



SpotLight#9:

**Vancouver Foundation – Piecing Together the Livability Puzzle
February 2004**

Abstract

The Vancouver Foundation will host the Funders' Network's 2004 annual conference, offering an exciting and illustrative context for the discussion of creatively funding smart growth and investment patterns and practices. The City of Vancouver is an uncontested smart growth leader in the Pacific Northwest region, with a high density, walkable downtown area featuring a seawall that serves as a locus of urban physical activity.

The Vancouver Foundation approaches growth and livability issues in a holistic manner, piecing together a tapestry of grantmaking, innovation, and leadership efforts over the range of related issues. The Foundation is active in the expected areas of transportation, environmental conservation, and land use planning, but it has also put its unique stamp on its efforts by incorporating work on arts and culture, “urban naturalization,” food policy, and social equity into its smart growth and livability framework. Through its grantmaking, advocacy, education, convening, and leadership, the Vancouver Foundation continues to be at the cutting edge of the City and Province's support for smarter growth policies and practices.

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Background. The Vancouver Foundation is the largest community foundation in Canada with an endowment currently valued at approximately \$550 million. Having celebrated its 60th anniversary last year, it is also one of the oldest community foundations in North America. It acts as a hub for the 35 community foundations in the province of British Columbia, providing an annual flow-through grants program, *LEAD: Leadership Engagement and Development*, intended to assist other community foundations in their capacity building efforts.

The Vancouver Foundation continues to be an active funder of smart growth and livable communities projects. While it does not have a specific Smart Growth program area or funding stream, the Foundation approaches growth and livability issues in a holistic manner, piecing together a tapestry of grantmaking, innovation, and leadership efforts over the range of related issues. While the Foundation is active in the expected areas of transportation, environmental conservation, and land use planning, it has also taken a unique approach in

incorporating work on arts and culture, “urban naturalization,” food policy, and social equity into the Smart Growth and Livability framework.

Smart Growth and Livable Communities Grantmaking. The Vancouver Foundation primarily promotes livability through grantmaking. One example is its Neighborhood Small Grants Program, which is an ongoing regranting program. A committee of local residents in each participating community, through a network of neighborhood houses, distributes grants of up to \$500 to local residents for projects ranging from community gardens to celebrations and festivals to public art. Another example is the Foundation’s multi-year support of Smart Growth British Columbia, a Province-wide nonprofit. A recent \$90,000 award to that organization is a large grant for the Vancouver Foundation, illustrating its commitment to this effort.

Urban Naturalization and Food Policy. One of the Funders’ Network conference site visits will be related to the City of Vancouver’s Food Policy Working Group, which the Vancouver Foundation has supported. Entitled “Food in the City: Sustainable Systems for Food and Agriculture in the Greater Vancouver Region,” the session will highlight the important role urban green space can play in both feeding a region’s population and revitalizing its urban areas.

The Vancouver Foundation supports the Evergreen Foundation, which focuses on the greening of the inner city, calling on schools and other institutions to serve as urban oasis stewards. Work with the Hastings Conservancy centers on turning land that houses a midway and racetrack into green space on the east side of Vancouver. This project started with the discovery by a community group that the land parcel had originally been left to the City as green space, and includes recovering a creek and creating urban natural areas.

Social Equity Innovation. The Vancouver Foundation is taking an innovative approach to social equity and urban investment. Through its Four Pillars Fund, the Foundation is forging a leadership role in addressing the issue of drug addiction in the context of urban revitalization in the Downtown Eastside – Vancouver’s inner city area. A partnership between the Vancouver Foundation, the City of Vancouver and members of Vancouver’s Four Pillars Coalition, the Four Pillars Fund addresses the “pillars” of: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement and community safety. Launched in the summer of 2003 with a \$250,000 permanent endowment fund, Vancouver Foundation seeks to build this effort to “empower people and organizations to make their communities safe and healthy places to live,” said Richard Mulcaster, Foundation President and CEO.

Context of Sustainability. The City of Vancouver is an uncontested smart growth leader in the Pacific Northwest region, with a high density, walkable downtown area featuring a seawall that serves as a locus of urban physical activity. The Olympics will come to Vancouver in 2010, and one theme of that event is sustainability. As Program Officer Mauro Vescera says, sustainability is “all the rage” in Vancouver; the Vancouver Foundation continues to be at the cutting edge of this trend.

Aesthetic Component. The Vancouver Foundation has a history of focusing on the aesthetic component of smart growth and livability. The Foundation has a strong interest in

promoting the arts, and at every turn finds ways to link arts and environment, arts and urban revitalization, and arts and community development. An example is the Vancouver Community Arts Council's Environment and Arts Initiative, which sponsors a juried process to select green living sculpture to be erected as urban public art.

Among the Foundation's Art and Culture program area's goals are: "To support the capital development of cultural facilities and museums that will provide enhanced benefit and opportunities to their communities," and "To support initiatives related to audience development including those that reach out to diverse cultures, age groups, sectors and new geographic communities." These stated goals illustrate the linkages the Foundation is actively making between support for the arts, community development, urban revitalization, and – ultimately – livability.

Resources. Additional information is available on the Vancouver Foundation's website at www.vancouverfoundation.bc.ca or by contacting Mauro Vescera, Program Director, Vancouver Foundation, Suite 1200, 555 West Hastings St. Box 12132, Harbour Centre, Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6B 4N6. Tel: (604) 688-2204 Fax: (604) 688-4170, e-mail: mauro@vancouverfoundation.bc.ca.