

LIVING IN FALSE CREEK NORTH: FROM THE RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVE



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FALSE CREEK NORTH POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION



SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND
REGIONAL PLANNING

False Creek North Post-Occupancy Evaluation

OVERVIEW & METHODS

In 2007, a class of graduate planning students set off to find out how the downtown, high-rise, family oriented, mixed-use community of False Creek North (FCN) is meeting the needs of those who call it home: the residents. False Creek North is internationally recognized as a master-planned community development that has been successful in bringing people, and notably families, into the downtown core. At the time of this study, over 10 570 residents lived in 5 450 households within the boundaries of FCN; 13% of the population was under the age of nineteen (Statistics Canada, 2007). Located along a publicly accessible waterfront, with a generous provision of park space and a range of shops, services, community facilities and amenities within walking distance from personal residences, FCN has been recognized since its earliest stages as an attractive, vibrant and socially diverse neighbourhood. But is there more to life there than meets the eye? From the residents' perspectives, which features in this neighbourhood are functioning well and which require improvement?

Research was conducted by graduate planning students at the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning. Over the course of eighteen months, Larry Beasley, C.M. and Dr Wendy Sarkissian supervised the course work and research papers of twenty-four students. Planning for implementation of the research agenda and study of the theoretical and historical foundations of post-occupancy evaluation occurred during spring and summer of 2007. Community engagement through various methods and subsequent data analysis were conducted during the autumn of 2007 and spring of 2008. The courses and research were generously funded by Concord Pacific Group Inc., Hillside Developments, Amacon Group, The City of Vancouver Planning Department, Beasley and Associates and Sarkissian Associates Planners. The courses and this research were generously made possible by the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning.

A mixed-method research design was employed to reinforce the credibility of the data and interpretation and to construct a more complete picture of the state of the neighbourhood. In October of 2007, 4 000 of the 5 450 households in the neighbourhood received a self-complete questionnaire in the mail. Of these, 497 were completed and returned, signifying a response rate of 12.4 percent. Quantitative responses were analysed using statistical software and written comments were compiled for qualitative content analysis.

Shortly thereafter, the planning students sought contributions from a grade six class at Elsie Roy Elementary School in False Creek North. The nineteen children involved took pictures of spaces in their neighbourhood that were important to them and later met in class with the planning students to compose a collage of their photos. Their comments about their photos were recorded and typed for content analysis.



Planning students worked with Elsie Roy Elementary Students to discuss their experiences of living in False Creek North.



Children living in False Creek North took pictures of their community and described why certain places are important to them.

On November 3, 2007 a SpeakOut entitled Have Your Say! Day was held at the Roundhouse Community Centre; well over seventy residents attended. A SpeakOut is a particularly personal and interactive open house style workshop where residents' comments are elicited, written on flip chart paper and displayed for other participants. This encourages an iterative and synergistic dialogue where residents build on the comments of those before them. Residents were asked to respond to these comments and other visual and auditory prompts facilitated by a one-on-one listener. As they spoke, almost verbatim notes were written by a recorder and later typed for content analysis. A second, more intimate workshop was held on the same day, through which a dozen participants explored the feeling of home and community and discussed which features added to or detracted from these sentiments in FCN.

Finally, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with residents of diverse backgrounds and demographic profiles. The details elicited from the interviews served to triangulate and elaborate on information that had been gathered in the previous methods and to investigate contradictions and gaps that had emerged through the initial data. A multi-method approach was effective in ensuring a broad topic scope that reached diverse user groups.

The questionnaire respondents were broadly representative of FCN residents, however it appears that fewer lower income and English as a second language residents responded than would be representative of the community's composition. The age distribution of respondents and the size of units, however, reflect the FCN demographic profile from the 2006 Vancouver census data (Statistics Canada, 2007).



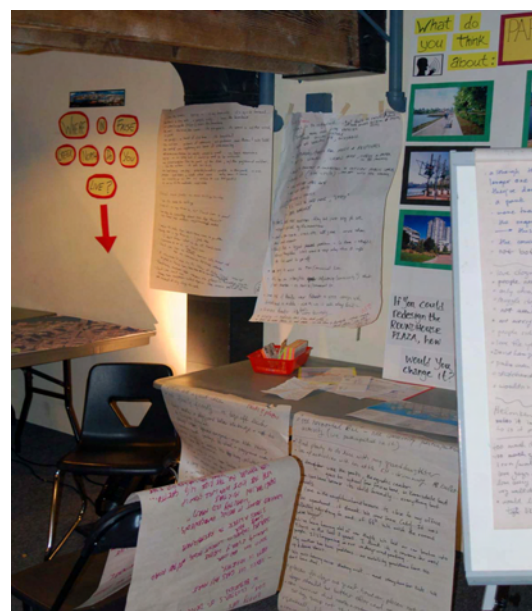
With one person listening and another recording, SpeakOut volunteers were sure to capture all of the participants' comments.



Over seventy residents participated in the Have Your Say! Day SpeakOut event.



Residents were asked their opinions about various aspects of their neighbourhood. Here, participants comment on their satisfaction with their dwelling unit.

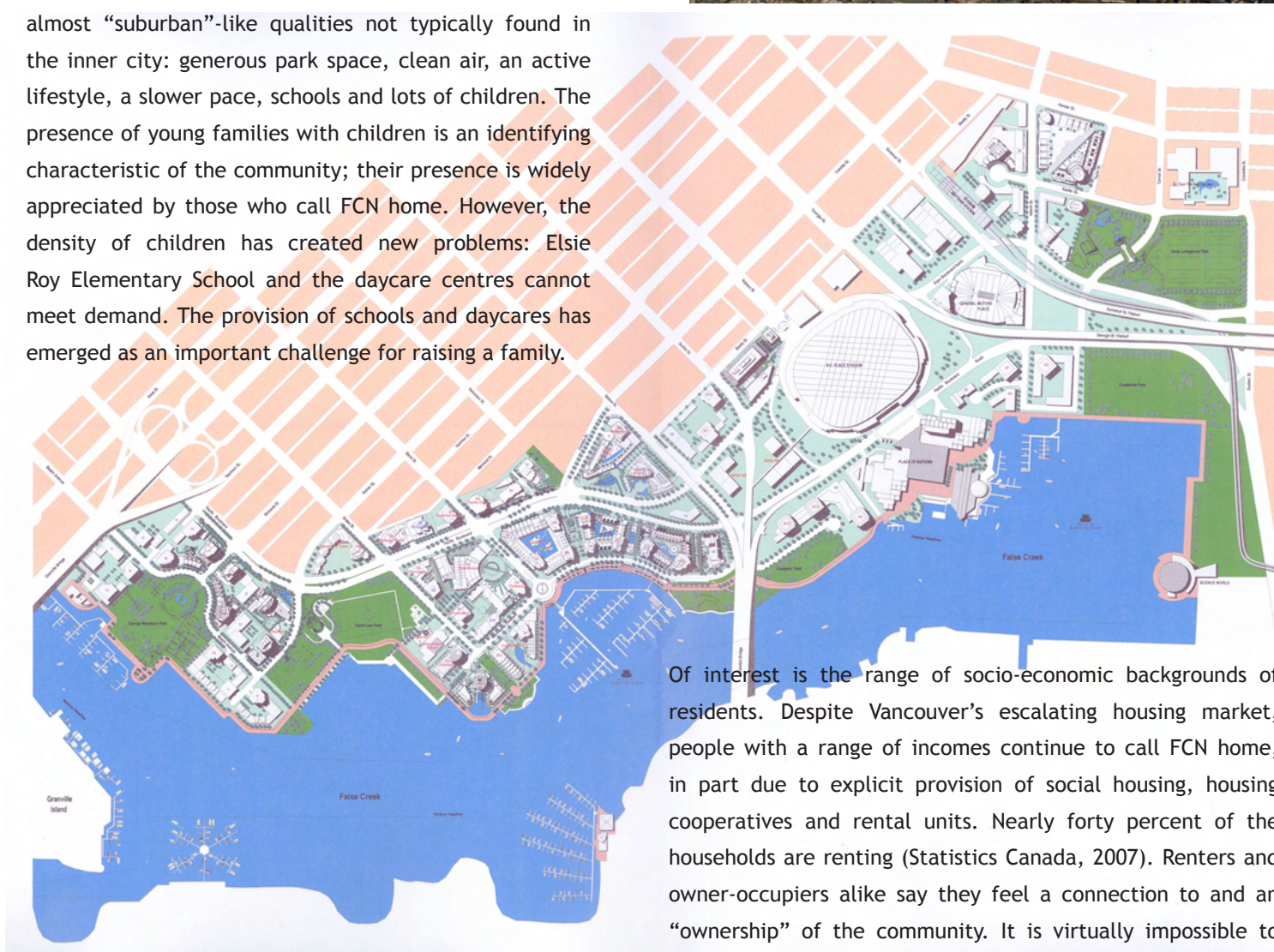


With notekeeping on flipcharts and many visual prompts, the SpeakOut is an energetic and iterative form of community engagement.

False Creek North Post-Occupancy Evaluation

PRINCIPLE FINDINGS

When done well, centrally located compact community development can become a vibrant hub for surrounding neighbourhoods. This is true of FCN, which is near Vancouver's Central Business District. Although downtown Vancouver has always had a resident population, most notably in the West End, FCN initiated family-oriented urban living supported by amenities and services. What residents notice about FCN, in comparison to other high-density downtown communities in Vancouver, are the almost "suburban"-like qualities not typically found in the inner city: generous park space, clean air, an active lifestyle, a slower pace, schools and lots of children. The presence of young families with children is an identifying characteristic of the community; their presence is widely appreciated by those who call FCN home. However, the density of children has created new problems: Elsie Roy Elementary School and the daycare centres cannot meet demand. The provision of schools and daycares has emerged as an important challenge for raising a family.



Of interest is the range of socio-economic backgrounds of residents. Despite Vancouver's escalating housing market, people with a range of incomes continue to call FCN home, in part due to explicit provision of social housing, housing cooperatives and rental units. Nearly forty percent of the households are renting (Statistics Canada, 2007). Renters and owner-occupiers alike say they feel a connection to and an "ownership" of the community. It is virtually impossible to distinguish among different tenure types in buildings: non-market buildings blend almost seamlessly with those around them. This is a source of pride for both Vancouver planners and residents of social and cooperative housing, who say that they do not feel that their homes stand out as being different. In fact, subsidized housing and the cooperative in particular are known for their strong family orientation, a source of community and great satisfaction for all FCN residents.

Top photo: Downtown Vancouver's peninsula from above. FCN is situated in the north shore of False Creek as shown in both images. See page 34 for a labeled map.

The cultural diversity of the people who live in FCN is another well recognized and appreciated characteristic. Fifty percent of residents speak English as a first language; the other fifty percent come from a range of backgrounds and cultures and speak many languages including: Chinese, Spanish, Persian and Serbian (Statistics Canada, 2007). Children are the ultimate stimulus of community building: children of all backgrounds play together in the parks and Roundhouse Community Centre and learn together at Elsie Roy Elementary School. Many residents suggest that parents and adults of different cultural backgrounds mix far less than do the children. In such a culturally diverse community there may be a need for more emphasis on and expression of the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood through more culturally focused community events, amenities and programs such as targeted initiatives to bridge language divisions.



Coopers Park, shown below the Cambie Street Bridge, is the the only designated dog park in False Creek North. The City Gate community in the background adds to the ring of development around False Creek.



Most FCN residents live in high-rise buildings. Surprisingly few are explicitly conscious of living in such a high-density setting.

Households with children and those from diverse backgrounds contribute to the community's cultural diversity and vibrancy. The local shops and amenities contribute to the sense of a 'complete' community. Residents note friendly interactions between the many dog owners and between parents, who chat as their children or dogs play together on the public playground. One conversation at a time, these unforced social encounters can contribute to a sense of belonging. Some residents say they feel a strong community attachment to their neighbours, while others feel that the community has room to grow in this respect, perhaps because it is a relatively new community. These residents explain that while they may recognise faces, relationships remain very superficial and it is difficult to make friends with neighbours.

Some highlights emerge from the experience of living in a mixed community. Seniors particularly appreciate the opportunity to age in a community with children; the children value friends living nearby in their building or a short walk away. These social activities and neighbourliness confer the benefits of "eyes on the street", a feature well recognized by the residents as being the foundation of the community's security. In spite of the proximity of FCN to the downtown core and troubled neighbourhoods like the Downtown East Side, FCN residents largely feel safe in their inner-city community.

Policy Recommendations for the Planning Community

Residents made suggestions for improvement on a variety of specific issues – from the provision of adequate in-suite storage and a hassle-free approach to visitor parking, to a request for public play equipment appropriate for children of all ages. Overall, most are very satisfied with the policies that continue to shape the community's development. The most notable are: the provision of 25 percent of units for families; 15.5 percent of units for residents in social housing and housing cooperatives; a particular planning emphasis on children; 1.0 hectare of park space per 1000 residents; a publicly accessible waterfront; a design that blends with and is appropriate to the existing downtown built form and the provision of shops, services, facilities and amenities for local residents. Overall, people of all socio-demographic categories (young and old, households with and without children, married and single, Canadians and immigrants, more and less affluent), are generally very happy living in FCN. Residents report that this community is generally successful from their perspective, not only on the surface, but also at its core. It appears to provide the basic elements necessary for one to feel at home. This is a heartening finding, if we consider the community's broad range of needs and expectations. From a planning perspective, FCN provides for a great source of learning as planners around the world work to make their downtown cores attractive to households of all types and sizes.

These comments notwithstanding, there is always room for improvement in the complex business of community building. And this community is no exception. From a policy perspective, some issues need attention. All are discussed in the proceeding summary of findings section. It is important to:

- Articulate more strongly policy guidelines framing implementation of social infrastructure, such as schools, to ensure that sufficient facilities are available before the first families move in. Ensure that these facilities are available within growing neighbourhoods such as FCN as the number and concentration of families increase.
- Guide the allocation of space for daycare facilities with a realistic sense of demand and projected growth. Identify and address any loopholes that might weaken such a framework.
- Design more diverse public spaces catering to the specific recreation and play needs of older children, as well as to younger children, rather than simply treating children as a homogenous group with common play and recreation needs.
- Aggressively foster affordable housing schemes targeting middle and modest incomes to ensure a diverse socio-economic mix, an environment appropriate for families and a strong sense of community.
- Target the incorporation of more appropriate and affordable retail outlets from the early stages of the development to meet the needs of residents from a variety of socio-economic grounds. Focus on families, in particular.



Although the Roundhouse Community Centre is a much loved community asset, residents request more activities for youth.

In general, we believe that this research confirms that the FCN example of a master-planned community development deserves its positive recognition. Nevertheless, succinct recommendations can be helpful in guiding this and similar developments in the future. The findings from this study, summarized below, should provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of FCN residents. As planners, we face a planetary emergency where courage and critical and reflective thinking are increasingly required. Planners internationally need to envisage and create compact, mixed-use, family oriented developments in central cities. The global trend toward rapid urbanization, coupled with recognition that such developments are a responsible use of land may contribute to reducing the ecological impact of built form. Thus, the findings from this study are particularly relevant.



Residents who purchased in FCN during its early stages, now feel that the neighbourhood is becoming unaffordable.

Our study suggests that we need further research into the experiences of living and raising a family in FCN. Though comprehensive, our findings raise further questions into what works and what could be improved. We have just begun to scratch the surface of the information and insights that a comprehensive post-occupancy evaluation can yield. Further, our study does not account for the perspectives of those residents who have left FCN. Understanding the role of the community itself in decisions to move out of the area would undoubtedly help us to identify other issues of concern. Finally, because no community is static and the residents of FCN are in many respects pioneers in family-oriented downtown living in Vancouver and more broadly in Canada and North America, there is clearly a need to track this community as it continues to develop and evolve.

Many questions arise. Will FCN continue to meet the changing needs of its residents? Will families be required to move as their children grow up? Will affordability remain a challenge in FCN to the point where modest-income households are no longer accommodated? Will the generous park spaces remain attractive and seem as spacious and plentiful as more people move to the area? What are the prospects of residents giving up their cars completely as commercial retail evolves and as improved public transportation provides opportunities for car-free access to the surrounding region? What new narratives might emerge with respect to expectations around the ideal settings in which to raise a family, set roots and age in place? Could the North American dream of a single-detached home bordered by a white picket fence be replaced by a new dream of a compact, flexible and adaptable dwelling, embedded in a vibrant, mixed-use, accessible, high-amenity neighbourhood? These questions are prominent at this time as planners continue to guide development in a changing global landscape and as sustainable alternatives to the sprawling suburban landscape must be sought.



More spaces are needed in local daycares such as Dorothy Lam above and in the Elementary School.

The following sections in this document highlight findings from the eight key research topic areas: parks and public open spaces, shops, services and amenities, mobility and transportation, community safety, the residential building; the unit; sense of community and perceived sustainability of the neighbourhood. A set of recommendations then follows, targeted to the planning, development and management sectors of the City of Vancouver, although many of these will apply to other communities. The recommendations are based on the findings of this study and are presented as much as possible in the residents' own words.



Residents request more spaces and amenities for relaxation.



Residents would like to have more shoreline access such as the area depicted above and see more adventurous play structures. Such interactive play spaces are known to stimulate children's development from a young age and offer environments for children and youth to experience healthy risk. Several residents critique the area for being too manicured and would prefer that function be emphasized over aesthetic.



The climbing play structure installed at David Lam Park is popular among younger and older children alike but is only a beginning to meet the demand for spaces for youth eight years and older.

Residents are overwhelmingly satisfied with local parks. Appreciated for their size, quantity and wide open spaces, the parks are well used and are considered one of the neighbourhood's strongest attributes. Although most residents choose to live in a downtown location for convenience, the Seawall and open parks are reasons cited for choosing FCN over other neighbourhoods, such as Coal Harbour or Yaletown. Residents compliment the overall aesthetic of the neighbourhood parks focusing particular praise on the Seawall, the quality landscaping and the design of the parks. The large size of the parks allows for flexibility and diversity of activities and causes the parks and Seawall to be a destination for residents and a centre of community. The exceedingly high overall satisfaction with park space is evident, as a majority of the residents would make no changes to the existing park system. The Seawall is voted the favourite space, although David Lam Park, with its popular playground and George Wainborn Park, with its much loved fountain, are also greatly appreciated. The annual jazz festival held in David Lam is lauded by many who would like to see even more organized events. The primary areas identified for improvement are more spaces for dogs and youth and more amenities for leisure activity. Residents also believe that the smaller parks should be better integrated into the neighbourhood to break-up the built form and to better connect the open spaces.

"One of the best things about False Creek North is that you can round a corner and see a vista and you feel alone."

Diversity of Activities

Although residents are generally satisfied with the provision of park space to meet their recreational needs, many identify a lack of appropriate areas simply for relaxation. Sitting, people watching, sun tanning and reading are common leisure activities in FCN parks that could be further enhanced with the provision of benches, chairs, picnic tables and barbeques. These are now either in short supply or are not widely distributed throughout the development. Other features that can promote relaxation are waterfront areas opened to cafés. Many people comment that they would like to be able to stop to have a coffee while walking along the Seawall. Although the topic of allowing private activities on the waterfront is a contentious one, this research seems to suggest that more residents support the idea than oppose it, particularly if only certain areas are zoned for such use. Indeed, the European image of canals lined with restaurants and cafés acting as community centres and creating a sense of vibrancy is appealing to many, and should be reconsidered by the City with further resident engagement.

Parks and Dogs

The presence of dogs in public parks is a polarizing and emotional topic for FCN residents. Residents feel strongly about the tension between dog owners and non-dog owners, although it is important not to oversimplify the distinctions. Many residents who do not own a dog are sympathetic to concerns about the lack of off-leash space and believe changes are necessary. Residents’ concerns focus on: insufficient off-leash space, incompatible uses between dog-owners and other residents (particularly children), lack of enforcement in on-leash areas and dog feces being left by owners with no consequent enforcement of fines. With so many residents owning dogs, one small off-leash park (Coopers Park) is clearly insufficient. Many residents consider George Wainborn Park “a de-facto dog park” because it is so popular among dog owners. Those trying to avoid dogs tend to frequent David Lam Park.

Parks and Children and Youth

Families with children under twelve visit the parks more frequently than do other user groups. However, significantly, parents rate their satisfaction levels with the parks lower than do non-parents. Parents use the playgrounds frequently but would like to see more “adventurous” playgrounds and an interactive water park. As the Roundhouse Community Centre Youth Worker explains, older children need space for “healthy risk.”

There is almost unanimous agreement among participants that the area is suitable for younger children who can use the playgrounds and older teenagers who, with public transit, have access to a host of activities throughout the downtown core. However, there is concern that children were seen as a homogenous rather than a diverse group in the planning of FCN. The specific needs of different ages are not well catered for and there is a gap in meeting the needs of children aged 8-14.

What could be changed to better serve your recreational / leisure needs?		
	number of responses	percent of total responses
no changes	170	26.1 %
more amenities for relaxation	162	24.9%
other	103	15.8%
more recreational activities for adults	94	14.4%
more park or open space	78	12.0%
more recreational activities for children	44	6.8%
Total	651	100%
When asked what they would like to change about the park spaces, most residents chose no changes, however many would like to see more spaces and amenities for relaxation. Residents were allowed to choose more than one option.		

“The art reflects an industrial use of the residential area and is too hard-edged for a pastoral park. Steel is cold, no matter what colour you paint it.”



Signs of children’s presence in a False Creek North plaza.

Fountains and Public Art

In general, residents are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the presence of fountains. Many see the fountain in George Wainborn Park as adding value to the neighbourhood. It is well used by dogs and children alike and many residents say that it is one of their favourite “people-watching” spots because of the activity around the fountain. In spite of some concern voiced by a few residents about the high cost of fountains or that they may be neglected and fall into disrepair, the fountains are broadly perceived as a form of public art and are more appreciated and less contentious than other forms of public art in the area. Overall, residents value the public art because of its symbolic value and ability to instil community. However, some specific pieces are critiqued for being too cold and metallic.

The most common motivation for people to move to FCN is the convenience of living in the downtown core. Residents are particularly satisfied with the proximity of shops and services and their ability to access almost any need by foot. Even those who do not regularly use the services within FCN boundaries still appreciate that they are there. Despite general satisfaction with available commercial services, the primary outstanding needs are for a greater diversity of shops and services that are affordable and reflect the range of incomes in the neighbourhood. Community services also receive praise: the Roundhouse Community Centre is a well loved community hub, and the school and daycare services are rated highly by those who have children enrolled. The quantity of school and daycare spaces are emotional issues that surface as priority problems for parents whose children are on waiting lists. More spaces in schools and daycare and more spaces and activities for youth are areas requiring immediate improvement.

"We don't have our own back garden, but I open the door and have access to every outdoor space I could want. I have everything right out the door. I'm not dependent on my car for things for my child."



The Roundhouse Community Centre is a valuable asset to the neighbourhood.

Roundhouse Community Centre

The Roundhouse Community Centre is a well loved landmark and focal point of the FCN community. Children and youth, in particular, make excellent use of the facilities and appreciate it as a place for entertainment, learning and activity. They praise the youth night and are grateful that it provides a location to hang out, particularly on rainy days. Residents of all ages appreciate its central location and the friendliness of the staff.

Despite nearly unanimous appreciation, however, some residents note room for improvement. Suggestions include more drop-in events, such as guest speakers covering current affairs, lower prices for families with children, more activities for youth and teenagers and more options for seniors. Although the Roundhouse offers many activities for children, parents explain that costs can add up for large families in a climate that requires indoor entertainment options much of the year.

"Without the Roundhouse there would be no community."



Dorothy Lam Daycare Centre, next to the Elsie Roy Elementary school, is one of two Daycare Centres in the neighbourhood. Waitlists are long at both.

School and Daycare

Elsie Roy Elementary School has operated at capacity since it opened in 2004 and is now over capacity. The waiting list for childcare centres in the area is now close to 1800, or one and a half to two years long (City of Vancouver, 2007). Many children have to attend schools in other neighbourhoods, some with reputations for lower quality services. Without a local school, many families suggest that they will likely have to move out of the neighbourhood as their children grow older.

"The [school and daycare] facilities are great – if you can get in."

Those whose children do attend local schools and daycare centres are very pleased that these facilities are within walking distance and that their children's school friends are also their neighbours. Children speak proudly of their school, which they recognize as an important place for learning and for social interaction.

Activities for Children and Youth

Parents with toddlers speak positively about the services available to them and their children and are well served by the Roundhouse. Teenagers are also afforded unique opportunities as they are able to access a host of services on foot or by transit. This age group reports frequenting the Greater Vancouver Public Library Central Branch and Science World, both of which are near the FCN development. The Principal of the secondary school located in the West End points out that the proximity to the downtown core with many museums, community centres and businesses provides opportunities to youth that are unusual: “It makes an awfully big difference to the way that we approach teaching here,” he explains, emphasizing the school’s frequent field trips and the many partnerships that they organize with various institutions.

Although children aged 8-14 years also use these services, their age often restricts their mobility, and both residents and local youth workers voice concerns about the services available to them locally. “There is a huge gap in servicing youth, huge,” emphasizes the King George School Principal. Parents suggest a skating rink, swimming pool, organized sports for youth and a youth specific club space as steps towards mitigating the problem.

Shops, Services and Restaurants

With one-third of residents reporting that they do not have to travel more than a 10-minute walk in a typical week to meet day-to-day shopping needs, the neighbourhood is clearly servicing a variety of needs. The other two-thirds, however, shop outside of FCN primarily for variety and affordability. Although planners had hoped that the neighbourhood’s residents could live without a car, FCN appears to be falling short of its potential in this regard. Groceries are a particular point of contention, as the two options, Urban Fare and Costco, are at two extremes of convenience and price. The greatest retail need identified in the community is a mid-sized grocery store. Other retail gaps frequently cited include a bakery, a hardware store, clothing shops and family and child-oriented stores, including a dollar store.

Residents are pleased with the medical services that are available and like living close to restaurants. Some would like to see more sidewalk cafés along the waterfront and more affordable restaurants. More entertainment for adults is desired, such as closer and more diverse theatres and lectures with forums for discussion in the Roundhouse. Nearby nightclubs in Yaletown, however, are considered noisy, disruptive and not appropriate for a residential neighbourhood.



Urban Fare is loved for its convenience but many find it prohibitively expensive for everyday grocery shopping.



61% of questionnaire respondents do travel beyond a 10-minute walk to meet their day-to-day needs. Residents cite a variety of reasons why their needs are not met locally. A greater diversity of more affordable shops and services are needed.

For the majority of residents, the car-free life is the community's main draw. Most residents travel by transit, on foot or by bicycle during their daily routines, but use a vehicle when traveling longer distances or shopping for large quantities of goods or bulky merchandise. They are pleased with the addition of the community shuttles (routes C21 and C23) and would like to see these operate with more frequency. Many enthusiastically await the new Canada/RAV line that is scheduled for completion in November, 2009 with the Yaletown-Roundhouse station in the study area. Residents are also satisfied with parking availability in the neighbourhood, although some mention the need for more spaces designated to zip-car and co-operative vehicles. Concerns are evident, however. Transit costs and distance to certain retailers, especially mid-sized grocery stores, or inability to commute quickly to work using transit are barriers that prevent residents from reducing their automobile dependence.



Ninety percent of residents access the local services, shops and amenities on foot. Residents are grateful for the opportunity to use their cars less but would like to see a greater diversity of stores.

"No matter what utopian city planners/bureaucrats believe, people still want to own a car. I walk wherever I can for shopping and recreation but I need my car for work. When the Skytrain comes, I will use it where I can."

Mobility and Families in FCN

The majority of residents emphasize that the transit options and proximity to work, services and school are beneficial for their family, as they trade commuting time for high-quality family time. Only 15 percent of families indicate that mobility is a challenge to raising a family in FCN. Some note that the transit options are particularly good for teenagers, who can easily access activities located outside of the immediate False Creek North area. Movement and transport are also relatively important issues for the children, many of whom comment positively about the Granville Island Aquabus and walking to school or friends' houses.



The Seawall in FCN is one of the neighbourhood's most loved attributes and makes the community particularly walkable.

Car-Free Living in FCN?

To what degree were the planners' intentions that living in FCN could decrease reliance on and ownership of vehicles successful? With such a high percentage of residents walking locally (over 90 percent) and many also walking, cycling or using public transit to get to work (nearly 40 percent), it is clear that residents of the area are far less reliant on cars than their suburban counterparts. However, although many residents appear to be using their car only once or twice per week, few seem to be willing to part with it entirely. Ninety percent of households own at least one vehicle.

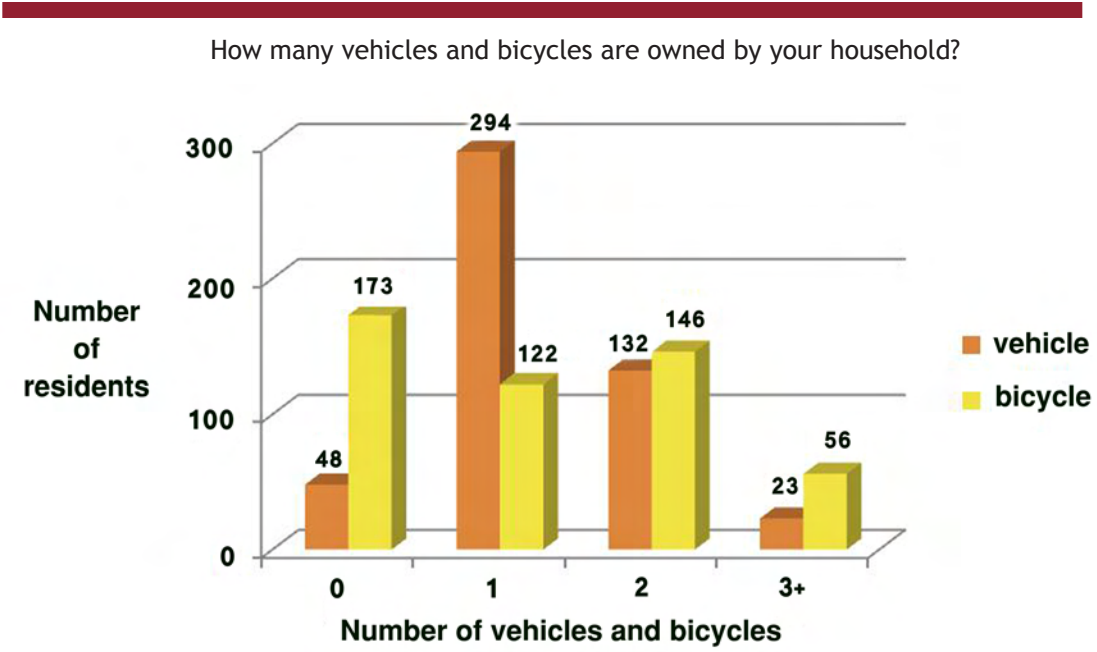
Those attempting to live without a vehicle find it difficult at times to connect with the rest of the City, however most find that walking, transit and especially car cooperatives are meeting their needs. There is evidence to suggest that some residents are at a crossroads, in that they use their cars so little that they are considering giving them up completely and using the cooperatives or car rentals instead. Others use their car rarely but explain that they “just can’t give it up completely.” Many such participants report filling up their gas tank once a month. It may be that the area is in a transition period as residents become accustomed to alternative transportation options.

For several residents, however, the lure of the car is just too great because of the convenience it affords. Those who use their vehicles frequently feel that rising gas and parking prices will act as deterrents to continued personal vehicle use, while those who use them infrequently doubt that such costs will influence their behaviour.



The Seawall in particular is appreciated as a means to connecting to other neighbourhoods and to local amenities. One complaint, however, is that at specific locations the separations between bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways are not clear, causing accidents to occur. The Seawall near the 1000 Beach development shown above is an example of a section where the bike path and the pedestrian walkway merge.

“My husband and I could not be happier living in the downtown core. The convenience is almost indescribable. We have absolutely everything the city has to offer at our fingertips... We walk the Yaletown Seawall every night. I walk to work, and now that I have that luxury I will probably never choose to live far from work again. I could honestly go on and on. I love living downtown!”



Questionnaire respondents were asked how many vehicles and bicycles are owned by their households. Ninety percent of households own at least one vehicle. Sixty-five percent of households own at least one bicycle.

Overall, FCN residents feel very safe in their units and buildings and in their outdoor community. The perception of safety in the neighbourhood is generally very high, even at night. Residents tend to first respond to their sense of safety positively and then add qualifying details. The majority, however, (72 percent) identify no safety concerns whatsoever, which may be surprising in a downtown setting. However, these results should be interpreted with some caution, as the questions in the formal self-complete questionnaire asked only about perceptions of safety and not about behaviour people might engage in to avoid unsafe areas and/or situations. There are no correlations between perceptions of safety in the broader FCN community and age, gender nor households with children, although it would appear that some residents, women and seniors in particular, do not go outside alone at night.

"I am a petite middle-aged woman, safety is not a concern in this neighbourhood, but is an important part of quality of life."



An apparently stolen bicycle in FCN. Car break-ins in residential building parkades are a particular problem.

Safety in the Building

Of the 497 people who responded to the questionnaire, few respondents report feeling unsafe in their building. Residents feel safe even in their parkades, thanks to adequate lighting and the number and proximity of exits. While nearly every building has experienced problems with parkade and car break-ins, most residents are not overly concerned. Removing anything of value and leaving car doors unlocked are commonly used theft-mitigation strategies. Nearly all buildings have a gated entry and exit to the parkade and management emphasizes a policy of waiting to drive away until the gate has closed entirely. Some residents indicate that installing separate entrance and exit gates significantly reduces break-ins. These residents note that the cost of implementing such a system during the building's design and construction would be much cheaper than the subsequent retrofitting costs.

How safe do you feel in your building?					
Income	Level of safety				Total
	Unsafe	Neutral	Safe	Very Safe	
Less than 20k	16.0%	20.0%	28.0%	36.0%	100% (22)
20k - 50k	8.2%	8.2%	34.4%	49.2%	100% (61)
50k - 80k	2.4%	8.3%	34.5%	54.8%	100% (84)
80k or more	3.0%	3.0%	33.7%	60.3%	100% (300)
Overall	4.3%	5.5%	33.6%	56.6%	100% (470)

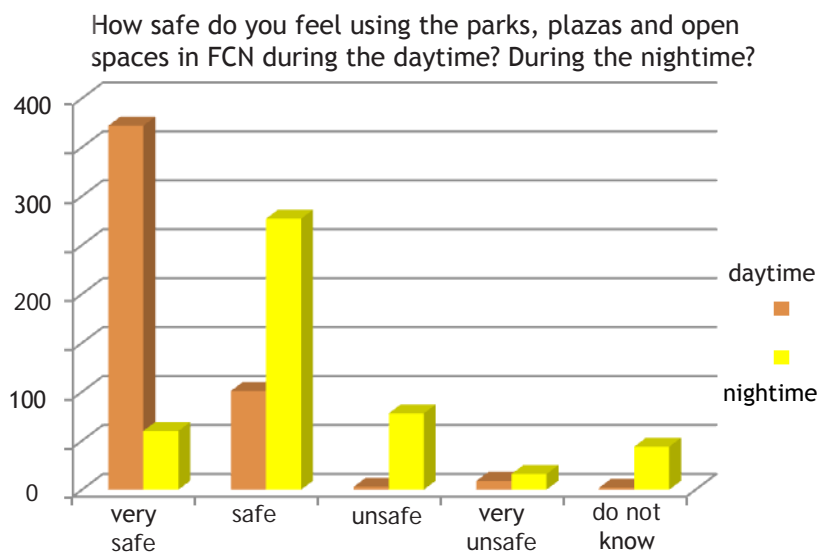
A statistically significant correlation exists between income and perceptions of safety in the respondents' buildings, as shown in the table to the left. Although there may be a variety of reasons why this is the case, higher income earners are probably more likely to live in buildings with greater security measures, such as a concierge, security patrols, alarm systems and secure entry measures such as key FOBs.

Although FOBs are greatly appreciated for the security that they afford, most residents are acutely aware of the trade-offs. They note that the system restricts floor-to-floor access, thereby inhibiting neighbourliness within buildings. Residents would like to see initiatives that counteract this negative impact of the FOB system.

90.2% of residents feel safe or very safe in their buildings but a statistically significant difference exists between a resident's income and their degree of perceived safety.

Safety in the Broader Community

Attributes that contribute to a sense of security in the public realm include the many wide-open spaces, wide sidewalks along the Seawall at David Lam Park, private security bicycle patrols, police presence and a resident population density that confers “eyes on the streets”. Many residents indicate that they frequently look out of their windows to watch what is happening outside and recognize that they contribute to the same natural surveillance that makes them feel safe when they are outdoors.



Questionnaire respondents tend to feel very safe during the day but many feel only “safe” or even “unsafe” at night. Many blame poor lighting in specific locations.

Perceptions of safety at night are more divided, particularly in specific areas. Many respondents (mainly women, although some men as well) feel unsafe at specific locations: the Cambie Street Bridge and the Granville Street Bridge, near the Concord Pacific construction site on the east end of FCN, the alleyways behind Pacific Boulevard that back onto pubs and nightclubs and the U-shaped seating area in the northwest corner of David Lam Park. These areas are perceived as unsafe because they are darker, less manicured and/or less frequented by people. This finding confirms the commonly held view by crime prevention practitioners that a critical mass of legitimate users of a space is an important deterrent to street crime. The Seawall and George Wainborn Park, in particular, are identified as being particularly dark in areas. The ambiguous lighting of some public spaces is a matter of concern.

Dogs are another safety issue, particularly those that are large, off-leash and/or aggressive. Traffic along Pacific Boulevard and cyclists moving too quickly along the Seawall worry some residents, particularly seniors and those with children. The dominant safety issues are homeless people and drug users; witnessing drug deals and aggressive panhandling unsettle many residents.

Safety as a Challenge to Raising a Family

Seventy-two percent of families indicate that safety is not a challenge to raising a family in FCN. Dogs are perceived as a threat to small children and dog feces are considered a health hazard. Some parents are also concerned that their children might find discarded syringes in the parks.

One sentiment that surfaced is that city-living may be safer for teenagers because of the vibrancy of the community, which results in more supervision and more activities than in some other communities. In a similar vein, key informants interviewed about the suitability of FCN for youth are quick to dispel the myth that urban environments are riskier places for exposure to sex and drugs than suburban residential areas. One informant did note, however, that children often mention feelings of discomfort at passing the large number of sex stores on their way to school at King George Secondary.



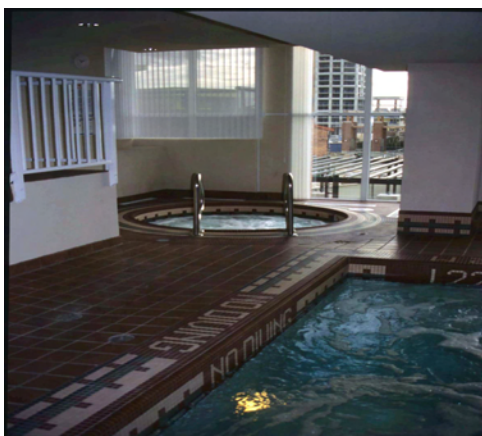
The fast flow of traffic on Pacific Boulevard is a frustration, particularly for parents and seniors. Most residents feel that such a main thoroughfare is inappropriate in a residential neighbourhood because of safety issues and noise.

Residents of FCN respond very positively about their overall satisfaction with their buildings. Not surprisingly, the location of the building both in relation to the downtown core and to open space is a determining factor in choosing FCN as a home. Building amenities, design of the building itself, building grounds, maintenance and friendliness of building management are also important to many residents, many of whom rate these highly. The main areas that could benefit from more attention in building design and management are visitor parking, number of elevators and storage space.

"I really like driving into my neighbourhood, the park and the water. It's like wow – I love it every time I come out my door. I also like that it's one block off Pacific Boulevard - off the busy street... it's enough off the main road that it feels almost like I'm in a suburb."



The building's location — near the downtown core, the water, and parks — is why most residents choose their home, rather than specific attributes of the building itself.



Most market-rate buildings include an amenities package with common spaces such as swimming pools and hot tubs (above) as well as weight rooms, games rooms and party rooms. Residents rate their satisfaction of their amenities very high with a mean of 4.1 on a scale of 1-5 with 1 signifying very unsatisfied and 5 signifying very satisfied.

Amenities

Quality and number of amenities differ between buildings. They include any or all of the following: swimming pool, hot tub, sauna, squash courts, exercise and weight-lifting room, meeting room, library, theatre, games room or billiards room, visitor bedroom with on-suite bathroom, party room, general purpose room, shared laundry and mail room. Older, cooperative and social housing buildings tend to have fewer amenities than newer market buildings.

In general, indoor and outdoor amenities at the building scale both rate highly and are valued aspects of the experience of multi-family living although they appear to be underused. Some residents find that shared common spaces help to create a sense of community within the building, as they provide a place where residents can meet and engage in common activities. Outdoor common spaces are greatly appreciated as a small piece of space to take children, walk the dog or get a breath of fresh air. People with children tend to report a greater need for such spaces and use them more often. The frequency of amenity use, however, depends on personal preference. Many respondents who do not use their amenities note that they simply have no use for them. Others offer suggestions to encourage use.

Outdoors, residents report that they would like more programming of the spaces or at least permission for active uses (such as badminton, kickball and gardening) and a flexibility of uses. They would like to see more outdoor furniture such as benches, weather protection, barbeques and interesting children's play equipment that is tailored to children of a wide age range. Such spaces should be designed with adequate sun exposure.

Indoors, residents state that they would like common spaces that are less general purpose and have instead more specific or programmable functions, such as play spaces for children and workshop rooms. Some residents express interest in attending events with a specific purpose such as games, crafts, movies or children’s activities. Other factors that could encourage more use of the indoor common spaces include incorporating ways to watch children while using the spaces and minimizing the hassle of booking rooms and paying a deposit.

Building Aesthetics

Preference for architectural styles is clearly a matter of personal taste. However, many residents respond to their building’s aesthetics with cool satisfaction rather than enthusiasm and the majority are rather critical. Taken as a whole, the collection of buildings in FCN is viewed by many to be too monotonous, gray and green.



Some residents would like to see more diversity of character in the buildings.

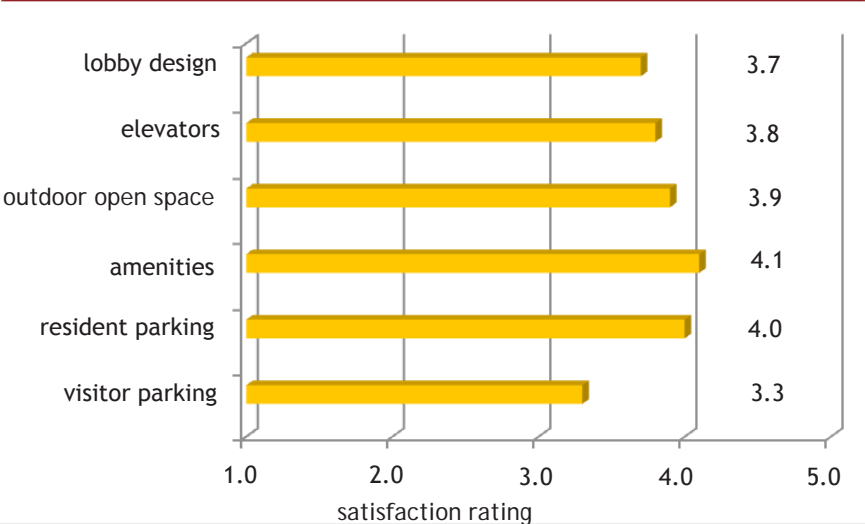
Residential Parking

Residents are very satisfied with residential parking. Ninety percent of the survey questionnaire respondents report owning a car and parking it in their building. There is also some indication that residents who do not own their car retain their parking stall for its resale value, for guest use or for parking their rental or cooperative car. Given this high use of building parking, it is noteworthy that residential parking does not pose a problem in a multi-household residential setting. It should be noted, however, that the situation in the cooperative building is quite different. Parking is so inadequate that visitor parking spaces have been completely removed and there are insufficient parking spaces for all residents.

Visitor Parking

Although there is general satisfaction with resident parking in the market-rate buildings, the provision and management of visitor parking is a major point of contention for many residents. To allow visitors to park, most residents must come down to the street, let the visitor in and place a pre-issued pass on their dashboard. When the visitor is ready to leave, the resident must accompany the visitor out to collect the pass and let them out of the parkade. Many participants find the pass system to be a major hassle, especially because they cannot even guarantee that there will be an available spot for the visitor when they enter the parkade. The number of stalls for visitors is generally described as “grossly inadequate,” a problem exacerbated because at any time there are generally many unoccupied stalls within the parkade, including those that are reserved 24 hours a day for commercial uses.

How would you rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of your building?



Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction of various aspects of their building on a scale of 1-5, where 1 signifies “very unsatisfied” and 5 signifies “very satisfied”. The figure above shows the mean of responses. Residents are most content with their amenities, however some criticism arises about hassles with visitor parking and too few elevators.

Building Storage

Residents in multi-family housing appreciate storage. There is strong evidence that indicates that this is a major source of satisfaction for those who have it and, more commonly, dissatisfaction for those who do not. This problem is exacerbated for some by the fact that there is other unused space within the building, usually in the parkade. Many residents are paying for storage in locations throughout the City, which they consider unacceptable given how much they pay to live in FCN. Although residents would not necessarily like to use parking stalls for storage even if they were permitted – because it could be unsightly, a fire hazard and attract thieves – using underutilized spaces more creatively and efficiently to meet resident storage needs would add to the satisfaction of living in multi-family residential buildings.

Lobby Design

The initial interior impressions of the buildings – the lobbies – also receive mixed ratings. Residents tend to appreciate a lobby that creates a good first impression through spaciousness, adequate lighting, attractive design and comfortable seating. Those who live in a building with a concierge service note that the concierge can create a welcoming atmosphere in addition to adding security, responding to resident maintenance concerns, accepting parcels and admitting trades people.

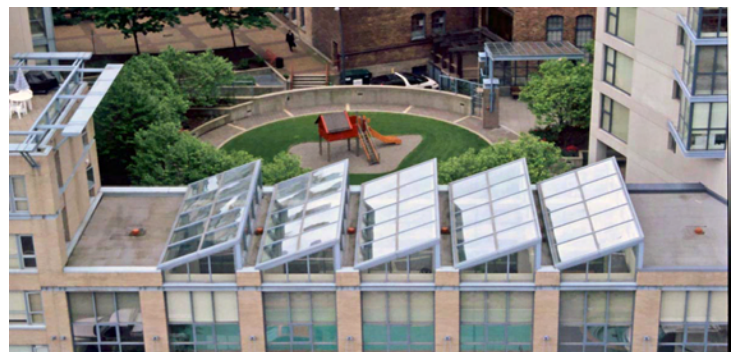
“How can a 20+ floor building only have two elevators? Unacceptable.”

Elevators

Elevators are another critical component of the functionality of a high-rise residential building. There appears to be a threshold of the acceptable ratio of elevators to numbers of residents or households. Although more research is needed on this topic, residents in more than twenty-story towers with only two elevators are generally very dissatisfied with their provisions, especially when one elevator breaks down or is being used for moving, which occurs regularly in large buildings with high renter turnover.

Families and Building Satisfaction

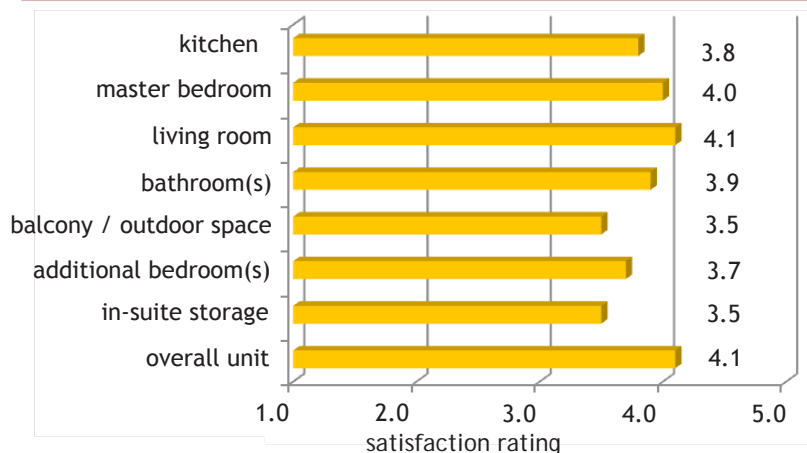
Families rate their overall satisfaction with their building lower than do residents without children. In particular, the amount, variety and safety of play space at the building scale are viewed as needing improvement. Parents, children and youth all comment on the need for more open spaces at the building scale for casual social use. They complain about strict and formal management of common spaces and articulate a need for more opportunities for play and spontaneous, informal activities. Outdoor play spaces are generally described as catering solely to younger children. Many children indicate that they know other children in the building where they live, a fact appreciated by both parents and children. Residents of the cooperative housing who do not have a FOB system point out how important it is that their children have free access to their friends within the building.



Buildings are often equipped with small outdoor common areas, many of which have a small playground such as this one. Residents believe the spaces generally could be better designed to encourage use and to foster community within buildings.

Overall, satisfaction with the unit is reasonably high. Comments suggest that, while certain elements could benefit from improvement, general functionality is not impaired by the unit design. Not surprisingly, unit affordability and inadequate space are commonly cited points of dissatisfaction. These are problems with no simple solutions, as more interior space necessarily increases the dwelling price. Although most residents agree that their unit meets their current needs, they indicate that if they grow in number, if they accumulate “more stuff” and as their children become older, they will likely not be able to continue to live in their units. Space in the dwelling unit continues to present a challenge to raising a family in FCN for most families. Overall, residents recognize that smaller living space is inevitable in multi-family housing and have adjusted their lifestyles to accommodate this constraint. Nonetheless, a commonly held view is that the unit (and building) space should be designed more creatively, flexibly and efficiently, particularly for storage.

How would you rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of your dwelling unit?



Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate various aspects of their unit on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 signifies “very unsatisfied” and 5 signifies “very satisfied.” The figure above shows the mean of the responses. Overall, residents are satisfied with their units though specific complaints emerge about certain aspects such as small outdoor balconies, enclosed balconies and insufficient storage space.



Residents complain of odd-shaped walls and unconventional placement of light fixtures, which make arranging furniture difficult. A fireplace next to a window was identified as an example of inflexible design.

Layout

Unit layout is a feature that elicits a high number of comments, particularly by those who live in L-shaped or traditional compartmentalized units with walls dividing different rooms such as kitchen and living room. These floor plans are less open, give the impression of more walls and create the feeling of too many hallways, which make the unit feel smaller and, in some cases, darker than it might otherwise be.

Unconventional shaped walls and windows are appreciated by some for their interesting architecture but they contribute to inflexibility, invariably making it difficult to arrange standard furniture in smaller apartments. For some, the finer details of design, such as the placement of electrical outlets and overhead light fixtures, are not conducive to arranging standard furniture, which further reduces flexibility in use of space.

Evidence suggests that many owners have made, are making or will make renovations to their unit to meet their taste or changing needs. Some renovations are as simple as removing the glass door from the enclosed balconies or interior glass dens to incorporate them into the living space. Others involve an entire reconfiguration of the unit’s space. Aesthetic changes are also very common, such as replacing carpet with hardwood flooring. In general, having a unit that lends itself well to renovations is a source of satisfaction for homeowners. Renters and people in co-ops clearly have less flexibility because they are generally not permitted to renovate.

Unit and Families

Our findings indicate that residents with and without children are equally satisfied with the overall layout of their suite, but families with children express dissatisfaction with particular rooms such as additional bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens.



Outdoor balconies are popular but should be reasonably sized. Enclosed balconies are more contentious: some residents have incorporated them creatively into their living space, while others use them for regular balcony purposes.

Bedrooms and Bathrooms

Bedrooms and bathrooms are considered by many to be rooms that require privacy and therefore should, wherever possible, not be accessible directly from the foyer or living areas. Those in units with more than one bedroom also prefer that the bedrooms not be adjacent to each other. Evidence suggests that many of the two- and three-bedroom units purchased in FCN are being used not for more people but for more flexible space.

Many residents with multiple bathrooms also note that multiple full bathrooms (with tub) are unnecessary and are a waste of space when space is at such a premium. Additional bathrooms are noted by parents as being indispensable.

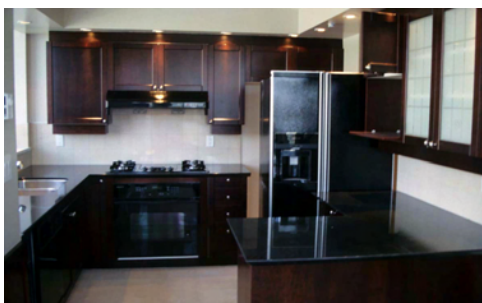


Open kitchen designs in smaller units are particularly appreciated since they give the perception of more space. A few residents, however, are adamant that they prefer the privacy of a closed kitchen layout.

Balconies and Enclosed Balconies

Private open balconies that are sufficiently large to allow for a conversational arrangement of patio furniture and a handful of adults standing comfortably are highly appreciated, particularly if they have sun exposure and good drainage. Glass railing walls are popular because they give the impression of a larger space.

Some units have multiple balconies, both enclosed and open. Whereas those who have an open balcony are very grateful for it, those with an enclosed balcony, particularly those with only an enclosed balcony, express mixed views about this hybrid feature. Some residents rave about it and use it as an office, dining room or solarium. Others feel that it is a waste of space because its function is unclear: a compromise of both indoor and outdoor space. At the very least, these respondents feel that residents should have the option of renovating the space to make it more functional.



Closed kitchen designs work best in larger units, but because layout preference is divided, developers would do well to build in flexibility.

In-suite Storage

Most residents who have in-suite storage consider it a major strength of their unit and use it for storage rather than converting it to other uses. Those without in-suite storage complain of a lack of general storage for large household items such as vacuums and children's sports equipment. Many point out a lack of specific storage spaces such as kitchen drawers and cabinets, linen closets and main bedroom closets. Many respondents indicate that their long narrow walk-in closets are so poorly designed that they cannot get into the closet to retrieve their items.

Kitchens

More cupboards and kitchen storage space are the most commonly desired changes in the kitchen. A preference for an open-plan, as opposed to a separated kitchen may be a matter of personal taste and is perhaps also related to generational and cultural preference. Most residents, particularly those in smaller units, value the openness, spaciousness and light that the open-plan kitchen provides. Others enjoy some privacy in the kitchen, especially when entertaining. These findings suggest that it may be advantageous for developers to leave the design of the kitchen layout as flexible as possible as an option for purchasers.

Noise

Overall, noise is not as great an issue as one might expect in a downtown high-density, mixed-use neighbourhood. In fact, some residents even identify the quietness of their unit as one of its major strengths. Where noise is a problem, noise generated primarily from outside of the unit and building remains an issue, particularly for those who live on Pacific Boulevard. Many residents cannot understand the rationale for having such a major thoroughfare in a residential neighbourhood and think that it is not only a source of noise, dust and pollution, but that it is also ugly, dangerous and that it acts as a mental and physical barrier separating their neighbourhood from the rest of the City. Other sources of noise include sirens, party boats, construction, bar spill-over, noise from shopping carts in laneways or noise from activity from commercial and shopping areas such as Urban Fare. The Skytrain, once complete, is also anticipated to be an added source of noise. Those who face the water or pedestrian thoroughfares rate the noise levels from outside as quite low or explain that they hear only “people noises”, which they enjoy.



Although floor to ceiling windows are unanimously appreciated for the sense of light and space that they provide, some residents feel that they are less appropriate in bedrooms.

Noise transmission from other units is generally not a concern except in the cooperative and in a couple of older buildings. Some residents mention that they hear less from their neighbours than they would expect or have experienced in other multi-family buildings. Hardwood and tile floors above units and renovations and repairs throughout the building are repeatedly mentioned as primary sources of noise within the building.

The noise level from within units (room-to-room noise) is unanimously not a problem for residents. Smaller spaces in particular could benefit from quiet appliances such as dishwashers.

*“If you open your windows you won’t sleep
— but I’m used to it.”*

Light, Heat and Visual Intrusion

Overwhelmingly residents are pleased with the amount of sunlight their dwellings receive and, if anything, say that they have too much sun. This is a benefit in the winter in a climate that is notoriously cloudy most of the year and results in residents turning on their heat very rarely. This poses a problem in the summer, however, when the heat can be unbearable, particularly for those in the higher floors and south-facing units. Air conditioning or better cross-ventilation are identified by many as ways to improve thermal comfort. Several residents believe that more could have been done to mitigate temperature variability when the units were constructed, rather than installing air conditioning. For example, installing UV-controlled glass films or overhangs and designing windows that open more fully are potential passive solutions.

Large windows are generally appreciated because they add much needed light. Few residents report visual privacy as an issue and many comment good-naturedly on the “mutual understanding” that everyone living in a high-rise building has with regard to looking into each others’ windows. Those interviewed and surveyed for the most part recognize this as an accepted part of high-rise living and mitigate visual intrusion by drawing their blinds or curtains. Some think, however, that full windows in bedrooms are not appropriate for privacy reasons. Floor-to-ceiling windows in the bedroom also constrain flexibility in furniture arrangement and storage in rooms that may already be quite small.

Sentiments about the neighbourhood's sense of neighbourliness and community are mixed and tend to depend largely on a resident's interpretation of the words. In the sense that community is established through activity and familiarity, FCN rates highly. People recognise the same faces in the stores and cafés and the bustle of activity in the parks and commercial areas helps residents feel that they are part of a community. On the other hand, many residents feel connected to neighbours only at a superficial level. While they recognise neighbours to smile and say hello, very few residents visit other dwellings in the area, even within their own building and on their own floors.

"I lived in the cookie cutter suburbs of Toronto where you have this massive house and you don't get to see anyone. Especially with the winters, you bury yourself in your house. Whereas here — we're out everyday! I've never experienced this, which is why I am so hell-bent on staying here!"



Local cafés and Urban Fare in particular are considered community hubs in FCN.

Community Clusters

Those who do know names and not just faces do so because they are part of one of the area's main clusters of community: dog-owners, strata councils or parents with young children. Community appears to be particularly important to the latter group and, although more research is needed, the greatest satisfaction with sense of community from parents seems to be from those living in the cooperative housing. This is a most interesting finding that merits further investigation. With many children living in the building and no limitation to movement imposed by the FOB security system, the sense of community in the cooperative building seems to be uniquely strong compared with that in the market-rate buildings. Residents in other buildings even comment on the phenomenon, saying that the subsidized housing in the area is the best thing to happen to FCN because it draws families into the neighbourhood, thereby contributing to the sense of community experienced by all residents.

"There are a lot of friends in our building, so there are lots of people to play with... I can name about twenty people who live in our building." (Male, 12 years)



The presence of children and families in FCN instills a sense of community in the neighbourhood.

Community is also connected to identity and to a sense of belonging. Many residents feel they are a part of something because they receive the neighbourhood's weekly newsletter or because advertisements received in the mail refer to local businesses.

Community appears to be stronger for residents who have lived in the area since its inception, about a decade ago. Newer residents often explain that they expect their sense of belonging to grow, or that the overall friendliness of the neighbourhood will evolve with time. Some longer-term residents, however, feel that the sense of neighbourliness that they once felt strongly is declining as units become more expensive and as the diversity of the area, in their mind, decreases. They describe a faster pace caused by growing density and increased pretense and snobiness with decreasing affordability.

Fostering Community

Although some residents appreciate the anonymity that high-density living offers, the majority with whom we spoke would like to see more social interaction and more encouragement of interaction. Some highlight the need for more community events similar to the annual jazz festival or specific activities catering to seniors. Several believe that a more vibrant commercial core with outdoor cafés and a more pedestrian-friendly Pacific Boulevard would contribute to community spirit. Many would like to see more efforts in their building to bring people together, citing particular initiatives in some buildings that have been successful: squash tournaments, movie nights, children's games or hockey nights.

From a design perspective, it is clear that buildings could be designed more effectively to foster spontaneous activity and chance social encounters. Open common spaces, in addition to privately reserved ones, could allow residents to meet one another informally through chance encounters. Further, many explain that common indoor and outdoor spaces in buildings would be more frequently used if certain rules were relaxed, such as limits to guests, complicated booking arrangements, costly deposits, alcohol bans and activity restrictions.



Local children selling lemonade along the Seawall in FCN.

"One of the things that I've discovered about condo living is that people don't want to get too close. I think they're frightened that if they get too close and then realise that they don't like the person, they're in an impossible situation."

Community Mix

The majority of respondents comment enthusiastically about the mix of residents' ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds although some residents, particularly young professionals, feel the neighbourhood is dominated by their demographic profile, a perception that makes them feel particularly at home. Others note that a common trait among most residents is that they are from other parts of Canada or other countries so that they all are discovering the area together and are friendly with their neighbours.

On the other hand, too many renters or overseas owners are blamed by many residents for a weak sense of community as they feel that these people do not invest in their community to the same extent as long-term resident owners. Reactions to language differences exacerbate the problem as many respondents explain that they often hesitate to speak to neighbours since they are not sure that they will be able to understand English. Interestingly, such division does not appear to occur at the schools; the Elsie Roy School Principal explains, "We have every continent and forty languages represented... [there is a] combination of awareness of diversity as well as a blindness to it because everybody is different so it is sort of a non-issue." Her interpretation is echoed by a few residents who explain that they see children of all ethnicities playing together on the playground but many say that the parents of different backgrounds interact far less. The issue merits further investigation; it may be that interventions celebrating diversity and fostering interaction are needed in FCN.

8 Perceived Sustainability of FCN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Although environmental sustainability was not at the top of policy agendas during the time that FCN was being planned, the area's accommodation of density near the Central Business District serviced by local shops and amenities were sustainability related goals that were ahead of their time. The less car dependent living offered in FCN is greatly appreciated by interview respondents, most of whom explain that this was a major reason for moving to the neighbourhood. Half of the respondents comment that living in a community that supports sustainability principles is important to them. Others do not connect particularly with the concept of sustainability but value healthy lifestyles and economically efficient options. In many cases such lifestyle choices are inherently better for the environment as well.

"Sustainability is very important to us! Vancouver is the leading City in North America; that's why we're here!"

General pollution and the condition of the natural environment in the area is a source of concern for some residents and particularly for children in the neighbourhood. Children are very aware of environmental issues and appreciate transit and recycling programs offered in the neighbourhood. One child noted, however, that where he used to see fish in the water, there no longer are any. Several participants suggest that they would like to see more opportunities to interact with nature and natural features within FCN.



Many residents equate an active lifestyle with sustainability. They praise community amenities that facilitate exercise such as the tennis courts at David Lam Park.

Limits to Sustainability

Many residents note that health and social aspects are equally as important as environmental dimensions of sustainability. Residents appreciate FCN's wide range of age demographics and the active lifestyle of walking to meet most daily needs, jogging on the Seawall and the general orientation to healthy and organic food in many of the stores, particularly Urban Fare. On the other hand, many residents fear that they will not be able to afford the lifestyle for much longer. A mix of stores that better reflects the range of incomes and needs in the community would add to the social and economic sustainability of FCN. Increasingly unaffordable housing due in part to the rising price of real estate is an issue that is difficult to resolve. A number of residents admit that they will likely have to move in the not too distant future because of unaffordable housing. This reality clearly threatens the diverse community that planners intended FCN to be, particularly because a majority of those that are considering leaving are families or young couples considering having children.

Many residents are also concerned that FCN may be approaching the limits to how many people it can accommodate and that more people will infringe on the qualities that make FCN what it is — a safe and liveable community. Some also recognize that the sustainability of FCN must be considered within a greater context of the residents' collective impact that extends beyond the geographical boundaries of FCN. FCN for instance is not sustainable in the respect that it can provide food for its residents, as more than one resident point out.

Although residents frequently express concern for the environment and explain that sustainable living is important to them, few identify explicitly ‘green’ features as a factor for choosing where they would like to live. Nonetheless, most participants are enthusiastic to suggest ways that the community could be rendered more environmentally friendly: improving the performance standards of buildings; replacing fixtures with energy and water efficient appliances; introducing composting programs; improving frequency and convenience of public transit including wheelchair and stroller access; increasing the variety and affordability of local shops; implementing more sophisticated recycling programs; installing motion-detector lights in buildings; reducing traffic on Pacific Boulevard; providing for green roofs; allocating more secure spaces for community gardens and hosting a local farmers market. The most frequently voiced complaint is that the design of the units almost necessitates air conditioning – an energy intensive feature that should not be needed in a temperate climate. Residents also complain of non-functioning energy efficient appliances, emphasizing that quality must not be compromised when striving for enhanced performance.

“I think more can be done to encourage residents to be more environmentally conscious. For example, there are no community gardens in the area, some buildings have air conditioning – why would that be necessary in Vancouver?”

The need to lessen the ecological impact of the built form, city infrastructure and human consumption is a concept with which residents of FCN are familiar and which they support. Interestingly, however, when asked if they think FCN will be able to weather anticipated macro-challenges such as peak oil, food security and rising sea levels, most residents with whom we spoke also admit that they have not considered such things for their community. Many also still find it difficult to engage in less impactful behaviour, such as relinquishing their car completely. While the role of individuals is essential in lessening our collective ecological footprint, cities and homes need also to be built in a way that facilitates resident engagement in behaviours that support this aim.

“We will probably have to move if we want to buy an apartment. We could not afford to start a family here, even though we would like to.”



Some residents would like to see more natural features in FCN. They hope that a natural presence will become more pronounced over time as vegetation grows.



The False Creek marinas are identified by some as an environmental concern. Here the shoreline is less modified than in most areas.



Coopers Park has been landscaped with some low maintenance natural features such as these bunch grasses. Some consider this area tranquil.

Primary Recommendations

This study yielded positive assessment of life in FCN from the residents' perspective. Most residents would like to continue to live in the neighbourhood for the foreseeable future. Criticisms and suggestions for improvement tend to emerge only with additional probing as part of each research method. In light of this, the general direction of the policy framework implemented during the planning and design stages of the FCN development should be viewed as successful. The process, in general terms, can be interpreted as representing leading practice and can be helpful in informing future urban planning. There are, however, some very important exceptions.

Future planning and design policies should be modified to reflect the following recommendations:

- Articulate more strongly policy guidelines framing implementation of social infrastructure, such as schools to ensure that sufficient facilities are available before the first families move in. Ensure that these facilities are available within growing neighbourhoods such as FCN as the number and concentration of families increases.
- Guide the allocation of space for daycare facilities with a realistic sense of the demand and projected growth. Identify and address any loopholes that might weaken such a framework.
- Design more diverse public spaces catering to the specific recreation and play needs of older children, as well as younger children, rather than simply treating children as an homogenous group with common play and recreation needs.
- Aggressively foster affordable housing schemes targeting middle and modest income earners to ensure a diverse socio-economic mix, an environment appropriate for families and a strong sense of community.
- Target the incorporation of more appropriate and affordable retail outlets from the early stages of the development to meet the needs of residents from a variety of socio-economic grounds. Focus on families, in particular.

While many aspects of the community have been successful, some policies are almost unanimously praised by residents. These issues should be given priority in framing future policy and in guiding similar developments:

- **Connectivity:** Replicate the planning of public space, by which large spaces optimize visual and physical accessibility and by which the water and open space within and outside of the study area are connected to the Seawall.
- **Amenities:** Allocate a minimum of the current public space for a diversity of activities including parks for recreation and leisure and an active community centre.
- **Accessibility:** Consider the current amount of public space reserved for parks, recreation and leisure to be a minimum allocation for high-density living. Include an active community centre in similar developments.
- **Tenure and Age Mix:** Persevere with the goal of mixed socio-economic communities; the presence of families with children adds value and community for all residents.

The above recommendations were echoed by respondents and participants in all the research methods. With such strong triangulation validating their importance to the residents, they should be considered primary recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Development, Civic and Management Sectors

Secondary and Additional Recommendations

The following secondary recommendations are general areas requiring improvement that were heard strongly throughout the research process but that did not evoke the same degree of consensus and emotion as the foregoing issues. Additional recommendations include specific suggestions by several residents to mitigate the concerns outlined in the secondary recommendations. All recommendations have been listed in order of importance and targeted to each of the development community, civic sector and management bodies.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| SAFETY | <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Install garage gates with separate controls for the exit and entrance such that both do not automatically open at the same time.♦ Install a second gate or 'arm' in all parkade entrances and exits to ensure that residents must stop while the gate is closing behind them so as to prevent intruders from entering through the parkade doors.♦ Prioritize perceptions of safety during periods of construction by installing more lighting and keeping areas well manicured and patrolled. |
| BUILDINGS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Address inadequacies with the quantity, distribution and management of visitor parking.♦ Design outdoor building common spaces with adequate sun exposure.♦ Design indoor and outdoor building amenity space with particular attention to the special behavioural needs of families and for unforced informal social encounters and spontaneous use.♦ In design of amenity spaces, recognise the unique needs of specific age groups of children, especially youth (ages 8-14).♦ Revisit in-house elevator allocation policies and regulations to ensure that sufficient elevators are built to satisfy residents, particularly in 20+ story buildings.♦ Consider creative ways to optimize vacant space within the building to accommodate additional personal storage.♦ Install outdoor furniture and facilities such as benches and barbecues in shared outdoor areas of the building.♦ Reserve common space within the buildings, but outside of units, for bicycle storage. |
| UNITS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Be creative about adding more in-suite storage, both general and specific; look to other countries for innovation.♦ Provide outdoor balconies for all units.♦ Improve noise-mitigating features in all residential buildings, especially those located near busy streets or commercial areas.♦ Use thermal comfort and mitigating measures on windows to obscure direct sun, such as UV films, overhangs or window coverings.♦ Design windows that can open as widely as possible even when blinds are drawn so that residents do not have to compromise ventilation for privacy and vice versa.♦ Avoid designing L-shaped units that waste space with hallways, wherever possible. |

False Creek North Post-Occupancy Evaluation

RECOMMENDATIONS: Development, Civic and Management Sectors

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CIVIC SECTOR

PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES

- ♦ Repeat the 'open' landscaping concept that has been used successfully to contribute to a sense of safety appropriate for parks in a dense residential area.
- ♦ Reserve more spaces specifically for dogs. Investigate the possibility of turning George Wainborn Park into an off-leash park using appropriate landscaping features to separate the children's play area from the proposed off-leash area.
- ♦ Provide biodegradable bags for picking-up dog feces in parks and along the Seawall.
- ♦ Place more garbage and recycling bins in parks.
- ♦ Provide more amenities for leisure activities along the Seawall and in the parks including: weather protection, public barbecues, chairs and benches, particularly sociopetal seating that supports conversations and interaction.
- ♦ Design and provide age-specific play and recreation spaces, services and activities for children and youth.
- ♦ Consider the allocation of recreation facilities in future developments for youth activities, such as a swimming pool, skating rink and water park.
- ♦ Use smaller parks to improve connections between the larger green spaces and to break up the density caused by tall residential buildings.

SHOPS AND SERVICES

- ♦ Encourage more retail and commercial space, particularly with patios and pedestrian-friendly zones.
- ♦ Continue to support the Roundhouse and its activities for people of all ages.
- ♦ Make more funds available for free activities for youth.
- ♦ Make space and funds available for a youth-centred space such as a club that accommodates unstructured activity based on the needs of local young people.

MOBILITY

- ♦ Promote and facilitate the growth of car cooperatives, as these appear to offer some residents the options and flexibility that they need to part completely with their vehicles, options that transit cannot provide.
- ♦ Conduct further research into why so few residents use bicycles to commute and support policies and programs to make Vancouver a more bicycle-friendly city.
- ♦ Attempt to address barriers that prevent residents from giving up their vehicles completely.

SAFETY

- ♦ Consider the 'eyes on the street' effect that was successfully implemented in FCN to be leading practice. This contributes significantly to a sense of safety in the neighbourhood.
- ♦ Install more lighting in the parks and along the Seawall, taking into account current principles of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED).
- ♦ Trim back unruly and high vegetation in the U-shaped seating area in the northwest corner of David Lam Park.

BUILDINGS

- ♦ Revisit design guidelines and regulations related to the location of elevators in high-rise buildings to ensure a sufficient elevator to resident ratio.
- ♦ Revisit City bylaws that prohibit resident use of parking stalls for storage.
- ♦ Plan to reduce traffic along Pacific Boulevard.

COMMUNITY

- ♦ Recognise that subsidized housing and cooperatives attract families with children and create community, a valuable asset for all residents; use such evidence to counter NIMBYism against such developments.
- ♦ Conduct multicultural planning in the neighbourhood and further investigate reasons for division along ethnic lines.
- ♦ Consider the establishment of cafés along the waterfront in certain areas to stimulate a sense of activity and community.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MANAGEMENT BODIES

- SAFETY**
 - ♦ Encourage provision of twenty-four hour concierge service, as this contributes greatly to resident sense of safety.
- BUILDINGS**
 - ♦ Consider alternative methods for exhibiting visitor parking status such as allowing visitors to register the car with the concierge in buildings with concierge service.
 - ♦ Negotiate arrangements so that parking spots reserved for businesses can be used by visitors in the evenings.
 - ♦ Install patio furniture, BBQs and children's play equipment in buildings' outdoor common spaces to increase use and support neighbourliness.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

- SAFETY**
 - ♦ Ensure that FOB security systems are implemented in all buildings of all tenure types.
 - ♦ Repeat the lighting and layout used for building garages, as these appear to have been successful and have contributed to residents sense of safety.
- BUILDINGS**
 - ♦ Install specific play areas and equipment for children of all ages, including youth (ages 8-14) in shared outdoor areas of the building.
 - ♦ Beautify lobbies so as to create a good first impression of which residents can be proud; provide seating, planters and flowers.
 - ♦ Install intercoms in all amenity rooms that are suitable for hosting events, such as party rooms and games rooms in all buildings, including social housing and cooperatives.
 - ♦ Consider ways to offer more amenities for social and cooperative housing without restrictive cost increases; amenities are valuable to children and these buildings have a high proportion of households with children.
 - ♦ Provide separate parking stalls for trades people during working hours; locate the stalls near elevators and allocate adequate unloading space.
 - ♦ Design parkades with sufficient space to avoid conflict of uses; for example, garbage collection should not disrupt visitor parking spaces.
 - ♦ Reserve more spaces in building parkades for cooperative cars.

False Creek North Post-Occupancy Evaluation

RECOMMENDATIONS: Development, Civic and Management Sectors

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY continued

UNITS

- ♦ Include a linen closet in all units.
- ♦ Provide for at least one pantry-type closet where residents can store large items.
- ♦ Provide kitchen storage for specific uses, such as cabinets and drawers of adequate size.
- ♦ Ensure that all walk-in closets are large enough for a grown man to turn around in when the closet is reasonably full.
- ♦ Provide for a wide range of unit sizes to meet various resident needs and family compositions.
- ♦ Ensure that the design of enclosed balconies allows for future modification; accommodate this in City bylaw strata title arrangements.
- ♦ Design open balconies so that they permit drainage without spilling onto floors below.
- ♦ Use glass or Lucite for open balcony railings.
- ♦ Consider the ease of cleaning when installing any materials that may be subject to extensive or extreme use, such as balcony flooring which may easily get dirty,
- ♦ Do not include floor-to-ceiling windows in bedrooms.
- ♦ Design floor-to-ceiling windows with the optional installation of standard-sized panels that can be easily added to permit more flexibility for privacy and furnishability. Provide information to residents on where they can purchase additional panels.
- ♦ Use reflective or semi-reflective windows to obscure views into the units during the day, particularly in lower level units.
- ♦ Ensure that rooms are of conventional room dimensions, particularly in smaller units that need to maximize space. Avoid angled or odd-shaped walls.
- ♦ Use pocket doors when possible to save space.
- ♦ Include overhead light fixtures in all rooms, as they minimize the need for freestanding lamps, thereby saving space.
- ♦ Do not locate power outlets and overhead light fixtures in odd locations. Locate them with furniture arrangement in mind.
- ♦ In close-plan kitchens, ensure that kitchen walls are not load-bearing for ease of renovation.
- ♦ Design open-plan kitchens to be as adaptable as possible to allow for the future insertion of walls.
- ♦ Locate bathrooms and bedrooms so they are not accessible directly from living areas, wherever possible.
- ♦ Design for visual and acoustic privacy to bathrooms and bedrooms.
- ♦ Design for soundproofing for both horizontally and vertically adjacent units.
- ♦ Avoid locating bedrooms adjacent to each other, wherever possible.
- ♦ Maintain the same levels of acoustic insulation all buildings, including non-market.
- ♦ Locate all bedrooms away from busy streets such as Pacific Boulevard, as much as possible.
- ♦ Install triple-pane glass on windows that face major streets for noise insulation.
- ♦ Maintain wide entrances and hallways to create a sense of space and to allow for evolving needs of senior residents, such as wheelchair and electric chair use.

SUSTAINABILITY

- ♦ Ensure that the energy-efficient technologies installed achieve their desired performance.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CIVIC SECTOR

PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Further explore the size and distribution of marinas that are appropriate for the area. ◆ Using leading practice research and design guidelines, design playgrounds to be more adventurous, interactive and stimulating. Consider incorporating natural features and more tactile stimulation such as vegetation, sand and wood stumps. ◆ Design fountains for their ability to provide interesting landscaping and to mimic the natural environment. Avoid decorative ‘spray’ fountains. ◆ Emphasize the historical aspect of the Roundhouse Plaza during the space’s re-design and add plants, shade trees and seating places to increase the Plaza’s functionality. ◆ Integrate more public access to the natural shoreline. ◆ Consider choosing public art with less metallic components, as these are generally disliked. ◆ Add more small-scale soft landscaping features such as plants and flowers, creating more “intimate” spaces and prioritizing native plants where possible. ◆ Encourage a farmers market in the Roundhouse Plaza as a means of enhancing the vibrancy of that underutilized space.
SHOPS AND SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Be creative about encouraging commercial diversity such as a weekly public farmers market.
MOBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ameliorate wayfinding along the Seawall in FCN, with particular attention to bicycle and pedestrian route separation, specifically at the following locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At the foot of Davie Street on the bicycle path heading east: consider changing the pavement colour heading up the ramp and into the traffic circle so that cyclists do not mistake this for the bicycle route. Replace the sign at this location to ensure that it is clear that cyclists are not intended to follow the ramp. ○ At the foot of Homer Street: move the concrete blocks to make it easier for cyclists to pass without risk of injury. Provide more appropriate, targeted lighting at this location so that cyclists are better able to see the blocks at night. ○ Add clear signage to the archway at 1000 Beach to direct cyclists heading west to follow the Seawall, rather than head straight under the arch. ○ Improve the Seabreeze Walk route between Granville and Burrard to be more cyclist-friendly by installing ramps instead of tapered curbs. If possible, integrate the cycling route to the Seawall route rather than redirecting cyclists through traffic. ◆ Recognise that high transit fares are a barrier to transit use, even for middle-income residents.
SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consider providing opportunities for more commercial areas at street level to increase ‘eyes on the street’. ◆ Develop ways to buffer residential zones from entertainment zones. ◆ Consider the need for more police and security patrols in the area because it is affected by bar and club ‘spill-over.’ ◆ Conduct regular programs to clean up needles in the neighbourhood and continue public education programs about drug use.
BUILDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stagger building placement to maximize views from units; this policy has been successfully implemented in FCN to the satisfaction of residents. ◆ Review polices to mandate two elevators (even a smaller secondary one) in buildings greater than four stories and three elevators in buildings greater than twenty stories.
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consider hosting more community events, using the Roundhouse Plaza in particular. ◆ Organize more community entertainment and other events to promote a sense of community. ◆ Host events that will celebrate ethnic diversity and foster inclusion and mixing between people of different ethnicities. ◆ Incorporate a cultural focus into the Roundhouse. ◆ Cater more activities to seniors to help integrate them into community activities and counter any sense of isolation.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO MANAGEMENT BODIES

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Enforce on-leash zones once additional off-leash space is designated.♦ Enforce fines for not picking up dog feces.
MOBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Reserve more parkade spaces for cooperative car companies.
SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Consider co-operating with other buildings' stratas to fund bicycle patrols.
BUILDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Program adequate time on the lobby entrance buzzer security feature to allow visitors (especially older people) to enter the building and elevator.♦ Allow FOB access to stair doors in buildings where this is not currently available.♦ Limit the use of FOB to critical doors of safety concern.♦ Use weight or motion sensors (rather than a FOB access card) to allow people to exit the parkade.♦ Take measures at a building management level to promote a sense of community that will overcome the barriers implemented through the FOB system and that will contribute to added security through a sense of neighbourliness. Measures include: encouraging residents to host activities in the amenity rooms such as games nights, children's activities, movies and sports games.♦ Consider simplifying the reservation procedures for common space so as to encourage more frequent use, spontaneous use and some common use, in addition to pre-booked privately reserved use of amenity rooms.♦ Program the common outdoor spaces to increase use.♦ Allow for flexibility of use of the common outdoor spaces and include provision for more active uses.♦ Provide for basic supplies such as dishes and utensils in the party room to permit easier catering of events.♦ Install intercoms in all amenity rooms that are suitable for hosting events such as party rooms and games rooms in all buildings including social housing and cooperatives.♦ Allow for some flexibility in provision of standard window coverings that can change with trends and availability of supplies in standard stores.♦ Revisit building rules governing the use of common outdoor space to ensure that restrictions of activities reflect the majority of residents' preferences.
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Cooperate with other stratas to organize community block parties.♦ Attempt to foster community through building events such as sporting events, games nights and movie nights.♦ Carefully consider trade-offs inherent in rules governing indoor and outdoor amenity use as these may placate some residents at the expense of the building's sense of community and suitability for children.♦ Cooperate with other stratas to form a neighbourhood association.
SUSTAINABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Provide explicit instructions and possibly even training on how to sort recyclable materials. Provide this information in a variety of languages reflective of the ethnic diversity of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Further Research and Continued Community Engagement

- Prepare planning and design guidelines for interiors and exteriors based on these findings and further study.
- Conduct trade-off analyses to understand better the attributes in unit, building and other community design elements that contribute most highly to resident satisfaction.
- Track residents leaving FCN to determine what factors are determining their outward migration.
- Consider locating residents who have moved previously to determine their motives for leaving.
- Determine which units have experienced the lowest turnover rates and discuss with these residents their reasons for not leaving their unit and their community.
- Conduct periodic post-occupancy evaluations of FCN over time at ten-year intervals to determine how the community is evolving.
- Undertake comparative post-occupancy evaluations, comparing developments with differing densities, populations, locations, amenities and design.
- Incorporate the evaluative framework and critical thinking inherent in post-occupancy evaluations into standard pedagogy for students in planning, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, design, recreation, child care, social research and development.
- Create evaluative frameworks based on target objectives, outputs and evaluation criteria during planning stages to establish a baseline for post-occupancy evaluation work.
- Integrate post-occupancy evaluations as part of best practice in planning, architecture, design and development.
- Conduct Building Performance Evaluations to monitor resource flows within buildings.
- Conduct further research and incorporate adaptability principles in unit, building and public space design as a means of adding flexibility and longevity to the community.
- Continue engagement with interested members of the FCN community developing action plans to address priority recommendations.
- Share this information with interested bodies through increased public relations and communication efforts.

CONCLUSION

How a community decides to use its land and allocate community services and infrastructure offers one of the greatest leverages in our pursuit to achieving sustainable use of land and resources. Living in high-density is still a relatively novel lifestyle choice for Canadians, and North Americans more broadly, which home owners and families have not embraced as fully as the suburban dream. The findings from the False Creek North post-occupancy evaluation have been useful in highlighting what is and what is not working well for the residents of the compact neighbourhood. It is our sincere hope that these findings will positively contribute to the satisfaction of residents in FCN and in other communities that aspire to be centrally located, high-density, pedestrian and family oriented mixed-use neighbourhoods.

In addition to substantive outcomes, this research exemplifies the value of evaluative thinking in planning and community development. The high overall satisfaction levels of residents living in FCN suggest that the community deserves much of its repute. However, without evaluative research the design and management aspects in need of improvement might otherwise not be identified, documented and addressed. We believe that this study should set a precedence in establishing post-occupancy evaluations as part of planning and development best practice.

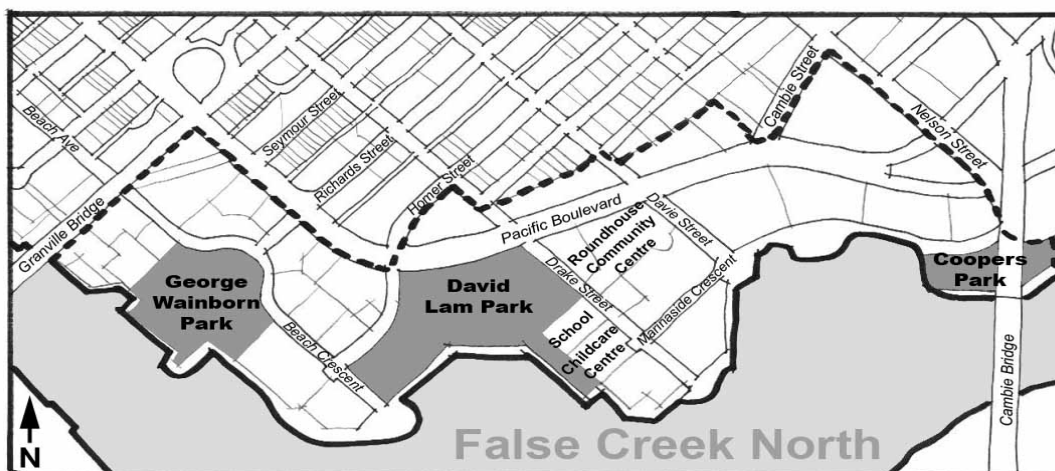


What will residents say about the FCN community as it continues to develop and evolve over the years to come?

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