



Southeast False Creek Pacific Admiration — Prairie Application

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Abstract

This case study identifies sustainable characteristics and processes that have been incorporated into Vancouver’s upcoming development of Southeast False Creek (SEFC) neighbourhood. SEFC is the one of the last available areas of undeveloped waterfront in downtown Vancouver. The design for this neighbourhood has been undertaken as a model sustainable community. Recognized by many as a premiere example of urban design, the vision for SEFC should be applicable in Winnipeg. This project will identify opportunities and challenges for creating sustainable neighbourhoods in Winnipeg with an eye to the real estate characteristics that separate Winnipeg from Vancouver.

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Background and Context

The City of Vancouver has received much attention as a model global city. It has taken the reins, driving urban design and sustainable growth throughout North America. This characterization is built upon decades of concerted effort to create a liveable city, and reduce sprawl. Urban villages

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have been an M.O. for city planners — a focus on building neighbourhoods rather than sites. The city-endorsed vision for Southeast False Creek outlines one definition of a sustainable community. This vision is the result of a lengthy process leading up to the creation of Vancouver's last major opportunity to create a highly urban, high-density neighbourhood. Southeast False Creek has been conceived as one of Canada's strongest emerging examples of sustainable neighbourhood design. SEFC has already achieved acclaim for its sustainable design and features, which seek environmental, social and economic sustainability through innovative energy, urban agriculture, transportation, and water management strategies.

Creating sustainable cities is vital to future urban health. Development patterns and policies in Winnipeg are slow to change and have maintained a suburban orientation for decades. The urban form that Winnipeg now finds itself with does not reflect sustainable practice. Patterns of future development will not change overnight, but all signs point to a need to rethink strategies, and what better to learn from than one of the best?

Facts of the Case

Granville Island and False Creek South

The False Creek Basin has been the site of concentrated residential development in Vancouver since 1970. False Creek South began in the minds of students in a UBC architecture studio course under Wolfgang Gerson. Vancouver city councillor Walter Hardwick took the image of high-quality mixed use area where once there was an industrial brownfield and ran with it. The political climate under the TEAM (The Elector Action Movement) banner of the time moved the project forward rapidly. False Creek South, which broke ground in 1974, is home to hundreds of people in several housing typologies — homes connect to unique and abundant retail on Granville Island and enjoy very public connections to the water. Granville Island was a related project sponsored entirely by CMHC and designed by Norman Hotson Architects. The False Creek South neighbourhood was followed by massive redevelopment of the north shore for Expo '86, featuring pavilions, recreation and public space, of which, the Plaza of Nations and Science World stand as the legacy. Expo's temporary structures paved the way for Concord Pacific's towers along the north shore, epitomizing the tower/podium concept. Popular throughout the city, they are

SEFC

Development Characteristics

Park area 104,600m²

Total floor area 554,560m²

Residential area 534120m²

Affordable units

Olympic Village

250 non-market units

Area 1A, 3A

33% non-market

33% modest market

Area 1B,2B,3B,3C

20% non-market

Business area: 20,440m²



one common way to create high-density living and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. The tower/podium design can be seen throughout greater Vancouver but epitomizes the architectural typology of the downtown.

Fifteen years to SEFC

The story of Southeast False Creek (SEFC) as a community of its own began in 1991 when SEFC was removed from the industrial land base by order of Vancouver City Council and Mayor Gordon Campbell. City council pushed to convert the area into a mixed-use community and fully explore its potential as a model of sustainability. The Clouds of Change report put city-wide sustainable practice on the table in 1990 and became the first hook for a new neighbourhood in southeast False Creek.

In 1996 Stanley Kwok, who had been a force behind False Creek North projects was retained to do a pro forma analysis that concluded in designs for a neighbourhood he called Creekside Landing. This report tended toward developer-friendly economic sustainability while carrying the stylistic status quo of neighbourhoods like Coal Harbour, Yaletown, and False Creek North, with extremely loose guidelines for sustainability. This was followed by a design charette that promoted councillors to take note of the disparity between Kwok's proposal and the goals of Clouds of Change. The Sheltair Group was brought in, in 1998, to generate a concrete set of performance targets and precedents that would underpin all further design proposals. In 1999, Mark Holland was employed to flesh out these guidelines and create a more comprehensive framework for a green community. His work resulted in the original Policy Statement for SEFC. The Policy Statement in conjunction with the Sheltair report spawned four subsequent reports, which concentrated on different aspects of sustainability including urban agriculture, energy options, water and waste, and transportation and finally an audit of the LEED congruencies of the proposal. The Merge Consultancy Report of May 2003 collected the findings from each of these reports to identify congruencies and conflicts arising between them. Throughout this period, VIA Architecture and others were charged with exploring how the development principles being established could be implemented through physical design. The fledgling Official Development Plan (ODP) was brought to council at the "report-in" stage and revised following the Choices Report, issued in 2004. The initial ODP featured the characteristic tower/podium design typical Vancouver's downtown. The Choices Report prompted a shift to a more European, mid-rise typology. The ODP was approved by council March 1 2005 and enacted on July 19, 2005. January 2006 saw minor changes to the housing mix and child care components of the ODP.



Southeast False Creek has taken on the added role as Olympic Village for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. This has helped the city to maintain focus on providing the highest quality of green construction. Olympic Village residences will be required to comply with the LEED Gold construction standard. SEFC is expected to provide an innovative showcase of emerging technologies and environmental features.

Developing the Plan

The foundation of the SEFC development plan rests on several reports examining four issues of sustainability. The economic orientation of early proposals has been shifted towards environmental and social sustainability. A host of indicators were developed that objectify this vision into Ten Principles of Sustainable Development and five categories of Performance Targets. Energy conservation, urban agriculture, transportation, and water and waste management are four pillars of SEFC that were studied in greater detail. An examination of the potential application of LEED standards was also explored in May 2003, and became a solid framework for analysing construction techniques in the Merge Consultancy Report released two months later.

LEEDing green development, May 2003

The Green Building Council's LEED standards were explored in a separate report identifying the utility and opportunities for certification. 'Silver' was identified as a goal for all new construction, but accreditation was not mandated in the final ODP. Since LEED is based on post-occupancy analysis and there is no real tool for interim enforcement, LEED certification will be held up as a valuable marketing tool. In any case, the LEED audit report in concert with the Merge Consultancy Report concluded that silver certification was well within the reach of the community based on Vancouver's existing building by-laws and readily available materials. Five additional points must be incorporated for most of the neighbourhood's buildings to qualify for a silver rating. Construction of the Athlete's Village for the 2010 Olympic Games will however, seek LEED gold.

Planner/Developer

In some ways, Southeast False Creek has been a more challenging development than others. Being the largest landowner, the city is able to control the type and scope of development in the new neighbourhood. As the major landholder, the city has

SEFC Sustainability Indicators

Environmental

- Energy
- Water
- Stormwater
- Solid waste and recycling
- Urban agriculture
- Transportation
- SEFC green buildings

Social

Basic Needs

- Appropriate, affordable housing with flexibility to meet changing needs
- Appropriate, affordable healthcare available in the community
- Locally produced, nutritious food
- Safe community
- Quality, affordable childcare

Enhancing human capacity

- Local employment opportunities
- Creativity and artistic expression
- Life long learning
- Recreation, leisure and cultural facilities

Enhancing Social capacity

- Community economic development
- Community identity
- Involvement in public process
- Social interaction
- Community networks and organizations

Economic

- Economic security
- Local self-reliance
- Ecological economy
- Economic advantage

found conflict between its own departments' different interests. Working with a private developer provides a better separation of roles and allows the city as an entity to make demands on the builder through exactions, and influence.

The master planning of SEFC, can be characterized as a mega project of community-building. Master planning does help to establish a sense and vision for a complete community—walkable and liveable. It promotes big-picture thinking about SEFC that will be more socially/economically sustainable through integration of services and closer proximities. This technique limits adaptability as successes and failures arise. A more incremental approach could allow developers to learn, fix, and enhance designs as the neighbourhood is built-out, while a masterplanned approach might establish a more cohesive urban design.

Learning Lessons: Winnipeg

Winnipeg is not Vancouver and developers here seem reticent to discard tried and true, standard development models for more sustainable practices and untested neighbourhood designs. A multitude of issues are cited as barriers to creating communities like Southeast False Creek, from geography to economy. It is valuable to consider these concerns and identify contextual overlap that can bring something of SEFC to Manitoba. While Vancouver may be advantaged by its construction policies and related by-laws, sustainable principles and techniques should not be set aside. With a history of slow, residential development in Winnipeg, innovative proposals are often contentious. SEFC has potential to demonstrate the success and opportunities inherent in environmentally sensitive planning and raise the profile of green building opportunities in our city.

It is important to remember that SEFC has been in the making for more than fifteen years. SEFC has been the product of a strong commitment to do something innovative while educating and changing perceptions along the way. The consistent vision and strong leadership from the Vancouver City Council has allowed innovative design to emerge by setting an agenda and sticking to it. The limited space in BC's Lower Mainland certainly makes environmental issues more poignant. Residents of Greater Vancouver and developers in the area have had to



consider and operate more sustainably for years, while critical public discussion in Winnipeg has only emerged in the last few years.

Sustainability: Building capacity

Several high-profile projects have raised awareness of green building principles in Winnipeg. Mountain Equipment Co-op, Red River College and Manitoba Hydro have made great strides in demonstrating the applicability and quality that sustainable principles can bring to an architecture project. These “demonstration projects” are landmarks that have helped city builders to see sustainability in action, but the scale and profile of them have limited their application to average neighbourhoods in the city. It is important to bring sustainability down from the realm of the experimental and expensive to the practical and necessary.

Creating an infrastructure for innovation

The City of Winnipeg currently has no incentives to build in a sustainable fashion. Prevailing attitudes in the city demand financial incentives in order to make green building a practical option for low-margin development projects. Since sustainable building practices use less energy and produce less waste, they reduce the burden on municipal infrastructure. Developers or homeowners could be compensated for this reduced strain on the municipal infrastructure, through tax credits or cost reductions.

Additional urban development increases the strain and burden of municipal infrastructure. Many jurisdictions across the country, including BC, have adopted development cost charges (DCCs) as a method of recovering the cost for future maintenance to their infrastructure. It is generally recognized that property taxes alone do not support the impacts of new construction, which could be offset by incorporating a flat fee into new lot sales. Current sustainability incentives are directed towards homeowners in the form of tax credits and rebates, additional incentives need to be shifted to the homebuilders.

Manitoba Hydro has developed some policies that support homeowners and builders, such as the Power Smart Residential Loan and R-2000 Programmes, but these concentrate solely on energy savings, without public education or innovative construction methods.

Winnipeg's Barriers and Opportunities

Vision: Developing and maintaining a stronger long-term vision for the future of Winnipeg with broad support and consensus

Planning: a shift away from a politically-guided development strategy to a considered and structured one developed by planners

Zoning by-laws: should be modified to permit more development innovation and fewer barriers to alternative residential forms

Land Availability: recognizing that while land is more readily available, it is not necessarily economical, viable, or sustainable to use it for extending neighbourhoods and infrastructure

City as Developer: land banking and municipal property should be leveraged for support of municipal goals

Thrifty Manitoba: reconsidering housing form and strategy to provide residential opportunities for all budgets in and around downtown

Community perception: education about sustainable values and value, and participation in creating the principles guiding development in all neighbourhoods to reduce NIMBYism and increase support for sustainable development

(cont'd)

Looking Ahead: The Marina Precinct

Site characteristics

A triangle of land wedged between Provencher Boulevard and Waterfront Drive along the Red River. The site is immediately north of the Forks proper and the south anchor for Stephen Juba Park. The Marina Precinct is under evaluation as a potential site for mixed-use development on Forks land. Proposals would include residential, commercial and recreational opportunities, tying increasing development in the Exchange District more directly into the Forks. Though the scale of the site is much smaller than SEFC, they share as many characteristics as possible for two cities so different. Waterfront, bridge-side, downtown edge, bordered by a recreational and tourist destination — CanWest Ball Park in Winnipeg and ScienceWorld in Vancouver— and conceived of as an independent neighbourhood, that complements other innovative developments in the vicinity.

Charette process and conclusions

Professionals, academics and students gathered together in November, 2005 to generate ideas and discussion over possible development of this site. While the prevailing sentiment was not to develop one of the few greenspaces available in the downtown, several recommendations emerged for any develop that was to take place. These included many of the same principles that guided SEFC, including environmental, social, and economic recommendations. Interaction with the waterfront, public access, adaptable design were high priorities.

Adapting SEFC to Marina

If this site is selected for future development, it will be vital to consider its environmental impacts and potential as an exhibition for sustainable design, given the Forks' role in building reclamation, and connecting Winnipeggers to the river, nature, and each other. Recent successes in real estate in the immediate area demonstrate the viability and desirability of downtown living in Winnipeg, an option that has regained favour in a very few years. The marina precinct is an opportunity to take a hard look at an exemplary planning project, bringing its format and reviewing its process for a Manitoban planning audience. It has the potential to contribute to discussion about what and how planning and urban design is conducted in our province.

Winnipeg's Barriers and Opportunities (cont'd)

Development in Winnipeg: identifying alternative ways to take into account the full cost of various development options in relation to infrastructure and services

Flood architecture: must be considered and provides an opportunity for innovation and linkages with experimental architecture

Climate: Winds, cold, sun: our extreme climate should provide more impetus for climate-conscious design rather than simply more insulated construction

Slow growth: provides an even more important reason to build with longevity in mind. Slow growth effects are highly compatible with green building considerations and well-designed neighbourhoods



Resources

All SEFC background reports and development plans are available at:
<http://www.vancouver.ca/sefc/>

Punter, John. (2003) *The Vancouver Achievement*. UBC Press: Vancouver.

CIP SEFC Project Brief (2001)
http://www.cip-icu.ca/English/about-plan/ud_prac1.pdf

CMHC (2001) Research Highlights: Southeast False Creek Design Charrett: Exploring High Density, Sustainable Urban Development. Document No. 62494: CMHC

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