



VANCOUVER FOUNDATION'S

VitalSigns

For Metro Vancouver

Community Conversations 2011



New Westminster





Backgrounder:

On October 4th, 2010, Vancouver Foundation released the 2010 Vital Signs report for Metro Vancouver. Vital Signs is a community check-up, conducted by community foundations across Canada, that measures the vitality of our communities, identifies significant trends, and assigns grades in a range of areas critical to quality of life.

One of the key findings of the 2010 Vital Signs report was that the degree to which we feel connected to one another has the biggest impact on how we rate the quality of our lives. A strong sense of belonging and a bond of trust between neighbours greatly contributes to stronger, healthier communities.

To build on this knowledge, Vancouver Foundation held a series of Community Conversations focused on building better communities through increasing individuals' sense of belonging and social connections.

Pre-dialogue meetings were held in each community with local partners to identify discussion topics that would be of greatest interest to the community, additional community partners, potential meeting venues, suitable dates and methods and mediums for promoting the Community Conversations.

Each Community Conversation started with a series of short presentations and was followed by small group, table discussions focused on how a sense of community belonging can positively impact a variety of community issues. In addition to the general issue of belonging, each community also identified one or two additional areas for discussion. Attendees participated in the table discussion that was of most interest to them.

All six Community Conversations took place over a three week period in June 2011 in the following municipalities: Maple Ridge; North Vancouver; Richmond; White Rock South Surrey; New Westminster; Vancouver.

Table Discussion Format:

Each table discussion was facilitated by a 'Conversation Guide' who lead the participants through three questions and ensured everyone had an opportunity to contribute to the conversation. The three questions were:

1. When you picture a healthy, connected community, what stands out?
2. What is your community doing well? What is working? What do you love about your community?
3. Where are the opportunities for improvement?

In addition to the discussion, participants were invited to record, on a Post-it note, an idea for how they could personally contribute to a sense of belonging and social connection in their own community.



The final action for each table was to capture one highlight from their discussion and turn it into a lively, one-minute report-back to be shared with all event participants.

As participants were leaving, they were invited to contribute to a dotmocracy exercise which included a list of 13 community issues ranging from Arts & Culture to Safety. Everyone was given three dots and asked to place them beside the issue/s they cared most about. People could elect to place all the dots on the same issue, or could spread their dots between two or three issues of importance.

Why this engagement approach:

Through initial research and conversations with community leaders, we discovered that most communities were already holding dialogues for their region on key issue areas such as seniors, transportation, and affordability. We did not want to compete with, or duplicate, what was already being done.

Instead of using a traditional model for dialogue, we chose to look at community issues through the lens of belonging. The topic of belonging and social connections affects all residents, is a thread that ties together the issue areas identified in the 2010 Vital Signs report, and gets to the heart of what Vancouver Foundation is about – building stronger communities. Our goal was to present a fresh and vital approach to draw out solutions. Instead of looking at the problems, we looked at the possibilities.

About this Report:

The following is a compilation of the comments from the Community Conversations, grouped by community, question and issue area. The comments have been loosely sorted into categories.

In many cases, the same points or comments are listed more than once under a category. This is an indication that it was mentioned at multiple tables.

In most cases, exact wording from the scribe's notes was used. In some cases wording was changed slightly to provide clarification. In a few instances, it was not possible to determine the context of a statement or point. In those cases the comments were not recorded as we did not want to unintentionally make a point counter to the discussion. Our apologies to anyone whose comments we were not able to accurately capture.

We hope this document provides a good indication of the discussion and issues addressed at the Vancouver Foundation Community Conversations for Metro Vancouver.

Project Next Steps:

A summary of the Community Conversations was presented to the Vancouver Foundation board of directors and will be presented to the Mayor and Council in each community where a conversation



was held. This report is available on-line through the Vital Signs website and will be distributed to community stakeholders and partners who were involved in the Conversations.

In addition, information from the table discussions, along with an issue priority setting exercise, will help inform discussion around a new priority area for Vancouver Foundation's work.



NEW WESTMINSTER

Date: Thursday, June 23rd , 6:00pm – 8:30pm

Issue Areas: Belonging in General

Supported by: City of New Westminster

Venue: Centennial Community Centre

Participant Numbers: 55

Summary of Discussions:

New Westminster residents' vision of a healthy, connected community includes a safe environment with a small town feel and active living. It also includes support from and for local businesses with plenty of shared spaces and partnerships such as co-located facilities and housing that encourages interdependence: a welcoming place with opportunities for all.

Residents reported strong leadership and engagement in New Westminster with the city being praised for its programs and level of engagement. The services and facilities are well-used and valued but many services are at maximum capacity and some buildings, such as the high school and Massey Theatre, are in need of replacement. In addition, with more young families moving to New Westminster, additional facilities might be needed to serve changing demographics.

The downtown core is accessible and walkable and the SkyTrain makes it a central location, but its location also makes it a thoroughfare which creates issues with traffic and wear-and-tear to the city.

New Westminster has a small town feel with a mix of new developments and a richness of heritage. This is viewed as a positive and also a challenge when trying to find the balance between progress and preservation.

Attitudes toward New Westminster are slowly changing, but there are still problems with image and reputation to overcome. Overall, people are proud to call New Westminster home with its markets, festivals and parks, and want others to know about this great area.

Dotmocracy Results

Top Three Issues Areas (with number of votes)

New Westminster Cares About:

Belonging & Inclusion: 22

Poverty: 18

Aging Population: 15



What does a healthy, connected community look like?

Social Connections/Community Support/Business

- Seeing/recognizing the same people at the pool, library etc
- Running into people you know – small town feel
- Strong local businesses
- Support for local business
- Ability to feel valued
- Opportunities to share personal gifts
- Reduced isolation of seniors
- Being able to recognize faces and names
- Sharing common interests and goals
- Partnership neighbourhoods
- Business involvement in community growth
- Organizations working together serving people
- Progressive leadership
- Opportunities for building community/relationships
- Friendly and welcoming
- Meeting people you know on the street
- Ability to feel connected

Programs/Services

- Language services and programs
- Library system
- Newcomer support
- Employment services
- Education opportunities
- Community services
- Community-based facilities



Gathering Spaces

Places to meet other residents
Gathering places for young people
Public areas
Block parties
Grassroots initiatives – ways to encourage play with other kids in neighbourhoods, block parties, bridge clubs
Festivals and celebrations
Common space for kids to play – shared front yards
Variety of activities
Place to connect – boardwalk, parks, community centres etc

Safety

Sense of security through trust and support
Neighbourhood safety
Safe housing
Safe environment for seniors

Active

Active living
Walkable, bikeable
Active outdoor living
Opportunities for active living

Diversity

All ages, genders and ethnicities
Equal opportunities
Youth & New integrating with Old & Traditional
Cultural opportunities
Welcoming newcomers
Old ways and New ways working together and sharing resources
Embracing immigrants
Welcoming and accepting of Newcomers



**Built Environment/
Urban Planning**

Smart design – walking paths around new development

No gated/walled communities

Co-locating facilities – seniors and youth centre; daycare next to assisted living; seniors to interact with children/youth

Combine rental and owned space

Row housing – housing that encourages interdependence and working together

Other

Clean and beautiful

City pride

Accessible transit



What is working?

BELONGING

Resources/Facilities

Century House – blending youth and seniors activities
Recovery House
Multicultural Centre
Parks & Recreation Services
Youth/Seniors Centre – intergenerational initiative
Child care policy and grant program
Great library – place for newcomers
Auditorium conversation class
Summer connections program
People from other communities use facilities
Small town but have all the needed resources – schools, parks, rec facilities, police, fire dept etc
Great local newspapers
Russell Centre and other programs and services for homeless
Programs for families with disabilities
New civic centre
Purpose Society, Mosaic and Metro Vancouver Family Service society

Getting Around

Bike Rentals
Walkability
Skytrain
Walkable downtown core
Transportation
Central location
Good for walking
Good access to public places
Skytrain to Vancouver
No need to drive downtown
Walkable city



Gathering Places/Events

Library, Quay, boardwalks, museums – meeting places
Churches
River Market
Farmers Market
Sapperton Day Festival
Traditional festivals
Lots of community events
Farmers markets and community gardens
Lots of green space and free programs in the park
Dog parks
Square downtown
Lots of good parks
Hyak festival
Community gardens – connect people, teach children
Easter in the park
Seniors lunch in neighbourhood house

Networks

Strong leadership in New West
Great inter-agency cooperation
School leagues seem connected
Wonderful agencies and organizations partner together to get things done

City of New Westminster

Less bureaucratic at the city level
Engagement in community by city reps – mayor and council
City funding to keep people involved
Hub for New West programs
Progressive mayor-in-council
Council is very involved, approachable, active and listens to the city
Mayor and council engaged in city



Built Environment/ Heritage

Architecture
Valuing heritage of city
Richness of heritage community with new faces and voices (immigrants/
culture)
Sense of history
Kept traditions – i.e. Mayfair

Engagement

A lot of people taking initiative
Queensbough is really neighbourhood based – residents are connected
Business is starting to reach out to community

Pride

Civic pride
Feeling proud to live in New West
Local stores have sense of ownership
More ‘city’ pride than ‘areas of the city’

Other

Green movement
Mix of old and new
Small town feel
Affordable housing
New blood coming in through business – open to new ideas
Less expensive than Vancouver
Churches active in community welcoming newcomers
Doing well welcoming Filipino community



What could be improved?

Engagement

- Volunteer opportunities
- Isolation in Queensbough as a result of transit connections
- Distinct neighbourhoods in New West sometimes give a sense of disconnect
- Silos – many splintered groups
- Need role models for kids in the 6-12 age group
- Outreach to youth
- Need more block parties
- Need free space to meet – a space for all people

Reputation/Marketing

- Bad reputation
- Tends to be ‘skipped over’ compared to other communities
- Hard to attract others to visit the community
- Downtown has a poor image – stigma that it is unsafe to go downtown to shop although this is starting to slowly change
- New Westminster charms are not promoted broadly
- Image problem – needs to change image like Whalley
- Some residents almost feel like apologizing for living in New West



Built Environment/ Infrastructure/ Growth

More community oriented shopping areas
Massey Theatre – not enough room on the site
High school – physical building
City Infrastructure – spread out
High school should just be grades 11 & 12
Fear that growth might not be planned for and could impact sense of community
Investment – with changing demographics, new schools, new ice rink might be needed
Would be good to revitalize Columbia street to be more like Commercial Drive – economic stimulation – support local businesses
Create more community oriented shopping areas
Moving from house to condo is like moving into a prison block – don't know anyone, isolated
High school – no more space to grow
15- 30 year old leave the city a lot because there aren't many restaurants, movie theatre etc for them
Shouldn't have grade eight students in NWSS
Open space
Rebuilding centres for safe and clean activities for youth
Changing community – younger families moving in – need different resources

Traffic/ Getting Around

Wear and tear resulting from other communities 'driving through' - local taxes have to pay for maintenance
Traffic and access issues in certain areas i.e. Sapperton
Traffic – thoroughfare
Traffic calming – wide curbs, planters, greenways
Traffic calming needed to kids can play outside, walk to school
Wider sidewalks
More accessible space – buses, sidewalks
Access – hills can make it difficult for people with disabilities



Arts & Culture

Hasn't been much growth in the Arts
There is room for strengthening relationships in the Arts Community
Room for growth in the Arts

Newcomers

Language barriers – need to reach out and find out what immigrants want
Challenge to find out the needs of immigrants
How to welcome newcomers
Not enough places to welcome immigrants/refugees to the city
Refugee community and Aboriginal communities are in need of services

Resources/ Programs/Services

Listen to community wants
Resources are spread thin
Frequency of buses
Lack of programming for middle-aged population – more focus on child, youth and seniors
Social agencies are currently maxed out
Need a one-stop volunteer centre
There needs to be a better job done of providing physical opportunities for kids who are not in organized sports
Public partners working towards four community hubs 0 Queensborough, up town, East End, West End
Provide the people in the community with the resources to develop what they want themselves instead of building it for them
Don't have the resources that big cities have

Food

Food policy for New West – want a food charter approved by city to have as a resource
Food bank is over capacity
Need to look at urban agriculture, food programs and community gardens
Need food on the radar – brings people together



Other

Not a vibrant social life for young adults (20-30 yrs)

Free space for gathering

Poverty Issues

Importance of business investing in community

Some business/stakeholders downtown have an old way of thinking – not open to change

Groups gathering in front of coffee shop on 6th street – some feel intimidated to walk through



New Westminster Community Conversation – Post – It notes

June 20, 2011

What can you do to personally increase a sense of belonging in your community?

“Creating social space / activity at skytrain stations”

“Connect with your neighbours, new or old. Get involved with you green spaces. Support your local businesses.”

“At a free meeting space”

“Make a point to get to know your neighbour.”

“Participate in community meeting involving my community”

“Start a seniors program at the high school”

“Be a block watch family”

“Let’s Bump at Peter’s Meat Market”

“Volunteer”

“Start young. Engage young families 0-6 yrs.”

“Speak to and/or offer info, help to anyone looking lost. Tell others about community services”

“Say Hello”

“Learn the names of all my neighbours”

“Invite newcomers to join in your group. Be open and aware of others’ community needs”

“Organize a committee in the neighbourhood to hang Christmas lights on seniors’ homes”

“Make a new connection in the community every week”

“Put more resources into NWSS. After-school homework club – possibly located at the library – hire a couple of staff to help students with their homework. After-school drop-in homework to help held at the schools.”

“More involvement in community groups. Try to get others involved. Engage with others in my community”

“the library coffee shop”

“Start saying ‘hello’ again to people I pass on the street”



“Go to where the ‘people’ are to ask what they want”

“Block parties”

“Plant a row for the food bank”

“I’ve created a community based social networking resources where neighbours can connect with others who share common interests. Communityguide.ca”

“I can volunteer to help at community groups.”

“Promote community gardens & gardening workshops”

“Organize block party”

“Make people feel welcome by saying ‘hi’ and smiling”

“Offer to cut neighbours’ lawn / shovel walk”

“Getting to know your community by volunteering!! Floor party & invite people”

“Be MORE local...shop, volunteer, play...etc.”

“Community engagement and input”

“Volunteer with seniors”

“Try to expand our disability hub to more families not served for disability”

“Smile and greet strangers everyday!!”

“Say hello to a stranger”

“Volunteer to teach English to immigrant groups.”

“Clean up garbage in parks”

“Take time to talk to people, engage newcomers”

“Organize a small community come and go breakfast. Invite a core group of people, ask them to bring a friend so people can become for intimate.”

“I’ll make an effort to attend and participate in community events.”

“Interact more with my personal community that I live in. Neighbourhood event!”

“Pressure local politicians to maintain safe, inviting open spaces”

“To promote outdoor play I organize a weekly park night for neighbourhood kids so they can learn street games like kick the can, capture the flag and hide-and-go-seek.”



Vancouver Foundation would like to thank:

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