

# Case Study: Port Moody OCP Update

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## Executive Summary

The City of Port Moody is currently revising its official community plan (OCP) to accommodate for future population needs. This report takes a glimpse at the planning of this process. In the first section, the project background is discussed with references to Port Moody statistics, relevant regional policies and planning principles. The second section of this report looks at the different planning stages of the OCP update process. The tools for community engagement adopted by the planners are reviewed in the third and fourth sections. In the fifth section, a SWOT analysis of the OCP update process is performed; additionally, the effectiveness of this process is assessed using five different criteria namely: 1) Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community; 2) Transparent process; 3) Recognition of expertise of participants; 4) Representative participation by all population groups; and, 5) Accessible and socially inclusive process. Finally, lessons learned from the OCP revision planning process are shared.

**Keywords:** *Port Moody British Columbia, Official Community Plan Revision, Evergreen Line, Transit Oriented Development, Civic Participation, Tools for Community Engagement*

## 1. Context

The Official Community Plan (OCP) of Port Moody is being amended by order of the city council. This project is headed by the planning department of that city in anticipation of potential growth generated by the construction of the Evergreen rail transit by 2016. The goals of the OCP update are two-fold. The first is to address future development and growth attributed to the extension of the Evergreen rail transit. The second is to integrate the values of the Port Moody community. This includes retaining a “small town” character (City of Port Moody, 2013). Residents, business owners, and developers interested in building near the two proposed stations will be affected by the revisions to the community plan. Beyond the aforementioned parties affected, participants involved in this project are the city council of Port Moody, city staff, and provincial agencies (i.e., Metro Vancouver, Translink, School Board). This OCP revision process is being funded by the municipality.

Port Moody is a small city located in the Northeast region of Metro Vancouver with a population of 34,000 (City of Port Moody, 2013). It is officially referred to as the *City of the Arts*. With a population growth rate of 19.9 percent, Port Moody has the third highest population growth rate in British Columbia, which is higher than the Canadian national average growth rate, estimated at 5.9 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2012). According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 68.5 per cent of residents in Port Moody are White; 16.4 per cent are East Asian (8.8 per cent Chinese, 6.6 per cent Korean, 1 per cent Japanese); 2.7 per cent are South East Asian; 3.1 per cent are West Asian; 2.2 per cent are South Asian; 2.6 per cent are Aboriginal; the Black, Latin American, Arab, and Multi-racial individuals accounted for 2.8 per cent of the population (Statistics Canada, 2013).

In Port Moody, 31 per cent of households live in single-detached homes, 13.2 per cent live in apartments with five storeys or more, 23.1 per cent live in apartment buildings with fewer than five storeys, while other households live in other housing types (Statistics Canada, 2012). Based on housing affordability data, 22 percent of homeowners and 27 per cent of renters spend more than 30 per cent of their pre-tax income on housing (Statistics Canada, 2012).

***Evergreen Line Project:*** This is a major public transit initiative that will provide SkyTrain service connecting Coquitlam to Vancouver through Port Moody and Burnaby (Translink, 2013). The project was approved in 2011. Its cost is estimated to be \$1.4 billion and will be funded by Translink, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada (Translink, 2013). The Evergreen Line will have two transit stations in Port Moody namely, Moody Centre Station and Inlet Centre Station (Translink, 2013).

## **2. General Policies and Concepts Guiding the OCP Update**

***Local Government Act (LGA):*** According to the Act, official community plans in BC should set policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management (Division 2, Section 875). The authority that has the responsibility to adopt an OCP is the local government (Division 2, Section 876), which in this process, is the Port Moody City Council. In terms of

the consultation process for an OCP revision, under this act, local governments are required to provide at least one opportunity for consultation with persons, organizations and authorities that will be affected by the amendment of the OCP. Under Section 879 of the Act, local government must determine if consultation should be early and on-going. They also must decide if consultation is required with adjacent jurisdictions, First Nations, school districts, improvement districts, greater boards (ie., regional districts), provincial and federal governments and agencies. The LGA requires that the consultation finish with a public hearing that will take place at the end of council approval of the plan.

According to the LGA, OCPs must address: present and future housing needs; present and future land use on a sectoral basis; 'planning' for public utilities, 'planning' for public amenities, protection of environmentally sensitive lands; restriction on hazardous lands; and identifying sand and gravel deposits for future extraction. OCPs must also include policies that address affordable housing, rental housing, special needs housing, social welfare, and social development (City of Port Moody, 2011).

***Metro Vancouver Growth Strategy:*** Five key goals make up the core principles of the *Metro Vancouver Growth Strategy*: (1) concentrating Metro Vancouver's growth in compact urban areas with a diversity of housing choices that are proximate to employment, amenities, and services. (2) Supporting and preserving the land base and transportation systems required to foster a robust business sector and sustainable economy. (3) Protecting the natural environment and responding to climate change impacts on the region. (4) Developing "complete communities" with affordable housing, employment, services, amenities, active transportation options, and public transit systems. (5) Supporting investment in sustainable transportation options in Metro Vancouver's transit-oriented and compact urban form to encourage healthy lifestyles, reduce energy use, and reduce vehicle emissions in the region (Metro Vancouver, 2011).

***Transit-Oriented Development (TOD):*** TOD is defined as the "relatively higher density that includes a mixture of residential, employment, shopping and civic uses located within an easy walk of a bus or rail transit centre. The development design gives preference to the

pedestrian and bicyclist, and may be accessed by automobiles” (Cervero et al., 2002, p. 6). Planning authorities at Port Moody recognized TOD as a planning principle that could guide new residential and commercial development around Moody Centre Station and the Inlet Centre Station.

### 3. OCP Update Process

Following the confirmation of Evergreen line construction in 2012, City Council of Port Moody requested an update of the OCP to reflect the presence of this transit development while reflecting community values. This process began in April 2012 and its subsequent stages are summarized in Table 1.

PROJECT MILESTONE/EVENT	
Project start up	April 2012
Public Input Session and launch of on-line survey	May 10, 2012
OCP Design Charrette	June 16, 2012
First Draft OCP document	November 27, 2012
Updated Draft OCP document presented to Council	March 12, 2013
Public Consultation on Complete Draft OCP	April 22, 24, 25, 27, May 2, 2013
Presentation of Community Feedback	May 21, 2013
OCP Town Hall Meetings	June 8, 18, 2013
Council review of Draft OCP	September 10, 23 and 30, 2013
Council Review of Updated Draft OCP	November 5, 2013
OCP Town Hall Meeting	November 27, 2013

(Table 1.) Update process of the Port Moody OCP from April 2012 to present.

Following this most recent town hall meeting, the current OCP draft will undergo a review by City Council in early January 2014. Further revisions and consultation may then need to be made before gaining council approval. Once approved as a bylaw, the OCP will go through a series of readings, as well as a public hearing. The OCP will then be submitted as a regional context statement, a policy tool that links municipal OCPs to the Regional Growth Strategy, to Metro Vancouver for acceptance. This process may take up to 120 days. If the

process follows the expected timeline, the revised OCP may be in effect as early as Summer 2014.

As the planning manager for the City of Port Moody, Mary De Paoli has organized and overseen the public consultation process for the OCP revision. She has been responsible for presenting ongoing revisions to City Council and serving as a liaison with external agencies such as Metro Vancouver, Translink, school districts, health authorities and First Nations. In this process, the Planning Department brought forward principles of planning they felt were appropriate, namely Transit-Oriented Development. They also structured an engagement process that included communication and consultation over a 20-month period. During this time, Mary has been responsible for public presentations of OCP revisions at town hall meetings, managing communications and making information available to the public. She has been responsible for adjusting the OCP according to feedback from City Council and residents. These OCP revisions will then be submitted by the Planning Department to City Council for final approval (De Paoli, 2013).

#### **4. Tools and Strategies**

***Population Forecasting:*** City staff calculated the potential population living in Port Moody by 2033 using Statistics Canada data and the Cohort-Component Method. This model is a demographic accounting equation that uses a base population and separate components of population change (fertility, mortality and migration) to project the future total population. City staff predicted the population will increase from 35,000 people in 2013 to 59,000 in 2033. Further calculations were made to account for future housing needs.

In the course of the OCP update process, the Port Moody Planning Department has used a variety of tools to communicate ongoing revisions and events to the public. Beyond traditional public meetings held throughout the municipality, the following tools have been used.

**Process Web Page:** The City of Port Moody website hosts a specific OCP update page. Here, OCP drafts, maps, meeting minutes and agendas are available for download. Streaming live broadcast and recordings of all past town hall meetings are also available for viewing.

**Facebook:** During the update process, the Planning Department has used this page to inform the public with reminders of community meetings, links to live streaming broadcasts and exit poll results from town hall meetings. It has also been a consultation tool in which citizens can submit their comments directly to town hall meetings. Hosting an official Facebook group page, the “City of Port Moody” retains 1,191 followers.

**Twitter:** Using the hashtag #pomoocp, people have been able to participate and to be informed of events, live broadcasts and live tweets during OCP revision consultation meetings. During the last town hall meeting, 30 comments related to the OCP update were shared online using this tool and the #pomoocp hashtag. The official twitter account of the city, @CityofPoMo, has 1,319 followers.

**Place Speak:** This tool is a location-based online community consultation platform that connects citizens with governments, businesses and organizations in their own neighbourhoods. It uses an Online Geo-verification tool to identify the location of participants within a desired geographic area. City staff have made this tool available since the beginning of the OCP update and have hosted discussion topics including development density near future stations and development priorities. Since April 2013, there have been 204 connected participants and 1535 unique views.

**Charrette:** This engagement process is designed to facilitate discussion among community stakeholders. An interdisciplinary team of experts meets with community groups, developers and neighbours to gather feedback from them. The charrette team then works together to develop solutions that will result in a plan. On June 16, 2012, the City of Port Moody conducted a design charrette. The participants were organized into five groups and

were asked to develop concepts for the areas within a 400-metre and 800-metre radius of the two proposed Evergreen Line stations.

**Feedback forms:** Forms consisted of ten formatted questions and asked residents how much they liked the visions proposed for the areas surrounding future stations. At the end of the form, there was a small space for writing comments about the current draft of the OCP. The feedback forms were available online or in written format. City staff received 250 of these feedback forms.

**Personal Mailing List:** The planning manager for the City keeps a mailing list of interested persons. Via this electronic mailing list, relevant notes to the project are shared.

## **5. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis**

**Strengths:** The main strength of the OCP revision, visible in the most recent draft, is the integration of general regional policies (RGS goals and TOD principles). This is noticed through an increase in density in areas surrounding the stations, the creation of mixed-use land areas, and the strengthening of pedestrian and bike routes (Draft OCP, November 2013). Strengths of the engagement process include the following:

- The presence of community-lead organizations such as the Moody Centre Community Association.
- A wide availability of information through different formats (online, hard copies of the OCP in the public library).
- The use of online tools for community engagement such as social networks and PlaceSpeak.
- The accessibility of the planner (Mary de Paoli), given the small population of Port Moody, which has led to more direct communication.
- The supportiveness of the mayor and council to an extended public consultation process.

**Weaknesses:** The principal weakness to the process is the perception of residents that OCP revisions have adopted TOD principles without adapting them to community values. Further weaknesses include:

- Budget limitations that restrain a broader community engagement.
- A lack of participation of people that don't live in areas around the stations.
- Low participation of visible minorities such as youth, ethnic minorities or low-income groups.
- Perception of citizens that they have been left out despite Planning Department efforts to achieve adequate engagement.
- A difficulty coordinating participation among non-English-speaking populations because materials have only been available in English.

**Opportunities:** Opportunities for this OCP update include the revitalization of Westport's industrial areas in order to increase livability. This could be done through the stimulation of current businesses and services alongside the creation of new ones. An opportunity for the Planning Department is to use community values to explicitly shape future transit through policy. Additional opportunities include:

- A broadening of communication channels between the local government and its residents.
- An increase in the legitimacy of the OCP through the involvement of residents in the decision-making process (Baker, Coaffee & Sherriff, 2007).
- Determining where the municipality will focus future growth.
- The creation of more public open spaces for recreational and cultural uses.
- Future developments that are unique and consistent with city values (city of the arts, small town character).
- Responding to housing needs of residents (affordability, housing for seniors).
- Addressing development and economic revitalization through policies directed at focusing density and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.
- The development of cultural amenities and services funded by developers .

**Threats:** The main threat to the OCP revision is a decrease in the citizen's trust of the local government. This may happen if they feel their input was not included in the plan or if City Council approves a draft without widespread public support. However, further threats remain, which include:

- An under-representation of minority groups' visions and interests in the engagement process.
- Dissatisfaction of the Moody Centre Community Association and other residents throughout the consultation process.

- A difficulty in translating opposing community values and policies into a coherent document.
- Inability to include community values in the OCP.

## **6. Effectiveness**

Ultimately, a planning process can be rated as effective by evaluating how well it achieved original objectives. In this case, there are two. First is the planning initiative, the densification of urban development around transit stops (Transit-Oriented Development). Second, is to achieve that initiative in a manner that is consistent with the values of the community (maintain town character). Policy revised thus far in the OCP has effectively addressed Metro Vancouver's regional growth strategy, mainly Goal One (the concentration of growth in compact urban communities), and Goal Five, (through transit-oriented form supporting a range of sustainable transportation choices that provide linkages among communities and the movement of goods) (Metro Vancouver, 2011). This is noted in major revisions to land use designation, greenhouse gas emission reduction, residential density and special study of neighbourhood areas and residential development in proximity to a railway corridor (City of Port Moody, November 2013). Long-term effectiveness of these revisions can only be evaluated through ongoing monitoring of these strategies at a long-term scale once the OCP is adopted.

Regarding the evaluation of the second objective, we will use two different criteria. The first one is the evaluation of the process by participants. Since there is presently no formal mechanism for the community to assess the OCP update process, we will reference social media postings and personal interviews to gauge participants' evaluation. The second criterion will be the assessment of the engagement process using the guidelines set by the Port Moody Public Engagement Toolkit (2007). This toolkit was developed by the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia to improve Port Moody's engagement efforts with the public.

Assessments of the engagement process by its participants have become evident in public spaces such as social media postings and blogs hosted by communities. One citizen of Port Moody made her/his positive assessment of communications tools via twitter:

“Props to @davedotca (Manager of Civic Engagement, Port Moody) and the comms team @CityofPoMo for getting the livestream out for the #pomoocp. Without it, I couldn’t have participated.”

Conversely, when interviewed about the effectiveness of the OCP process, these were the words of the President of the Moody Centre Community Association:

“In terms of opportunities for public participation, opportunities have been limited to date, although reading the city-prepared information might suggest otherwise. MCCA has taken an active role in updating residents of developments, but our budget and reach is not what we'd like.”

According to the Port Moody Public Engagement Toolkit, the update of Port Moody’s OCP has a high impact because it involves significant changes and affects the whole community. Following toolkit recommendations, high impact processes require all types of public engagement: communication, consultation and direct participation in decision-making. The following is a brief description of these types of engagement and the extent to which they have been included in the OCP update process.

***Communication:*** This consists of informing the citizens about the issue at hand. The government institution in charge should try to reach as many people as possible and share as much information as possible. Some tools that can be used for communicating information are: TV, radio, websites and newsletters.

***Evaluation:*** Communication has been widely used during this OCP update process. Municipal staff have used the following methods: conventional advertising, notices on the website, informative mailing list, pamphlets, posters, public presentations of drafts to council, letters to regional agencies, and information through social networks.

**Consultation:** This is the process of seeking the opinions and suggestions of the community. This type of engagement includes resident input among the criteria for the decision-making process without necessarily involving citizens in making the final decision. Some methods used in this kind of engagement include public meetings, community mapping, focus groups, workshops and surveys.

*Evaluation:* The OCP update has also included consultation as part of the community engagement process. The methods of consultation that have been used by city staff comprise: surveys, public meetings in different parts of the city, town hall meetings, public input during council meetings, a charette with different stakeholders, PlaceSpeak, consultation with city committees and residents' input through social networks.

**Direct Participation:** This is the most difficult but most empowering form of engagement. In this case, residents have direct impact in the decision-making process. Some examples of direct participation are citizen juries, participatory budgeting and Citizen Advisory committees.

*Evaluation:* To date, city staff have not used any method of direct participation during the OCP update process. Additionally, the Port Moody Public Engagement Toolkit sets five criteria for assessing the effectiveness of an engagement process. An evaluation of each criterion is included below.

**1. Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community:** The information available for the public uses plain language. In the cases that technical terms are introduced, these are explained in the documents. The information material also includes a lot of visual content. In general, most of the information about the project is available online for the public. However, some kinds of information, such as constraining factors, budget or timeline, have not been disclosed to the public. Regarding communication of events related to the update process, city staff have used a diversity of methods: web page, mailing list, social networks, posters and advertisements.

**2. *Transparent process that links results of community engagement to decision-making:*** Port Moody is a small community, enabling direct contact with City Council and the Planning Department. This facilitates a more transparent process in which residents know what is the position of elected officials and can ask for accountability when they feel the process is not transparent. On the other hand, most of the information related with the process is available online (videos, agendas, minutes of City Council meetings and community feedback forms). Residents can also access the printed materials by request at City Hall. According to the planning manager, community feedback has been included in the revisions of the OCP document. However, there has not been systematic feedback to the participants about how their comments have been addressed or explaining how their opinions have been integrated in the OCP drafts, which could create a sense in the community that their voices are not being heard.

**3. *Recognition of knowledge and expertise of participants:*** The Planning Department recognizes that residents have a wealth of knowledge about the municipality. This is one of the reasons of the ongoing consultation with residents. However, the expertise of Port Moody citizens has not been recognized openly in public situations.

**4. *Representative participation by relevant population groups:*** As the OCP update affects the entire Port Moody community, this process should include a representative sample of the socio-demographic characteristics of the municipality. The planning manager expressed that most event participants are residents of areas surrounding the proposed stations and citizens that regularly attend Port Moody municipal government events. City staff have not held events or used tools to draw participation from under-represented populations such as youth, First Nations or non-English speakers.

**5. *Accessible and socially inclusive process:*** There are five key points included in this criterion: venues, timing, transport, childcare and language. Public consultation sessions were held during an array of times and different locations throughout Port Moody. Most events were streamed as live broadcasts, which made them available for people that otherwise would not have access to them. However, no transport or childcare services

were provided during the events, nor was information available in languages other than English.

## **7. Lessons Learned**

The confirmation of a major transit line such as the Evergreen line project, can initiate a demanding process of community engagement surrounding an OCP revision. However, there are a few notes for future practice. We have learned that people who live closest to the proposed stations (the areas heavily addressed in the OCP revision) have been the most involved and are opposed to increases in density more than four storeys, something that reflects broader community values of a small town feel. This strong reaction to potential changes in the municipality can be understood using concepts of place, meaning and attachment as reviewed by Manzo & Perkins (2006). They note that spaces acquire meaning and value through experience and that people develop an emotional connection with them and tend to perceive changes to these spaces as a threat. This sentiment of threat may lead residents to resist any proposal, regardless of its value, and to question trust in the planning process of their municipality. If these feelings are acknowledged appropriately, they could motivate citizens to participate and be involved in the transformation process. According to Innes, the most traditional planning tools for community engagement (such as public hearings and town hall meetings) are likely to overlook symbolic and effective concerns that should be central in any community process. Instead, collaborative approaches in which citizens can participate directly in the design and decision-making of initiatives like TOD, address tensions associated with place attachment and meaning. In Port Moody, people have sought active inclusion in the consultation process for the OCP update but there has been confusion in their expectations regarding the degree of participation. Future community engagement processes should state and define their goals explicitly (i.e., consultation not direct participation). Further, as noted in a recent paper evaluating the quality of community plans in southern British Columbia, in which Port Moody was sampled, an emphasis on implementation and monitoring OCPs is the key to understanding if they are effective at achieving goals (Stevens, 2013). Monitoring programs are mentioned only vaguely in Section 17.2 of the

OCP and are focused on targets or policies rather than the OCP as a whole (Port Moody, 2013). OCPs should make clear how their implementation will be monitored.

The study of a community in the periphery of a metro area updating its OCP in response to transit-oriented growth while striving to maintain place-based values is a common one. Through effectively incorporating direct community participation and placing an emphasis on monitoring a revised OCP, a plan's effectiveness and the community's trust in the planning process can be retained.

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