



Heritage Vancouver

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October 21, 2021

Mayor Stewart and Vancouver City Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver BC V5V 1V4

Re: The Future of False Creek South: Advancing a Conceptual Development Plan and Addressing Lease Expiries

Dear Mayor and Council,

Earlier in July, for over five hours, many living in co-op housing in False Creek South spoke to Council in response to the proposed methodology for Co-operative Housing Lease Renewals. In contrast to the market logic of the methodology, they, some in tears, talked to you about their lives in this community. They asked that the City not view them only as number of units, rates, percentages and other statistics. They communicated what it meant to live in co-op housing and how it works. Co-op housing cannot be understood only as affordable housing, it is a way of life with responsibilities and commitments to others. It emphasizes human cooperation over self-interest.

You may remember one False Creek South co-op resident read a poem he composed that lamented the reach of the market into a community whose values are communal, reciprocal and protective of each other from the adverse effects of the market that make people vulnerable. Councillor Carr remarked that that was the first time in her experience that someone had read a poem during proceedings.

The original vision of False Creek South subordinated the logic of the market in order to pursue housing and livability for a mix of income and social groups including those with low incomes and those interested in co-op values.

The ongoing expression of that vision to this day is the living community and social infrastructure that shape the norms and behaviour that animate life in False Creek South. As a collective, they took in and welcomed refugees, they supported temporary modular housing when other neighbourhoods fought it, they developed a plan to increase affordable housing and develop a seniors care facility.

Visiting the neighbourhood, I have also learned of the many smaller (but no less important) human gestures: sharing a cup of sugar with a neighbour, taking care of the child next door because the parents have come up against something unexpected, having tea time with seniors, or offering to help rake leaves.

This proposed development plan recommends that our city government think of the world as a one big market. It applies a market logic that extracts financial value from

what it describes as leveraging “prime waterfront property”, dismisses the co-ops to the sidelines, and inverts the tenure mix between market and non-market housing without consideration for what False Creek South actually means for civic culture. This fundamentally clashes with the worldview that created and characterizes this neighbourhood.

The report states that the proposed plan respects the neighbourhood’s legacy character of building heights and green space. There is much more to False Creek South than the heights and the green space that make it a significant and meaningful place.

The heritage of False Creek South is the interrelationships between the people, the buildings, the nature, the ideas and worldviews that give that place meaning. In order to respect the neighbourhood’s legacy character, we need to care about what gives this place meaning. Many will list those as including the design, the planning model, some of the buildings, the legacy of when CMHC was active in providing vulnerable Canadians with housing, and the political history that led to False Creek South’s creation. Leadership at False Creek South also want to work with local First Nations to see how False Creek South can help bring back visibility of local Indigenous culture to this area.

One of the most critical aspects of the heritage is the social structure that has produced a well functioning and socially responsible community with a strong concern for the challenges we all face in the city. This proposal puts this at risk.

The report is focused on numbers and percentages that are useful in making utilitarian calculations. It does not use or have the information that tells you what False Creek South means in order to make good and careful decisions to plan change. Values and qualities and not part of its focus. Good community and heritage planning would start here.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Yuen', written in a cursive style.

Bill Yuen
Executive Director, Heritage Vancouver Society