

URBAN PLANNING CONFERENCE

Exploring the highlights – and lowlights – of Metro

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VANCOUVER SUN

When North America's conference organizers look to Vancouver as a place to hold events, the city's mountain views, natural beauty, mild weather, and abundant hotels and restaurants always rank high.

But when the 3,000 delegates of the Urban Land Institute arrive next month for their international conference, they'll be more interested in probing what makes Metro Vancouver so livable. And if that means poking into some of the gritty corners, so much the better.

"A lot of American cities where our members live and work are facing challenges that appear to have been solved by Vancouver and the region," said Patrick Phillips, CEO of the Washington-based urban land think-tank.

This is the first time the conference has been held outside the United States, and it will draw planners, architects, developers, real estate owners, mayors and civil engineers.

"Vancouver is a poster child for ULI," said Alan Boniface, the chair of ULI's B.C. chapter and a principal in the architectural and engineering firm Dialog.

Unlike most cities in North America, Vancouver and its neighbours experiment with a lot of different planning ideas, making the region a great place to see many ideas in action, he said.

Brent Toderian, Vancouver's former director of planning, said the ULI has organized 11 tours for its delegates looking at topics such as the success of Granville Island's mixed-use zones and Surrey's plan to redevelop the city's central area.

One tour, provocatively titled *Gastown: A Fine Balance: Treading Between 'Hip', 'History' and 'Heroin'*, looks at the area around the Downtown Eastside.

"It is a very deliberate strategy by those of us who are organizing the conference that we are not just trying to show our best. There is a constructive candour there," said Toderian. "We don't want to gloss over our challenges as a region and our learning moments that have come from failure."

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TOURING THE REGION



It used to be ice. Basketball courts set up in the centre of the Olympic Oval, now a community centre in Richmond.

MARK VAN MANEN/PNG

Leveraging Olympic Legacies

No tour of Metro Vancouver by civic officials and planners would be complete without looking at the leveraged opportunities that came from the 2010 Winter Olympics. The best example is the Richmond oval, now a multi-sport community centre. The building along the Fraser River has become the heart of a developing urban village, including Aspac Developments' River Green project.



The Gastown steam clock.

JEFF LEE/VANCOUVER SUN

Gastown: a Fine Balance: Treading Between 'Hip', 'History', and 'Heroin'

Gastown and the Downtown Eastside may include Vancouver's poorest areas, but Alan Boniface, ULI's B.C. chairman, says the area is undergoing major development pressure, while also being a bastion of social intervention.

"It is a fascinating experiment in providing immense social services, which most North American cities don't do."

The tour looks beyond the history and architecture of the neighbourhood to examine the issues and lessons learned.



City Centre Library in Surrey.

CITY OF SURREY

Surrey: Creating the components of an Urban(e) City Centre: Civic, Development, Transit

By 2020, Surrey is expected to eclipse Vancouver in population. Much of that will be due to a three-way partnership between the city, TransLink and Simon Fraser University for Surrey City Centre, which will accommodate some of the residential density Surrey needs to handle an expected population of 500,000 by mid-century.

The ULI tour is being billed as a "rare opportunity to see and discuss the transformation of a new 21st-century city as it literally occurs in front of us."



The Granville Island entrance.

GERRY KAHRMANN/PNG

From Granville Island to the Olympic Village: The Story of South False Creek

The dream to turn Granville Island from a dilapidated industrial site into a public market began in the 1970s. Four decades after the launch of that ambitious remake, which set Vancouver on a new course in urban redevelopment, the south side of False Creek is a dense, yet playful neighbourhood.

"Granville Island has become the mixed-use urban commercial heart of the city," says Boniface.



Luxury condos: a hot property.

IAN LINDSAY/PNG

Vancouver's Finest: A Look at the City's Luxury Condominium Real Estate

Few who live here are unaware of how costly downtown real estate is, and how that has allowed Vancouver's developers to build a luxury condo market. This "insider's tour" looks at how the pressure of high land prices has led to the creation of fine luxury condominium real estate, taking advantage of views in what the ULI calls "a highly amenitized and livable public urban realm."

Innovative Solutions to Transit-Oriented Development along the Canada Line, a \$2-billion Airport-to-Downtown Transit Investment

The 19-km line has done more to spur urban and suburban redevelopment than any other major transit improvement in the region. But city planners are trying to focus the redevelopment upward, rather than outward, with projects such as the \$1.5-billion Oakridge redevelopment, the \$75-million Telus Garden project and the \$370-million Marine Gateway campus.

Other tours

Also on offer are:

- Cascadia Experience: Seattle and Bellevue, including Microsoft and Amazon campuses
- UniverCity: Simon Fraser University's Burnaby Mountain sustainable community
- Vancouver West End: its diversity, inclusivity and livability
- Whistler and the Sea to Sky Corridor and experience-driven development
- View From The Water, a tour of Vancouver's dense urban development along False Creek and Coal Harbour.