



When Mayor Sullivan announced his 'EcoDensity' scheme, he went to a very public example of densification, on Oak Street. The Vancouver Sun was there, too.

Who's listening to the mayor?



BOB RANSFORD
VANCOUVER SUN

REAL ESTATE MATTERS

When Vancouver's mayor, Sam Sullivan, introduced his "EcoDensity" program in June, I praised the initiative as an example of focused leadership too often missing in electoral politics and as a potential catalyst for change in the way city hall would treat future development.

Now, I realize I forgot a basic truth of electoral politics: For elected political leaders, shaping the thinking of bureaucrats is often more difficult than shap-

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ing public opinion. It doesn't seem like anyone at city hall really listened to the mayor's message. Little seems to have changed, at least not yet.

Sam Sullivan's announcement was made with great fanfare on the eve of the World Urban Forum. The timing got him reasonable media coverage. Those of us who have long promoted the new urbanism were elated. Finally a politician admitting that density is good.

The mayor seemed to be issuing both a challenge to residents and a directive to city hall. It seemed to be aimed at dealing with at least three or four big issues — housing affordability, sprawl, the unsustainable global ecological footprint and friendlier, healthier neighbourhoods.

His pledge to make Vancouver healthy, clean and green by combating sprawl while encouraging the supply of

more housing had the promise of rippling right across the region and actually changing the way politicians, planners, engineers, developers and, most importantly, residents view development.

I have a long background in politics. So I wasn't so naïve to expect massive change overnight because of one pronouncement from the mayor of the biggest city in the region. I know that political pronouncements do not immediately result in new policy.

The mayor also made it clear that his EcoDensity initiative was a year-long process to bring about change. It would start with the development of as yet undefined "EcoDensity Charter" that would guide future decisions on planning and development in Vancouver.

Well, let's talk about where the rubber meets the road — where residential developments are reviewed, where infill developments are tested against

existing city regulations — things like zoning bylaws, land-use policies, design guidelines. In these regulatory documents, policy pronouncements mean little if they aren't reflected in actual words and clauses.

Changing regulations like those that govern development in Vancouver isn't easy. There are literally layers upon layers of regulations. There are numerous departments and countless bureaucrats who all review each development application.

My recent experience tells me that none of this change has even started.

Despite the mayor's high-profile announcements, for example about Vancouver providing increased housing choice, benefiting young families and enabling seniors to age in their neighbourhoods, not a single regulation has changed.

See **NO REGULATIONS** K10

No regulations have changed since the mayor's statement

BOB RANSFORD

From K4

Let me give you an example. The parking requirements for an infill development in one of Vancouver's most walkable neighbourhoods — the West End — require the provision of about two parking spaces for every new home built and, further, although not a requirement, in expensive underground garages.

Recently I assessed the suitability of a small West End property for a town-house development that would be built to a slightly higher density than the existing low-rise older apartment building on the site.

The parking requirements for the new development physically couldn't be achieved on the site.

Why should an infill development in the West End require [almost] two parking spots per residence? Is this eco-friendly?

Why even as much as one parking spot per residence? Why are we letting the

automobile determine our form of housing in a neighbourhood where walking makes sense?

Staff in the city's planning department have considerable discretionary authority when it comes to approving new developments.

They can recommend relaxing regulations like the parking requirements. It seems, however, that few of the bureaucrats in Vancouver's planning department really understand the direction the mayor is pointing Vancouver.

I am now wondering how effective it is for politicians to make announcements about big, year-long policy initiatives.

Do such announcements ever result in real change? Will this one change the way we build our neighbourhoods?

If change doesn't come now — and it must start now because we are at the peak of the housing-development economic-cycle — might it be too late?

Bob Ransford is a public affairs consultant with COUNTERPOINT Communications Inc. He is a former real estate developer who specializes in urban land use issues. E-mail: ransford@counterpointcom.com