

# **Ripe with Potential**



**Vancouver as a destination for talent**

*Canada25*  
110 Charles Street West  
Toronto, ON  
M5S 1K9  
416.313.3722 (T)  
416.313.2999 (F)  
info@canada25.com

## **Executive Summary**

Vancouver is frequently praised by residents and visitors alike as *the* ideal place to live, work and play due to its cosmopolitan character and natural beauty. However, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) is currently challenged by a host of socio-economic issues including a chronic shortage of housing, an inefficient transportation network, and a pervasive sense of economic stagnation.

*Ripe with Potential* represents the collective visions, critiques and recommendations of twenty-five of British Columbia's young leaders, which addresses the means for transforming Vancouver into a world-class city capable of attracting talent and stimulating the engines of growth. The report points to need to make the development of affordable housing a priority; to strengthen its existing transportation networks and create alternative modes of transit; to facilitate the growth of innovative private-public partnerships; and to foster an attractive investment climate and culture of innovation in Vancouver. *Ripe with Potential* is an attempt to stimulate both dialogue and action on the most pressing policy challenges facing the GVRD amongst the private, public, and non-governmental sectors.

## **Canada25**

Canada25 is a non-partisan organization dedicated to engaging the perspectives of young Canadians living around the world in Canada's public policy debates. Last year, Canada25 critically examined how Canada could become a magnet for attracting young talent in the report, *A New Magnetic North*. The report was well received, and the ideas put forward in the report have been discussed by leaders in the voluntary sector, at the highest levels of government, and in the nation's boardrooms, as well as by Canadian youth. Building upon the success of that report, Canada25 shifted its attention to the role of Canadian cities. Specifically, Canada25 sought to answer one of the most pressing issues facing Canadians - how do we promote economic development in cities, while at the same time ensuring that they become vibrant places to work, live and play?

## **Vancouver Roundtable**

As part of a series of Canada25 regional roundtables, twenty-five young British Columbians met on July 5-6<sup>th</sup>, 2002 at the University of British Columbia Robson Square campus to examine the social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental challenges facing the GVRD, as well as other cities across the province. Through sector specific and cross-sector analyses, the delegates sought to identify key obstacles confronting Vancouver, as well as the means of transforming Vancouver into a vibrant, world-class city capable of attracting and retaining talent. In turn, it was hoped that the new vision of Vancouver could serve as a model of development for other cities with similar challenges.

Vancouver's socio-economic development and revitalization is an issue that weighs heavily on the minds of politicians, business and community leaders, and citizens alike. In recent years, Vancouverites have been made aware of the city's growing poverty rates, chronic shortage of affordable housing, general economic stagnation and malaise, as well as its isolation from the axis of political and economic power in the Ottawa-

Toronto-Montreal region. They have also witnessed a growing tendency for the provincial and federal governments to devolve responsibilities for the provision of basic social services onto cities, compounding the magnitude of these problems.

The aim of *Ripe with Potential* is to stimulate both dialogue and action on the most pressing policy challenges facing the GVRD amongst the private, public and non-governmental sectors. The report represents the vision, critiques, and recommendations of British Columbia's young leaders, and it is call to action by youth - the very individuals who are key to growth of a vibrant and innovative Vancouver.

### **Vision: Vancouver in 2025**

Canada25 presents the following vision of Vancouver in an effort to guide the development of social, cultural, and economic policy for the coming years.

Within the next twenty-five years, Vancouver will become a world leader in balancing economic innovation with social integration. The city will be renowned for fostering an innovative and entrepreneurial climate, which stimulates both business investment and civic engagement, enabling Vancouver to provide services for its citizens beyond basic needs. Rather than accept the increasing stratification of the city, Vancouverites will build accessible and integrated communities, which seek to tackle community challenges through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Vancouver will build upon its tradition of multiculturalism and it will continue to capitalize on its natural aesthetic beauty. A new holistic mindset will captivate city leaders, planners, businesses and citizens alike. The city will be a centre of co-operation and balance where businesses operate in formal and informal clusters, urban design caters to both affordable housing and commercial development, and culture flourishes amidst new spaces for events and artists. Above all, Vancouver will be a socially progressive and participatory city where a sense of civic pride and social responsibility will be entrenched in daily life.

### **Vancouver's Current Context: Ripe With Potential**

Canada25 readily acknowledges that Vancouver is a world-class city that is consistently ranked among the top three cities in the world in which to live. Its natural beauty, coupled with a laid-back lifestyle, makes Vancouver one of the most inviting cities, and one ideally suited for attracting Canada's best and brightest. With a distinctive environmentally friendly urban landscape, and a wide range of grassroots and mainstream cultural activities, Vancouver possesses a global reputation as a leader in social innovation. Whether it is the willingness to find solutions through collaboration, or the strong tradition of social activism, the city seemingly reflects a strong sense of community. Despite these strengths, Vancouver has failed to develop to its full potential. The city continues to face a series of challenges, which must be addressed if it is to become a truly renowned global leader and a model of development for other cities.

## ***The Business of Cities – Catalysts for Change***

***“Drowning in a sea of labour unrest, Vancouver must re-evaluate its current labour-management structures if it hopes to successfully weather the transition from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.”***

**Delegate Stephen De Wit, Labour Relations Analyst**

Vancouver’s aesthetic beauty, active lifestyle, and diverse range of cultural activities collectively emerge as the city’s greatest assets for recruiting top industries and workers for the knowledge economy. Surrounded by stunning scenery and a unique cultural mosaic, the city offers both an attractive working *and* living environment. Vancouver boasts an unparalleled “quality of life”, which is increasingly integral to cutting edge industries, as well as to the talent that drives those industries.

Unfortunately, this superior “quality of life” has not fueled a culture of innovation. The merits of Vancouver’s lifestyle continue to be undermined by traditional corporate mindsets and labour relations models. On one level, Vancouver’s businesses have either failed to recognize the importance of lifestyle choices in recruiting, or else they suffer from an inability to effectively market that lifestyle to the best and brightest from around the world. In short, the private sector needs to be trained on how to capitalize on the lifestyle factor, which is one of Vancouver’s few marketable commodities.

On another level, Vancouver has a high level of unionization within both the private and public sectors. When compared to other provinces and cities, Vancouver’s high labour costs and frequently tense, if not disruptive, labour environment acts as a deterrent for both investment and entrepreneurialism. As such, the Province and the business sector need to work collaboratively to restructure union agreements and union-management relations within Vancouver. Such restructuring should aim to increase personal employee stakes within industries, as well as foster the transition of public sector workers to the private sector through education and buy-out incentives.

At the same time, the Province needs to actively foster clusters of innovation in the city. The development of both informal and formal linkages amongst the private, public and non-governmental sectors is a prerequisite for nurturing new industries and developing lucrative markets. Vancouver needs these trilateral linkages to become integrated, agile and responsive to changing labour and market demands in order to act as catalysts for positive and sustainable economic growth.

## ***Culture and Community – Creating A Culture of Civic Pride***

*"Right now Vancouver has wonderful pockets of culture, but we need to turn those pockets into an entire city of culture."*

Delegate Mark Mallet, MFA student

A city's sense of community and cultural flare is an integral measure of its livability and ability to attract young talent. Vancouver has a national and international reputation as a world-class city with thriving communities and vibrant cultural activities. It is a city with a flourishing art and music scene, and one that offers a variety of distinct neighbourhoods, such as Commercial Drive and Chinatown, which showcase the unique values and customs of its residents. From the Film Festival, to the range of ethnic culinary delights, Vancouver is able to cater to almost every taste imaginable.

Despite being home to a diverse range of cultures and peoples, Vancouver has yet to fully integrate its cultural amenities into the socio-economic fabric of daily life. For instance, the communities that act as magnets for certain talent often exist in isolation from one another, thereby undermining a sense of connectedness. All too often, Vancouverites rely upon their local communities to provide a sense of self and fail to participate in activities that would develop an overarching sense of civic pride.

Vancouver is currently unable to provide city-wide activities and events on a consistent basis, which would engage individuals from other communities. While Vancouver does possess large-scale events, such as the Symphony of Fire, or the Fringe Festival, there is no ongoing effort to continuously showcase the achievements of local artists to the entire city. Widespread exposure to, and interaction with, independent galleries, alternative media producers and performing artists is key to the livability of the city, as these events bring vitality, promote interaction, and help shape a sense of self-identity and community.

Vancouver must make a concerted effort to integrate communities and expose the larger populace to its cultural achievements. The creation of an accessible and widely recognized public space, such as the conversion of Robson Street into a pedestrian mall, is one means of achieving that goal. By developing a central locale for artists and performers to gather and interact with citizens, and providing free access to events, Vancouver would be in a position to attract both creative workers, as well as foster pride in Vancouver as a city. At the same time, Vancouver should explore the possibility of creating subsidized housing for artisans as a means of fusing commercial development with cultural enhancement. By mandating that a percentage of new developments be set aside for artists and cultural groups, Vancouver would increase the space for galleries, artist housing, and theatres, while at the same time stimulating the prosperous process of gentrification.

### ***Social Potential – Meeting More Than Basic Needs***

*“The issue isn’t just housing, but the amenities surrounding housing. Are there jobs, affordable shops, recreations and shops?”*

Delegate Simone Sangster, PhD Candidate

Vancouver is a city rich in social potential, defined as the ability to create an inclusive, healthy, and safe community, which meets more than the basic needs of its citizens. The city already actively engages its residents through such avenues as social activism, cultural festivals, post-secondary education institutions, and volunteerism. Vancouver is home to some of the finest centers of higher learning, and it is renowned for its socially progressive outreach programs that seek to address the roots of poverty and social stratification. The city is equally renowned for its long tradition of grassroots activism, best manifested in the desire for sound environmental stewardship.

While Vancouver is often perceived as offering a superior quality of life, Vancouver’s ability to achieve its true social potential is threatened by the cost and availability of quality safe housing. In particular, the absence of affordable housing has contributed to the increasing stratification of socio-economic classes in the downtown core, as well as the growing homelessness and drug-abuse problems in such areas as the Downtown Eastside. As such, there is a desperate need for new housing options to help combat the spread of substance abuse, prostitution, poverty and infectious diseases.

Developing safe and affordable housing is a means of addressing such social problems, while simultaneously stimulating economic development and reducing barriers between ethnic communities and neighborhoods. It is recognized that mixed housing uses, such as work/home spaces, as well as mixed economic development, can attract and retain a greater number of people, while also providing innovative solutions to poverty and homelessness. To this end, the city needs to change its zoning bylaws to ensure a more equitable distribution of single-family dwellings, duplexes and other buildings across neighbourhoods. Vancouver also needs to re-institute funding for co-operative housing initiatives in an effort to integrate citizens and establish personal ties to local communities. Such housing initiatives are key to the revitalization of Vancouver as an inclusive and prosperous community.

---

## ***Urban Design – Designing A Connected Community***

***“People do not need more newsletters telling them what is happening in Vancouver in order to engage more in urban cultural life. They need housing, services, jobs and transit in the kind of proximity that will support efficiency in their daily pursuits, including more time to enjoy cultural events, family and social life.”***

**Delegate Deana Grinnell, Community Planner**

**A truly connected community in Vancouver is largely contingent upon a city designed to allow access to all the amenities of daily life. By combining a distinctive urban landscape with a strong environmental focus into its planning, Vancouver is on the verge of becoming a leader in urban design. The city is already a leader in wheelchair accessibility, and it has shown vision and innovation in its increasingly dense downtown, with a strong live/work focus. However, there are several challenges, which need to be addressed if Vancouver is to maintain its reputation and move forward as city renowned for progressive planning.**

**Greater co-operation amongst all levels of government in funding for infrastructure, particularly with respect to Vancouver’s transportation network, is key to the success of future planning. A more efficient, extensive and cost-effective transportation system is required in order for people to access services, employment, recreation, and connect with other districts, and hence achieve their social potential. The city needs to critically examine its current transportation network, expand existing services, and develop alternative modes of transportation to support Vancouver’s changing demographics. Initiatives such as increased accessibility for cyclists on roads and transit, commuter options via shuttle vans and “Park and Ride” lots, and educational and institutional transit passes need to be integrated into future structural plans for the city.**

## ***Networks and Linkages – Collaboration Not Confrontation***

*“The future depends on our ability and willingness to work co-operatively in developing innovative solutions to the complex challenges that our city faces.”*

Delegate David Oliver, PhD Candidate

While a concrete transportation network is key for connecting people, informal and formal linkages are important for the creation of innovative solutions to pressing socio-economic problems. Vancouver has demonstrated a great deal of initiative and success in forming productive collaborations with key stakeholders to address the diverse range of issues associated with the modern city.

Foremost amongst these innovative partnerships is the Vancouver Agreement aimed in part at revitalizing the Downtown Eastside. Signed in 2000, this historic agreement is a five-year, three party agreement amongst the federal, provincial and municipal governments to support sustainable economic, social and community development in a traditionally depressed area of the city, as well as in other communities within Vancouver. In another example, British Columbia witnessed the development of a rural medical placement program aimed at addressing the shortage of doctors, as well as the urban-rural disparity in the placement of doctors. Devised in partnership between the Province and city universities, the program will train medical students in communities outside of the Lower Mainland, with the hope that many will decide to stay in those regions. Such initiatives demonstrate that Vancouver possesses a mindset, which allows for fruitful collaboration when a common goal is clearly delineated.

However, the increasing magnitude and complexity of Vancouver’s social and economic problems, means that the need for multi-governmental networks and co-operative linkages has become paramount. To date, Vancouver’s willingness to develop multi-stakeholder solutions remains largely underdeveloped and in its infancy state. While other leading cities have embraced the need to consult key players, particularly ones outside of the traditional arena, Vancouver has failed to capitalize on the diverse range of actors willing to provide constructive input and/or human and financial resources. As such, Canada25 recommends the formation of pro-active multi-governmental groups, which would collectively analyse and propose solutions to the city’s pressing problems. This group would attempt to build on Vancouver’s previous successes by discussing problems and solutions in an inclusive manner, which focuses on collaboration, not confrontation.

### **Priorities - Building A Stronger Vancouver**

While Vancouver is beset by a host of socio-economic challenges, Canada25 has prioritized four areas for immediate action, which are key to attracting talent and promoting growth.

- 1.1 *Canada25 recommends that Vancouver strengthen its existing transportation networks and create alternative modes of transit, which meet the needs of businesses and communities alike.*

Enhancing Vancouver's transportation infrastructure is a prerequisite for the creation of dynamic and integrated communities. By increasing existing services, such as late night transit, or developing new ones, such as community "Park and Ride" shuttle services, Vancouver will be able to promote its cultural activities, increase accessibility, link neighbourhoods, and facilitate the movement of workers throughout the GVRD.

- 1.2 *Canada25 recommends that Vancouver develop affordable housing through multi-stakeholder collaboration with government and community partners.*

Given the relatively high cost of living in Vancouver, affordable and safe housing is currently at a premium. If Vancouver is to foster a sense of community, facilitate the promotion of culture, and preserve the uniqueness of its neighborhoods, the city must provide more housing options. By developing more mixed housing uses, and ensuring an equitable distribution of housing types across neighbourhoods, Vancouver will create the heterogeneous communities necessary for attracting talent.

- 1.3 *Canada25 recommends that the Province and business community foster an attractive investment climate and stimulating innovation by employing new models of production and labour relations.*

In order to bypass the city's current economic stagnation, Vancouver must embrace a new approach to economic growth. The city can no longer rely on a heavily unionized economy built on primary and resource based industries. Rather, Vancouver must employ tax incentives to proactively develop new skills in strategically targeted areas, while businesses need to restructure operations around open-book management styles where workers have a personal stake in the performance of companies. Once such measures are in place, Vancouver will have the economic engine of development necessary for funding new cultural amenities, addressing social problems, and designing a city with optimal networks.

***1.4 Canada25 encourages the development of private-public partnerships as a means of mobilizing the resources and expertise necessary for developing solutions to Vancouver's pressing problems.***

No one sector of Vancouver can address the broad range of problems facing the city alone. Confronted by burdening debt levels, and faced with a growing recognition that the existing provision of services is inadequate, Vancouver is in a position where it must embrace new models of problem solving and service delivery. It is increasingly clear that the Province and the GVRD need to actively explore the use of more private-public partnerships, as well as private-public-NGO partnerships, in order to meet the growing demands of its citizens. Such partnerships are the new engines of innovation, capable of mobilizing the capital for new infrastructure, as well as devising cost-efficient models for service delivery. In short, they are the tools for encouraging participation by all sectors of Vancouver in the economic, social and community development of the city.

### **Canada25 Youth Initiatives – Leading by Example**

Canada25 committed to informing key decision makers of youthful perspectives, as well as launching youth initiatives for furthering dialogue and action. As such:

- 1.1 *Vancouver Canada25 delegates will create an “active” Canada25 Chapter which will focus on fostering youth engagement in all sectors of the city.*

In recognition of the need to stimulate a more participatory climate for Vancouver’s youth, Canada25 delegates will utilize their professional and personal networks to promote youth engagement. Specifically, delegates will investigate and promote opportunities for skills development for youth through linkages to mentoring programs in the academic, business and non-profit sectors. For example, linkages could include association with professional organizations, as well as with leadership programs at junior and senior high schools.

Of particular interest is the creation of a youth advisory committee to the GVRD. Such a body would be composed of youth representatives from businesses, cultural communities, voluntary organizations, and the public sector. The committee would seek to provide advice to policy-makers in an effort to create a culture of sustainability, foster socially responsible economic development, and develop sound environmental stewardship. Once created, the committee will act as the voice for the youthful segment of society that will be entrusted with the development and maintenance of a city geared towards the attraction of talent and the promotion of development.

- 1.2 *The Canada25 – BC Chapter will actively participate in the CitiesPlus Initiative by offering its vision of Vancouver as a model of sustainable development.*

Canada25-BC has recognized the CitiesPlus Initiative as a unique opportunity to integrate its vision of Vancouver with a regional initiative aimed at showcasing a model for sustainable community development. By devising a 100-year plan for a sustainable metropolitan area, CitiesPlus affords Canada25 the chance to shape the economic, social, and environmental priorities of a plan, which could act as a template for development both nationally and internationally. As such, active participation in the initiative will not only permit Canada25 to voice its recommendations for strengthening Vancouver, but more importantly, it will allow the chapter to ensure that the attraction of young talent is a priority in any future model of community sustainability.

*Ripe with Potential* represents an attempt by British Columbia’s young leaders to share their concerns, critiques and priorities for transforming Vancouver into a world leader in the promotion of development and the attraction of talent. By voicing the vision of young Vancouverites, *Ripe with Potential* hopes to garner interest and support amongst the people and organizations that can make the Canada25 vision a reality.

**Vancouver Roundtable Delegates**

Basil Alexander  
Stephen de Wit  
Jonathan Fershau  
Rob Fleming  
Cory Fry  
Kate Geddie  
Jennifer Girard  
Deana Grinnell  
Simon Jackson  
Carolyn Kamper  
Tracey Leacock  
Mark Mallet  
Lisa Manfield  
Susan Martyn  
David McCarthy  
Liz McGregor  
Andrea Nauman  
Dave Oliver  
Simone Sangster  
Jodi Westbury  
Jesse Wood

**Organizing Committee & Facilitators**

Shoshana Alice  
Janet Butler  
Carolyn Finlayson  
Cynthia MacKenzie  
Joseph McPhee  
Alyssa Polinsky  
Irfhan Rawji  
Nicole Sawka  
Jared Wright

**Sponsors**

University of British Columbia  
City of Vancouver