

In 1991, the City of Vancouver adopted the “Central Area Plan” to reinvent its inner city. In the North American context, the Central Area Plan is a revolutionary document. It advocates very intensive, high-density, inner city development with an emphasis on housing. Ultimately it is a plan that promotes a specific urban lifestyle – one that is a radical departure from the suburban ideal. It advocates inner city living, aims at reducing the reliance on the motor car, and re-establishes the idea of community in an urban setting. In many respects, this plan is the antithesis of half a century of un-city making on the North American continent. It also calls for large-scale changes in land use, particularly on the waterfront, from industrial and railway use to residential and recreational use.

A massive redevelopment project is also taking shape on the former industrial and railway lands in Coal Harbor on the Burrard Inlet. The site was owned by Canadian Pacific Railway who transferred the ownership to Marathon Realty in 1990. A development plan was devised conditional upon approval of certain requirements that include a specific package of public benefits, similar to False Creek North. This package includes 12 acres of parkland, a continuous waterfront walking and bike system, a community center, childcare facilities, a public art program, an arts center, and a 20 percent social housing requirement. Sites are now being sold for development. Adjacent to the Marathon site is Bayshore Gardens, owned by Japanese developers Aoki, which has followed in a similar manner.

The East Shore of False Creek was also used for Expo’86, but remained the property of a private industrial company. After Expo’86, the site was rezoned for residential use and sold to Bosa Developments, a local developer, who implemented a comprehensive plan known as City Gate. The project comprises 14 acres, 1,500 residential units and 370,000 square feet of commercial space.

Connection between the new waterfront residential areas and the older downtown is facilitated by the extension of existing city streets and by infill developments designed to mesh the older downtown to the recreated water’s edge. With these developments, 7,500 housing units have been added to the inner city in the past decade and another 16,000 are planned. The form of this connective tissue has been middle to high-rise towers rising out of residential or retail podiums. This strategy has been successful in meeting the regional growth objectives for the city, which include raising the jobs–housing ratio, creating social and cultural diversity, encouraging transit use, and supporting a more environmentally sustainable city.

The Southeast Shore of False Creek is the last piece of industrial waterfront to be planned for residential use. The City of Vancouver owns the site and in addition to meeting the regional objectives of concentrated, mixed-use growth, this project aims to be a model for sustainable development in a high-density urban context. The project covers 80 acres of land and allows for some 5,000 residential units with very limited commercial space. Explicit targets for sustainability have been set, a policy framework has been completed, and specific community development planning is now underway. In this case, sustainable urban development refers to a neighborhood which “is integrated with its urban context while protecting and enhancing the social and economic health of its community as well as