with our eyes and ears open, trying to listen and find solutions to which the development industry could contribute.

But what I have heard, both as an independent developer and as an institute director, has been: "No Gentrification Partnerships".

I am simply asking stakeholders in the local planning process to consider the presence of the institute in this process as an opportunity to find solutions to which the development industry can contribute.

Development will continue in the Downtown Eastside regardless, with or without a collaborative approach. But maybe we could take this opportunity to stitch some of it together and achieve some good outcomes for the community.

Jon Stovell is a director of the Urban Development Institute and president of Reliance Properties.

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun