

ARKS,¹ EcoDensity and the Vancouver City's EcoDensity Charter

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Definition: There appears to be no clear definition of the term "EcoDensity". But apparently:
 "In advance of the World Urban Forum held in Vancouver in June 2006, Mayor Sullivan was joined by a number of environmentalists, community activists and academics to launch his proposal called EcoDensity. In an unusual move, Sullivan registered the term EcoDensity with the patent office under his name."²

Its purpose is stated as:

- "EcoDensity has a goal of protecting the local and global ecology through the use of densification as a means of reducing the City's ecological footprint. Sullivan claims that by increasing density throughout the city, there will be a reduced requirement for people to make unnecessary car trips, hence reducing carbon emissions.
- EcoDensity also aims to increase housing affordability as well as make cities more competitive by making them less reliant on fossil fuels. Sullivan indicates that if more cities around the world enacted EcoDensity principles, it would have a great impact on climate change."³

While these goals appear to be very laudable, it is evident that the mainstay of the program is "(Population) Densification". In practice, "densification" simply means increased population in a limited area.

Therefore, and in my view, "densification" is flawed because more people living in a given area in the current service environment means taking away a little bit of "livability" from each one of us to accommodate the increase.

Our current service environment is already challenged and may be characterized as follows:

- We are short of electrical power at peak periods and in a future severe cold snap must expect brownouts or power failures
- Fresh water is short in summer, and a warm dry winter at some time in the future such as we have had in the past will present real difficulties.
- The fresh water supply distribution system is in need of extensive renewal in many areas
- Greater Vancouver has only a minimal standard of sewage disposal, well below a reasonable environmentally acceptable standard
- The lower mainland's solid waste disposal site is almost full
- Family doctors are in short supply (new comers may have difficulty in finding a doctor)
- Our hospitals are working at maximum capacity (if wait times for serious surgery is any guide)
- Our police forces appear to be unable to curb mounting drug trafficking and related crime
- Other social services are also seem to be stretched (if you believe the media)
- Many of our roads are in urgent need of repair (e.g. Blenheim)
- The City has created serious congestion centers (e.g. Arbutus and Broadway)
- As our road systems support more traffic, the more dangerous they are

Bear in mind that we are also up against Metro Vancouver who are contemplating a population increase of 820,000 people in the next 25 years. That is about a 35-40% increase over the present population. While this increase may or may not be shared equally around the Metro Vancouver area, nevertheless, it does mean a 35-40% increase in the number of vehicles on the roads.

Conceptually, packing people more tightly into a given area could mean, as in Sullivan's vision, "a reduced requirement for people to make unnecessary car trips". For example, if suitable work is available locally, that could mean a reduction in car-to-work trips, but what about all the *necessary* trips where suitable employment is not available?

It is true that some people will give up cars altogether and use other forms of transport, especially if they live close to their work. But the number is unlikely to be very high simply because the personal vehicle is so much more convenient than public transport, especially where carrying goods is involved – like carrying home the weekly shopping.

Moreover, the more people that crowd into core areas, like downtown Vancouver, the more small businesses are inclined to move outward because of high occupation costs (real estate overheads and property taxes). This generates traffic in the opposite direction, and while this may ease unidirectional traffic, it does nothing to curb carbon gas emissions – probably the reverse. Presently, outbound job trips are about 30% of those to the downtown core.⁴

As an example of city congestion that already exists, a City of Vancouver Administrative Report in May, 2006, has this to say about *Central Broadway*:

"Central Broadway, the city's health and civic centre, is the largest destination outside of the Downtown. Broadway has experienced a doubling in transit trips to the area. It has a similar dense, mixed-use development as the Downtown, but trips to Central Broadway are *increasingly auto-oriented*. It has an auto mode share that is more comparable with the GVRD than with the Downtown. Central Broadway is not currently served by rail rapid transit, a factor contributing to the high auto mode share of trips destined to this area. With bus service on Broadway nearing capacity it is unlikely that the City's mode share targets can be achieved until rail rapid transit service is extended. The Transportation Plan targets for Central Broadway were based on two new rapid transit lines: Downtown to Richmond and Central Broadway to Lougheed. Both of these lines were to have been in place by 2006. With the Canada Line construction currently in progress, the Millennium Line extension to Central Broadway is still needed to achieve mode share targets."⁵ (Emphasis is mine)

Every additional housing unit added to the area, means adding an average of 2+ people to the local population. Since, the average number of registered vehicles per person in Vancouver is about 50%,⁶ that means adding a car for every housing unit.

So, in terms of the Arbutus Shopping Centre in particular, it makes much more sense to develop the site as an expanded shopping area. This would increase local employment opportunities, thus encouraging shorter work trips, and reducing the necessity for local employees to take longer trips to employment elsewhere.

¹ ARKS stands for Arbutus Ridge Kerrisdale Shaughnessy (area)

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Sullivan

³ Ibid.

⁴ City of Vancouver Administrative Report RR-1(a), dated Ma 15, 2006, p4

⁵ Ibid, p1

⁶ Ibid, p27