

FINAL PROPOSALS

The Downtown Hastings Project

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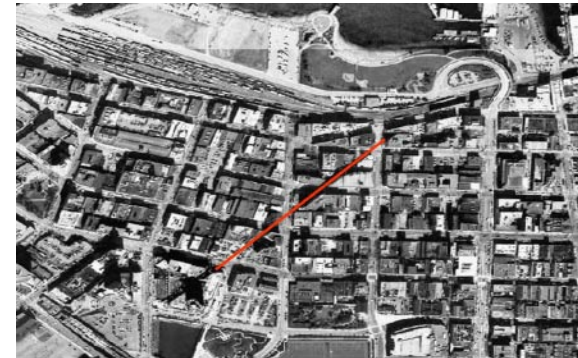
BCE Building - Carrall at Hastings



CPR Right-of-way at Hastings and Pigeon Park



CPR Right-of-way: Plan view (1886)



CPR Right-of-way: Plan view (1994)

GOAL

Through the application of a holistic (social, economic and ecological) design approach, we propose to convert the old CPR right of way into a pedestrian-oriented way which serves as an armature of revitalization and investment into the surrounding urban context, connects the existing and new communities within the Downtown Eastside and False Creek areas, acts as a centre of diverse public activities and opportunities, and contributes to the creation of a socially equitable, cohesive and liveable urban environment.



The site's urban fabric is quite dense within built-up areas (approximately 35 units per acre or 87 units per hectare). Land uses are typically mixed within buildings, and the streetscapes and building typologies reflect the site's former role as Vancouver's central business and warehousing district - especially within Gastown, Chinatown and along Hastings Street. Buildings are predominantly low to mid-rise (with the exception of International Village and City Gate), and many have significant heritage character. The site also contains the Vancouver Port Lands (along Burrard Inlet), once considered for casino development, and vacant former Expo 86 lands south of the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts.

The physical framework of the old CPR right-of-way is evident within the site, cutting through the city fabric in a north-east to south-west direction and intersecting portions Gastown, the Hastings Corridor (at Carrall Street), and International Village (which is immediately west of Chinatown). The arcade segment of the Tinseltown Mall is oriented along the old right-of-way.

SITE CONTEXT

Located immediately east of downtown Vancouver central business district, the proposal site is bounded by Burrard Inlet to the north, Cambie Street to the west, False Creek to the south and Main Street to the east. Covering approximately 200 acres or 80 hectares, the existing site is one of the main entry points into the downtown peninsula. It contains a population of approximately 9,000 people, and is composed of a myriad of distinct neighbourhoods and districts, ethnic and age groups, income brackets and land uses. Gastown, Chinatown, Victory Square, the Downtown Eastside, International Village area, North-East False Creek and City Gate comprise the neighbourhoods/districts within the site.



Unemployed Workers on Hastings - 1930s



Burrard Inlet Waterfront



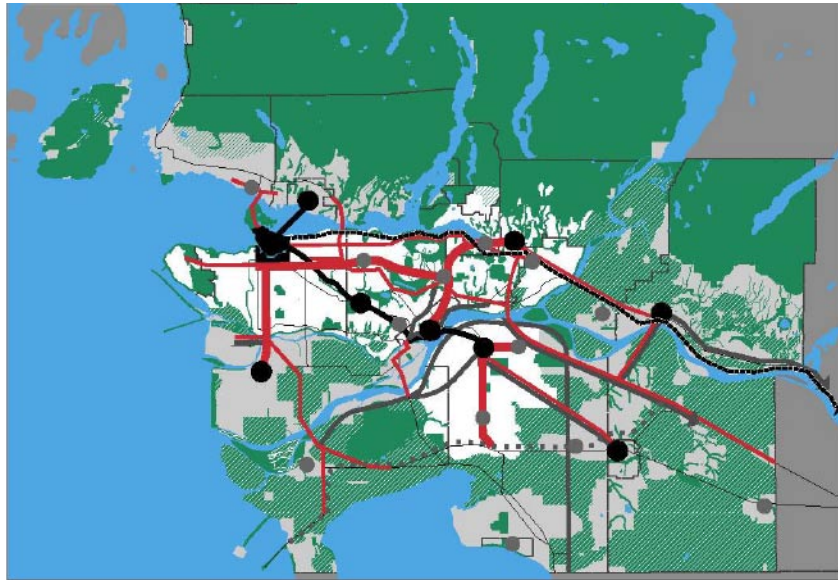
North-East False Creek Area

The narrow lots and short blocks found in the northern half of the site are indicative of late 19th/early 20th century pedestrian and street-car based development. The newer developments of International Village and City Gate, on the other hand, are contained in large 10 to 20 acre blocks. Within the Gastown, Hastings Corridor and Chinatown areas, building heights average between 40 to 70 feet, contain narrow frontages, little or no setbacks and 75 to 100 percent lot coverages. The current zoning for the Gastown, Chinatown and the Victory Square portion of the Hastings Corridor reflect commitments to preserve existing buildings and their heritage character. The newer developments,

involving tall (250 to 350 feet) residential point towers, reflect regional and City-based initiatives to increase density around the current central business district. However, as areas on the periphery of the site are currently undergoing densification, the core of the site (along the Hastings Corridor) remains a 'density hole', where numerous commercial and residential buildings remain empty.

The majority of the built form within the northern half of the site is a part of the Downtown Eastside community, considered to be Canada's poorest postal code. Seventy percent of persons in this area are classified as low income, and are either housed in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels, non-market housing projects, or are homeless. Although the area has been characterized as low-income since the early part of this century, the shift of central business functions to Georgia and Granville in the fifties, the closure of Woodward's at Hastings and Abbott, and the decline in affordable housing stock during the last two decades has resulted in rapid commercial abandonment in the area. Ultimately, these events have resulted in increasing homelessness and a stigmatized image.

Recently, areas within and around the site have witnessed new developments (International Village, City Gate, and condos in Gastown) which are putting pressure on land values. Land values are the highest around the edges of the site and are lowest along the Hastings Corridor between Cambie and Abbott - coinciding with the residential and commercial abandonment found in this area. It seems that the Hastings Corridor is becoming surrounded by increasing land values, a situation which may result in the increased conversion of SRO rooms into hotel or market units (or demolition for market housing). Furthermore, the traditional number of low-income units (4500) in the area may be eroded through increased market development. Trends like these will most likely only serve to exacerbate homelessness within the Downtown Eastside.



Liveable Region Strategic Plan - Greater Vancouver Regional District (1996)

WHY THIS SITE?

Although this design proposal is based on a holistic approach in terms of considering social, economic and ecological issues, priority will be given to enhancing liveability, social equity, and economic vitality. Following this priority, there are a number of excellent opportunities to develop and apply design interventions which attempt to enhance the site. These opportunities are as follows.

1)The development of this pedestrian corridor and its environs provides the opportunity for the revitalization, restoration, and densification of the existing urban fabric through the provision of additional housing, community oriented commercial and civic uses, increased parkland (and access) and transportation choice and equity for residents.

Given that the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Liveable Region Strategic Plan calls for the concentration of 70 percent of future regional growth into the Growth Concentration Area of Vancouver, Burnaby, the North East sector, and North Surrey, and that the site is 35 percent vacant, it offers an excellent opportunity to meet these regional growth objectives while densifying an underutilized urban site.

2)The existing urban form, layout and buildings provides opportunities for mixed income housing scenarios, existing and potential densities are appropriate for rapid transit, and topography and building typologies provide opportunities for ecological infrastructure (including Storm Water Management-SWM) and local agriculture. The majority of the buildings within the site have flat roofs, providing opportunities for roof-top gardens and rainwater catchment. The pedestrian way is located in a natural valley, and could serve as a means of funnelling away runoff from surrounding streets and building rooftops along its length and the direct the runoff to SWM ponds at the two end points. Also, the increased density, coupled with SWM ponds, provides opportunities for district heating through heat pump technologies - potentially leading to lower utility costs and perhaps lower rents.

3)The fact that infrastructure and built form is already present provides excellent infill opportunities and savings in terms of emplacing new infrastructure (public expenditures and energy) relative to developing greenfield and/or brownfield sites from scratch.



Orthographic Photo - Greater Vancouver Regional District

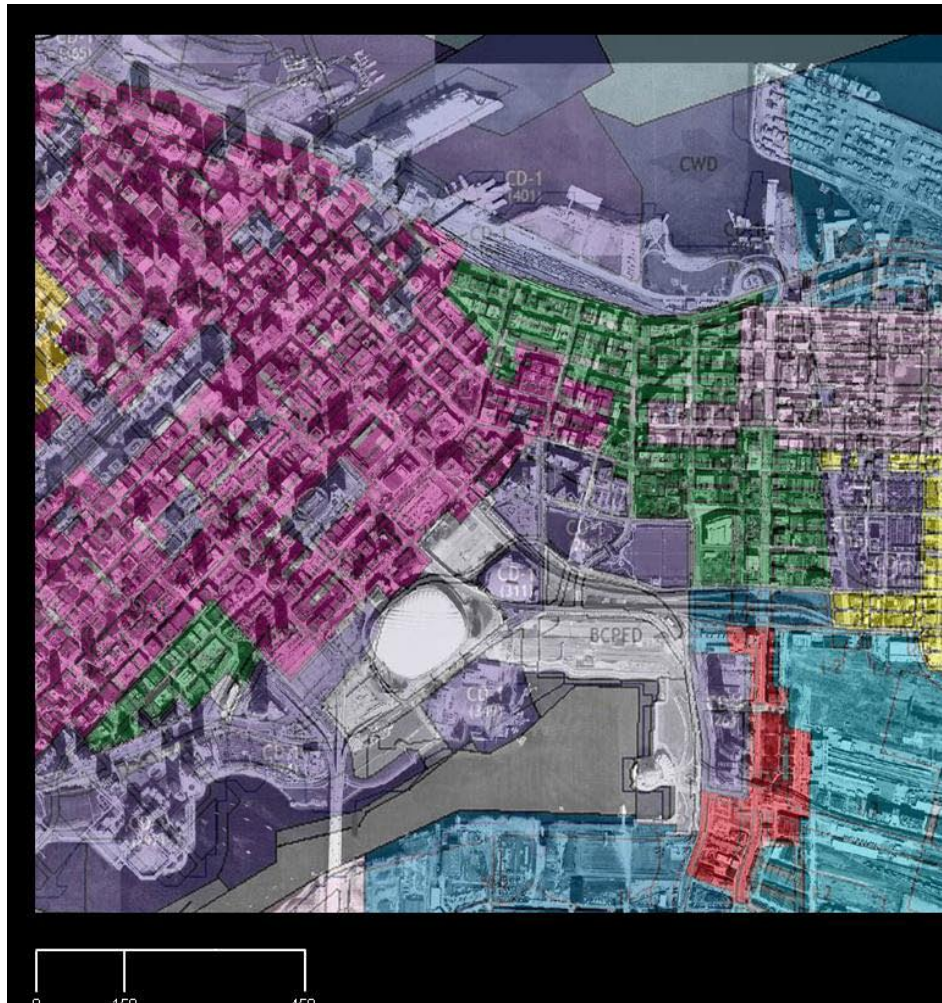
4) Existing SkyTrain, conventional bus transit and West Coast Express commuter rail infrastructure provides another excellent reason to densify this site. Increasing density around these facilities will put more people within easy walking distance of local and regional transit. This will in turn serve to reduce reliance on the automobile, and increase transit ridership and revenues. The pedestrian way will also serve as a convenient and timely pedestrian connection between the Stadium SkyTrain station, bus routes along Pender, Hastings and Cordova and the myriad of proposed uses along its extent.

5) The development of the pedestrian way may provide opportunities to create a more diverse social environment and unique spaces which gives residents an enhanced sense of security, place and belonging, and provides visitors a safe and interesting journey involving a myriad of people, spaces and details.

6) Lastly, the development of the pedestrian way, along with the aforementioned complementary initiatives, could serve as a catalyst for enhancing the entire area in social, ecological and economic terms. The enhancement of this area will only serve to benefit the entire region - the region is only as healthy as its sites. This area could serve as a model of working towards a more equitable and liveable urban environment. Hopefully this design proposal will play a significant role in working towards remedying some of the area's social problems.

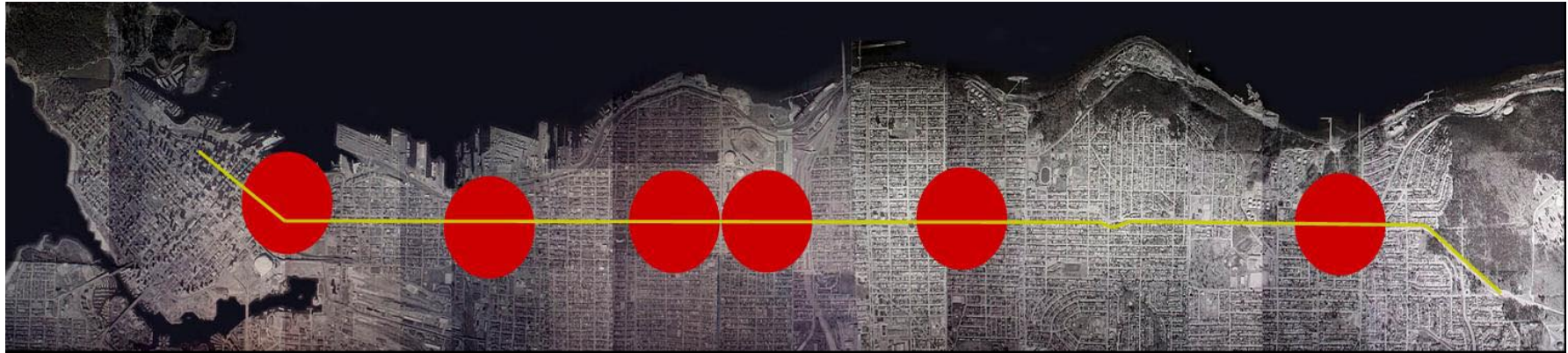


Aerial Photo of Downtown Vancouver Peninsula (2001)



ZONING DISTRICTS

- North East False Creek (BCPED)
- Comprehensive Development (CD-1)
- Central Waterfront (CWD)
- Chinatown (HA-1/1A)
- Downtown (DD)
- Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer (CD-1/DEOD)
- East False Creek (FC)
- Gastown (HA-2)
- Industrial (I-2)
- Industrial (M-2)



Sites of Investigation along Hastings - throughout studio duration



Current Site of investigation



CPR Right-of-way - from Tinsel Town (International Village)

“ Generally in the past, new urban networks have started by connecting existing activity nodes that had been made possible and sustained by earlier networks....Then, like parasites taking over their hosts, they have transformed the functioning of the systems on which they were superimposed, redistributed activities within these systems, and eventually extended them in unprecedented ways.”

William Mitchell, e-topia (1999)

Final Proposals: Vince Barter, Carl Johanssen and Erick Vilagomez