

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the concept of sustainable development and the use of sustainability indicators as they pertain to the case of southeast False Creek in Vancouver, British Columbia. Southeast False Creek is a 19.4 hectare (48 acre) parcel of waterfront property located adjacent to downtown Vancouver which has been home to various industries over the last century. During the past thirty years, the City of Vancouver has been assembling the lands at southeast False Creek for possible redevelopment. Today, southeast False Creek is one of the last large waterfront development sites in Vancouver.

Southeast False Creek is unique because the site has been resolved by Council to be redeveloped into a 'model' sustainable community. This has caught the attention of several special interest groups, academics, and the media. Issues that have been highlighted include on-site solid and liquid waste management, energy efficiencies, soil contamination, community health and safety, and the return on investment for the publicly owned lands. Although sustainable development has become the catch phrase for urban and regional planning during the 1990s, there has been some debate on the actual definition and how to implement these concepts.

Sustainable development, as coined by the Brundtland Report, can be defined as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, 43). Sustainable development considers the means to a desirable end, and can be characterized as future-oriented. Since the Brundtland Report, sustainable development, as a policy instrument, has migrated globally to the local level. This has prompted the need to have a definition of sustainable development in an urban context. First, a local definition should recognize that there are

three domains of sustainability which includes: ecological sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. Sustainable development should promote the linkages between these three domains and attempt to find a balance. Second, a local definition should possess six common principles which includes intergenerational equity, intragenerational equity, carrying capacity, economic vitality and diversity, individual & community health, and participation in governance. These principles reflect the long-term dimension of sustainable development, and integrate the ecological, social, and economic domains.

The City of Vancouver, in consultation with the Sheltair Group, have recently provided a local definition of sustainable development for southeast False Creek. The definition states that "...a sustainable urban neighbourhood integrates with its urban context while protecting and enhancing the social and economic health of its community as well as the health of local and global ecosystems" (City of Vancouver, 1998b, 7). This locally oriented definition addresses the surrounding social and economic context of southeast False Creek, and is future-oriented with respect to the ecological, social, and economic concerns of the site.

Aside from the debate regarding the definition of sustainable development, many sustainability issues have been brought forth by the media, politicians, and the general public. These issues are interrelated, and are not always understood in isolation. After a thorough review of several media articles, a total of fourteen categories can be established. They include solid waste, transportation, energy efficiency, air quality, soils, water, green spaces, land use, built form, economic development, housing, health of community, sense

of community, and stewardship. These categories are not exhaustive, but instead provide a way of understanding all of the issues and how they relate to each other.

Once a local definition of sustainable development has been agreed upon, and the issues have been discussed, consideration must be given to implementation. The use of sustainability indicators to implement the concepts of sustainable development is a relatively new planning tool. In order for sustainability indicators to be effective, they should be integrating, forward-looking, distributional, and developed with input from multiple stakeholders in the community. Communities such as Hamilton-Wentworth, Calgary, and Seattle have been developing and monitoring sustainability indicators, and they have had some degree of success. The Sheltair Group have recently produced a list of potential indicators for the City of Vancouver to consider. However, they were developed with no public participation, and little governmental involvement. Public and governmental consultation is required in establishing a set of sustainability indicators.

According to Virginia Maclaren, a community wishing to establish sustainability indicators should follow nine steps. They include clarifying sustainability goals, scoping out the audience, choosing an appropriate indicator framework, defining the selection criteria when choosing indicators, identifying potential indicators, selecting a final set of indicators, analyzing indicator results, preparing and presenting the indicator report, and assessing the indicator performance. Southeast False Creek would benefit from using this model because it would involve the media, special interest groups, politicians, bureaucrats, and the general public to find some common ground in the pursuit of a model sustainable community.

Sustainable development is not a difficult concept to understand if it is demonstrated through a case study. The use of sustainability indicators also helps to demonstrate how the principles of sustainable development can be implemented and maintained. Listed below is a series of recommendations for the City of Vancouver to consider:

1. An agreed upon definition of sustainable development is required. A definition can include a vision statement and/or a series of goals and objectives that leads to an action plan. A definition can only be done through a community consultation process which includes politicians, various stakeholders, city departments, and the general public.
2. The roles of various decision makers must be clearly established. If the Planning Department is going to lead the planning process, then they must have the support of the Real Estate Department, the Property Endowment Fund Board, and Council. Factions have been developing between city departments, and this has led to Council entertaining other redevelopment ideas for southeast False Creek.
3. An investigation of current city-wide policies for each department should be conducted using some of the indicators suggested in the Sheltair Report. This will allow the City to understand if their current policy framework promotes or contradicts the concepts of sustainable development.
4. A planning process, similar to Maclaren's nine steps in urban sustainability reporting, involving extensive public participation is required for the City of Vancouver to select appropriate indicators for southeast False Creek. Without any way to measure sustainable development, policy makers will continue to work in a vacuum. While

developing sustainability indicators, it must be kept in mind that southeast False Creek should become a model of doing development differently rather than acting as a one-time only experiment with demonstration projects.

5. It is difficult to draw a line around a neighbourhood and declare it a sustainable community because this implies that the rest of the urban region is unsustainable. In addition to establishing sustainability policies and indicators for southeast False Creek, the City and the GVRD should engage in sustainable development policies and indicators for the entire Greater Vancouver region.
6. A great deal of coordination between various city departments, the GVRD, and voluntary organizations is required in order to implement sustainability indicators. Ongoing data collection and monitoring is integral to maintaining a sustainable community.