

Introduction:

Vancouver is a part of a growing trend among major international cities towards sustainable urban growth and development. In February 2009 the City introduced its Greenest City Initiative, outlining a series of recommendations necessary to make Vancouver the greenest city in North America by 2020. In doing so, they join a number of other major international centres with similar goals, including London, Sydney and Stockholm. This City proposal is the latest in a growing number of Vancouver City initiatives that seek to establish Vancouver as a world leader in creating sustainable urban communities.

As a relative newcomer to Vancouver, these environmentally focused municipal policies are fascinating, particularly for their visibility and mainstream acceptance. More specifically, they have led me to question whether these attempts to create a green city are having an impact on the relationship between private and public property owners. Green politics and property models can diverge significantly from a traditional western liberal property theory, and as such I am interested to know whether these environmentally based policies (both prior to and including the Greenest City Initiative) have changed or are changing the dynamic between private and public, and private and commons. In other words, is Vancouver a poster child for green property, as well as green economy?

In exploring these questions I will discuss the following:

Context:

Vancouver's municipal development has been unique within Canada. Zoning practices, physical constraints such as the mountains, oceans and the agricultural reserve, foreign investment, and connection to the Asian market, are all factors that have had significant impact on Vancouver's development. Additionally, the City's relationship with the Canadian Pacific Railway has also influenced the ways in which the City grew. The goal of this section is to place the recent trend towards environmentally friendly planning within the broader context of the City's municipal planning history.

Theory:

Environmental ethics in relation to property are different than those traditionally conceptualized by mainstream private property interests. An environmentally conscious approach to property, or "green property" is noticeably different in that it acknowledges human and ecological interdependence. My question is whether a green property dynamic is actually being implemented in Vancouver, or if it just being given lip-service and promoted as a savvy economic strategy? In doing so, I will explain the basis for of a traditional private property regime, as well as the emerging theory of green property. I will also explore important municipal planning regimes that stem from it. Specifically, I will discuss urban planning models such as Smart Growth and New Urbanism, which are based in aspects of green property theory.

Case Studies:

To answer these questions I will examine a number of City of Vancouver municipal planning initiatives, including CityPlan, EcoDensity, the Greenest City campaign, as well as a number of Official Development Plan by-laws. In doing so, I will provide a critical analysis of the ways in which these policies do or do not reflect the principles of green property.

For example, in neighbourhoods like the Downtown Eastside, does this type of planning really create the kinds of effects that are consistent with the stated goals and intent of the by-laws, regulations and Official Development Plans?

Additional Considerations/Conclusions:

Is Green Property progressive? Where on the spectrum between classical liberal theory and new/green emerging theories of property is Vancouver with regards to private property? While the tension between private and public is always present in any property regime, it seems to be especially vocal in Vancouver. Although the relationship between individual autonomy and community interests may not be changing, there is definitely a strong dialogue happening between both sides. It remains to be seen whether these community ethics, which seem to reflect an environmental ethos (at least as far as City Hall is reflecting) will be able to influence property law in a substantive way.