

## METRO VANCOUVER FUTURE OF THE REGION SUSTAINABILITY DIALOGUES

### ***BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER*** July 4, 2012, SOUTH OF THE FRASER

The Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues are a series of discussions intended to assist decision makers shape the future of the region by inviting a range of views that challenge conventional wisdom and stimulate fresh thought on regional issues. The sessions explore topics such as housing, industry, labour and immigration, drugs and crime, the regional economy, transportation, energy and agriculture. The “issues summary notes,” below, provide an overview of unique points raised in the July 4, 2012, dialogue on building community. Summary notes from each regional dialogue and related board reports are available on the Metro Vancouver website [www.metrovancouver.org](http://www.metrovancouver.org).

### Issues Summary Notes

#### **ABOUT THE TOPIC:**

#### **BUILDING COMMUNITY—SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER**

- This dialogue series will explore the question of social connectedness. Though Metro Vancouver is renowned for being green, embracing diversity and scoring very high with respect to overall livability, recent research by the Vancouver Foundation suggests that many people are feeling a sense of isolation. There’s a lack of connection to neighbours and community, and by extension, a lack of connection to the city and the region.
- What do we mean by social connectivity? What might contribute to it or undermine it?
- Today we hope to consider many different facets of this issue. As residents of this region, what is your experience within your own community? What might be contributing to this trend? Is it our growing, and perhaps increasingly multicultural population? Is it our planning approaches? Is it our transition to a more digital age? Or is it something entirely different?
- How can each of us help build the social connections that support the development of strong and healthy communities?
- These are really important questions if we are to succeed in building a sustainable region.

#### **THE DIALOGUE**

##### **1.0 Context**

- Social alienation is a trend that has taken a couple of decades to emerge.
- Some common threads [in discussions about social disconnection] are trust, time and a shift in neighbourhoods.
- This process of community development is a process of educating our neighbours, elected officials and planners.



- I'm a gerontologist, so I'm particularly interested in the aging population and their connection or lack thereof to community.
- Where do we go from here? How can we look for engagement to develop neighbourhoods from where they are today to make people feel engaged in their community again?
- How do we get people who are isolated to change?
- What fundamental shifts are needed to move us toward a more connected society?

### **1.1 What is a neighbourhood?**

- There are 1,000 people in [my] building; that's as big as a prairie town. When we use this term "neighbourhood," I think we need to give some thought to what we're really talking about.

### **1.2 Types of community connection**

- There are two b-words.
  - One is bonding, or connecting with people who are similar to you, whether you all live in an apartment block or you share a particular religion.
  - The other "b" is bridging, which is connecting across different cultures.
  - Both are important, and both start with us as individuals.

### **1.3 A sense of belonging and connectedness is essential to solving community problems**

- We need to make everyone feel that they are part of one community, that we all have an equal stake in it and that we're all in the same boat.
  - We can't solve the largest issues facing our community — environmental challenges, poverty, homelessness — if we have a large group of residents sitting on the sidelines not participating.
  - As one of our survey respondents said, "How can we deal with the bigger issues in our community if we don't even trust each other enough to be able to talk about them?"
- We can't make progress if people's concerns end at their front door, or at their front yard. Or if residents are feeling bitter or resentful. A sustainable community is a connected and engaged community. [Sustainability] can't happen any other way.

### **1.4 Social connections are extremely important to health**

- The connection between [social connectedness] and health is so important. People need to be more aware of the relationship between social connection and physical, cognitive and mental health.
- Research has shown that you can decrease your chance of dying by a year for every club you join. There's a bigger chance of dying from loneliness than there is from smoking.

### **1.5 How does Vancouver compare to other cities in Canada and North America?**

- Is the trend that we're seeing in this region also present in other parts of Canada or North America? If I was in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, what similarities or differences would I see?
- [Studies] in the United States found that communities or towns that had less diversity, whether it was age diversity or ethnic diversity, had less social capital.

- If you look at communities like Toronto or Montreal that share the benefit of having a diverse population, I would expect to see the same [benefits of diversity we see here].
- In a city like Moose Jaw or Saskatoon, where they don't enjoy the kind of diversity that you see in Richmond or Vancouver, I would expect to see [lower] social capital.

## **2.0 The Vancouver Foundation's survey on connection and engagement in Metro Vancouver**

- Two weeks ago the Vancouver Foundation released the top-line findings of a major survey of 3,800 people in Metro Vancouver.
- The Vancouver Foundation has participated in all of the regional discussions so far.
- The Vancouver Foundation is not a foundation only for Vancouver: it's a foundation that gives money all over B.C. We've thought about changing our name to the B.C. Foundation, but when you have 70 years of history it's hard to give up a name.
- There was a lot of good news in the survey, but there was also some concerning news.

### **2.1 Goals of the survey**

- To examine engagement are at three different levels: the personal friendship level; within their neighbourhoods; and in the larger community of Metro Vancouver.
- To quantify how connected and engaged our community residents are and to understand what the gaps or needs are. We want to know where to put our funding to address those gaps and needs. We can't fix things unless we know what needs to be repaired.
- To measure social capital now to provide a benchmark.
  - We want to implement programs and support charities that are doing work in this area, and then measure [social capital] again four years from now to see whether [these programs] made a difference.
  - If we're going to put donors' money into the community, we want to make sure that it's having the impact that it should.

### **2.2 How the survey was done**

- We did the research in 17 different communities in Metro Vancouver. In Richmond, Vancouver and Surrey, the survey was broken into quadrants because they are such large communities.

### **2.3 Including a wide range of Vancouver residents**

- The survey was done in four different languages: Punjabi, Mandarin, Cantonese and English. [We also] had interpreters.
- Languages are imbued with values, and questions that may seem suitable in one language might seem impertinent when asked in another language.
  - If I were using Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi and English, I would have four people, each one of whom would be fluent in one of those languages.
  - The questions would initiate from each of the four languages and be translated into all the others, and there would be a comparative evaluation before they were tossed into the public forum. Maybe you already did that.
- We did have people who spoke all four languages to do the interviews.
- We would have loved to have had the financial capability to include more languages, but there was a cost every time we introduced another language.

- These were the four languages that had the most speakers in mainland Vancouver.
- When [the Vancouver Foundation] launched the survey, we met with the Chinese media to explain what we were doing.
  - There's a large percentage of the population who are Chinese-Canadian, particularly in Richmond, and the media could get the message out that when people received a phone call asking for this information it was OK: that we were a legitimate organization and that they weren't going to be identified.

#### **2.4 Survey findings about neighbourhood relationships**

- Neighbourhood relationships are cordial but shallow.
  - A lot of us know our neighbours' names but it doesn't go much beyond that.
  - Most of us have not done a favour for a neighbour, such as picking up their mail when they're away, and we don't know where their key is.
  - Few of us have had a neighbour over for a visit or visited our neighbours.
  - About half of us do not trust, or don't know whether we trust our neighbours.
- We know from statistics that neighbourhoods where people know each other's names are much safer.
- We also found that the more interaction and discussion, and the more you're dealing one-on-one with people, the greater the benefits are [in the neighbourhood]. Trust and optimism increase.

#### **2.5 The effects of diversity in neighbourhoods**

- Diversity puts a strain on our neighbourhoods, and as a community we have not fully addressed this issue.
- The more diversity there was in a neighbourhood, as measured by the number of languages spoken, the more people said:
  - they did not trust each other;
  - they did not feel welcome, or that they belonged; and
  - that it can be difficult to rally the neighbours to solve a local problem. For example, if there was a problem with speeding cars in the neighbourhood, it would be difficult to bring people together to solve it.
- Let me be clear that this is not a knock against diversity.
  - The Vancouver Foundation embraces and encourages diversity for the many benefits it brings to a community.
  - This is a reminder that we have not focused on the challenges of diversity and that we need to build bridges between different ethnic groups.
- At the larger community level, residents are tolerant of diversity, but also a bit impatient.
  - Sixty-five percent of people said they prefer to stick with people from their own ethnic background.
  - Forty-four percent feel that those who do not speak English are not trying hard enough to learn.
  - A third of us have no friends outside of our own ethnic group.
  - A third of us will easily identify who would not be welcome in our neighbourhoods.

#### **2.6 The most disconnected groups**

- A few groups kept showing up as being the most disconnected:
  - people 25–34 years old (I could make a lot of comments about technology);

- people living in apartments, condos or suites in houses; and
- [certain groups with ethnic differences] that we will be examining in more detail this summer.

## **2.7 Findings about young adults**

- We're concerned that such a large group of younger adults, about 60%, are feeling disconnected.
  - This causes them to retreat from participation in civic life, and that in turn affects their optimism and attitudes towards others in their community.
  - This is something we can't ignore.

## **2.8 Disconnection between generations**

- The report found that young people are most likely to feel that the two generations are not making enough of an effort to connect.
  - Fifty-one percent of those aged 18–34 agree that the two generations do not make an effort to get to know and understand each other.
  - Thirty percent of people over 65 agree with that statement.
- I agree [with that finding]. I've been to a number of what were supposed to be intergenerational dialogues, but these only work if more than one generation shows up.
  - [I went to an] intergenerational dialogue on sustainable transportation in Vancouver. There was a good turnout, 50-plus people, [but they were] mostly people my age. We said, "OK, we all agree . . . so what now?"
  - I don't know why the older generation didn't show up. Maybe it was the type of event. Certain events attract certain people.

## **2.9 Using the survey results and ideas from the Sustainability Dialogues**

- The survey is available online.
- Over the next couple of months, the Vancouver Foundation will take [the ideas presented in these dialogues] and come back with some suggestions for what to do. Maybe it will be a menu, or a whole catalogue of different things that communities and neighbourhoods can do.
  - All of you have got great ideas; we heard some of them today. I encourage you to go to the [Vancouver Foundation] website or email us and let us know what they are.
- We are committed to going back to the communities and sharing the results for each community with the city manager and the mayor.
  - We're quite willing to share the information with anyone who wants it.
- The survey was revealing, and it gives our foundation and other groups like planners, developers, governments, neighbourhoods, community groups and businesses the start of a roadmap.
- At the Vancouver Foundation, we are optimistic. We feel that this is a beginning. We know that we can build a bridge but we need to know where the bridge is needed.

## **2.10 Value of the Vancouver Foundation survey**

- I'd like to thank the Vancouver Foundation for bringing forward these valuable statistics. I hope people do this more often because we have a lot of different opinions and maybe statistics help us.

- The Vancouver Foundation has done a really great job at doing the work that no one has really done before, of reaching out to people and seeing how they feel. We're generally not very interested in that, but it's very important.
- I'd like to compliment the Vancouver Foundation for bringing [these results] to light, because that also brings to light some of the good stuff happening. I don't want us to forget that we have a lot to build on.

### **2.11 Similar surveys in Canada and the United States**

- As far as I know, no other survey like this has been done [in Canada]. We are encouraging other cities to do this so that we can compare the results. Some similar studies have been done in the United States.

### **3.0 Building community in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood**

- For 23 years I worked as the executive director of an organization whose mandate was to build neighbourhood and community within the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood of Vancouver.
  - [This neighbourhood] has been the subject of a film and a book called *Where Strangers Become Neighbours*.
  - Two years ago I received a fellowship to explore the changes in our neighbourhood even more deeply.
  - I was looking at both what happens to us personally when our community changes, and what an organization with a mandate to build community can do to break down social isolation and encourage citizen engagement.
- Over my fellowship year we explored the question of what the process was like for our organization and for individuals. We framed it as a process of:
  - being: bringing value and being valued;
  - belonging: engaging with others to improve your community and making that engagement as diverse as possible; and
  - becoming: everyone I talked to said that they became a greater person as a result of the diversity in their community, and that they were able to work together to achieve lot of things that improved their community.

### **3.1 Dealing with diversity in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- [The population of Renfrew-Collingwood] almost doubled over a 25-year period.
  - Currently the population is 48,000 people.
  - Diversity has increased because of immigration.
  - [Twenty-three years ago], 30% of the population had English as a second language. Today more than 74% do.
- We have a lot of diverse perspectives.
  - We learned early on that we have to let diverse perspectives come to the forefront when we try to solve problems together.
  - To create a safe place for people to bring their diverse views to the table, we made an agreement years ago that whatever happens [when we meet], we will leave as friends and neighbours.
  - [This is possible] because we all have a huge commitment to improving our communities.
- We found that language, culture and income differences really did divide us.

- Sometimes [this because of] how we plan our communities: we have a Chilean housing co-op, an Aboriginal housing co-op and people who live in poverty in one housing unit.
- We started to advocate for more mixed housing and mixed communities.
- Many people identify certain groups that they don't think have much to contribute.
  - One [group that people may have seen that way] is our Aboriginal population. We have 8% of the urban Aboriginal population in [Renfrew-Collingwood].
  - We partnered with them to see what we could do to improve the community, and they came up this incredible idea to create these beautiful carvings. We have five public carvings that an Aboriginal person taught youth how to carve.
  - Through that process, people in our community began to see that this is not a needy group; these are people who are filled with gifts and assets, and can make huge contributions in our community.
- We focus on intercultural policies and practices. Interculturalism means building bridges between people who are seen to be different.
  - It doesn't just apply to differences in ethnic cultures. We thought about differences in age, generation, income, experience and political perspective.
  - We have all of those differences in our neighbourhoods, and we've got to find a way to bring them together.

### **3.2 Diversity is an asset in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- We know, not just from our own story but from research, that when you bring diversity together, you get a greater whole. You get more dynamism, creativity and innovation. We began to see diversity not as a challenge, but as the greatest asset we have in our communities.
- When we have issues in our community, or when we want to create harmony, we have an incredible number of diverse ideas in our community. If we can bring those together we can create some spectacular things.

### **3.3 Obstacles to building connections in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- People do not have a lot of time on their hands these days.
  - Many people are working double jobs and juggling care for their children.
  - People have other commitments that don't allow them to spend time contributing to their neighbourhoods.
- We often plan for housing without planning for places for people to interact, and that can really hinder social sustainability.
  - As our communities are expanding, housing developments are coming in at a rapid pace, and sometimes [these developments are] not well thought out.
- [Concerns about safety contribute to isolation.]
  - When we set up a school walking [program], we mapped out where all the children lived. We found that two kids who were best friends in school did not know that they lived next door to one another. Their parents did not feel comfortable letting them play outside in their own yards.
  - One way to create safety is to create safe places.

### **3.4 Federal funding cuts to community-building initiatives in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- We have been working with the Aboriginal community for quite some time in [Renfrew-Collingwood]. They wanted to create a canoe club to help Aboriginal youth and everyone else in our community understand their culture.
  - This program has been operating for 12 years now.
  - The federal government recently removed their funding with two and a half weeks notice before their big pulling-together journey.
  - We're trying to find a way to rectify that situation.
  - We were very proud that when our youth got this news they were not hindered. They went out and fund-raised, and they are on their journey now.
  - When they come back they will mobilize people in our community to let the federal government and other governments know the importance of these programs.
- [We were] hugely disappointed and sad that our government does not see that these are really important investments.
  - Instead [the government] would prefer to use the investments in prisons or other social service supports.
  - [Initiatives like the canoe club] are preventive measures that encourage and engage community in a wonderful way.

### **3.5 Tools for creating connections in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- We [have taken] a very experimental attitude. Sometimes we took risks and it did not work out really well. Other times we took risks and we soared and thrived.
- Neighbourhoods have lots of places for human connection:
  - people shop in the same districts;
  - their children are likely going to school;
  - they're sharing libraries and places of learning;
  - there are recreation programs where people get to know one another; and
  - we have early childhood education programs.
- The things that connected us were:
  - our food;
  - the arts, which transcend language; and
  - our work towards gaining places where we could meet and connect.
- We have a lot of common values. We had differences, but boy, we had a lot of commonality that allowed us to move forward.
- We were able to find simple ways to make welcoming gestures:
  - saying hi to your neighbour;
  - creating welcoming environments when you come into neighbourhood institutions; and
  - taking other small steps.
  - One of our business leaders was trying to clean up the garbage outside his place. About a month later a few more businesses were starting to clean up the garbage in front of their places. Today we have 1,500 people who come out every year to clean garbage in our community, and it started with one person taking a small step and others jumping on board.
- Education is important, but so is experimentation. [We decided to] take some risks and see what we could do together.

### **3.6 Focusing on families and children created community in the long term**

- [Renfrew-Collingwood has] a very strong family orientation. We focused a lot on our children and youth.
- We've had the great luck in Collingwood of having 25 years to see kids [who were] 2, and are now 27, doing some pretty phenomenal stuff because they were born into an environment of community and engagement.

### **3.7 Combining community and city resources in Renfrew-Collingwood**

- When Collingwood Neighbourhood House was built in Collingwood Village, it was a huge development — the largest in its time. We engaged over 1,000 people in the process.
  - A lot of that was supported through the community, not the city.
  - Combining those two resources was an opportunity to engage community members who then continued their engagement for 25 years.

### **4.0 The importance of public space in building community**

- As a resident, places and spaces are really important to me.

#### **4.1 Vancouver Public Space Network**

- The Vancouver Public Space Network is a grassroots organization that works on advocacy, education and outreach pertaining to Vancouver's public spaces.

#### **4.2 The Space98 project**

- Not long ago, I began a project called "Space98" to transform a derelict 98 B-Line bus shelter at the corner of Broadway and Granville into something the community could use.
  - Right now it's just an empty shelter; buses don't stop at it. What could we use it for?
- We decided to ask the community what they'd like to see. We put up some chalkboard panels, left some chalk and waited to see what would happen. I half expected to see graffiti, profanity and someone drawing a giant penis, but that didn't happen.
- The response was overwhelming. It got people to stop, consider the space and add some ideas.
- People talked about their ideas:
  - "If there was a community garden, what would we grow?"
  - "Could we add a swing set to the bus shelter to make it a tiny playground?"
  - It was a conversation starter, and I consider it a great success.
- A few days after we started the project, a Coast Mountain Bus Company employee took everything down and left a very passive-aggressive note to cease and desist because this is private property. That's not where it ends, hopefully.
- We got a Greenest City Neighbourhood Small Grant, thanks to the Vancouver Foundation, for about \$1,000. We'll see what we can do with the community to make that space something more usable.
- I learned that with very little help, a couple of volunteers and I were able to engage our community, meet people and kick-start an idea.
  - An important thing was that instead of asking the city or an organization to do this, we went ahead and did it with very little resources.
  - We realized that sometimes we are the ones we're waiting for. That phrase is extremely important to me nowadays.
  - [It's worth] taking a risk. What can happen?

#### **4.3 It's important for municipalities and businesses to provide public spaces**

- We need to think [about public space] on an individual level, a business level and a community level.
- [At the square near where I live in Richmond], [the management of] the Starbucks where we meet people removes either a table or some more chairs from their outdoor space every six months.
  - I've spoken to the manager about how it's getting smaller and smaller outside, [and there's less space] to sit with your dog and meet people.
  - They said once in a while someone complains to the management about the tables and chairs outside.
  - We need to think about the implications of that. We're not only responsible as a community for doing things, but businesses also need to think about what they're doing.
- That square has been under renovations. I said we needed more benches, so they built a new bench, but they put it in the middle of the parking lot right by the gas station. If you don't mind sitting alone on a bench in the middle of the parking lot and breathing gas fumes, it's really nice. Unless the sun is pouring down or it's raining, because the bench doesn't have any shelter.
  - In the meantime, there's a covered space where they could have a few benches and you could sit with your grocery bag.
- I'd like the city to take seating into account. Who's going to steal a table and chair?
  - New York and San Francisco put tables and chairs out for people to use, but Vancouver is very reticent about doing that.
  - We fix tables and chairs in place and assume people will want to sit in those places. Movable tables and chairs are great things.
- We need to build spaces [that can be used by] everyone, even if [those spaces are] [privately owned], and to hold our businesses accountable for providing those spaces.
  - One of the great public spaces Vancouver has is Jack Poole Plaza, where the Olympic cauldron is. But it's not [really] a public space; it's a private space, patrolled by the [convention centre].
  - A lot of younger people gather there, and they have skateboards. The [Vancouver Convention Centre] security guards come and chase them away when they're not doing anything. They can be thrown out just because they have skateboards and they're on private property.
- Building public spaces is a hard thing to do with limited funds and spaces in the city.

#### **4.4 The polis model for shared space**

- [In the classical world, the polis was a place] where citizens came together to talk about what mattered to them.
  - [Citizens] are the repository of initiative. If they want to do something, they can do it. All we have to do is come together and talk about it.
- There are roughly 85–95 of us in this room, which is a nice, comfortable gathering. This is a really nice gathering — I appreciate it — but it's a one-off.
  - This room probably costs \$500 or so to rent for these few hours. The food is another \$500, or more.
  - Just this little gathering takes a purse of at least a grand. That's not the sort of thing that a citizen would have an interest in generating for a gathering.

- How about making a space where after work, rather than watching some sit-com or drama on TV, you go down to the neighbourhood commons and see what's going on and whether there's something interesting that you want to do? A local park could set aside a space for a polis of about 100–200 people to gather. In other words, a neighbourhood commons.
  - People can come together whenever there's an interest in discussing an issue.
  - [You would] get to know the neighbours by talking to one another regularly, and talents would rise to the occasion.
  - Maybe there would be an adjacent community garden where people could produce some produce.
  - They could decide on an initiative to generate some wind power on top of a skyscraper.
  - How about generating some jobs in the neighbourhood? What do we need? The citizens can exercise their own initiative and learn their civil abilities and civility by practicing them and doing what they choose to do.

#### **4.5 Apartment buildings should include shared space**

- Most of us live in apartments and to me it seems that apartments were meant to be apart. They're separate spaces, and we're very weak in building common spaces. We've got to work on building what I call "togetherments" rather than apartments.
- I live in an apartment. It's managed by a large property management group, and I love that they provide a communal barbecue for us.
  - They provide the propane, and it's a great community spot next to our building.
- One time a friend was house-sitting for someone in Yaletown. I went over to this condo building and you couldn't go to other floors. It locks you to your own floor. It's a gated community in the sky. That boggled my mind.
  - This is very prevalent in Vancouver, but I don't know why people do it.
- My neighbourhood is a condo with about 350 units. It's locked down. It drives me crazy and I'm glad there's a developer here.
  - There are three [treadmills] in the common sports room. I can walk on the street; I don't need a \$4,500 machine to walk.
  - What I need is space. I want ping-pong and basketball in the condo.
- I've been living in Vancouver for 50 years. Last year I moved to a new place.
  - Where I used to live, we had a laundry room and you intermixed with people there. We had a workshop; you intermixed with people in the workshop. You walked up and down the stairs to meet people.
  - Now we are sealed into our own floors with a little fob, and you can't go anywhere else.
  - We don't even have a Christmas party because the building is too big. The council said there were too many apartments.
  - You get to the elevator and you can only go to your own floor. People come out of the elevator with a Blackberry in their hand and don't even see you.
  - We have a big problem in society compared to 50 years ago.

#### **5.0 Patterns of car use can contribute to social isolation**

- Living in a suburb, my experience is that people go through their house to their garage, get in their car, open the garage door, and you see a car drive away. They come back at night, open the garage door and go into the house.

- If you ask me who my neighbours are, I can say there's someone who drives a blue Caravan and another person with a green Lexus; that's all I know.
- Fortunately I'm really outgoing and interested in community. Last year I had a garden party, and a bunch of people showed up who I'd never seen before even though they lived on my street.
- The Vancouver Foundation survey found that [the most significant reason for social disconnection] was seldom seeing [other people], for example because of our habit of driving into the garage.
  - I was talking about this survey over lunch yesterday with someone who said she knows all of her neighbours. She said, "I think the difference is that we don't have a garage. We park on the street."

### **5.1 Alternatives to driving are important to provide access to community amenities**

- I use public transit. Everywhere I go in Richmond, I have to take a bus unless I walk to the square near where I live.
- We've been on the right track in Metro Vancouver and Richmond in getting people walking. I'm amazed at the changes in Surrey in the Guildford area. We need to keep moving there. Walking and biking will make a big difference.

### **6.0 Technology use can contribute to social isolation**

- I grew up with a computer, and most of my younger siblings have spent their entire lives on Facebook.
  - I'm a social media person, but I don't use them in lieu of friendships, I use them as a tool to network. Some people rely on social media and say, "Why don't things happen?" "Why don't I see my friends more often?" Well, we should probably just pick up the phone and call them.
- People are starting to realize how lonely Facebook makes you. We need to realize that these tools aren't replacements for actual relationships.
  - I [have a Facebook account], and I spend more time using it than I probably should. I use it sometimes to catch up with people.
  - My dad joined recently, and he managed to find his boyhood friend, who he hasn't seen in 50 years. Now he's going to fly to Hong Kong and catch up.
  - Facebook is [useful for] making the initial connection, and keeping the connection, [but the social interaction has to happen in real life]. A lot of people haven't realized that yet.

### **7.0 Dogs can help build connections between people**

- I'm happy to see the motif of a dog on page 39 [of the Vancouver Foundation report], because as a dog owner [I know that] dogs foster community.
  - People will speak to you if you have a dog.
  - However, it's very hard to find an apartment in a non-dog-friendly city.
  - Dog parks also foster community, not just for the animals, but for their human companions.
- Having a dog is great, and people do talk to you. Sometimes you don't want to hear what they have to say, but it is a great conversation starter.

### **8.0 The role of time in building community**

- People do not have a lot of time on their hands these days.
  - Many people are working double jobs and juggling care for their children.

- People have other commitments that don't allow them to spend time contributing to their neighbourhoods.
- We need to allow time to grow and change.
- Outreach takes a lot of time to build trust.

### **8.1 There has been a cultural shift in how we spend our time**

- Talking to my grandparents, the way we spend our days is very different.
- The juggle between time and money is [the result of] political choices that have been made over the decades by certain frugal-thinking people who somehow don't understand that you don't have to be in the NDP to appreciate social justice and [social] interaction.
- My time is very limited. I'm now onto my second [university] degree, and I also work full-time and volunteer.
  - Learning about time management would help.

### **9.0 Cultural integration**

- In a pluralistic society like ours, we need more bonding between different ethnic and cultural groups. But that is precisely the hardest type of connection to make. We need to make an effort to make this happen.

#### **9.1 Immigrants can find it difficult to integrate in Metro Vancouver**

- I'm 45. I've lived half my life here, and [before that] I lived in India.
  - When I came here it was very difficult to integrate in this society. I lived in an apartment in North Vancouver. We definitely saw a lot of closed doors.
  - I thought that was the way it was going to be.

#### **9.2 Immigrants can bring a culture of connection to Metro Vancouver**

- When I had kids and was living in my own residence away from my parents, I knew that we had to do something different.
  - It started with a cup of milk. We had some friends over and we didn't have milk. My husband said, "Wouldn't it be nice if it was like India and we could just go to the next-door neighbour and get a cup of milk?" And that's exactly what we did.
- There are time management [benefits to working together with our neighbours]. My kids can go and play with the neighbour's kids while I do the laundry or wash the dishes.
  - That understanding and awareness, and rekindling of the concept of interdependence is so important in community connection.
  - I've seen that [in India] and I see that happening here now. It's great for our future generations.

#### **9.3 How significant are language barriers for new immigrants?**

- I spoke English [when I came to Canada], so I can imagine the barriers people who do not speak English face: how hard it might be to go to the next door neighbours and mingle with them.
- The [Vancouver Foundation] survey showed that a language barrier was not the most significant reason why people didn't connect. In fact, [the reason was not seeing each other].

## **10.0 Individuals and communities can take the initiative in building community**

- As individuals, we need to take responsibility. I don't know how we can encourage this.
- It's up to each one of us to take the first step.
- It takes experimentation to find ways [of building community]. I often work with groups who invite other groups to come and join them. Often nobody shows up and they wonder why.
- Doing work with neighbourhood houses and reconnecting neighbourhoods is a really important factor [in feeling connected].
- We often expect people to come to us rather than going to people.
  - Outreach takes a lot of time to build trust, particularly with really marginalized populations and groups that are very isolated. My heart was broken one day when I went into a home to find out what we could do to encourage this culture's involvement in the community and they told me that nobody had ever come to them and asked them that. And yet they had been in our community for quite some time.
  - We think that kind of outreach isn't needed anymore, but it is.
- Your wonderful story about what you want to contribute as an artist is an example of how we each can take responsibility.
- We've become quite professionalized in how we create communities, and we've underestimated what communities can do for themselves. We have to find a way to get that balance back and not think about centralized power. [Consider the story about reusing the TransLink bus shelter]: that community had a great idea for improving that resource and we need to see that as an asset rather than as a challenge.
- I'm a citizen of Richmond and a member of the Baha'i community. The Baha'i community has divided Richmond into four quadrants, and we're going to develop the neighbourhoods.
  - What we have found is that we have to go at this in a learning mode. We don't have all the answers, and we have few workers at the moment.
  - It has been a wonderful experience to focus on how to develop a neighbourhood community.

### **10.1 People will follow an example**

- Sometimes we are the ones we're waiting for.
  - If we want more community, sometimes we have to provide it ourselves.
  - I believe that people will follow an example.
  - It's a very difficult job to convince people that voting and volunteering are good things, but we've got to be the ambassadors and show the way.

### **10.2 Building community requires a shift in thinking**

- Instead of thinking about what if things go wrong, [we can think about] what if everything goes well. We often don't think that way.
- There are some attitudes we need to change. We need to:
  - think of ourselves as contributors, not people who receive services;
  - think of diversity as an asset, not just a challenge;
  - be open when people come up with ideas so that we can use the best resources we have available to us;
  - think about how we've centralized and professionalized, and how to shift towards a more decentralized and community approach to the work we do; and

- have an intention take the initiative to bridge social gaps and break down isolation.

### **11.0 Building community requires specific social skills**

- I'm observing that some people don't have the life skills for community engagement.
- Engaging your neighbours in a condo is quite difficult because a lot of them used to have houses and have downsized to condos, and they don't have the life skills for getting along with neighbours.
  - The old-timers in my building who grew up in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, built farm buildings together and had parties. They still have the attitude of [wanting] a Christmas potluck.
  - Then you have a gap where people [take the attitude that] "We just live here, we don't have to socialize with you." Or "What's in it for me if I go to sit at a city council meeting and complain about the traffic lights?"
- A lot of us don't know how to engage other people. [Younger people like me] don't know how anymore, which is kind of scary.
  - When I get in the elevator, I don't want to talk to anyone. I'll take out my phone and pretend I don't see you.
  - When I'm walking down the street, I have my iPod on. Changing those behaviours will take time.
- I'm not a shy person. I grew up moving every year, like an air force brat. I grew up to be assertive and curious. I've been called nosy, but then people know who to come to to find something out.

### **11.1 We need to encourage skilled social connectors**

- [Building social connections in the community] requires a certain chemistry or certain personalities.
  - Champions have to be identified, and they can't always be the same old players.
  - I often bring someone [to a meeting] who's never been before, whether it's a teenager, a senior citizen, a soup kitchen [client] or anyone, and then they'll go again by themselves. I say, "I don't want to go alone. Would you come with me?"
  - We need to do that kind of initiative more often.
- There are some people who are natural connectors.
  - We all have them in our neighbourhoods, on our streets and in our buildings.
  - We need to shine light on them and bring them forward, but engagement is also something that can be taught.
  - Your children who play with your next-door neighbour's children are getting engaged at a very early age. They will become youth and then young adults who are more engaged. That's a long-term investment.
- Businesses teach certain life skills for networking and connecting, and doing good for charity, but then people go home and close the door and don't know the neighbours.
  - They don't seem to transfer the knowledge and skills from one place to another.
- If you ask a busy person to get something done, it gets done.

### **12.0 Fostering engagement among children and young adults**

- There are youth who are engaged, as I am, and there are lots that aren't.

### **12.1 Maintaining community engagement as children become adults**

- The youth who are engaged in the community play [with other children], and we encourage that.

- When they become young adults there's a disconnect. They forget the engagement they had in their [childhood] and how they knocked on doors to get their neighbours to come out and play.
- There is a next step. How can we get the 24–36 age group that we heard about in the study better engaged?

## **12.2 Creating intergenerational links**

- How can the aging population get a better understanding of that group? We have those groups mixing in neighbourhoods.
- One of the ways of making a link between intergenerational groups is through mentoring.
  - I'm involved with the City of Vancouver as a Seniors Advisory Committee member, helping younger planners because they have parted company with the older crowd.
  - There are a lot of young people in the social planning department. They are very grateful.
  - There is a way of doing it. I don't treat them like children. Every child is an independent human being with their own soul. I don't treat young people in any way that will be detrimental to building intergenerational relationships.

## **12.3 Respecting the contributions of young adults**

- Some of the key findings from a B.C. youth summit on sustainable transportation are that youth don't need to be pandered to or looked on as naive.
  - We're looking for allies to teach us skills and empower us to make decisions.
  - Youth engagement can take many forms, for instance protesting. When we do that you can see the backlash in the mainstream media. The backlash is that we're "entitled" or "why aren't they working right now?" We work, and we work pretty hard, because school and living in Vancouver are expensive and we don't have a lot of the resources that older people do.

## **12.4 Creating more accessible community development education programs**

- [Social planning] is very institutionalized.
  - There are many very interesting programs in the city. There's one called the City Program that City of Vancouver is putting on to help them their greenest city goals. They've partnered with Langara, Emily Carr, UBC and SFU. It's a very cool program, bringing together all these university students, but what about people who aren't in school?
  - It's very difficult for people my age to get in the door without a formal education. I'm pursuing my master's degree because it's necessary. When I graduated I decided I wanted to do urban planning. I got rejected from school because I didn't have a geography background, but I had the passion and will to do it. There aren't many programs for people like me who want to learn urban planning, because [the programs] are all geared toward this professionalization or institutionalization.
  - The City of Surrey does a really cool transportation lecture program to teach people what the city does for transportation planning. It's open to the general public. You write a cheque for \$300 and if you go to every class you get it back. It's a very inventive idea. The City of Portland does the same thing. This is educating the public about the city's decision-making policies and engaging people. It also creates community within the class, with very little cost to the person, and it goes outside the more formal education process.

## **12.5 Grants to youth for sustainability ideas**

- Last year for Vancouver's 125th birthday, [the Vancouver Foundation] ran a program to offer grants to youth aged 8–24.
  - The grants were for ideas to make the city greener and more sustainable. We were blown away by the ideas that these youth came up with. It was amazing. We got so much feedback from a number of people and from schools who did it as a class.
  - It was so successful that we approached the City of Vancouver about doing it again this year. We put in \$50,000 and they put in the same, and we're running it in Vancouver.
  - If you want to do something concrete, encourage Richmond council to do the same thing: we'll put in \$50,000 if they put in the same. We'll run a program in Richmond for youth and get the kind of ideas that you're talking about.
  - [Youth are] so much smarter than most of us, and they've got some incredible ideas. All they need is the encouragement to be able to express them. It's not a very costly thing to do. Sometimes their ideas are as little as \$1,000-\$2,000.

## **12.6 Including youth in community organizations**

- One of the definitions of lunacy that I've heard is to do exactly the same thing and expect different results.
  - In Richmond we are heavily dependent for our community and social structure on community organizations and groups. My experience is that they're very reluctant to change to accommodate a new world order and a new community. The comment was the Vancouver Foundation wants to change its name but with 70 years of history, we don't want to change.
  - I often go work with groups and find that when I walk into a board meeting I'm the youngest guy in the room. That's not a really good sign for healthy community organizations.
  - How can community organizations rejuvenate or change themselves so that they're more interesting and engaging for the younger, emerging community?
- For the last couple of years, the Vancouver Foundation has been talking about how to get more youth involved. We started a youth advisory group with a priority of youth homelessness.
  - One of our younger staff looked perplexed when I said we needed to get more youth engaged in this discussion. She said, "I think you need to ask yourself what you mean by youth engagement. For you, youth engagement means you've already decided what direction you're going and you just want some youth to support that."
  - Our youth advisory committee has been very successful. This is hard in a network like the Vancouver Foundation, which was an old boys' network for so many years. We brought the youth together and supported them in the direction they decided on. As easy as that is to say, it's really hard to do, because you think you've got the right answer. That's a big challenge for all of us.

## **12.7 Making the community more welcoming to youth**

- A number of years ago we had absolutely nothing for youth in Renfrew-Collingwood. We decided to invest in youth and youth leadership.
  - It's been about 15 years since we did that and we have youth engaged from as young as 10 years old to whenever youth ends. They are involved and engaged.
- There's no place they can go in our community where people aren't willing to support their ideas.

- Somebody comes to [a business] and suggests a change, and the business community engages them and says, “OK, what can we do to support you to do that?”
- If it’s a problem, for example, if it’s illegal, then we explain that and do some problem-solving. We moved all of those organizations from just thinking unilaterally to thinking more like a community.
- Because of the experiences that they had in their engagement with youth they grew incredibly. They thought they would be mentoring and helping these youth along, but they got much more out of the experience than some of the youth did.
- One of our greatest prides is how we have been able to engage youth and keep their engagement over time. They go to university and come back, and they’re still contributing. We have to think long-term, but also think about getting people out of their protective environments and into a community environment.

### **13.0 Short-term versus long-term solutions**

- How might our short-term solutions differ from our long-term solutions?
- I’m not sure I would think of [the approaches] as differing. [Building community] requires a long-term investment.
  - Our short-term initiatives need to build into the long-term vision of what we’re trying to do. I don’t see them as separate; I see them as interconnected.
  - We have both short- and long-term measures for environmental and economic sustainability. We have to start thinking about social sustainability in the same way.

### **13.1 Short-term measures for building community**

- There are things that each of us can do in the short term.
  - Set a goal that you will meet six of your neighbours by year-end.
  - When you’re walking your dog or walking to the bus stop, smile and say hello. Even if the person looks at you as if you’re some alien, don’t give up.
  - It is the first day of summer, as far as I can tell, so go home and barbecue and invite a neighbour over.
- In the short term it takes all of us committing to reach out.
- It’s always going to be a work in progress, but there are things we can change immediately about our built environment. Maybe we can unlock the floors and have a Christmas party.
- Each of us as individuals needs to say, “We can do it.”
  - Having a common room to hold a Christmas party in is one way of doing it, but if the developer built that building without a common room I’d say to hell with them. Do a Christmas party on your floor where you eat something at every person’s apartment on the floor. Don’t let it be an obstacle. Put your creative hat on. We don’t have to accept this.
  - Each of us can take responsibility for doing what we feel needs to happen. I’m not saying [we should try to] get back to the way it was when I was growing up, when you could leave your bike on the lawn at night and you’d know it would be there in the morning. I’m saying that things need to get better than they are.
- If the facility doesn’t allow [an activity], sometimes people need to give notices out that we’re meeting at a local restaurant, a neighbourhood pub or a community centre. Someone has to step out and coordinate this form of engagement.
- Meet in the building’s lobby.

### **13.2 Long-term measures for building community**

- The longer-term issue that we need to talk about, although nobody wants to talk about it, is how to build bridges between different ethnic groups.
- In the longer term [we need to] involve more organizations or perhaps even local government to get meeting places, benches in parks where people can sit down and talk, and building a community garden.

### **14.0 Regional and municipal roles in supporting community connection**

#### **14.1 Metro Vancouver should include building community in its sustainability goals**

- Sustainability includes a social aspect; it's not just environmental or economic.
- I propose that building community [should be considered part of] sustainability. This might help academics, planners and developers understand this way of thinking.
  - I encourage Metro Vancouver to educate the municipal planners in order to take down barriers and help them understand what community development is.
  - It took me [as a developer] a long time to understand what [community development] is.
- [Attempts to create a] complete community and social sustainability should be included in the planning cycle. Studies like [the Vancouver Foundation's] will hopefully shed some light and allow us to move forward.
- It's really easy to quantify environmental standards and economic worth, but how do you quantify social value?
  - How do you measure happiness and social connectedness?
  - This report definitely helps. We don't have a LEED standard for social connections, and maybe we should.
  - [The social connectedness standard] is definitely not the number of Facebook connections a person has.

#### **14.2 Metro Vancouver should provide clear guidelines for community development**

- What does goal four in the Metro Vancouver 2040 regional growth strategy: "Develop complete communities" mean exactly? I hope Metro Vancouver tells us more about that.
- There seems to be a lot of confusion [about the responsibilities of municipalities, communities and developers]. What are your experiences at the municipal level? How receptive have [municipalities] been to integrating community development into housing [development] and community planning?
- Vancouver takes a community amenity contribution as part of the land lift, which goes into a general pool.
  - [How is that used] locally? [Could we use it to create] community gardens?

#### **14.3 The Vancouver municipality's social planning department**

- I have a lot of experience with the Vancouver municipality and I think they are incredible in being able to engage residents through their social planning and planning departments.
  - When Collingwood Neighbourhood House was built, [the city helped engage] more than 1,000 people in the process.

#### **14.4 City planners should suggest community-friendly options when people request zoning changes**

- My daughter and her children are moving into a development that I think was designed have people bump into each other.
  - There's a group of youth who are walking along the walkway between their houses.
  - When I was growing up, we would probably have connected with those youth. What [the people who live there now] did was go to the city and fight for permission to build fences with locked gates to keep the neighbourhood children out.
  - To my mind they have a community problem, not a gate problem. The city planners, TransLink, Coast Mountain and so on need to be educated so that when the community comes to them they can go back and say, "What about a block watch?"
  - What happened to block watch? It used to be everywhere and it's really gone quite small now.

#### **14.5 Municipal governments should create community development planning positions**

- I'm a community development coordinator for regional parks. My role is to facilitate groups like [the Vancouver Public Space Network] to realize their passion and their ideas. In parks it might be a history project, a stream restoration, removing invasive plant species or whatever the public can imagine. The community is a community of people around the park, and that doesn't have to be geographical.
  - Just as there are environmental planners, transportation planners, social planners and urban design planners, there is a role in municipal government for community development planning. [The Vancouver Foundation] research has identified that people who live in condos and apartments are one of the largest demographic groups in isolation and diminishing civic engagement: perhaps you can facilitate people who live in condos to build gardens.
  - How can we balance out social connection with the increasing density of housing unless we have a community development planner? [This planner could] make sure designs don't just filter through environmental regulations, design guidelines, social planning and engineering, but also through community development measures.
  - There didn't used to be affordable housing toolkits and now there are tons of tools in the affordable housing toolkit, because there was a focus on that.
  - Maybe the Vancouver Foundation could consider what tools a community development planner might bring to building the bridges that we talked about earlier. The municipality could take that recommendation, and there would be another position like mine.
  - My position is very effective in regional parks, and [a similar position] could be just as effective in overcoming the problems that your research has found and implementing the ideas that people here have identified.

#### **14.6 Municipal response to the Vancouver Foundation survey**

- When [the Vancouver Foundation] met with the [Richmond] city manager about doing [the Vancouver Foundation] study, he was incredibly supportive.
  - We talked to him about breaking Richmond into four quadrants instead of getting one big view of Richmond.
  - He and the mayor are very interested in hearing the results to see what's working in Richmond, what isn't working and where the difference is. And [to see] how we can develop some of the initiatives [that we identify from the survey results].
  - They certainly showed interest in hearing the results of the survey.

#### **14.7 Making the Metro Vancouver Sustainability Dialogues accessible to a wider range of people**

- In the future, can Metro Vancouver design these forums in a more diversity-friendly way, with expectations for diversity?
  - Being held on a work day, on the fourth of July, this event hasn't really been designed in a way that [facilitates a wide range of people attending].
  - The breakfast meetings have all been good for people who work. But [although] at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue there have been work people coming, maybe that doesn't happen so much here in the suburbs.
  - You don't have a lot of young people coming because this is not a time or place where they would come.
  - I'd like to see you consider [attracting a wider range of people] as one of your predominant focuses as you design more forums.
- Making forums like this available on an evening or a weekend would bring out more people.
- That's a valid comment that Metro Vancouver will look at in the future.
  - [Maybe Metro Vancouver can] move away from a lunchtime activity to the morning or evening.
  - We'll take that suggestion and see how we can deal with it.
- The timing and location of meetings are important, but it's also important that the panel represents the community.
  - We have the age difference [represented here], but I think it is equally important that you have people [from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds].
  - One of the barriers to feeling a sense of belonging that people mentioned [in the Vancouver Foundation survey] is whether or not they were represented in the community in different institutions or entities. I encourage Metro Vancouver to consider that.
  - Whether it's ethnic diversity or having First Nations representation, the best kind of dialogue comes when people can see themselves as part of the institution as well.

#### **14.8 Community amenities are needed to support people's community-building projects**

- I'm Dene, known as Navajo. I'm from the United States and I've been here since 1997.
  - I'm in the arts; I'm a filmmaker. Filmmakers don't retire.
  - When I had jams, I used to go to my friends and colleagues from UCLA film school and ask them [for help] with problems, but I don't have that [community] here.
  - There's a local arts community in Newton [Cultural Centre] that I was trying to join, but I felt their fee of \$25 was a little bit too high for me, because I'm a low-income artist. I really wasn't given a good answer for why they couldn't lower their fee for a low-income artist like me.
  - Volunteering would be a great way to get involved. I've volunteered with SPCA cat care, and I like that, but I'm still an artist, [and I would like opportunities to volunteer as an artist].
- It's very frustrating not to have [community] resources as an artist. It's really hard. If you have money it's a different story.
  - I use the computer a lot — it's a tool of my trade — and [my own computer] conked out.

- I went to the local seniors' centre near the library and their didn't have any computers you could use for many hours. The director of the senior's centre said they don't get money from the city. I use a computer for a long time, because sometimes it takes a long time to work on a resume and biography. They only give me one hour at the local library [in Surrey].
- In Vancouver there's a women's collective where women can use the computer and other resources all day. There's Aboriginal access in the Aboriginal centre, and there's the arts centre, which is great. They have that in Vancouver, but we don't have that in Surrey.
- Housing is a problem too, [especially] if you have cats.
- Since I'm in the arts, I have a lot of great ideas.
  - I want to create a still photography show for indigenous still photographers. I don't see that in Vancouver and I think it would be a great thing. You see film video making, but not still photography.
  - I was a part of Image, a now-defunct indigenous film and video festival. I managed one of the programs, so I know how to do that kind of thing.
  - As an artist, a film and video maker, I want to create shows that will [create awareness of aboriginal contributions]. The community can attend the show and see that there are photographers out there who can create great pictures.
  - That's what I want to do. That's how I think. I could change [the community].

#### **14.9 Public information campaigns could promote community engagement**

- Look at how we've changed attitudes about the environment.
  - Richmond was trying to get people to get low-flush toilets to save water and seniors were saying, "Why should I change? I'm not going to be here long enough to take advantage of the savings."
  - There was a lot of encouragement, discounts and material going to the condo complexes, and slowly, it's changing. Maybe we can do a similar thing with some of these concepts.

#### **14.10 Getting the City of Richmond more involved with the Fraser Valley**

- I would like to see more involvement with the valley. I didn't even know Richmond was part of the valley. There's so much happening out in the valley as well as Richmond and Vancouver; it would be really nice to hear some of those things.
- On that point of being part of the valley, occasionally we're referred to as south of the Fraser. Sometimes we're in the Fraser and sometimes we're north of the Fraser. It depends on the cause and where they want to place us.

#### **14.11 Vancouver planning should include health care co-ops**

- [We know that there are questions about] the sustainability of the healthcare system, which is really an illness care system. [Can Vancouver's community amenity contribution be used to provide] a healthcare co-op for us to stay healthy? I have been lobbying the ministry to discuss that. They don't know what a healthcare co-op is, and that it could be delivered to the local community, or that there's a Canadian Federation of Healthcare Co-ops.
- As a society we like health care more than health.

## **15.0 Living communities are an idea for creating connected communities**

- I'm the director of a non-profit that promotes the concept of "living communities." I've been promoting living communities since 1992, helping put projects together in North America, mostly in B.C. We've got about 10 projects in B.C.
  - I appreciate what's been said about the social ills of being disconnected, alone and isolated. When I moved into my single-family dream house I felt very disconnected from my neighbours. I felt there was something missing and I was looking for a different way.
  - A "dead" community is one where there are no connections. I felt dead in my connections with my neighbours.

### **15.1 Co-housing**

- Co-housing is building new communities or reorganizing existing communities so they are more livable.
  - People at a grassroots level get together and create connections and as a result will feel more connected to their larger neighbourhoods, communities and their region.
  - There's a huge environmental impact and effect.
- I encourage everyone to learn more about this pattern of doing things. There's a website at [www.cohousing.ca](http://www.cohousing.ca).
- I find co-housing different and fascinating.
  - I'm considering where I want to spend the next 30 years.
  - Community is very important to me. I came from Edmonton, at a time when they had very strong communities, and I found it very hard here.
  - You should consider the co-housing model's ideas for working together and being together in a community. It's different than a co-op.
  - I've worked a long time with seniors and I'm fascinated with seniors' co-housing, where [seniors are] able to manage their housing and community rather than paying for a private facility that does it for them.