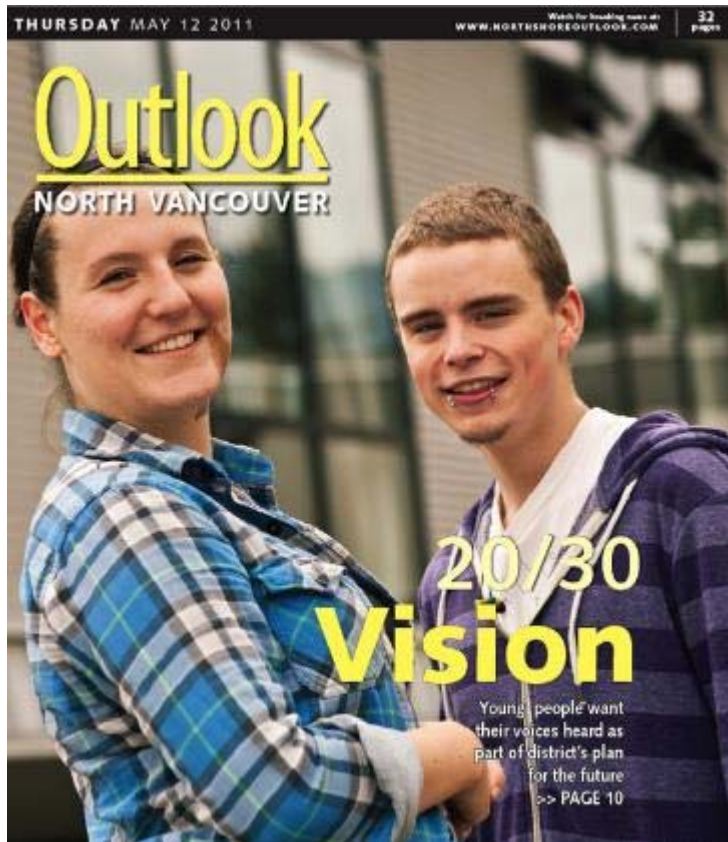


## North Van teens have 2030 vision



In addition to their regular homework, a group of engaged North Van teens has been brushing up on politics and public speaking. This Monday, the youths — including Carson Graham secondary's Stephanie Strong and Shane Longoz — hope to address district councillors at the Official Community Plan public hearing.

*Rob Newell photo*

By [Greg Hoekstra - North Shore Outlook](#)

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It's one of the nicest communities a kid could possibly grow up in.

It's just a shame, says Grade 12 student James Downie, that he might not be able to live in the District of

North Vancouver much longer.

"I feel like once I'm done school, I'll pretty much be forced to leave," says the teen, to nods of approval from his friends and classmates.

"After we go to [post-secondary] school we want to be able to come back and live here, but it's so expensive we might not be able to," agrees Steph Strong, a fellow senior at Carson Graham secondary school. "We don't want to have to move to Squamish... this is our home."

Gathered in an office at the Delbrook community centre, the collection of teens is a microcosm of a much larger youth group that has been working with Capilano Community Services to ensure young people have a say in the district's new Official Community Plan.

After nearly three years of studies, surveys, workshops, and community consultations, the district is preparing to unveil the comprehensive plan, "Identity 2030," at a public hearing this Monday, May 16.

At that meeting a group of students, including Downie and Strong, will address council to remind councillors of what's important to teens on the cusp of adulthood.

Their top priorities? Improving public transportation, preserving our natural environment, and ensuring there are affordable places for young people to live.

### **Hitching a ride**

So, what can be done to make the District of North Van a more youth-friendly place?

What are the most critical problems and challenges facing district youth?

What is "smart growth" and how can the district strive to be more sustainable?

These are just some of the questions Capilano Community Services posed in a survey to roughly 200 youth at Carson Graham, Balmoral, and Handsworth secondary schools.

In January, youth outreach workers compiled the results and produced a report outlining some key areas for change.

At the top of the list was transportation, with many youths saying the district needs more efficient, more frequent, and more accessible ways to travel across the North Shore.

Strong, who lives in the Lower Capilano area of North Vancouver, says getting to school or the Lonsdale corridor often means navigating a series of two or three busses.

"Going to school every day is already not that exciting, but not having a solid way to get there is a real bummer," she says.

Students in the Pemberton Heights area can take a direct bus to Carson Graham, she notes, but the same cannot be said for those living in Woodcraft, Norgate, or on the Squamish Nation reserve.

“Before I could drive, it was tough to go to things,” she adds, suggesting that youth might make more use of programs and services at community centres if it wasn’t so hard for them to get there.

In order to improve transportation for youth, survey respondents suggested the district should help fund eco-friendly shuttles to ferry people to malls and the more populated areas of the community. The school district should increase the number of school buses, they added, and the municipality should continue with initiatives to make the city more friendly to cyclists.

### **Ten trees for every building**

The latter idea sits well with Shane Longoz, a Grade 12 student who says we all have a responsibility to preserve the environment and practise sustainability.

“My biggest concern is leaning away from dirty energy sources and moving towards green energy,” he says.

Longoz suggests the district should install more bike racks and introduce more bike lanes to cater to shorter trips within the community.

“It’s about getting people out of their vehicles,” he says.

He’d also like to see his local government lead the charge on solar and wind energy, both by utilizing it, and by promoting its benefits through public events.

Downie agrees, and says it’s the district’s natural surroundings that set it apart from other municipalities in Canada, and even the Lower Mainland.

“I really like that even though it’s become a very residential area we’re still trying to keep nature as a part of our neighbourhoods,” Downie says.

“Even the city of Vancouver seems less in touch with nature. In North Van, there’s a lot of concrete, but it seems like there are 10 trees for every building.”

### **A place to call home**

By far, one of the most prominent issues affecting young people is the lack of affordable housing on the North Shore.

As the study points out, a typical two-bedroom apartment on Marine Drive typically costs about \$1,400 per month. Even when split that with a roommate, the pricetag is steep for a young person making entry-level wages.

“It feels hopeless to most young people,” reads the study. “Landlords do not want to rent to young people, think we cannot pay the rent, or party too much.”

In order to solve the problem, Downie suggests the district should promote further growth — including affordable apartments and student townhouses — around the North Shore’s only post-secondary institution.

“I feel it’d be a good idea to build up around the Capilano University area, to try and emulate what they have around UBC,” he says.

By encouraging such a community, Downie suggests the district could promote itself as an attractive place for young people across B.C.

North Van resident Shannon Norman, 34, agrees that anything that would attract more people her age would be a benefit. She also feels there aren’t enough programs for those in her age range living on the North Shore.

“What they don’t tell you is that there’s a big gap once you finish high school,” she says. “I’d like to see more programs for younger people in a social setting. All these baby boomers, like my parents, have their own issues with health and other things. I wish there was a place to go and meet other people my age, because I find it really hard.”

### **The aging avalanche**

Attracting young people to the district is also paramount to keeping the community healthy, says Renée Strong, executive director of Capilano Community Services.

“It’s not healthy to not have a mix of people,” says Strong, thumbing through pages of statistics in her North Van office. “If we don’t change our ways, we’re going to end up a bunch of old people living in big houses with nobody to look after us.”

Strong first volunteered to sit on the Official Community Plan roundtable committee two years ago. Since that time, she says she’s learned so much about the community that she feels she’s earned a university degree.

But what shocked Strong most was learning about North Van’s “missing generation” of 25- to 40-year-olds. Baby boomers like herself are part of an “aging avalanche,” she says, living in single-family homes, resisting change.

In recent years four schools have closed and more are slated to close because of a lack of young people. We need people in their 20s and 30s for vibrancy and sustainability, she says. But with housing prices the way they are now, a young couple would have to earn \$170,000 combined to buy a home in the district.

“We will need younger people to provide our health-care services and transportation. Without adding housing options to our community, our home taxes will sky-rocket,” reads part of a speech Strong is preparing for Monday’s meeting.

The answer, she says, is to start looking at added density and creative housing options such as coach houses and basement suites.

“We have to wake up,” she says. “Young people feel like there’s no hope for them to ever live here. That’s why we need this OCP. It’s not for us, it’s for the youth.”

Youth outreach worker Dan Monument says he feels the district has done a great job reaching out to youth and taking their concerns into account.

“I think this OCP is an awesome opportunity to make sure that they’re heard,” says Monument. “It’s a chance to channel their energy and give them a voice.”

Downie agrees, and says people shouldn’t be surprised that youth are so anxious to get involved in civic matters. They just need to be asked, he says.

“Youth are very concerned about the future of their community, they just have different ways of showing it. The young people I know are full of ideas. They have just as many, if not more, ideas as adults. And often they’re not as afraid to be creative,” Downie says.

“A lot of kids love living here, but they do have concerns and they do have points to make. This OCP is a great idea. Our generation is going to rule the world one day... it’s important to start that vision off sooner rather than later, so we have time to work towards it.”

*After years of preparation and the input of more than 5,000 residents, the District of North Vancouver’s proposed OCP bylaw had its first reading last month. On Monday the community is invited to a public hearing, at which the plan will be unveiled and the aforementioned youth will address council. For more information on the OCP or the hearing visit [www.identity.dnv.org](http://www.identity.dnv.org), email [identity@dnv.org](mailto:identity@dnv.org), or call 604-990-2421.*

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