

February 27, 2023

Dear Members of the UBC Board of Governors,

The University Neighbourhoods Association (UNA) represents the 15,000 residents of UBC neighbourhoods, including thousands of UBC students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other supporters and beneficiaries of the University's academic, research, and cultural programming. UNA residents are deeply invested in the University's success, its reputation, its ecological and financial sustainability, and the quality of its urban form. In that spirit, the UNA has called on UBC to develop bold plans for climate-responsible, affordable, and sustainable residential communities. The Land Use Plan (LUP) currently under development falls well short of these aspirations.

We urge the Board of Governors to pause the development of the new LUP pending the completion of:

- a Climate Action Plan with greenhouse gas and embodied carbon goals for the neighbourhoods;
- a Housing Action Plan with specific targets and actions for increasing housing availability and affordability;
- an independent Environmental Impact Assessment to determine upper limits of ecologically sustainable development at UBC;
- a study to determine the optimal amount of green and open space needed to foster individual and community well-being in campus neighbourhoods.

Climate Action

UBC's Board of Governors declared in 2019 that we're facing a climate emergency, and that the University must act decisively to cut Greenhouse Gas (GHG) and embodied carbon levels, as well as embrace climate resilience. The University's 2020 Climate Action Plan drew on a team of UBC experts to measure the campus's current emissions and set carbon budgets that would guide UBC in reducing its GHG emissions by 85% in 2030.

UBC has not applied the 2020 Climate Action Plan to its neighbourhoods; it has not done GHG measurements nor set carbon targets to guide present or future land use planning. BC's Climate Change Accountability Act of 2007 requires public sector institutions to document their annual GHGs and their progress towards carbon neutrality. UBC has not done this for its neighbourhoods. It has drafted a Land Use Plan that does not reflect nor respect the University's climate commitments.

The UNA's position:

UBC should pause its Land Use Plan until it can complete a comprehensive Climate Action Plan that includes the University neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhood Climate Action Plan should:

- **Set a Baseline:** What is the carbon intensity of existing buildings, energy systems, transportation, and waste in UBC neighbourhoods?
- **Set Targets:** What are UBC's greenhouse gas and embodied carbon reduction goals for the neighbourhoods by 2050?
- **Set Plans for Action:** What short-, medium-, and long-term actions are needed to ensure that UBC achieves its GHG reduction targets?

The new LUP should include the Climate Action Plan's GHG and carbon goals, setting parameters for building types, green infrastructure, and density that will put the University on track to achieve those targets.

Affordability

Students, faculty, staff, and area workers face a severe shortage of affordable housing near the University. Rents at UBC are among the highest in the Vancouver metro area, and rental vacancy rates are near zero. The average purchase price for a basic apartment is close to \$1.1 million¹, out of reach for most employees of the University.

In response to the housing affordability crisis at UBC, the University has drafted an updated Housing Action Plan, which is currently under consideration by the Board of Governors. But the draft leaves critical targets for rental housing unspecified.

The UNA's position:

Before issuing a Land Use Plan, UBC should finalize its Housing Action Plan with specific targets for housing availability and affordability. Student residences and faculty/staff rental housing are good long-term investments, both financially and for the well-being of the University and its people.

UBC should:

- increase the proportion of rental housing to at least 50% in its neighbourhoods, as well as affordable purchase options for UBC affiliates;
- reserve a portion of rental housing for employees of other entities who work on campus (police, firefighters, teachers, hospital workers, UNA staff, etc.);

¹ <https://campusvision2050.ubc.ca/32843/widgets/134564/documents/89117>

- finance student residences and rental housing with existing funds in the TREK endowment, rather than through leasehold sales of a large proportion of its remaining land endowment.

Ecology and Green Space

The Campus Vision planning process should take account of the ecological limits of the land and should prioritize a diverse “green infrastructure” within the neighbourhoods, including an abundance of trees on streets and pedestrian corridors, small and large parks, green roofs, and ecologically nourishing connections with the surrounding forests and watersheds. The World Health Organization recommends² at least 9 m² of green space per person in a compact city, with an ideal amount of 50 m² (between 0.9 and 5 hectares per 1,000 people).

The UNA’s position:

In order for the University to meet its climate targets, its open-space obligations to residents, and its commitments to sustainability and ecological responsibility, the LUP should specify minimum levels of green space per capita for campus neighbourhoods.

Before completing a Land Use Plan, UBC should

- commission and publicize Environmental Impact Studies for a range of development scenarios;
- set development limits compatible with the preservation of the ecologically rich and fragile natural systems of our peninsula;
- and determine a balance of population and green space to achieve at least 5 hectares of green space per 1,000 inhabitants.

Affordable, Sustainable, Livable Neighbourhoods

The University has advanced a plan to sharply increase housing density on its remaining land by building at least twenty new towers, many over thirty stories tall, in developments at Stadium Road, Acadia Park, and on the edge of the Wesbrook neighbourhood. Concrete and steel towers involve considerably more “embodied carbon”³ than other housing forms, and directly contradict the University’s Climate Action goals. The proposed tower heights would preclude the use of climate-responsible mass-timber construction, which tops out at around eighteen stories.

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6209905/#:~:text=The%20World%20Health%20Organization%20%5B36,50%20m2%20per%20capita.>

³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s42949-021-00034-w>

The UNA's position:

The University should draw on its faculty's renowned expertise in urban planning, ecology, landscape architecture, and mass-timber engineering to design compact, green, human-scaled communities. These wood-based neighbourhoods should comprise a mix of low- and mid-rise apartment buildings, stacked townhomes, and mass-timber high-rises no higher than twenty stories.

UBC's campus and neighbourhoods should be models of low carbon, sustainable, socially responsible, community-oriented urban planning. The Board of Governors should seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to establish UBC as a global leader in campus and community planning. We urge the Board to press for revisions to the Land Use Plan that will reflect these aspirations, as well as the values and public mission of the University.

Sincerely,



Richard Watson
Chair, Board of Directors
University Neighbourhoods Association

Copy: MLA David Eby
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