

## City mulls public spaces

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BY VANCOUVER COURIER SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

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Today's picture sits in sharp contrast.

Older buildings have been scrapped to make space for new condos while landfills bulge with concrete and rebar.

"Vancouver is a young city, and the European tradition of taking buildings and places and making them serve different uses over the span of generations is not something we have a lot of experience with. It's an idea that we're trying to foster in the urban fabric of Vancouver," said Michael Klassen, vice chair of the Vancouver city planning commission. "We really do want people to understand that there are ways to make our city grow and change, yet retain what is good about it."

How should the city's public spaces and buildings be constructed today to shape the character of Vancouver in the next quarter century?

It's a question the commission, the city's advisory group of architects, planners and other citizens, has mulled over for a year and a half. To get the public to join in the discussion, the commission has planned three events, the last of which, the Adaptability Ideas Forum, is this Thursday and Friday. The commission will cull its findings and expects to submit a final report to city council in the beginning of November.

Professor Robert Kronenburg, chair of architecture at the University of Liverpool, will speak at a free public lecture, A City Built for Change: How can "flexible architecture" make a better Vancouver? on Sept. 18 at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre.

Flexible architecture consists of buildings that are designed to respond easily to change. Instead of constructing a residential tower with concrete floor plates at intervals of eight feet, six inches, a building could be constructed with concrete plates at 17-foot intervals with more temporary floors in between, so residential buildings could be used for commercial space in the future, Klassen said.

Adaptable buildings remain in use longer, better accommodate new inhabitants, different activities, cultural and social trends, more readily take advantage of technical innovations and are economically and ecologically more viable, says the planning commission.

Klassen, a director on the NPA's board, says the city expects to see a population increase of 20 per cent over the next 25 years. A resident of Mountain View and a native Vancouverite, Klassen hopes his fellow residents will be excited about and not fearful of change.

On Friday morning as part of the forum, four teams of Vancouver youth will be given design challenges to adapt urban spaces in response to events such as climate change, a reduced reliance on cars and an aging population.

Planners, architects, landscape architects, engineers and community leaders will meet Friday afternoon to discuss adaptability when it comes to neighbourhood street networks, neighbourhood centres, single-family neighbourhoods and gathering places.

All of this work will culminate in the report that will outline what elected officials should take into account when they make decisions about public spaces and buildings.