

## **SUMMARY NOTES OF “VISION COMMITTEE” MEETING**

Attended by Ann-Marie Neudorf, Andre Pekovich, Wally Braul and (for a while) John Friesen.

Based on the initial meeting at the Friesens, we understood the committee’s role to be two-fold: (a) identify the main themes which arose at the initial meeting, and (b) suggest practical next steps for the immediate future.

### **MAIN THEMES**

In no particular order, the themes identified by the committee included the following.

#### **General Vision**

Broadly stated, the meeting at the Friesens endorsed the concept of a residential development based on shared Christian values such as community and mutual support. Although not stated expressly at the meeting, we understand that such a residential development will be informed by an Anabaptist view. The committee also observed seemingly broad support for the idea that there is value in living in proximity to each other, especially if we are committed to the same larger church. There is also broad acceptance of the goal to reduce the cost of residential living.

#### **Diversity of Residents**

A common theme at the Friesens was the need to plan for diversity. Recognize the following: many in our community are aging and may require some degree of medical support (short of extended care) and units amenable for ageing folks; young couples and new families have a difficult time locating on the west side; students are our “project”; diversity of views is part of who we are.

#### **There are Many Lessons from Real-Life Projects**

The idea of a community-based residential development is not new. We heard of examples at the Friesens. There are many lessons to be learned from existing projects: how they physically design the development, how they tie in with a related church or mission, the diversity of the community, how to allow for special needs (eg. limited health care, subsidies), mode of ownership and tenure. At most, we have only a limited view of what is possible, albeit with many good ideas. An essential step is to simply get more ideas and collate them in some systematic way so the larger group (a society?) can have something substantive to consider as options.

#### **Scale and Density**

There are economies of scale, both for the residential development itself and, if so decided, a students residence. For example, we may be able to realize economies of scale but at the same

time realize that a certain number of residential units will be optimal. This is a difficult question in the abstract, but will obviously be a key consideration.

We do not assume that the development will have single family detached. A combination of townhouse, low rise, and (perhaps) high rise will be the likely candidates which receive serious consideration.

### **Private v. Public Ownership**

There likely is a strong bias towards individual residents being able to own their property, subject to the following. For some, the high cost of private ownership will be out of the question, and we may consider a certain number of residential units being rental. We simply point out that a combination of ownership and rental units gives rise to more legal governance issues and financial complexity, but this is not necessarily a reason for avoiding this combination.

There is a severe shortage of both private and public property on the west side. We should be prepared to consider all options. Acquiring land from a public body does not necessarily mean we cannot ultimately arrange for individual private ownership of some or all units. We suspect that there is a strong inclination for locating on the west side, given our various historical connections in this part of Vancouver.

We have not reviewed any options in particular, but the obvious choices will be private land, UBC, and Jericho. We should enquire about UBC's development plans, especially since UBC might readily identify with our church's student residence mission. While the Jericho option is interesting, the real questioning is timing (one wonders if it is an option within the next 10 years).

### **Environmental Integrity**

Starting from scratch presents a good opportunity to use sound environmental principles, covering issues such as unit design and building products, heating systems, and local (native) landscaping.

### **Church Infrastructure**

Whether the residential development is formally part of a church remains to be determined. But there appears to be interest in considering a development which includes a church facility. It may be time to think about relocating from PGIMF's current location. We noted the parallel visioning process under the umbrella of the Menno Simons Centre. As the residential development concept takes hold, there will inevitably be a need to formally raise this with PGIMF if the idea is to have a church facility as part of the larger project (the residential development concept is not, formally, a child of PGIMF).

## **Access to Services (or, Location, Location, Location)**

We must recognize the advantages of location, eg. close to UBC, public transport, stores, medical facilities.

## **Government Relations**

We will face complex government requirements (local, provincial and perhaps federal), both when acquiring land and when seeking development approval. We must ensure that we – and our vision – are known to government bodies intent on promoting diversity in higher-density settings. Opportunities for buying land from government might arise if we are known as a credible organization with a sound community vision. The likelihood of development approvals will be increased if government knows what we are about prior to formal applications.

## **PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS**

### **Establish a Society**

To advance the concepts noted above, there is a need for something more formal than meeting occasionally on an ad hoc basis. There is a need for a society or some other formal structure which allows interested and committed members to take on responsibilities and make decisions. A society gives us the necessary “structured democracy”. Without at least some degree of formality, there is a risk that merely meeting informally without a mechanism for taking concrete steps (and thereby create the risk of losing momentum and interest).

The other advantage of establishing a society or analogous group is that it gives us credibility in the event that we must (inevitably) compete for land and other resources on the marketplace. That is, organizing ourselves as a society and running ourselves in a disciplined way as a society shows that we not only have a vision but we are committed to taking decisions which may have legal obligations. (A society is like a corporation, recognized by law, unlike an informal group of persons.)

If the group feels that a society should be pursued, we should do this sooner than later. The society will put in place a way for making decisions, even at these early formative stages. At later stages, when it will be necessary to make tough decisions re acquisition of land, mix of housing type and sale/purchase policies, it will be even more important to formalize how we make decisions.

### **Recruit Society Board Members**

If a society is established, then the board should have diverse directors. We will need to elect directors from within as well as persons with special insights in development such as architects, contractors, developers, financial experts. These latter experts should preferably have some connection to our Menno community.

**More Fact-Finding**

Even before a society is established, several persons should undertake to enquire as to what private and public lands might be available. Land availability can be an unpredictable matter, and we need to monitor availability from an early date (even if we do not have a fine-tuned vision of how we actually want to use the land).

**Clarification of the Vision**

We are not advancing a comprehensive vision statement; we are not at that point after only one meeting. We do, however, recognize general and significant support for many of the ideas identified above. We are certain that there should be further articulation of the vision. A vision may well evolve over time, and may fall to a society board. That is, the board will likely start off with some general views and become more specific with the benefit of more information. For example, if a particular piece of land becomes available, this may prove to be an incentive for reviewing specific matters such as quantity and types of units, extent of ancillary related facilities such as sanctuary, and green space.