

Reimagining Vancouver's Downtown Waterfront

A visioning initiative led by the
Downtown Waterfront Working Group
and MST Associates

January, 2022





We acknowledge we are on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Sel̓ilwítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We thank them for stewarding these lands and waters since time immemorial, and look forward to working with them in partnership as we envision the future potential of the Downtown Waterfront.

A Place that Reflects National Commitments to Truth and Reconciliation

The overall design needs to reflect the cultural values of MST, honoring the place they once called home.

Our waterfront needs to reflect and celebrate the diversity of Vancouver and BC. Residents need to feel comfortable here. While tourism and commerce are important, they need to complement rather than dominate this precious space.



Habitat Island Vancouver, B.C.
photo credit: PWL Partnership

An Adaptive Waterfront

We have waited a long time for the waterfront redevelopment to get started and the climate change challenge has become so much more real and urgent. Nearly 40% of the world's population live in coastal locations threatened by sea level rise. Here is an opportunity to showcase to the world how the built environment can be climate-proofed.



Pier 5 - Brooklyn Bridge Park Brooklyn NY
photo credit: Architectural Research Office



A Working Waterfront



The Port has and will continue to play a vital economic role for the city, for BC and for the nation. It is unusual among world cities for freight railyards located in the central city to occupy such a large footprint. Truck/rail congestion, the negative impact of truck traffic, combined with concerns about dangerous goods movements have been the main reasons for re-location. In most major cities, the rail footprint has been reduced or capped with a structure to make way for a diversity of economic and cultural functions. How can the economic functions of the waterfront be expanded while maintaining an efficient good movement system?

Cultural and recreation attractions, entertainment, restaurants, offices, shops, housing, and a farmer's market are among the many possibilities for the future waterfront.

A World Class Transportation Interchange

Where else in the world do so many modes of transportation come together in one place? The spectrum of uses range from the busiest transit station in the Metro Vancouver system all the way to cruise ships, and every mode in between.

Pre- COVID, Waterfront Station had 13 million transit boardings a year. This demonstrates its tremendous transportation role, but also flags its potential for a full range of commercial and cultural opportunities, given the foot traffic. The careful planning of the waterfront will ensure that there is space for an expanded ferry system, more passenger rail for the Lower Mainland and beyond, as well as improved cruise ship logistics. The presence of the station also adds to the vitality and interest of the Downtown and is an underused urban resource waiting to be tapped.



Atocha Train Station Revitalization Madrid, Spain
photo credit: Wikipedia commons

A Dynamic Public Waterfront

Our aspirations for urban design and public spaces are lofty but achievable. Design needs to be informed by the rich traditions of local host nations MST and complimented with Northwest Coast culture. The building scale has to reflect and respect its spectacular setting and historic buildings, and at the same time help create delightful public spaces. Some of these spaces will be a product of the ecological services the water's edge offers, and add a much needed green lung to the park-deficient inner city.



Waterman's Cove Sydney Australia
photo credit: Wikipedia commons



Stitching Together Vancouver's Neighbourhoods

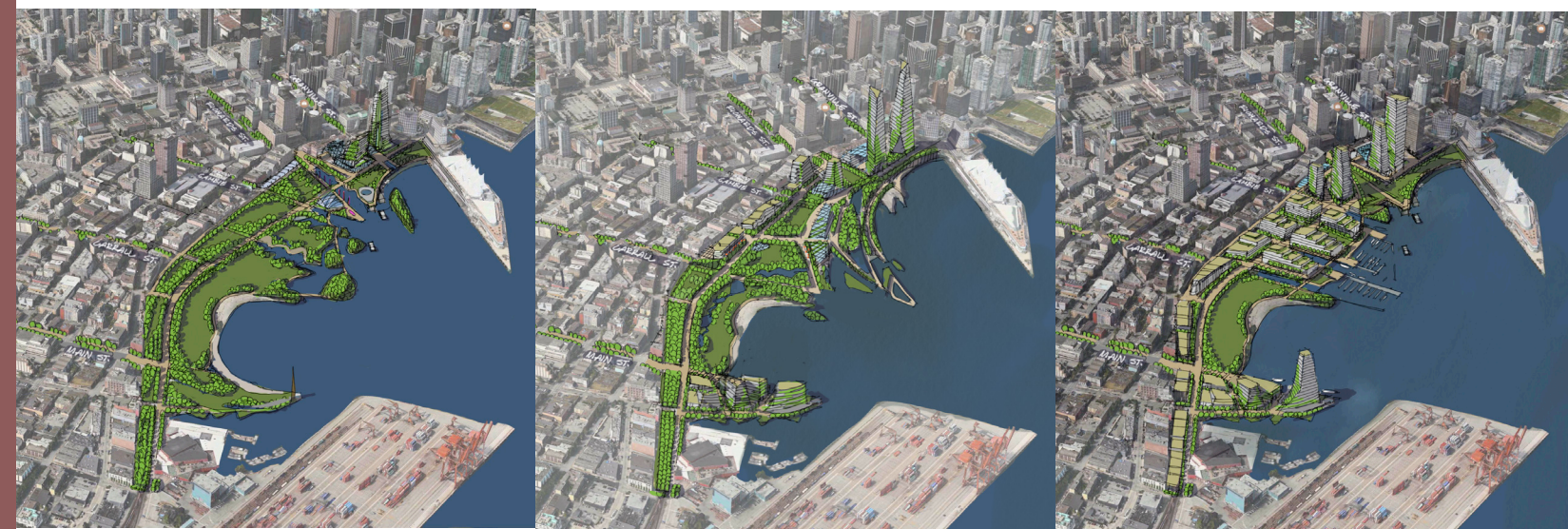
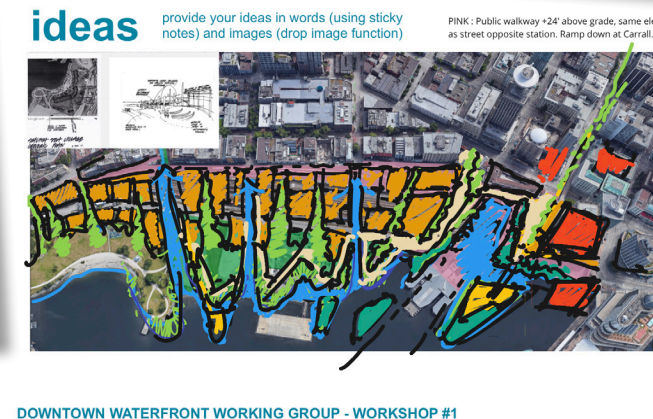
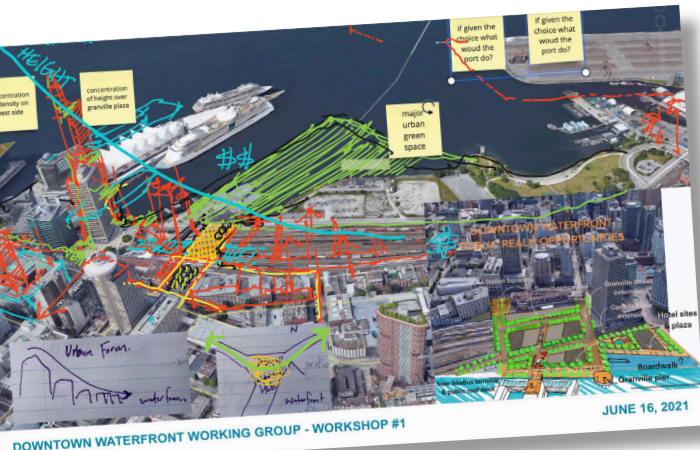
Pivotal is an over-used word but in this case, it accurately describes the prime location and function of the waterfront redevelopment site. Of all the potential city-building and social equity enhancements, few are more important than connecting the east side of Vancouver to the Downtown and Stanley Park. This will be achieved by continuous pedestrian and cycling links. We envision that the redevelopment of the waterfront could help inject much-needed vibrancy and commerce back into Gastown and Chinatown.



Downtown Eastside Vancouver B.C.
photo credit: Wikipedia commons

Waterfront Effort

The success of the waterfront will depend on the federal, provincial, regional, MST Host Nations, and local government working together, along with the private sector and the wider community. Let's get started!



Let's open up the discussion on the future of the waterfront

Have you ever wondered why the land at the north end of Granville Street around Waterfront Station is still occupied by freight rail tracks and surface parking lots?

Port cities around the world continue to revitalize their downtown waterfronts by moving freight yards out of the downtown and adding a deck over passenger rail lines. These cities demonstrate how innovative solutions can continue to support Port functions while providing a spectacular waterfront for all to enjoy.

The City of Vancouver's plans to redevelop the waterfront have existed since the 1970s, yet opportunities to realize these plans continue to be muted due to a lack of funding and collaborative leadership. Since that time, two significant projects requiring senior government funding and leadership, City and Port collaboration, and the relocation of freight rail tracks were completed: Canada Place for Expo '86, and the Convention Center for the 2010 Olympic Games. In 2009, the City prepared a vision of the Waterfront which included exciting ideas such as the elegant and efficient expansion of Waterfront

Station, preservation of historic townscapes, improved transit access by ferry and rail, the opening of Granville Street to the Burrard Inlet again, as well as job/ entertainment space. These plans have collected dust since then.

In 2015 Cadillac Fairview proposed an office tower on the parking lot to the east of Waterfront Station. This led to the formation of the Downtown Waterfront Working Group (DWWG), a group of urbanists, architects, and city planners looking for much better solutions for the future of the waterfront. In December 2020, after non-support from the Vancouver Heritage Commission, Cadillac Fairview decided to put the office tower project on hold for now.

The Downtown Waterfront Working Group in collaboration with MST Associates has been advocating that no individual projects should be approved until waterfront plans are updated. The themes in this brochure provide a way forward for communities, landowners and all levels of government to engage in discussion, plan-making and implementation on how to create a wonderful and inclusive waterfront.

