

SEEING IT OUR WAY



By Wendy Pedersen
& Jean Swanson



Carnegie Community Action Project

Vision of the Downtown Eastside

Draft Report

CCAP Acknowledges and honours the fact that our neighbourhood lies within the Traditional Territory of the Coast Salish people.

CCAP invites DTES residents to give feedback on this draft Vision. Please attend CCAP's Town Hall meeting on Monday, December 7, 2009 at 2 pm or send us your input before Thursday, Dec. 10, 2009.



Carnegie Community Action Project
401 Main St., Vancouver BC V6A 2T7
604. 839.0370 or 604.729.2380
www.ccapvancouver.wordpress.com

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Support for this project does not necessarily imply Vancity's endorsement of the findings or contents of this report

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Introduction

This is a report on three Planning Workshops that the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) held with 44 low-income residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood in July and October 2009. Low-income residents make up about 70% of the total population in Vancouver's DTES. The Planning Workshops were the fifth stage of CCAP's consultation process to involve low-income residents in making decisions about the future of our community. (See Appendix A for an outline of the full community planning process). This report should be read in the context of CCAP's two other reports on our consultation with DTES residents: *Nothing about us without Us* and *Our Place and Our Words*. Both are on CCAP's website at www.ccapvancouver.wordpress.com

This report is based on the principle that the low-income community in the DTES has a right to exist and to seek improvements for itself.

What is the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP)?

CCAP is a project of the Carnegie Community Centre Association, which has about 5000 members, most of whom live in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. CCAP works to get more and better housing as well as better incomes for DTES residents. It also works to involve low-income residents in deciding on the future of our community.

What have CCAP's Visioning, Questionnaire and Mapping Projects revealed about the DTES community?

CCAP's Visioning Workshops with 300 low-income residents showed that they like the people, the community, the services and the non judgmental nature of the DTES.

CCAP's Questionnaire with 655 residents found that over 85% thought it was very important to have higher incomes, new affordable social housing and alcohol and drug treatment on demand; 95% would want to stay in the DTES if they had safe secure housing; 99% feel that a

few condos in the DTES would be ok if the community housed mostly existing residents and low-income people.

CCAP's Mapping Project with 200 residents found ten major assets in the DTES community:

- We are very accepting and non-judgmental people;
- We have a lot of empathy for those who are suffering;
- We have rich cultural heritages;
- We have green spaces that are spiritually important to the community;
- We have many places to volunteer and contribute to our community;
- We have cheap and free necessities that are nearby;
- We have some great services, many that we started ourselves;
- We work for social justice;
- We have some good quality affordable housing to secure our base; and
- The DTES is a strong community.





Why did CCAP hold the Planning Workshops?

CCAP held the Planning Workshops to build on the findings of previous consultation work and figure out in detail:

- What low-income DTES residents have as a Vision for our community;
- What actions residents think need to be taken to achieve this Vision;
- What community values should be protected and enhanced;
- What kinds of housing residents want in our community; and
- What residents see as the biggest problems in the neighbourhood and what the solutions to these problems are.

Who attended the Planning Workshops?

Participants included 44 low-income residents who are homeless,

live in SRO's, social housing, supported housing, co-ops, and people who are active in DTES resident based groups and people who aren't usually active in these groups. Participants live in six of the eight sub-areas of the DTES: Gastown, Chinatown, Victory Square, the Oppenheimer District, Hastings Corridor and Strathcona.

We believe this report represents the general views of a broad range of low-income DTES residents because it is based on input from about 1200 of them.

What happened at the CCAP Planning Workshops?

At the first Planning Workshop participants viewed and discussed a power point presentation on CCAP's Mapping, Visioning, and Questionnaire results. They wrote words on rocks that best expressed the future of the DTES that they would like to see. They also made four large collages of the community they would like to see in the future and discussed their Vision for the future of the neighbourhood.

At the second Planning Workshop participants worked on the 'nitty gritty' of a Vision Statement for the DTES and also talked about what they consider to be the worst problems in the neighbourhood, and how to solve them.

At the third Planning Workshop participants worked on a list of Values and a list of Actions to implement their Vision. They also discussed what kind of housing they'd like in the neighbourhood.





Our Vision for the Downtown Eastside

The Vision that planning day participants agreed on is as follows:

Our Vision is to:

1. Honour the Coast Salish people on whose unceded Traditional Territory the DTES resides.
2. Celebrate our strong community of urban Aboriginal and low-income people of many ancestries, abilities, cultures, health conditions, genders, ages and sexual orientations.
3. Put people first and welcome all who advocate for affordable low-income housing and appreciate our community values.
4. Ensure low-income people have affordable homes and access to resources to meet our needs.
5. Unite in fair processes and act in peaceful and necessary ways to expand our abilities, overcome adversity and protect our community.

Community Values

The community Values mostly identified in CCAP's previous Mapping Workshops, at the first Planning Workshop and agreed to at the second Planning Workshop are as follows:

Working for justice and the community

Community

Respect for each other and nature

DTES residents should make decisions about their own community

Acceptance/non judgmental

Cooperation

Diversity

Sanctuary

Caring

Unity

Compassion

Respect all generations and their roles in creating a healthy community

Harmony

Empathy

The Values that people at the second Planning Day thought were most important are the first five.

Actions to implement the DTES Vision

Participants agreed on the following Actions to implement their Vision:

Housing

- Build high-quality, self-contained affordable homes for Aboriginal and low-income people.

Incomes

- Increase welfare, disability, pensions and minimum wage to sustain a quality standard of living;
- End earnings clawbacks of welfare, EI and disability incomes;
- Employ low-income and Aboriginal Downtown Eastside residents to design and build our community.

Arts and Culture

- Work with the pre-existing Downtown Eastside creative community and Aboriginal artists to secure their space in the cultural development of the neighbourhood;
- Create artist co-operatives which prioritize longtime DTES artists/artisans;
- Ensure that post secondary school programs use their resources to support and not undermine existing Downtown Eastside residents and artists;
- Create a registry of arts and cultural resources that Aboriginal and low-income residents can access.

Governance

- Build grassroots governance in all aspects of DTES life where decisions centre on the strengths, needs and opportunities for Aboriginal and low-income residents;
- Create mechanisms so DTES low-income residents can make decisions about what happens in our community because we already live here.

Health

- Ensure that health and community services are adequate, user-centered and serve the diversity of the neighbourhood;
- Create mechanisms so that health facilities are controlled by resident boards like the board at the REACH Clinic;

- Ensure access to harm reduction services and move toward ending prohibition of now illegal drugs;
- Create more safe inhalation and injection sites;
- Provide more services that use the peer support model.

Economy

- Work with the city to ensure that business attracts and serves Aboriginal and low-income residents by selling what they need at prices they can afford, and training and hiring local residents;
- Work with the city to mandate BIA's (Business Improvement Associations) to work with Aboriginal and low-income DTES residents;
- Encourage resident run co-ops and social enterprises;
- Work with the city to create mechanisms to keep chain stores and franchises out of the DTES;
- Work with the city to create affordable retail spaces for businesses serving the low-income community.

Public spaces

- Ensure that green and public spaces celebrate and welcome all Downtown Eastside residents;
- Create more quiet green spaces;
- Create safer pedestrian spaces;
- Create more accessible public washrooms, drinking fountains and benches without bars on them;
- Build in extra public space before adding more residents to the area.

Physical forms

- Plan the neighbourhood to respect the historical and neighbourhood scale;
- Build within the existing zoning. Smaller buildings have a sense of community;
- Ensure that buildings for families are not higher than eight stories.





Safety

- Start a program where DTES residents educate police and security guards on mental health issues, cultural customs, compassion, empathy, anti-racism and conflict resolution;
- Pursue policing that focuses on predators, not criminalization of the poor;
- Engage Peer Safety Patrols which reflect the diversity of the low-income community;
- Increase non violent conflict resolution;
- Increase spaces for women and children, GBLT and Two Spirited people;
- Improve pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Rate of Change

- Use zoning to implement our Vision;
- Consider a ten year Stabilization Plan for the DTES, to give time for more harm reduction and low-income housing to improve conditions for low-income residents;
- Ensure the security, well-being and assets of the existing Aboriginal and low-income communities before unaffordable condos are built;
- Ensure new post secondary schools don't take over low-income housing and services like SROs and the Carnegie cafeteria.

Housing

After a wide ranging discussion about housing, participants agreed that:

- Homeless people are the first priority for new housing;
- The 70% who are low-income are also a priority for new housing;
- We like the idea of mixed low-income housing in buildings that have a mission to house diverse people, including those who need support. A combination of informal and formal supports needs to be built in. DTES residents need to have control over the Mission, Values and Goals of this housing and the admission criteria for new tenants.

Participants said the following types of housing were needed:
Low-income housing for:



- Homeless people (700 in DTES)
- Communal housing
- Intergenerational housing with couples, children, people with disabilities and elders
- Housing for people in SROs (about 3500 privately owned and 1500 government owned)
- Supportive housing
- Co-operative Housing
- Independent living housing
- Aboriginal housing
- Housing for families, children, couples, people with disabilities and elders
- A hospice

Also mentioned: housing can be built so that people support each other informally. Units with two or three bedrooms could be built so that people who support each other can live together even if they aren't in a traditional, biological family.

Problems

On the second Planning Day participants were shown a list of DTES

problems identified in CCAP's earlier mapping and asked to add to that list. Problems were divided into two categories based on themes in CCAP's mapping results. The categories were exclusion and violence. People then prioritized the problems with dots and discussed solutions to the top priority problems.

The worst problems identified by the group were:

Exclusion

14 dots: Condos/gentrification/forces of greed/upscale stores/Gastown/Tinseltown;

10 dots: Security guards who harass homeless people and people who "look poor";

6 dots: BIA's have more power and less representation and they don't want social housing;

3 dots: Forcing drug users outside and criminalizing them;

3 dots: Providing services for "labelled" people only. This emphasizes deficits;

3 dots: Organizations that communicate by email and exclude people who don't have it;

3 dots: Violating civil rights of low-income people;

2 dots: Healthcare by ambulance;

1 dot: Pharmacies that require you to get prescriptions from their store if you live in their building.

Also mentioned: the DTES needs proper bus shelters, more park benches, sidewalk benches, corner parks, telephone booths and water fountains. "Everything everyone else has, we have a right to and should have already had," one person said. They also said treatment in welfare offices should be improved, and medical offices should accept new patients and have shorter wait times.

Violence

9 dots: Police brutality against the poor and ticketing;

6 dots: Systemic poverty;

4 dots: Media and photographers;

4 dots: Non-resident drinkers/users and dealers;

4 dots: Racism, harassment;

3 dots: Alleys;

3 dots: Violence against women of all ages;

3 dots: Predators;

2 dots: Dark places;

1 dot: Electronic and video surveillance.

Also mentioned: Gangs and organized crime, noise (30,000 ambulance sirens a year), government controls everything and people driving through the Downtown Eastside who poor bash local residents.

Solutions

Participants at the second Planning Day brainstormed and came to general agreement on possible solutions to the problems they





identified. The following ideas need further work but could be the basis for community and government action on priority DTES problems:

Condos/gentrification

- Rate of change bylaw;
- No condos without affordable housing ;
- Lobby like crazy;
- Tell developers in a dignified way that the DTES is not for sale;
- Have churches or social justice committees buy condos in the DTES buildings to house DTES residents;
- Create a community story to educate developers and buyers;
- Have community solidarity to force all levels of government to provide more social housing;
- Get political and organize at all levels.

Security guards

- Join BIA security committee and end hiring of security guards;
- Provide more training for security guards to not be judgmental;
- Require security guards to follow a clear, well understood code of ethics;
- Use Pivot and BCCLA to ensure our rights are not violated;
- Develop and enforce hiring procedures to ensure that security guards are not violent and respect local residents;
- Have photo ID's of security guards in storefronts so it is easier to make complaints against individuals. This should be for the police too;
- Have Block Watch instead of security guards.

Business Improvement Associations in the DTES

- Create a low-income BIA or Community Improvement Association;
- Let other businesses know that a small number of groups in BIAs are making decisions for the whole;
- Make BIA's more inclusive;
- Join the BIAs ourselves;
- Ensure progressive companies join the BIA;



- Go to City Council and oppose funding for BIA's that don't support social housing;
- Do something to stop decision makers from giving more weight to business than resident opinions, even when we vastly outnumber them;
- Start up a BIA strategy committee.

Forcing drug users outside

- Open more Insites and smoke rooms, maybe five or six more in the Downtown area, and have some throughout the city;
- Educate residents to get support for supervised safer drug using sites;
- Encourage drug users to police themselves;
- Work for more harm reduction which means education to care for yourself, better supplies to stop the spread of infection, ending poverty and homelessness which make people vulnerable, getting rid of the black market for drugs and opening up culturally appropriate centres where people can practice their traditional cultures and values;
- Create programs like they have in Europe to catch children who may be drawn into drug use when they first come to the area;



- End the black market in drugs;
- Provide more Healing Centres and Cultural Centres that get at the root of displacement and addiction.

Media and photographers

- DTES community members could act like the media and go to wealthy neighbourhoods and film the people there;
- Change the public's perception of the DTES by doing more tours of the DTES led by DTES residents;
- Create our own stories based on our own history;
- Strike a committee to react to media misinformation;
- Talk to the management of media companies because they decide what reporters write;
- Write letters to the editor;
- Form a committee to analyze patterns in how DTES is portrayed;
- Educate people on the street about their rights to privacy;
- Organize community responses to media coverage.

Racism and Harassment

- Use BCCLA and Pivot more for legal cases and free legal advice. Hold workshops to help residents understand how to use the legal system;
- Educate;
- Create huge billboards extolling DTES diversity;
- Get efficient, effective ways to report each and every incident to institutions that harass people or act in racist ways;
- Train institutional workers in people skills;
- Expose incidents of racism and harassment.

Police Brutality

- Have a place where you can go to see photos of all the beat cops to help with identification of individual police or security guards so complaints can be made;
- Make empathy training mandatory for police/security guards;
- Train Native peacekeepers;
- Research the cost of the police jaywalking ticket campaign and put that money into pedestrian safety instead;

- Have DTES residents provide training sessions for police;
- Provide a course on portrait drawing so if you are victimized by police you can draw their face accurately;
- Stop police from policing the police;
- Shift to valuing life instead of property;
- Hold police accountable;
- Provide more education to police about poverty, diverse people and being sensitive to others;
- Get efficient and effective way to report each and every incident to the Vancouver Police board and unions;
- Give police a list of people labeled severely addicted mentally ill or SAMI and tell them, DO NOT ARREST as people are further traumatized by choke holds, jail etc.

Systemic poverty

- Raise the rates: welfare and minimum wage, plus disability and pensions all need to be raised;
- Loosen up the system so people on welfare can do some work or run a business;
- Ensure that Aboriginal people are at the table and listened to with respect and that their expertise is valued;
- Do demonstrations of distribution of wealth in pennies;
- Get political and educate;
- Create local training in local jobs;
- Provide education grants for DTES residents.

Non resident drinkers

- Make bars close earlier;
- Stop increasing the number of alcohol outlets;
- Keep soccer stadium off the waterfront to reduce non resident drinkers;
- Stop perception that people can come here and do whatever they want once the bars close in their neighbourhoods;
- Pay DTES residents with conflict resolution skills to monitor bar closure times and stop violence against DTES residents.



Conclusion

The various actions that need to be taken to implement low-income residents' Vision for the area can be divided into things that require action by each level of government as well as things that residents and their groups and local agencies can do.

CCAP will use this information to develop a Vision document with actions that can be taken to maintain DTES assets and improve the DTES for the 70% of its residents who have low-incomes.

Next steps

This document will be circulated to low-income individuals and low-income resident based groups for their input. A Town Hall Meeting to discuss the draft will be held in December 2009 as well.

A final Vision document will be produced, based on all the work and input so far. It will be taken to DTES groups for their input and endorsement and then submitted to City Council in the New Year.

Thank you

CCAP would like to thank the following people for their help on this report: Kathy Coyne, Elvin Wylie, Egor Marov, Ada Dennis, Joyce Rock, Mark Michelle, Dave Cruzelle and Dave Diewert. A special thanks to the Blackbird for his wonderful photos and to the 44 residents who participated in the Planning Workshops.



Appendix:

CCAP's low-income planning process

CCAP's process for developing a Vision, Principles and strategies for achieving a healthy, safe, authentic, affordable low-income DTES include:

Visioning and Questionnaire Completed in 2008 with about 955 people, and published as *Nothing about us Without Us* available at www.ccapvancouver.wordpress.com

Common Ground meetings: In the winter of 2009, three meetings with a broad range of DTES resident, agency and business groups to determine if there is common ground among the groups.

Resolution on Local Area Planning: CCAP and Low-income Land Use and Housing Coalition circulated this resolution on Local Area Planning which has been endorsed by 46 groups so far:

The following organizations support or will participate in a local area planning process that:

- 1) Has a Vision, goal and implementation mechanisms to create and maintain a safe, affordable and healthy low-income neighbourhood;
- 2) Has a steering committee made up of low-income DTES residents and their representatives in proportion to their population;
- 3) And will take about one year.

Community mapping: Between Sept. 2008 and May 2009, CCAP held community mapping sessions with about 200 low-income people at 23 DTES sites. This report, *Our Place and Our Words*, is available at www.ccapvancouver.wordpress.com



Reflection Committee: On May 22, 2009 a reflection committee made of about 15 people who had participated in the mapping sessions reflected on the mapping and overall community input process and gave direction for future steps.

Planning Day Meetings: Three Planning Day Meetings were held in July and October 2009 with 44 residents. "Seeing It Our Way" is the result of these meetings.

Final Vision and Implementation: A final Vision for the Downtown Eastside will be available early 2010. CCAP will work with DTES residents and others to implement it.



NOTES

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