

Vancouver Economic Development Commission  
**Economic Development strategy Roundtable #1**  
**Human Resources Attraction and Retention**  
June 23, 2009, 8:30am – 11:00 am.  
Vancouver Museum, Vancouver, BC

**Attendees:**

Mayor Gregor Robertson (City of Vancouver), Councillor Andrea Reimer (City of Vancouver), Amir Ali Alibhai (Alliance for Arts & Culture), Toby Barrazuol (Strathcona Business Improvement Association), Graeme Burgland (Artist), Jane and Steven Cox (Cause and Affect), Kierstin De West (Conscientious Innovation), Josh Dunford (Burnkit), Jill Earthy (Forum for Women Entrepreneurs), Charles Gauthier (DVBIA), Glenn Entis (EA/VanEdge Capital), Rochelle Grayson (New Media BC), Michael Green (MacFarlane Green Architects), Howard Harowitz (Knightsbridge), Luke Harrison (Rize Development), Mary Henley (UBC Sauder), Lea Johnson (Consultant), Jason Karman (Cineworks), Maureen Kirkbride (TELUS), John Leschyson (Go2HR), Graeme Lovely (MCW Consultants), Rob Malli (Vancity), Heather Martin (Mono Clothing), Jenny Matthews (UBC), Amanda Mitchell (SmartGrowthBC), Maureen O'Reily (Consultant), Sylvain Provencher (SIGGRAPH), Vanessa Richards (SFU), Karri Schuermans (Chambar Restaurant), Colin Simkus (Vancouver Board of Trade), Lino Siracusa (CMHC), Ben Sparrow (Saltworks Technology), Matthew Swanson (Borden Ladner Gervais), Peeroj Thakre (Architect), Julian Thorsteinson (Consultant), Juvarya Warsi (Lighthouse), Roy Yen (Soomo Entertainment/Live Nation), VEDC staff

**Proceedings:**

Phil Heard, CEO of VEDC, opened the meeting at 8:30 a.m., welcomed the participants, and noted the morning's objectives:

- Discussing human resources, in particular attracting and retaining talented young professionals, which is a key element of the economic development strategy being developed by VEDC for the City of Vancouver
- Providing an overview of findings from focus sessions of young professionals held by Cause + Affect;

He then introduced Mayor Gregor Robertson to provide opening remarks.

**Mayor Gregor Robertson** observed that the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games provide the city and its residents with both a challenge and a major marketing opportunity. Much of the focus is on the preparations and the event itself – the Olympics are the equivalent of hosting 3 Super Bowl Games per day for sixteen consecutive days - but what the City and its constituents do beyond the timeline of this event is equally important. We have the opportunity to

shape the lasting imprint the Games will have on Vancouver, and the lasting imprint we wish to leave on the world after the Games.

- Vancouver has the opportunity to lead, both through our commitment to the environment, and through a strong economic development strategy,
- Our economy is at a turning point, and how we use our human resources and our brainpower are critical to developing our knowledge economy and the green economy,
- Talented and creative people are increasingly attracted to Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver Administration's focus is to fulfill its election promises: addressing homelessness, making the city a leader in environmental responsibility, and finding ways to capitalize on economic development opportunities. Moving forward on all of these together will build a prosperous and green city. In the bigger picture, the city's global contributions are what matter. He thanked the attendees for their time and input as the City works through the next steps for Vancouver to spread its influence throughout the world; how to build prosperity, while being socially and environmentally conscious.

**Phil Heard** thanked the Mayor and encouraged participants to “consider yourselves Mayor for the day”, and to look towards the future of the city.

**John Tylee**, VEDC's Director of Policy and Research, outlined VEDC's draft strategic directions for the city:

- The City of Vancouver needs to take greater responsibility for its own economic prosperity;
- Firms are important, but people are important too, and concentrating on human resources is as important as the business environment;
- The green sector is our greatest challenge and our greatest opportunity;
- We need to think more about Metro Core, the most international part of the city.

He presented a slideshow (available here) that outlined 8 paradoxes

1. Vancouver has the best livability in the world and close to the worst housing affordability.
2. Vancouver is the wealthiest city in Canada, and has among the highest poverty levels.
3. Vancouver is highly regarded internationally as a leisure destination, though many younger people complain about it being “no-fun-couver.”
4. Vancouver is highly regarded as a “green city,” though the deployment of green technologies lags behind many European cities.
5. Vancouver has a boutique economy with few head offices and median employment per firm of 4, but Vancouver employees are creative, entrepreneurial and innovative.
6. Vancouver's levels of earned income, exports and productivity are relatively low, but it has the advantage of a highly diversified economy.

7. Vancouver is highly multicultural, but the cultures are not well-integrated, nor does Vancouver take full advantage of the educational qualifications of immigrants.
8. Vancouver has strong public and private educational institutions, but the overall level of education of the workforce is about average.

He then noted 8 trends that will shape the city and global economy in the coming years

1. The recession will make the world economy increasingly fast changing, increasingly competitive.
2. Local government policies are increasingly important in creating prosperity.
3. Greening the economy is our greatest challenge.
4. Green sectors also offer great economic potential.
5. There is a vast shortage of talent worldwide that will only get worse in future years.
6. People - younger people in particular - are working in fundamentally different ways.
7. City centres need constant attention.
8. Neighbourhoods need to develop as more complete communities.

John introduced **Steven Cox**, of Cause+Effect, who had hosted three focus groups of 10-15 young industry leaders each, between April and June of 2009. In a presentation available here, he summarized some of the groups' key conclusions on six broad issues:

#### *Affordability*

- The issue isn't that Vancouver is too expensive, but that the city's high cost of living is not in line with its relatively low earnings.
- There isn't enough registered child care in the city; and at what point do young professionals opt out of the work force to stay at home (and what is the cost to the economy of losing half a family's earning power)?

#### *Public Space & liquor regulations*

- There is a lack of venues for culture, especially connected to public spaces – streets are more of a runway for cars, animating public spaces would make the city more livable
- The short hours for liquor are a big liability; concentrating everything on Granville Street may facilitate policing but doesn't work for those looking for casual entertainment; and there is a lack of venues for privately-organized functions.
- Entertainment in the city is too controlled, too limited.

#### *Brand, marketing, communication*

- Vancouver is celebrated on a global stage for leisure activities, but this doesn't do the city justice, nor does it reflect the concerns of the younger population.
- There is a lot of discussion of "What is the real Vancouver?" The problems of the Downtown Eastside will end up taking the spotlight when there are successes there and elsewhere that we should be showcasing.

### *Green*

- There are many questions about "green": what does "green" mean, where do we draw the boundaries around the issues involved?
- Is sustainability a technological or a social issue, and can the two really be separated?

### *Business*

- Young companies have an uphill battle to fight, and don't feel supported by the "old guard" in the business community. How to improve the relationship between established and new companies?
- Transportation issues go beyond movement around the region: connecting to the West Coast of the USA is the way of the future

### *Multiculturalism*

- Multiculturalism was a natural process that you can't control or mandate, and is happening naturally as we mature as a society.
- Our cultures are still somewhat segregated in the older generations, but looking at our schoolyards shows a lot of integration.
- Food – there is lack of ethnic food sold in public spaces, which doesn't do justice to our cultural makeup.

### **Discussion:**

Phil Heard and **Jane Cox** of Cause + Affect moderated the discussion, with 15 minutes for each of the 6 topics.

### **Affordability:**

#### *Child Care*

- Child care subsidies may be necessary, public sector is stretched, so may need to look to private sector to subsidize or facilitate child care arrangements for employees.
- Small firms are challenged by parental leave, but finding day care is difficult. A subsidy may not be the right approach, but more day care centers would make a difference. Unfortunately, day care is a low-paying job, and the industry has trouble finding workers.
- Co-located child care may be a solution, or arrangements between families within condo buildings.

### *Housing/Transit*

- SFU attracted young professors to Vancouver through its UniverCity project with Vancity Enterprises, where it created new housing through a housing authority model that ensures the units sell below market rate, though indexed to the market value.
- Purchasing real estate to provide housing for employees may be a necessity for some large firms wanting to attract top talent.
- Smaller companies just want to survive, not get into the real estate market. Strengthening transit makes commuting from lower-cost parts of the region easier, which might help make Vancouver's affordability more competitive over time.
- It's harder to attract US talent now that the high Canadian dollar makes housing unaffordable from a US perspective as well. Features like strong neighborhoods are important to incoming employees, and in Vancouver these are often in the East of the city, which is also a bit more affordable.
- Affordability is linked to the city's rental stock. Developing affordable rental housing is important, especially for younger people. People look at buying vs. renting as a long-term investment.

### *HR, Wages, immigration*

- Training will help increase people's earning power over time. More training programs in both companies and schools are needed.
- Does our labour market just pay less, or are our human resources underemployed? If skills are underutilized because of lack of opportunity, like university grads answering phones, then that's a serious issue.
- Vancouver should consider marketing the city differently: Clean air, relatively low crime, strong neighborhoods, not living near highways.
- There is concern that many of Vancouver's creative and artistic community will move away from the city post-2010 if the city stays on its "leisure destination" path.

### Public Space & Liquor regulations:

#### *Public Space*

- Many cities have a nice streetscape, transit, and free events. Vancouver does as well, but more would be good. Less car-focused streets, better public spaces and larger terraces for restaurants.
- Public and private spaces need to interact better; Montreal is populated with vibrant public spaces bordered by cafes and other private spaces.
- We need to stop denying that it rains so much here and consider year-round public spaces that celebrate the rain, and indoor spaces.
- Vancouver Public Library is a great example of an enclosed public space. The only other enclosed space we have is shopping malls, but we need spaces for functions other than shopping: concern about homogenizing the city, losing its character, and losing our diversity and personality.

- More public space with free Wi-Fi access would help promote gatherings of entrepreneurs.
- People in Vancouver live in small spaces, but public spaces make this more tolerable: if the seawall is your living room, it expands your space. Vancouver has many natural amenities; adding urban and cultural amenities that are free would boost the city's attractiveness.
- Vancouver Public Space Network has been promoting the idea of creating an urban public square.

### *Liquor Licensing*

- Reduce the amount of red tape to obtain liquor licenses, mix of provincial/municipal licensing
- Adopt a more European model around public drinking.
- Copenhagen's harbour has spaces where the well-heeled sit at cafes, and younger people sit and drink nearby or the street: normalizing behavior.
- In the UK, children can be in pub patios drinking orange juice; and there is drinking in public spaces.

### Brand, Marketing & Communications:

#### *Media*

- Create a new Vancouver story, not just relying on the geography and leisure aspects, and celebrating the city's cultural diversity. This was successfully done by Turin around the last winter Olympics.
- There is a lack of recognition and awareness of local stars, compared with other cities, and young stars especially aren't celebrated.
- We suffer from buy-local campaigns: it can be seen as negative, out of guilt. The people of the city need to support local businesses because they are in fact world-class.
- Focus on local successes: build a mass of local stories for the media.

#### *Events, Domestic and International*

- There are already many great events in the city, we just need to raise the bar on delivery and outreach.
- Technical & industry conferences are important for putting a city's industries on the map. Vancouver has the resources to attract more international conferences.
- Hold events like the Eastside Culture Crawl or Illuminares during the Olympics to showcase Vancouver's cultural offerings.
- Look at partnerships between the city and different talent-driven industries; hold a Vancouver Studio "crawl" to open up the digital economy to the public. SIGGRAPH actively brings computer graphics professionals together in social environments, to help make it fun to be in the graphics industry in Vancouver.

## *Marketing*

- How do we approach this during 2010? A dynamic journey.
- Downtown Eastside: culture, accessibility and affordability of cultural spaces, i.e. warehouse space. A success story in the making.
- Do for the cultural industries what food and drink has done for the “foodie” economy.
- Different options for different neighbourhoods; celebrate the city’s differences.
- Vancouver has considerable cultural assets, connecting them is key, and needs investment in supporting technological infrastructure: media outlets, social networking.
- Work with the Tourism industry: advocate leveraging the marketing already in place through Tourism Vancouver, etc., that this is a great place to visit and work. The dollars are being spent, so try to help fine-tune the message.
- In NYC you can find entertainment options and buy tickets in the back of taxis; could adopt that system here: the company that makes the devices is here in Vancouver.

## Green:

- As a restaurateur, it has been very hard to arrange for commercial recycling services.
- Composting & recycling: the private sector needs to play a role. The city can’t fund everything, some of the support needs to come from the market. Implement private sector standards for composting or waste reprocessing, as with green buildings?
- Business can find uses for waste: reprocessing to make new products; sustainable agriculture or new-generation plastics, etc.
- Don’t silo; people are looking for a sustainable life, not just a green life. More concerned about community connection: occasionally initiatives are positioned as green when they are as much community issues.
- There is currently no zoning for green tech development, and a similar challenge exists for creative industries and artists.
- Greenest City Action Team update: looking at what it would take to be the greenest city by 2020;
  - it’s not possible to lead in all categories, but leading in a few is possible.
  - A quick start report has been released, with 41 recommendations. Progress is being made on those regarding pedestrian streets; those regarding buildings and transit are more complicated.
  - Within the 2020 time frame, 20% of buildings would have to be retrofitted in order to meet targets; in reality only 6% of the building stock will turn over in that time. Transit would need a 3-fold increase in funding.

- Meeting these goals will be a challenge, and needs help from the entire city.
- 4 levels of government deal with environmental issues, making cooperation vital.

## Business:

### *Immigration*

- The Provincial Nominee Program is an excellent resource for companies looking to import talent.
- There is a challenge with non-degree-granting institutions not being able to obtain work permits for graduating foreign students, who then leave and take their skills home, instead of using those skills in Vancouver.
- Immigration: potential migrants often receive awkward, conflicting information that could be made more appropriate for today's immigrating population.
- Consider an immigration Ombudsman, to help maneuver through the federal and provincial bureaucracy.

### *Talent Attraction/Retention*

- Skills development is easier for larger companies with training and professional development resources.
- Quebec often requires the use of local companies in its tenders and procurement.
- Requirement to use local companies is a double-edged sword; as a nation we rely heavily on exports, and business relationships that help exports could be hurt by local firm requirements. Find a way to promote relationships and use of local companies, through partnerships with larger international companies.
- Develop a mentorship program to bridge the 'established' and 'new' business environments

### *Celebrating Stars*

- Young, successful local companies often have to do well in other regions before they are recognized locally. Recommend being more aggressive in identifying the stars of key local industries.
- Hold more open competitions: best company wins

### *General*

- From an industry perspective, this is a helpful dialogue; just as industry is telling the city what it needs, the city needs to articulate what it needs from industry. "Quid pro quo"
- Business and sustainability: new idea of the collaborative – rather than competitive - economy.

- Businesses going green have found a lot of low-hanging fruit from efficiencies; support for a green business coordinator to work with the BIAs could be a positive step.
- Sweat Equity enterprises: take youth that are disenfranchised, and place them into industry where they learn skills and self-esteem. “Build it and they will come”, creating and supporting it internally within firms and the city.
- Revitalized traditional spaces provide some of the best office locations for up-and-coming firms; can this process be reinforced through zoning?
- There is an opportunity for not-for-profits and the private sector to collaborate better. The Alliance for Arts and Culture is looking at the creative industries as a major source of future growth. Building better partnerships between sectors and not-for-profits provides major benefits in terms of new business opportunities and building social capital.
- Building community among professionals helps solidify those sectors in the city.

#### Multiculturalism:

- Focus groups thought that this was “not much of an issue” but at the same time observed that they were often unaware of many communities’ events.
- Counter to that statement: Multiculturalism is not taking care of itself. The idea that we can create a city’s multiculturalism by happenstance is naïve. We need cultural education and conscious investment in youth (Vancouver Foundation’s “Multiculturalism and Youth” booklet lays out the issues well.)
- Invest in children, and find ways to bring together different ethnicities at a young age
- It is important for different communities to understand their culture’s role in Vancouver. There are two parts of this: valuing the original culture, and sharing that value with others.
- Multiculturalism needs attention, and it’s a powerful incubator for new ideas in our society.
- There is often competition among such things as ethnic film festivals. One building with a focus on multiculturalism and innovation could help promote collaboration and interaction.
- Multiculturalism is not about the competing views of separate communities. Misguided to focus on special announcements about ethnic events: there should be a way of sharing our business and culture that is not a “special announcement.”

#### **Next Steps**

VEDC chair Maureen Kirkbride thanked the participants for their time, and their input. Minutes will be shared on the VEDC website and taken into consideration in building the City of Vancouver’s Economic Development Strategy. Further

engagement with this group is anticipated, and it is hoped that this is a beginning of a dialogue between different generations in Vancouver's business community that will continue into the future.

The meeting was adjourned at 11 a.m.