

"I'm interested in what buildings can do beyond what they look like, and how they can affect whole areas of people's lives. I have never done a building where I didn't at least attempt to see it in a new philosophical or social way."

B.C. ARCHITECT ARTHUR ERICKSON



PHOTO ANJI SMITH

Space

Making Space for Dialogue

Formal dialogue fosters inclusion and a better understanding of complex and important issues face. It needs a space of its own.

PAGE 5

Prince George's Partners for a Healthy Downtown

The revitalization of downtown spaces is a challenge facing many municipalities across Canada. Prince George's approach is innovative, inclusive, and successful.

PAGE 8

Making Space for Women in Cities

Women in Canada are under-represented in municipal politics. They need to become engaged in the process.

PAGE 11

Spaces, Places, People, and Power

Our communities are a mosaic of overlapping spaces, a great quilt made from the social and physical places that inform our lives.

PAGE 14

Inclusive Space

OUR CHILDREN ARE NOW OUT on their own and my wife and I are thinking about our next move. The family home has been an important space to us as the kids grew. In many ways, it shaped our interactions as a family—the dining room meals, the homework areas, the back yard games. The design of space influences its use and its comfort to users. We see this in public buildings as well as our private spaces.

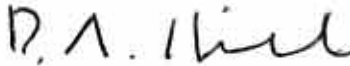
I have been working with SPARC BC on its Inclusive Cities Canada project, which looks at ways to enhance social inclusion in cities and communities across Canada. We have recognized the importance of making sure public spaces are designed with our diverse society in mind. Inclusive spaces are important because they support a sense of inclusion to those who may otherwise be marginalized in our society.

Public spaces also speak to our civic responsibility to create the communities we want. A recent story from the news suggested that a condominium owner deliberately poisoned a stand of trees in a public park to improve the view. That selfish act illustrates a total disproportion

between our private spaces and our public responsibilities. Social inclusion requires the participation of us all, to have more interaction with each other, and to share our sense of public responsibility.

As my wife and I ponder our future moves, we are concerned that we will miss the space in our family home. But then I wonder why we feel we need so much space for just the two of us. Perhaps if we all had less private space, we would get out and use public space more, and become better citizens for it.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of SPARC BC and our staff and volunteers, I wish you all the best for a happy 2005.


PRESIDENT, SPARC BC

ON THE COVER

The combination of stairs and ramp shown on the cover is an accessible and appealing architectural feature of the B.C. Law Courts. The building was designed by renowned B.C. architect Arthur Erickson.

The photo was taken by Vancouver photographer Anji Smith. You can view more of her work at www.anjismithphotography.com.





Space

- 5 **Making Space for Dialogue**
Dr. Joanna Ashworth
- 8 **Prince George's Partners for a Healthy Downtown**
Christine Russell and Stephane Labonne
- 11 **Making Space for Women in Cities**
Councillor Ellen Woodsworth
- 14 **Spaces, Places, People, and Power**
Andrew Pask

OUR MISSION

SPARC BC (The Social Planning and Research Council of BC) works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all.

ABOUT SPARC BC

SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization. Since 1966, SPARC BC has conducted public education and advocacy on key social issues, focusing our efforts on the areas of:

- Income Security
- Accessibility
- Community Development



ACCESSIBILITY

- 30 **Too Little Space**
Matthew Beall

INCOME SECURITY

- 22 **Update on Child Poverty**
Michael Goldberg
- 27 **Living with Disabilities on Income Assistance**
Nick Istvanffy
- 32 **The Impact of 'Welfare Reform' on Single Mothers in B.C.**
Suzy Blown

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- 17 **Perspectives on Community Development**
Nick Istvanffy
- 24 **Bringing the Power of Design to Affordable Housing**
Margaret Condon
- 31 **Community Development Education Takes Off**
Jim Sands

COMMUNITY EXTRAS

- 20 **A Showcase for Sustainability: The World Urban Forum 2006 in Vancouver**
Mayor Barbara Sharp
- 28 **The Poor State of Poverty Law in B.C.**
Anne Beveridge and Andrea Long

TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING

- 34 **Getting on the Agenda: Tips for Influencing Policy**

SPARC BC News from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC is published by SPARC BC four times a year.

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Broadway Printers 

Founded in 1966, SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization who draws its members from across British Columbia.

SPARC BC conducts public education and advocacy on the priority issues identified by a provincial Board of Directors and volunteer committees. SPARC BC's Research and Consulting Services, Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities, Community Development Education Program, and other programs contribute to the goals of fostering the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities in BC.

SPARC BC gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of over 14,000 members and donors, and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Membership in SPARC BC is open to all persons who support the mission and goals of the organization.

For further information visit our website at www.sparc.bc.ca or call (604) 718-7733

Charitable Tax Number: 12168 3916 RR0001
ISSN: 0840-8734

PUBLICATION MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40069354
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
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NOTE TO OUR READERS:

SPARC BC News enjoys a wide readership across B.C. but we want it to be wider—and you can help. Please, when you've finished reading your copy, pass it on to a friend or colleague. We can also furnish a limited number of extra copies if you contact us at info@sparc.bc.ca.

NEXT ISSUE:

The next issue of *SPARC BC News*, due in March 2005, will focus on "influence."



Dialogue lets voices be heard. With a commitment to candour, curiosity, and release of certainty, dialogue can help solve some of the complex problems we face. **BY DR. JOANNA ASHWORTH**

Making Space for Dialogue

DIALOGUE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE community through purposeful talk among equals. It is distinct from debate and negotiation in that it is not intended to reach agreement, win points, or look for flaws in the other's argument, but to examine and challenge assumptions and reach new understandings.

Creating a space for dialogue—physically, intellectually and emotionally—has a number of difficulties. In many communities of interest, voices are often left out of important public dialogue and feel silenced or ignored because they are not free to set their own agenda or to have meaningful involvement in defining a problem. These people feel that they do not have a voice. Within the context of our “meeting culture,” driven by time constraints, rigid agendas, and a desire for efficiency, dialogue may seem anachronistic. Simply put, dialogue takes time. And attending to how we plan dialogue and meaningfully include individuals who are not often involved in public deliberation also takes time.

Through my work as the Director of Dialogue Programs at Simon Fraser University I have convened many dialogues on a variety of pressing public issues. These include immigration, rural urban interdependence, community drug prevention strategies in Vancouver, creative conflict

“Dialogue is distinct from debate and negotiation in that it is not intended to reach agreement, win points, or look for flaws in the other’s argument, but to examine and challenge assumptions and reach new understandings.”

management in health care, and ‘What is an educated Canadian?’ among others. Currently, I am leading a project called Imagine BC that is encouraging as many British Columbians as possible to deliberate on the future of our province. I am also very committed to creating a culture of dialogue through the “Dialogue Makers” programs and dialogues we offer at SFU’s Vancouver campus. Our “Dialogue Maker’s Network” invites individuals to meet regularly to

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

explore the potential of dialogue in their work and other parts of their lives.

One of the consistent problems in creating dialogue is *framing the problem*. Framing itself involves discussion and negotiation among key participants, sponsors, or partners of the dialogue. The purpose and core questions of the issue need to be resolved, not simply pronounced by the planner. Defining the problem or

“The problems we face in our society are so complex that no matter how well-trained or educated we are, thinking alone is inadequate. Most often our knowledge is limited. We need the benefit of many viewpoints to fully understand the scope of complex problems. ”

issue to be examined or locating the genuine questions around which a dialogue event or process is planned calls for inquiry and careful listening. Involving stakeholders early on in this process means that the quality of the dialogue is enhanced and more accurately reflects the diversity of perspectives held on the subject.

There is always some tension in *agenda setting* between not wanting to over-specify or under-specify the items on the agenda. If you arrive at the dialogue’s purpose, set it out clearly and define the core questions you want to explore, a flexible agenda helps to structure the process. However, dialogue facilitators need to be responsive to emerging questions and directions. It doesn’t work to hold on too tightly to the agenda.

Participants in dialogue require a certain *set of*

predispositions such as a commitment to candour, curiosity, and a willingness to relinquish certainty. These are qualities that can be enhanced by learning to listen, demonstrating empathy, and being alert to hidden assumptions. Holding back, pushing a pet preoccupation, or rushing to action also makes dialogue difficult.

Dialogue convenors are responsible for creating a welcoming space for dialogue. As Morris J.

Wosk Centre for Dialogue Fellow, Glenn Sigurdson suggests, “Dialogue meets one of the fundamental needs for taking control of your life and your own agenda.” To create a space for many voices in dialogue means respecting the particular traditions and ways

that people prefer to interact. Creating a sense of safety and belonging in a dialogue starts with a conversation about what this means for those who would participate.

We know that successful dialogue processes, whether long or short, most often create new and respectful relationships among the participants. We can also be clear about the purpose of dialogue in a particular context. But can we really be certain about the “outcomes” in terms of specific deliverables? New, surprising, and worthwhile insights gained from dialogue experiences cannot be guaranteed. Rather than over-specify outcomes, we pay close attention to clarifying the purpose and process of the dialogue itself.

Creating a space for dialogue often involves spending adequate time orienting the experts

who join the dialogue to inform our thinking. We ask many subject matter experts who contribute to our dialogues to think about their contributions as a starting point for the dialogue, and to be open to other perspectives and other ways of knowing. Not all experts are skilled in encouraging or facilitating dialogue.

Whenever I am asked about the value of dialogue to individuals, organizations, or government, I suggest that most of the problems we face in our society are so complex that no matter how well-trained or educated we are, thinking alone is inadequate. Most often our knowledge is limited. We need the benefit of many viewpoints to fully understand the scope of complex prob-

lems. We need to involve those who have not traditionally been a part of our public deliberations to contribute in ways that are meaningful to them. As the political philosopher Hannah Arendt said so well: "For excellence, the presence of others is required." Much remains to be learned about how to invite the other and make them welcome. ■

DIALOGUE ON ACCESSIBILITY

SPARC BC, in collaboration with the SFU Centre for Dialogue, BCACL, and VanCity, will be holding a **Dialogue on Accessibility** on **April 27, 2005**.

For information about the dialogue and how you can participate, contact Emese Szücs at emeses@sparc.bc.ca.

CSPN BC

Interested in joining a provincial network of community social planning organizations?

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Supporting Member

- organizations involved with community social planning.

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For more information contact Jim Sands at SPARC BC at (604) 718-7742 or jsands@sparc.bc.ca. Visit www.sparc.bc.ca for more information or to download an application form.



Prince George's downtown revitalization initiative, Partners for a Healthy Downtown, is innovative, inclusive—and successful.

BY CHRISTINE RUSSELL AND STEPHANE LABONNE.

Prince George's Partners for a Healthy Downtown: The Inner Frontier of a Community's Space

MANY ENVISION DOWNTOWN SPACE as the heart of a community—an area of healthy *busyness* with working people coming and going, shops and offices full of activity: a hub of retail, business, and service agency opportunities. Community cores, however, increasingly do not reflect this image. In Prince George, as with other B.C. communities, the buzzwords around downtowns are now “revitalization” and “rejuvenation” because the downtown space needs a renovation.

A Collaborative Management Approach

Since February 2003, a group of individuals representing City Administration, City Centre Ventures, the Prince George Downtown Business Improvement Association, the Town Centre Business Association, the R.C.M.P., the Community Planning Council, and downtown social service professionals have collaborated in an attempt to manage a number of issues identified as problems in the downtown district. In January 2004, Council representative Murry Krause joined the group. The collaborative approach represented by this broad range of

interests was seen as the ideal way to bring stakeholders together to work to resolve many issues related to the health and vitality of downtown Prince George.

The Partners for a Healthy Downtown have focused on a core concept that emphasizes the *management* of issues and challenges facing the downtown core, rather than their complete resolution.

The process includes an open, inclusive, and transparent dialogue, consultation with all downtown stakeholders. The hope is that the perception and reality of safety and security in downtown Prince George is improved.

Throughout their deliberations, the Partners have been guided by the following objectives:

- Review the safety and security issues and problems in downtown Prince George.
- Meet with various interest groups and parties that do business or operate in downtown Prince George.
- Identify existing resources, problems, and gaps in downtown services.
- Identify solutions to the problems and service gaps.



Partners for a Healthy Downtown. From left to right: Supt. Dahl Chambers, Kathy Lachman, Jeff Elder, Kirk Gable, George Paul, Jennifer Harrington, Lynn Florey, Marianne Sorensen, Inspector Greg Funk, and Ted Coole.

- Recommend improvement actions to the various stakeholders.
- Create and monitor the implementation of an action plan.

To date, the Partners have focused on the following issues:

- Improved safety and security
- Balanced municipal, provincial, and federal social policy
- Improved transportation
- Increased investment and development
- Effective on- and off-street parking
- Providing a variety of activities, especially those related to family and homelessness

It is the opinion of the Partners that many of the issues facing the downtown, particularly policy-related issues, overlap with one another and, for the purposes of this report have been catego-

rized for simplicity. This does not mean, however, that each issue has been considered in isolation, but that a holistic approach has been taken.

That said, it is also important to note that the Partners are committed to a long-term approach to managing the downtown issues, and will continue meeting until the Partners agree their mandate has been fulfilled. Many of the issues have existed for a number of years and it is agreed that a simple short-term solution is not going to resolve them.

A Community Code

In helping to address the negative behaviours found in the downtown, the Partners recommended a Community Code of Conduct, similar to the one implemented in Victoria in 1998. The

continued on page 10

SPACE

continued from page 9

Code of Conduct will act as a means to protect individuals who live, work, shop, and access services in downtown Prince George and its purpose is to promote a safe and friendly neighbourhood for everyone who frequents the area.

“The downtown by its very nature is many things to many people—a neighborhood, a place of work, a centre for recreation and leisure, and for some, a place of last resort.”

The diversity of needs and values among the various individuals who live, work, shop, and access services in downtown Prince George means that few values are held in common. For this reason the foundation of Prince George’s “Community

ACCOLADES

In September 2004, Partners for a Healthy Downtown received the Solicitor General’s Community Safety & Crime Prevention Award and has been short-listed for the Fraser Basin’s Sustainability Award in the category of strengthening communities. The award recognizes those who enable communities to build diverse economies, an educated work force, safe neighbourhoods, access to basic commodities, shared goals, local action, and a sense of belonging.

Code of Conduct” is R.E.S.P.E.C.T.: **R**emember, **E**veryone **S**hares **P**ublic places and **E**xpects **C**ourteous and considerate **T**reatment.

Key points of the code include:

- Pay attention to pedestrian traffic—please ensure that you and your belongings do not get in other people’s way.
 - Plan your activities so that you can use a washroom when you need to.
 - Keep dogs on a leash and remember to clean up after them.
 - Please respect laws around the illegal use and selling of illicit drugs and alcohol in unlicensed public areas.
- Liquor primary establishments are responsible for not over-serving their patrons and should take measures to ensure their patrons’ drunken behaviour outside their establishment is not compromising other peoples’ daily activities.
- Business owners have a responsibility to report to the R.C.M.P. any criminal behaviour such as intoxication in a public place and drug dealing, in the hopes of eliminating this behaviour.

A Space for Everyone

The downtown by its very nature is many things to many people—a neighborhood, a place of work, a centre for recreation and leisure, and for some, a place of last resort—but ultimately, our community’s economic and social health depends upon our ability to make our downtown space a place of choice for everyone. ■



Urban space needs to be designed by the people who use it. Women's interests should be reflected in the decisions that shape our cities. **BY COUNCILLOR ELLEN WOODSWORTH**

Making Space for Women in Cities

ALARMING NEWS: Canada has fallen to 37th place in the world in the number of women in elected office. Only 21% of Mayors or Councillors are women, despite the fact that in 1998, all cities signed the *World Wide Declaration on Women in Local Government*, which called on local authorities to echo the gender equality commitments made by their governments. In Vancouver, only two of ten elected councillors are women. How is it possible that women who pay taxes, create 70% of new businesses, manage families, and volunteer so much of their time are not shaping the policies and the funding that create the city space in which everyone lives? How can women shape spaces if women are not heard in government, in the environment, in the economy?

At the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September 2004, the manual *A City Tailored to Women: the Role of Municipal Governments in Achieving Gender Equality* was launched. This manual is an invitation to municipalities in Canada and abroad to design an "ideal" city space for women. Vancouver will host the World Urban Forum in June 2006, and women want to make sure this forum will address the design of an urban space that works for them.

"Traditionally, towns and cities have been

shaped around the activity patterns of men, and patriarchal assumptions about the role of women, and yet today, women are playing an increasing role in the social and economic life of urban centres. Women's and children's needs have been invisible and decision makers have continued to adopt a gender blind approach."¹

The unbalanced nature of policy and its impact on Vancouver women is due to gender

"Canada has fallen to 37th place in the world in the number of women in elected office. Only 21% of Mayors or Councillors are women."

inequality, in particular in the economy, income distribution, and employment. This situation is particularly serious for women with disabilities, older women, aboriginal women, and visible minorities.

Most people are aware that women continue

¹ Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Femmes et Ville. *Women and the City*. Available at www.icmd-cidm.ca or www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/femmesetville

continued on page 12

continued from page 11

to be primarily responsible for child care, elder care, food preparation, laundry, and cleaning. This work is in addition to our paid work at an average income 28% lower than men's. The unpaid work shapes women's space but since it is not recognized as work, but as volunteer activity, it does not shape public discourse, public policy, public spending, wages, or design of public spaces. The work load of unpaid labour means that women often do not have the time or the income to take further training, engage in significant leadership roles, take other paid jobs, or

“When city planners do consider the impact of their plans, they consult seniors or youth or the disabled or the multicultural community but do not disaggregate the data to find out if the results are different for women.”

pay for child care that would take them away from this work.

Much of the space that women occupy is invisible. For instance, if we made a map of the city that looked at how women spent their days doing unpaid work, would we configure our spaces—roads, child care centres, schools, and shopping centres—in a different way? If we mapped how women used their time in both paid and unpaid work, would our spaces look different? Would we design our buildings with a child care centre in the middle so that parents could look out from the home or work space to

see if their children were safe and happy? Would we design a common kitchen and child care centre in all apartments so that parents could share the work? How would we know what a space that works for women looks like if we do not have a women's advisory committee at city hall to ensure that women look at city plans through a women's lens?

If we engage women in creating participatory budgets and get their advice on how to spend city funds in ways that work for women and the community, we will create a city planning process that develops city spaces that work for women and families.

An urban space needs to be designed by all participants who live, work (both paid and unpaid), play, sleep in homes or are homeless, walk, ride public transit, wheelchairs, bicycle or drive in it. Usually, city planners just look at how those with nine-to-five jobs driving cars want their cities to work.

Often they fail to consider the impact on those who they do not consult. In general, city planners do not think about consulting women for a women's lens. When they do consider the impact of their plans, they consult seniors or youth or the disabled or the multicultural community but do not disaggregate the data to find out if the results are different for women. The results might well be different if women were surveyed in a space alone without the pressure of their culture, religion, or partner.

If we engaged women in a participatory budgeting process as is done in the Philippines, sev-

eral countries in Africa, and Brazil, we could find out how women would design their neighbourhood spaces. We could design our homes so that women could reach the shelves in the kitchen. We could design the bus stops so that women and shorter people could sit down with their feet touching the sidewalk instead of dangling in the air. We could have a national day of remembrance for peace and all the civilians who have died in wars, and a fully funded peace museum dedicated to all those who have worked for peace.

The City of Vancouver has set up a Women's Task Force to address some of these concerns. The Task Force, in their first report to Council, recommended a Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan for the City of Vancouver that would make recommendations in three areas: civic engagement, safety and accessibility, and health

and well-being. The Task Force will be going out into the community in 2005 to talk to women. If you are interested in shaping your city space so that it works for women, please get in touch with the co-chairs, Councillor Ellen Woodsworth and Councillor Anne Roberts at the City of Vancouver. ■

Further Reading

Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals. Available at <web.idrc.ca/openebooks/067-5/>

Gender Budgets Make More Cents. Available at <web.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/10999500721GBMMC.pdf>

Gender Equality Scheme by the Greater London Authority. Available at <www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/women/gender-equal03.pdf>



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SPARC BC's Parking Permit Program:

- Issues parking permits for people with mobility impairments
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SPARC BC has advocated for the rights of people with mobility impairments since 1969.



Our spaces—social, political, physical—overlap and interact to form our cities and cultures. The shaping of those spaces has a profound impact on the way we live. **BY ANDREW PASK**

Spaces, Places, People, and Power

SPACE IS A FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT to understanding community—a fact that is both sensible and surprising. It is sensible because all communities have a spatial component to them. It is surprising because when we think of communities, we tend to think of people, or groups of people, forgetting the spatial context that exists where these people meet, converse, and experience everyday life.

Part of this oversight comes from the fact that we tend to think space as being synonymous with emptiness or a void. Modern urban and regional planning (sometimes called ‘spatial planning’ or ‘land-use planning’) can reinforce this but often at the expense of acknowledging the people that inhabit these spaces.

Space and Place

From a community development perspective, space is defined not by absence, but by presence. Space is an area where activities and interactions occur, meaning is made, behaviours are permitted or forbidden. The term defines territories, contains resources, cultures, languages.

Space imbued with meaning becomes Place. The distinction between these two terms comes down to perceptions of value: “Space is the structure of the world; it is the three-dimensional

environment in which objects and events occur, and in which they have relative position and direction. [*Whereas*] a place is a space which is invested with understandings of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations, and so forth. We are located in ‘space,’ but we act in ‘place’... The distinction is rather like that between a house and a ‘home;’ a house might keep out the wind and the rain, but a home is where we live.”¹

To geographer Edward Relph, place is a “fundamental aspect of people’s existence in the world.” Places, he wrote, “are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world.” Furthermore, “regardless of the historical time or the geographical, technological, and social situation, *people will always need place* because having a place and identifying with place are integral to what and who we are as human beings.”²

Harrison and Dourish claim that “spaces and places are different things,” but it is not necessary to make too much of this distinction, because both space and place inform one another. They are two sides of the same coin. Spaces

1 Steve Harrison & Paul Dourish. *Re-Place-ing Space: The Roles of Place and Space in Collaborative Systems*. Available at www.ics.uci.edu/~jpd/publications/1996/cscw96-place.pdf

and places are in a constant state of dialogue.

A Community is Many Spaces and Places

A multiplicity of different and overlapping spaces and places exists within every community. These spaces are found on a range of scales and fulfill different needs.

Some spaces fulfill individual needs—a tree house, a den, a street corner—all are spaces of individual retreat. Then there shared spaces—within households and beyond, common areas such as offices, neighbourhood houses, sidewalks. The same space can also have multiple meanings and reflect a different sense of place. Sometimes meanings change with the time of day. A covered bus stop may act as a gathering place for transit riders, but may also be a home for a street-involved individual.

Indeed, the everyday world can be enumerated through a vast array of different spaces. There is social space—places of “encounter, assembly, simultaneity,” in the words of Henri Lefebvre.³ Some space is governed by explicit controls and articulated usages—for example commercial space, green space, and institutional space, as well as other clearly defined areas set out in municipal zoning bylaws (a form of control which takes a given space and makes explicit its usage). Public space and private space are distinct. The former includes the pathways, corridors, sidewalks, parks, libraries, and public beaches that comprise roughly one third of all space in an urban environment. The other hand, private space, is often defined as being “the space you pay to get into” either with an entrance fee or with a transaction of some sort. Both your

local café and your place of employment are private spaces. Private property is a restricted space—rules and customs govern when, where, and who can access these places.

The distinction is not always clear, however, particularly where physical and symbolic spaces overlap. A covered sidewalk that surrounds the pedestrian with advertising may be a public space, but it can often feel a bit like it is the private territory of a retail store. Similarly, the tiny parks that sometimes sit next to office towers are often public parks, but they feel as if they are part of the corporate domain.

The blurriness between public and private spaces is mirrored in other types of space as well. The lines that demarcate some places are clearly defined, with sharp edges and distinct boundaries, like a jail. But other forms of space are less clearly defined. Consider a neighbourhood as one such “fuzzy” space. Where exactly does a given neighbourhood begin and end? Lines easily blur or multiply. Boundaries can change depending on who’s doing the talking.

Space and Power

We are born into a given environment and come to normalize the spaces around us—our streets, neighbourhoods and markets, even our towns and cities as a whole. It is easy to forget that the world in which we grow up is the result of innu-

2 David Seamon. “A Singular Impact: Edward Relph’s Place and Placelessness”. *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*. vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 5-8.

3 Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. New York: Blackwell, 1991.

continued on page 16

continued from page 15

merable plans and decisions, both good and bad. It is often difficult to get a sense of the scale of the overall complexity of the process of spatial planning and design. Sometimes you have to go away and then return to a place to appreciate the evolution of spaces. Beyond that, the implications of change are also normalized. After all, as the old saying goes, ‘change is inevitable.’

Having said that, two fundamental tenets exist that we need to be aware of when we look at space through the lens of community development. First, space—its creation, ordering, and maintenance—reflects a variety of decision-making processes. Moreover, a great amount of power, influence, and control are embedded in these decision-making processes.

Second, despite appearances to the contrary, power can be accessed in a variety of ways by the community at large. Change may be inevitable, but the shape of change is evitable. Everyone has the potential to influence space—to advocate for change, or, conversely, for preservation.

Space, far from being arbitrary in its organization, is highly ordered. Everything from the layout of housing lots and apartment blocks, parking spaces, the placement of commercial centres, billboards, community forests and industrial zones, the locations of parks, to the corridors of energy, transit and resource flow—all of this order is connected to decision-making. And this process is a point of access for community involvement.

In years past, the planning and ordering of space was the exclusive domain of professional planners. Up until the 1960s, the profession of

Urban Planning rested on the notion of ‘planners as experts.’ In the last five decades, the idea of planners as specialists has given way to a far more collaborative process that involves community organizations, local expertise, and legally mandated consultations with local stakeholders. How space is designed is far more of a participatory process than it was in years past. In an era where more and more places are being planted with a monocrop of chain-store and factory outlets, an urgent need exists to ensure that communities are empowered with the capacity to participate in the planning process. Without effort in this respect, the ‘sense of place’ that we associate with the spaces of our community can easily become bankrupt. When this happens we move from place to *placelessness*, what Relph terms “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place.”

Want to ensure your community is strong, vibrant, and healthy? Start by thinking of community both as a gathering of people, but also as a mosaic of spaces. By adding the language of space to your vocabulary you will begin adopt part of the discourse of power used by decision-makers. Second, recognize that you—as a member of your community—are part of the decision-making process. Speak up. Organize around issues in your neighbourhood. Be inclusive. Foster dialogue. Insert yourself into the arena of spatial and social planning. Something is always happening in your neighbourhood, and you can be a part of it. ■

Perspectives on Community Development

Nick Istvanffy continues his interviews with B.C. pioneers in community development. In this article, Liz Robertson and Jeremy Triggs share their thoughts on and experiences in community development in B.C.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT is an evolving process. The accumulated knowledge and wisdom in the field, hard earned through countless victories and losses, is an essential resource for engaged citizens and community development professionals.

British Columbians have actively promoted various forms of community development for decades. In the last issue of *SPARC BC News*, we interviewed Margaret Mitchell and Walter Paetkau, two people who had extensive experience in community development. This time, we have interviewed Liz Robertson and Jeremy Triggs, who both have a long history of practical community development work. Their personal experiences can help us strengthen our own activities, and provide a perspective on the day-to-day challenges of community development.

Liz Robertson

Liz became involved in community development for the simple reason that she cared about the community in which she lived, Williams Lake. Liz was motivated by wanting to “put the best foot forward for visitors,” and so became involved in many community organizations and activities—the Cariboo Friendship Society, the Stampede Association, and the museum and

historical societies.

Her favourite community development work was on a housing project for single parents. The most difficult part of the project was overcoming community suspicions about the project. Broadly speaking, the neighbourhood was dis-

“In the beginning, the neighbourhood was distrustful of the creation of low-cost housing ... but in the end, the neighbours who had wanted to build a fence felt it was no longer necessary.”

trustful of the creation of low-cost housing. In order to address and reduce those concerns, they spoke to the neighbours, had community information events, and held open houses. The final outcome of all that work was that the project became well-accepted in the neighbourhood. By the time it was finished, neighbours who had wanted to build a fence no longer believed it was necessary.

Approaches that worked well:

Recently, Liz experienced broad community participation at a dinner to hear about social planning, which would have been unheard of just a few years ago. Over time, Liz has seen the

continued on page 18

continued from page 17

development of a real awareness of the need for social planning to be included in city plans. In the case of the dinner, she also credits a local social planning organization for their dedication to the project.

Liz has seen a gradual growth in awareness of community participation. It does not happen overnight, it takes a long time. In her communi-

“The flower program has grown so the city enters an international competition for cities in bloom. The program’s growth has resulted from the community developing pride in itself and its appearance, and great spin-offs have followed from that for other forms of social and community engagement.”

ty, social planners have been fortunate in that their city councils have been willing to listen to what organizations have voiced as community concerns.

When Liz was on City Council, she was adamant that Williams Lake had to show pride in its own community before they could expect business people to do things like hang baskets and banners. When they got the city to allocate the money, it was suggested they could save money by using plastic flowers, which she successfully opposed. That program has now grown so the city enters an international competition for cities in bloom. The growth of the flower program has resulted from the community developing pride in itself and its appearance, and great

spin-offs have followed from that for other forms of social and community engagement.

Jeremy Triggs

Jeremy became involved in community development while working on a Master’s degree in education at Simon Fraser University. He was particularly interested in community involvement

in the educational field, and he ultimately obtained a job as a community school coordinator. As a part of that job, he attended monthly social planning meetings and became involved in a number of initiatives, including a committee examining the social issues around the Burnaby Metrotown develop-

ment, and another committee looking at youth issues.

Jeremy also helped develop a popular parade in North Burnaby, which included a number of merchants and parents. That community involvement became a basis for further community development, as people developed networks and began initiating other projects.

Jeremy has been involved in several of the SPARC BC Community Development Institutes (CDI). He was on the steering committee for a Comox valley CDI in 2002. He is currently involved in a residents’ association in Comox, which is another form of community development. In the past, he has been involved with the Cancer Society, where they had various meetings

with health-related societies in order to improve coordination in the community health field.

In Jeremy's experience, community development has become more professionalized, and less 'seat of the pants.' As a result, it has lost some of its initial attraction, but is probably far more efficient than in the past. Community development professionals now know effective systems of goal setting and evaluation, and are more knowledgeable and experienced than in the past. Many communities now have some form of community development with heritage activities, parades, and recreational activities.

Approaches that worked well:

In Jeremy's opinion, SPARC BC's Community Development Institute programs worked pretty well. He recently went to a conference in Cumberland on saving small towns that was extremely well implemented. More generally, community development works well when residents and committees work closely with municipal councils. Rather than a one-off event, planners now recognize that community development is an ongoing process. Currently, with less help from the province in many areas, communities increasingly have to do things on their own, and in some ways that stimulates new community development activities.

In Jeremy's experience, projects often do not work well if they depend too heavily on govern-

ment finances over the long-term. For example, many of the community schools he used to be involved with have closed since provincial funding was eliminated. That is one of the things about community development: practitioners need to maintain an ongoing process because everything comes to an end. When planning for community development people must keep in mind the question of how to keep it going under changing financial and political circumstances.

"Community development has become more professionalized and less 'seat of the pants.' Community development professionals are more knowledgeable and experienced than in the past."

Shared Wisdom

Jeremy Triggs and Liz Robertson come from broadly different experiences in community development work. Their experiences reflect some significant lessons for current and future community developers. Both of them identified the importance of involving community members in the development process, and working with local councils to build consensus and support for community initiatives. Jeremy identified the importance of maintaining community development processes over time, and not becoming too dependent on a single source of income. Their experiences and knowledge provide us with valuable insights into developing effective, sustainable community development programs. ■

A Showcase for Sustainability:

The World Urban Forum 2006 in Vancouver

The Greater Vancouver Regional District will host the next World Urban Forum in June 2006. **Barbara Sharp**, Mayor of North Vancouver and one of the Vancouver Forum's directors, recently attended this year's Forum in Barcelona.

WE HAVE A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY to showcase the GVRD and our leadership in sustainability in 2006 when Greater Vancouver hosts the next World Urban Forum. The World Urban Forum for 2006, also called the Habitat +30 Forum, is scheduled to take place 30 years after Vancouver hosted Habitat I, the original United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. Habitat +30 will encourage at least 30 cities from around the world to bring the best examples of sustainability to the GVRD.

Barcelona hosted the World Urban Forum in September 2004 and I had the pleasure of attending on behalf of the GVRD. The GVRD was part of a much larger Canadian delegation headed by Joe Fontana, the Federal Minister of Labour and Housing.

Learning in Barcelona

We were all in Barcelona to learn. Many of the delegates that formed the Canadian team needed to learn quickly what content and organization was necessary to host such a large forum in partnership with the United Nations.

The World Urban Forum covered many issues, with topics that included healthy rivers, access to safe water, health care, shelter, education, and security of tenure. There were also net-

working meetings on women's issues, peace-building, youth empowerment, city-to-city relationships and communication technology, sustainable relief and restructuring programs, natural disaster recovery, and integration of actionable plans, to name a few. WUF 2004 hosted many dazzling exhibits and activities—a youth congress, a concert from an Iraqi musician, and a speakers' corner highlighting issues such as fighting for social inclusion, genocide and rebuilding after conflicts, and much more.

Many dialogue reports were also made available, such as *The 3 P's—Political Will, Policy, and Participation* that illustrates the importance of the “3 P's” in translating political vision into reality. *The Urban Resources* was another dialogue report that recommends altering commercial banking and housing finance systems to meet the needs of the urban poor and ensure that slum dwellers are the dominant partners in slum upgrading initiatives. An other notable dialogue report was *Urban Governance, Inclusiveness and Community Empowerment: A Partner's Dialogue*, which explored many urban governance ideas, including such innovations as participatory budgeting, strengthening community organizations, and public participation in planning. It concluded with the recognition that

empowerment is not only an end in itself, but also a means of access for the poor to public goods such as transportation, land, and basic services.

Preparing for Habitat +30

As a GVRD representative and one of five Directors, I was in Barcelona to learn how we in this region can take a practical approach to ensuring that we provide ideas and examples of sustainable practices that delegates are able to take back to their cities throughout the world and put into practice.

One of the concerns expressed by some countries and cities in attendance in Barcelona is that many are not in a position of financial security like most Canadian cities. Representatives from some of these less affluent cities advised us that the direct cost of their attendance could be counted in the number of school desks left unpurchased. We came to understand the necessity of emphasizing simple, practical solutions for our local government stream on sustainability at the 2006 World Urban Forum.

The GVRD is working with International Centre for Sustainable Cities, who do practical demonstration projects that show how urban sustainability can be implemented. The official signing of the first of these cities took place in Barcelona and the event was well attended by delegates from around the world. Minister Joe



Signing Off on Habitat +30. At the table, right to left: Murray Hunt, Surrey Councillor and GVRD Chair; Joseph Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing; Mike Harcourt, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Cities.

Fontana; Mike Harcourt, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister; Konrad Otto-Zimmerman, the Secretary General of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives; and Dr. Nola Kate Seymour, President and CEO the ICSC were but a few.

Planning for Success

The Forum in Barcelona was a fascinating experience, one I am able to personally compare to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. I look forward to 2006 and being part of hosting the best World Urban Forum since Habitat I in 1976. We began the process for a sustainable and inclusive society many years ago and I am sure we will continue to show the dynamic leadership everyone has come to expect when we host Habitat +30 in June 2006. ■

Child Poverty Update

Child poverty in British Columbia is on the rise, more than 5% higher than it was in 1989 when all parties in the House of Commons unanimously agreed to seek an end to child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. **Michael Goldberg** outlines the state of child poverty in B.C. and proposes some solutions.

THE LATEST STATISTICS on child poverty show that both the private sector labour market and government are doing a poor job on behalf of children in B.C. Governments are failing children by not providing adequate income supports, and the private sector is failing children by not providing enough jobs with decent wages and good working conditions for parents .

Child poverty rates rose slightly in 2002 after a trend of decreasing rates. In B.C., the rate of child poverty increased slightly in 2001 and rose

dramatically in 2002. The latest figures from Statistics Canada show that 19.6 percent of B.C. children were living in poverty in 2002. That is 167,000 children—more than the combined population of Nanaimo and Prince George.

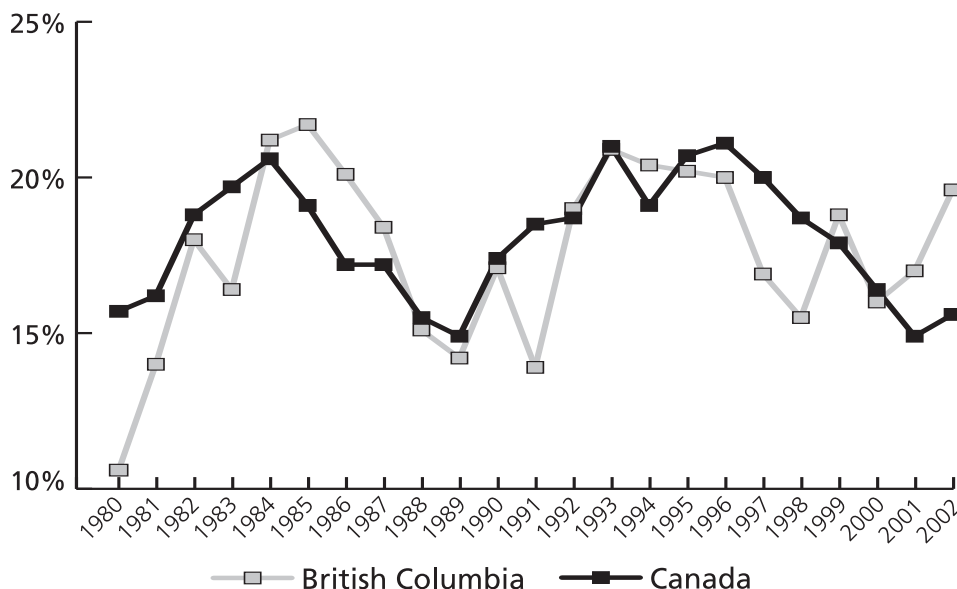
The B.C. child poverty rate was only 14.2 percent in 1989, when all parties in the House of Commons unanimously agreed to seek to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000.

B.C. had the third highest rate of child poverty among Canadian provinces. Only Newfoundland and Manitoba recorded higher child poverty rates in 2002.

Contrary to popular impressions, most poor children in B.C. live in families with annual incomes thousands of dollars below the poverty line. In 2002, the average depth of poverty for poor children was over \$10,000, the worst of all provinces in Canada.

Furthermore, only 18 percent of all poor chil-

Rates of Child Poverty in B.C. and Canada 1980 - 2002



Source: Income Trends In Canada 2001, Statistics Canada 13F0022XCB

dren in B.C. live in families with no market income, and 22% live in families that work full-time (30 hours or more per week) and full-year (at least 49 weeks).

This means that too many employers in the private sector offer low-wage, part-time, or part-year jobs that do not allow parents to earn enough to look after their families.

Meanwhile, welfare incomes in B.C. have been declining since 1994, after adjusting for inflation. The National Council of Welfare reported that B.C. welfare incomes fell to 15-year lows in 2003. While federal support for children on welfare has increased over the years, the increases have been more than offset by cuts in provincial support.

The eradication of child poverty in B.C. and Canada requires action on a number of fronts by both the federal and provincial governments.

Income security through an enhanced Child Tax Benefit

- Develop a multi-year plan with targets and timetables to consolidate the Canada Child Tax Benefit into a single program that provides \$4,900 per child per year.
- End the “clawback” of National Child Benefit funds from families on social assistance in B.C.

A Canadian system of Early Learning and Child Care

- Use designated federal funds to develop and sustain quality, universal, affordable, inclu-

sive, and *regulated* early learning and child care.

- Use federal funds only to supplement, not replace, existing provincial funding.

A comprehensive Canadian housing strategy

- Increase annual federal funding to \$625 million per annum over the period 2004–2008.
- Develop a minimum of 25,000 affordable units across Canada annually.

Action to create good jobs with decent wages and working conditions.

- Eliminate the \$6/hour training wage.
- Increase the minimum call out from two to four hours.
- Increase the minimum wage to \$10/hour.
- Repeal legislation (Bill 37) that reduced the work start age from 15 to 12.

Increased and stabilized funding of the Canada Social Transfer (CST)

- Focus CST on social services and social assistance.
- Increase federal funds.
- Establish enforceable principles that ensure adequate support is available to those in need.



Online Resources

Detailed fact sheets on child poverty in B.C. are available in the “What’s New” section of the First Call web site at www.firstcallbc.org.

Bringing the Power of Design to Affordable Housing

The design of affordable housing, **Margaret Condon** argues, is critical to the acceptance of units in communities and fundamental to creating a safe, welcoming space for residents to call “home.”

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER TEN YEARS, guarded excitement—even some optimism—exists in the affordable housing community in Canada. The recent appointment of a Minister of Housing, the Honourable Joe Fontana, and a promise from the federal government of \$1.5 billion of new money over the next five years, has given hope that Prime Minister Martin has not forgotten his call, made in the late 1980’s from the opposition benches, for enactment of a National Housing Strategy.

Given the absence of increased support for housing from the federal government for over a decade, and the shift by the provincial government since the last election, the environment into which a National Housing Strategy would be launched is one of enormous pent-up demand. Over 10,000 people in B.C. are on a waiting list for affordable housing. So, despite the fact that Minister Fontana has said that “At the end of the day, it’s about more than units per se, it’s about families and individuals and how we help people,” the current situation raises the risk that a strictly short-term focus on delivering housing units will arise, with little attention to the long-term goal of creating a safe and wel-

coming space for residents to call “home.”

Space, the theme of this issue of *SPARC BC News*, is about our surrounding environment, both built and natural. The appreciation of the beauty of natural landscapes is almost universal. Built environments on the other hand, often designed as commodities, are often less appealing. In the case of affordable housing, because of the budget constraints that typically accompany this type of project, the potential for a disappointing outcome is forever present. Limitations may apply both in terms of the location as well as the size of the building and the surrounding land. The variable that can be enhanced however, regardless of location and size, is design. No matter the perceived shortcomings of a project, good design can go a long way to overcoming them. Nor does good design necessarily mean a higher budget. Good design, however, requires a level of creativity that only occurs when the development of a solution to a mundane problem extends into the realm of enhancing the beauty in our lives.

What is good design?

Good design in affordable housing, or almost

anything else for that matter, consists basically of the following four elements: meeting the needs of the users, fitting into the surrounding environment, reflecting current socio-economic and demographic trends, and incorporating quality and aesthetics.

First and foremost, affordable housing design must meet the basic needs of the occupants in terms of size and location. Families need larger homes with more bedrooms, larger kitchens, and more storage than single adults. Seniors living alone, on the other hand, need less space but often have accessibility needs, as do people with disabilities. Proximity to social services may be important to seniors; daycare services may be critical to families.

The power of design is demonstrated when an affordable housing development responds to its neighbourhood context, namely the surrounding houses and yards, as well as the sidewalks and streets, parks and playgrounds. Existing housing styles such as pitched or flat roofs, porches, bay windows, patios, or decks must be considered along with existing yard treatments. It can be that a deliberate choice is made to differentiate rather than mimic the existing neighbourhood style, but if so it should have some integrating features such as setbacks or fence styles.

Examples of Good Design

A recent example of good design in affordable housing, as evidenced by being awarded the 2004 Governor General's Medal for

Architecture, is the Lore Krill Housing Co-operative located in the downtown eastside of Vancouver. The brick detailing on this 203 unit non-market housing development built on two former parking lots recalls the window and bay

“Good design in affordable housing meets the needs of the users, fits into the surrounding environment, reflects current socio-economic and demographic trends, and incorporates quality and aesthetics.”

proportions of the nearby Woodward's building. At the time it was being designed it was thought that Woodward's would be demolished. Now that a decision has been made to preserve it, the imitation and the original will stand together.

Another example is a heritage mansion infill development that took place a few years ago in my own neighbourhood in East Vancouver. To achieve the density required to make the project viable, the original building was moved closer to the street, at the same setback not only of the infill housing but also of the surrounding houses. The result is a more pleasing streetscape from anywhere in the neighbourhood, including in front of my own home, though the density on the site has increased manyfold.

The power of design is further evident when the layout of the dwelling reflects current socio-economic, technological, and demographic trends. This may be achieved through simple details such as communications hookups in every room, or designing the entrance area and

continued on page 26

continued from page 25

internal traffic areas to accommodate the needs of the independent ways of life of adults sharing with older children, or for economic or lifestyle-driven considerations such as where part of the dwelling may be rented out or used for working at home. Demographics also dictate that household situations will vary, and that they will change over time, so good design incorporates universal accessibility and reversible adaptability. Well-designed space adapts to different uses with minimal expenditure, whether it be to accommodate diverse cultures, the needs of young children, the disabled, or the elderly.

Lastly, the power of design is exhibited when quality and aesthetics are incorporated into the structure. Quality materials contribute to the longevity of a project and its ability to appreciate in value. They also make a project easier to maintain and can reduce operating costs, particularly where energy efficiencies are built in through better windows, insulation, and equipment. Designing for maximum natural light is one of the most important aesthetic considerations. The simple use of colour in paint is another, as is the growing of ivy on a building's facade. The reality is that people respond positively to design that has an element of beauty. While projects that meet minimal code requirements may indeed provide better shelter than their occupants previously enjoyed, they do little for their spirit, or for the spirit of the neighbourhood in which they are located.

Benefits of Good Design

The benefits of good design accrue for the life-

time of an affordable housing development and may be summarized as follows:

- Excitement and pride of occupancy among residents
- Stable and enhancing influence on the neighbourhood
- Reduced chance of community resistance during development
- Greater support of planning officials during development
- Lower operating costs, less maintenance, increased longevity
- Improved potential for value appreciation

So as the potential for new investment in affordable housing in B.C. seems a little closer at hand, and discussions and partnerships hopefully start to take shape, let us all remember that the one non-negotiable element is good design. Long after the impact of spending extra dollars has passed, the residents and the surrounding community will continue to reap the rewards of lives enriched by design. ■

Affordable Housing Design Resources Online

Affordable Housing Design Advisor
<www.designadvisor.org>

Design Matters: Best Practices in Affordable Housing Catalog
<www.uic.edu/aa/cdc/AHDC/website>

The Affordable Homes Program, McGill University
<www.homes.mcgill.ca>

Livable and Affordable: Good Design in Affordable Housing
<www.nhi.org/online/issues/124/gooddesign.html>

Bronx By Design: Why Beauty Matters
<www.nhi.org/online/issues/134/beauty.html>

Living with Disabilities on Income Assistance

SPARC BC is developing a way to assess whether income assistance rates are sufficient for people with disabilities. **Nick Istvanffy** is one of the researchers working on the LiDIA project.

DO WE PROVIDE ADEQUATE FINANCIAL support to adults who are unable to work as a result of living with a disability? A just and healthy society requires that all citizens are able to participate in community life to the best of their abilities, and barriers to that participation need to be identified and addressed. In the case of persons with disabilities, the barriers are often significant, and can result in real hardship and social exclusion.

In early 2004, SPARC BC initiated a pilot research project titled 'Living with Disabilities on Income Assistance.' The project's purpose is to develop a way to assess whether income assistance (welfare) rates for people with disabilities are sufficient to meet their basic needs, which include shelter, food, medicines, clothing, and community participation. The nature of individual disability is such that each person has a unique level of specific needs, which makes the problem of assigning adequate income assistance complex. Previous studies on the adequacy of general income assistance are not applicable in the case of disabilities, because each person experiences extra 'non-optional' costs of living with a disability.

Many of the costs of living are fixed, meaning they do not usually vary from month to month, and are not flexible. Rent, heat, electricity, and

other bills are not easy to reduce or ignore in a financial tight spot. Many of the non-optional costs experienced by people with disabilities fit into the same category. Where a person is living in poverty, little remains in a monthly income

"A just and healthy society requires that all citizens are able to participate in community life to the best of their abilities, and barriers to that participation need to be identified and addressed."

after the fixed and non-optional costs are paid. Food costs are not fixed in the same way, and many people are forced to make sacrifices in the quality and amount of food they purchase.

SPARC BC is testing a methodology to assess the cost of living with a disability and compare it against what people receive through income assistance. To account for the individualized nature of disabilities, we have undertaken a set of individual case studies in which volunteers tracked their income and expenses over a month, followed by an interview to discuss their experiences. This approach, combined with background research and key informant interviews, will provide us with a new perspective on the adequacy of income assistance for persons with disabilities. ■

The Poor State of Poverty Law in B.C.

Justice for the poor depends on adequate legal aid. **Anne Beveridge** and **Andrea Long** report on the results of the SPARC BC Poverty Law Project, a study undertaken with the support of the Law Foundation of B.C.

“It is understood that without legal aid, a segment of the population cannot take advantage of the protections and guarantees offered by our legal system and are therefore denied access to justice. To protect the integrity of our legal system and to give full meaning to the constitution that supports it, everyone in Canada must have access to the courts and, by extension, to the knowledge and legal advice that make access to the courts and to justice meaningful.”¹

LEGAL AID IS A CORNERSTONE of the Canadian justice system. It provides a mechanism through which citizens can launch legal challenges when their rights are violated, or when they are treated unfairly, even if they cannot afford to retain a lawyer. When a legal challenge relates to an area of law with which lower income persons are most likely to interact, it falls into the category of ‘poverty law.’ Key poverty law issues include welfare, landlord/tenant disputes, employment insurance, pensions, debt/bankruptcy, and workers’ compensation.

For over thirty years, B.C. had a poverty law system admired and imitated around the world for its quality, range of service, and number of clients assisted. Funded primarily by the provincial government, poverty law lawyers and paralegals annually helped 40,000 people unable to afford other legal services.

Today, poverty law in B.C. is no longer

admired. Dramatic reductions in the legal aid budget in 2002 resulted in the elimination of government-funded poverty law lawyers and paralegals. Instead of direct assistance and legal representation, legal aid now offers a toll-free telephone service through which poverty law clients can access some information and advice. While B.C. is fortunate to have a network of community-based poverty law advocates, legal clinics, and organizations that undertake test-case litigation outside of the legal aid structure, they are being overwhelmed by significant increases in client numbers and requests for assistance. In effect, options for poverty law assistance in B.C. are now scarce and fragmented.

SPARC BC’s Poverty Law Project

It is in this context that SPARC BC, in cooperation with a group of poverty law advisors, set out to look at the current state of poverty law and begin to think about options for redevelopment. This project was one of a series of poverty law initiatives funded by the Law Foundation of B.C.

SPARC BC’s Poverty Law Project had two parts. First, consultations with poverty law advocates and lawyers with poverty law experience

¹ Canadian Bar Association. February 2002. *Making the Case: The Right to Publicly-Funded Legal Representation in Canada.* www.cba.org/CBA/pdf/2002-02-15_case.pdf

provided an overview of key pressures and priority areas. Second, research on opportunities and challenges encountered by other jurisdictions offered a starting point for thinking about service delivery options in B.C. From this data, some clear themes emerged around specific areas for action, and principles around which to structure service development. The principles are highlighted below.²

Legal Expertise: A strong theme in project findings is that it is essential to have lawyers involved in poverty law work, providing direct services (particularly representation), and supports like legal supervision. A poverty law system that includes lawyers is more efficient and effective for clients, staff, and funders. Dedicated poverty law lawyers also have current knowledge about poverty law issues, and an appreciation for the circumstances of clients.

Collaboration: Community advocates and lawyers make unique and valuable contributions to poverty law. In combination, these contributions produce high quality services, comprehensive coverage, and efficient resource use. Strong and supportive networks of service providers also yield greater stability, and decrease susceptibility to funding loss.

Funding: Unsurprisingly, lack of funding is identified as the biggest obstacle to poverty law redevelopment. Jurisdictional research confirms that funding quantity and stability are pervasive concerns. A key finding from this project is that having multiple sources of funding decreases

vulnerability and increases independence.

Training: Access to training is necessary to maintain skills and knowledge—preconditions for high quality, efficient services and confident service providers. The cuts to poverty law legal aid mean that few trained poverty law lawyers are available to train advocates and pro bono lawyers.

“For over thirty years, B.C. had a poverty law system admired and imitated around the world for its quality and range of service. Now, after years of government cuts, the options for poverty law assistance in B.C. are scarce and fragmented.”

Pro bono services: Pro bono services (lawyers volunteering their time) help extend available legal services—particularly in the absence of legal aid—but are not a substitute for paid staff. The roles pro bono lawyers play in advice clinics and test case litigation clearly make a contribution, but these functions are an inadequate foundation for a comprehensive poverty law system.

The SPARC BC Poverty Law Project points to some first steps in redeveloping an accessible, effective poverty law system. We now need to translate statements of principle into positive action for the people of B.C. who currently lack access to justice. ■

2 To review the complete set of findings from the *SPARC BC Poverty Law Project*, see Section III of the full report. The report can be downloaded from SPARC BC’s website at www.sparc.bc.ca.

Too Little Space

Designated parking for people with disabilities is critical to healthy, inclusive communities. **Matthew Beall** examines parking and accessibility in light of a recent unfortunate event related to a disputed designated parking space.

IN AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT in Vancouver in October 2004, a man shot his neighbour in a dispute over a parking space for people with disabilities. Luckily, both men sustained only minor injuries. Although the event may be the culmination of a long-standing quarrel not solely related to the contested space, this conflict is only the most recent extreme escalation of a disagreement over designated parking. The dispute is a pointed example of the importance designated parking to many British Columbians who depend on it to maintain normal, active lives. As more and more parking permit holders continue to unwittingly compete for the same number of designated spaces, conflict, inconvenience, and exclusion will inevitably result.

Critical Parking

Parking permit holders have barriers to mobility that prevent them from easily walking any distance. Extra-wide parking spaces close to building entrances are essential to their participation in the everyday activities that most citizens take for granted. When these permit holders cannot find a suitable space, they often have no alternative but to return home.

SPARC BC encourages property owners, businesses, and municipalities to make extra efforts in designation, design, and enforcement to accommodate drivers and passengers with

mobility impairments. Despite commendable efforts by some organizations, many popular destinations face an increasing demand for their limited number of designated spaces. Equitable use of the current designated parking spaces in B.C. requires responsible enforcement, inclusive policies, and, especially, considerate treatment from other drivers and permit holders.

The Value of Accessibility

The issue of space for people with disabilities extends far beyond convenient access to parking. Parking is only one of many accessibility issues that are important to creating inclusive and welcoming communities. Ramp access, Braille alternatives, curb cuts, accessible public transit, and other accommodations made for people with disabilities are indicators of a conscious social effort to include everyone, no matter their condition, within our community. Universal access to public events, services, and spaces increases the diversity of voices and perspectives that make our culture rich and our society welcoming. It also promotes a healthy society that values everyone's contribution and encourages participation in all aspects of community life.

As Canadians and British Columbians, we owe it to ourselves and to our fellow citizens to make space—in communities, in dialogues, in culture—for everyone. We all stand to benefit. ■

Community Development Education Takes Off

Jim Sands is the project coordinator for SPARC BC's Community Development Education Program. For more information please contact cde@sparc.bc.ca or visit our website at www.sparc.bc.ca/cde.

SPARC BC'S PILOT PROJECT designed to make community development education accessible to rural and Northern B.C. communities is proving to be popular. So far, more than 75 participants have taken part in four workshops. Many attendees have expressed strong support for the workshop concept.

SPARC BC designed the CDE pilot project to test a new model for delivering support for community development in rural and Northern B.C. A SPARC BC Board task force developed this new model to build on the success of the Community Development Institute organized by SPARC BC in partnership with communities across B.C. from 1995 to 2002.

To date, workshops have taken place in the Village of Laxgalts'ap (Greenville), Chase, Slovan, and on the ʔAkisqnuq First Nation reservation near Windermere. An additional community development workshop addressing social planning and the link between social and economic issues is scheduled for December in Kitimat. SPARC BC selected the five pilot project communities from more than twenty applicants who responded to a summer call for proposals.

Although we offered workshops on a variety of topics, the issue of developing effective partnerships was requested most often. In the workshop sponsored by the Village Government of Laxgalts'ap, participants discussed the revitaliza-

tion of an inter-agency committee and developed strategies for addressing local alcohol and drug issues. Laxgalts'ap is one of four communities in the Nass River Valley covered by a Nisga'a treaty.

In Chase, participants discussed how to develop a broadly collaborative approach to address social issues. In Slovan, thirty participants came to a Saturday morning workshop and brainstormed on partnerships needed to develop a community foundation, examined land use issues related to a community forest, and discussed the need to build economic opportunities for youth in the Slovan Valley.

The workshop at ʔAkisqnuq First Nation was part of a day-long event that brought aboriginal and non-aboriginal residents and organizations together to discuss community issues for the first time. The event included several presentations on the history and vision of the ʔAkisqnuq First Nation. Workshop participants discussed ways to share ʔAkisqnuq First Nation and Ktunaxa history with the non-aboriginal community, developed strategies for the integrated protection of facilities in an emergency response program, and discussed the development of mentorship programs for youth.

More information regarding results of the CDE pilot project and the future of community development programs will be announced in the New Year. ■

The Impact of ‘Welfare Reform’ on Single Mothers in B.C.

Single mothers on income assistance in B.C. likely face increasing hardships due to the government’s welfare reforms, according to research by SPARC BC board member **Suzy Blown**.

RECENTLY, THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT made sweeping changes to B.C.’s welfare policies. Single mothers have been particularly affected by these ‘welfare reforms.’ Under the new income assistance guidelines, monthly shelter and support have been reduced, single mothers are no longer eligible for earnings and child support exemptions, and employment guidelines are stricter. In effect, a lone mother’s income could be reduced by up to \$400 per month by the 2002 changes. These changes mean single mothers on income assistance and their children must live even farther below the poverty line.

The provincial government has argued that the changes will be beneficial as lone mothers will enter the labour market, earn more income, and therefore become better role models for their children. However, critics argue that these reforms create undue hardship and challenges for single mothers. In order to uncover what these changes mean, a group of researchers from universities around the province and community partners such as SPARC BC and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have come together to interview 32 single mothers on income assistance over a three-year period. The interviews will explore what life is like for these mothers living on income assistance and how they work through finding child care, navigating

the welfare bureaucracy, and trying to meet their family’s basic needs.

B.C. is not the first jurisdiction to introduce these types of welfare reform measures. In Canada, under Ralph Klein in Alberta, and Mike Harris in Ontario these ‘welfare reform’ measures have already taken place. The United States has also implemented such changes, including a two-year benefit cut-off time limit that applies to single parent families. As such, we can review the literature from these other jurisdictions and glimpse the outcomes of what may be in store for B.C.’s lone mothers on income assistance.

The outcomes of welfare reform in Alberta and Ontario would suggest that female single parents have much to lose under a system of stringent eligibility requirements and lowered benefits. Sylvia Bashevkin writes in her book *Welfare Hot Buttons: Women, Work and Social Policy Reform*, about the increase in poverty in a particularly disadvantaged segment of lone mothers, those under 25 years old. After 1995—that is, after welfare reforms in Alberta and Ontario began—the number of young, lone mothers living in poverty in Canada increased from 83% to 91%.¹ In addition, various meas-

¹ Bashevkin, Sylvia. (2002). *Welfare Hot Buttons: Women, Work, and Social Policy Reform*. Toronto/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Toronto Press/University of Pittsburgh Press.

ures of child poverty in Canada also showed higher absolute numbers and higher relative percentages over this time period. These statistics are consistent with research arguing that this type of welfare reform functions both to deepen poverty and to raise profound dilemmas for those who live under the altered systems.

In 1999, Premier Mike Harris gave a speech to the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce saying that “over the last three years our province has started to pull itself back on track... It took hard work and sacrifices by the people of Ontario and as a result families are better off.” However, the report called *Booming for Whom? People in Ontario Talk About Incomes, Jobs and Social Programs* would argue that instead of being better off, many households in Ontario are struggling to get by because of fewer job protections, less generous social programs, and cuts to social spending.² For example, the annual incomes of single mothers in Ontario fell by 3.1% from 1995 to 1997 (\$27,617 to \$26,771) making it more difficult to pay rent and put food on the table.

A debate exists in the American literature about the effects of welfare reform on single parent families. According to a study by the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute, the 1996 reforms have caused increased hardship, due to restricted eligibility, lowered benefit rates, and time limits. The survey found that among families that left welfare between 1997 and 1999 for full-time employment, nearly half

experienced hardships such as going without food, necessary medical care, or housing. Other studies show that while the incidence of poverty in the U.S. declined overall during the 1990's, poverty “actually deepened for those who remained poor, and has increased among working families.”³ Nevertheless, it is important to note that B.C.'s policies differ from the American welfare reforms in that U.S. reforms were not entirely driven by a fiscal imperative. In fact, the U.S. increased its spending for low-income people in the post 1996 welfare reform period through supports that help people transition to paid employment, such as childcare, transportation, training and educational opportunities and earning exemptions. Unfortunately, this is not the case in B.C.; the current changes are accompanied by a 30% budget cut to the Ministry of Human Resources.

In summary, most of the literature foreshadows increased hardship for single mothers and their children under the new welfare guidelines. Through the Income Assistance Research Project, the actual qualitative impacts of these changes will be documented. Stay tuned for the full report in 2006. ■

2 Bezanson, K. & McMurray, S. (2001). *Booming for whom?: People in Ontario talk about incomes, jobs and social programs*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute.

3 Boushey, H. & Gunderson, B. (2001). *When work isn't enough: Measuring the hardships faced by families about moving from welfare to work*. Washington: Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper.

Getting on the Agenda: Tips for Influencing Policy

Social planning organizations today can ill-afford to ignore policy makers in their efforts to affect positive change. In this issue, SPARC BC presents an approach to getting issues on the political agenda—and keeping them there.

INFLUENCING POLICY MAKERS in their decisions is challenging and oftentimes frustrating for social planning groups. Presented here is one approach to effective policy influence.

A Directed Approach

Collaborate with the right parties. Include experts, advisors to policy makers, and those directly affected by the policy in a collaborative process. Do the groundwork then go forward with concerns, facts, guiding principles, and examples of other successful approaches. Emphasize your willingness to develop reasonable solutions.

Be positive. The culture of Canadian politics is increasingly combative, which is disconnected from the way policy decisions are actually made. Collaboration and strategic compromise are the basis of sound, representative policy.

Be persistent (and polite). In-person meetings are best. Setting up meetings takes persistent phone calls and letters.

Speak to policy makers' local concerns. Policy makers are beholden to their constituencies. Even if policy makers' posts have wider responsibilities, relating issues to their local concerns can further engage them in the process.

Relationship Management

Include government employees in your planning process. Contact policy makers or their direct advisors and invite them into your planning group. Let them see opportunities for collabora-

tion and give them every reason to support your concerns—engage them in the process.

Develop relationships with policy makers. Use every means at your disposal—Board contacts, networks, calls and letters—to create a dialogue with policy makers. Direct, positive contact with policy makers builds trust in and credibility for your organization.

Build networks. A chorus of voices is more likely to be heard. Offer workshops and group meetings to provide 'protected time' for stakeholders to find common ground and set priorities. Provide information resources to the network and keep them up-to-date on the process.

Tend your policy makers carefully. Don't over-stress them. But remember to supply them with local information they can use with confidence in their own speeches and materials. Give them plenty of notice for meetings and events.

Ongoing Support

Work on an issue does not end with a presentation to policy makers. Most times, follow-up letters, calls, and meetings are needed to see a positive policy resolution on the issue. Keep the issue alive by mentioning it in every forum and attract media attention by exploiting contacts and timing news releases to coincide with related newsworthy events. ■

Written with files from *What Works! Putting Community Issues on the Policy Agenda*. 2004. Produced by Susan Lilley for the Population and Public Health Branch, Atlantic Regional Office, Health Canada.

We truly value your support of our work with communities in building a just and healthy society.

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I will join SPARC BC as an Annual Member or Renew my SPARC BC Annual Membership

\$25 Individual \$60 Organization

Low income membership available.

I would like to pay by: Cheque Visa Mastercard

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SIGNATURE DATE

2 Make a donation

I will further support SPARC BC's programs and services

\$75 \$50 \$35 \$_____

3 Become a sustaining member

I would like to show my commitment to the work of SPARC BC by becoming a sustaining member making a **monthly pre-authorized donation in the amount of**

\$20 \$15 \$10 \$_____

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I authorize SPARC BC to withdraw from my chequing account on the ____ day of each month, beginning _____, 20____, for the amount indicated above. (Please include a cheque marked "void").

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SPARC BC collects certain personal information from our members and donors during the course of your financial support of the organization in order to manage our relationship with you. For example, as a federally registered charity we collect your name, telephone number, and address in order to issue you a tax receipt. Additionally, SPARC BC uses that information to contact you for future donations to support our programs, renew membership, and issue copies of *SPARC BC News*. The submission of this form constitutes your consent to the collection and use of information for the purposes described above. You may withdraw or change your consent at any time, in respect of your personal information and in respect of any of the purposes described above, by contacting SPARC BC by email info@sparc.bc.ca or phone at (604) 718-7734.

Additionally, on approval of SPARC BC's Board of Directors, SPARC BC may periodically share your contact information with other charitable organizations within BC so that they may contact you about their local programs. In all cases, these organizations would have goals and charitable purposes similar to SPARC BC. No financial information will ever be shared. If you do not wish to have your information used in this manner please contact us.

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- **To update your contact information please call (604) 718-7733 or email info@sparc.bc.ca**
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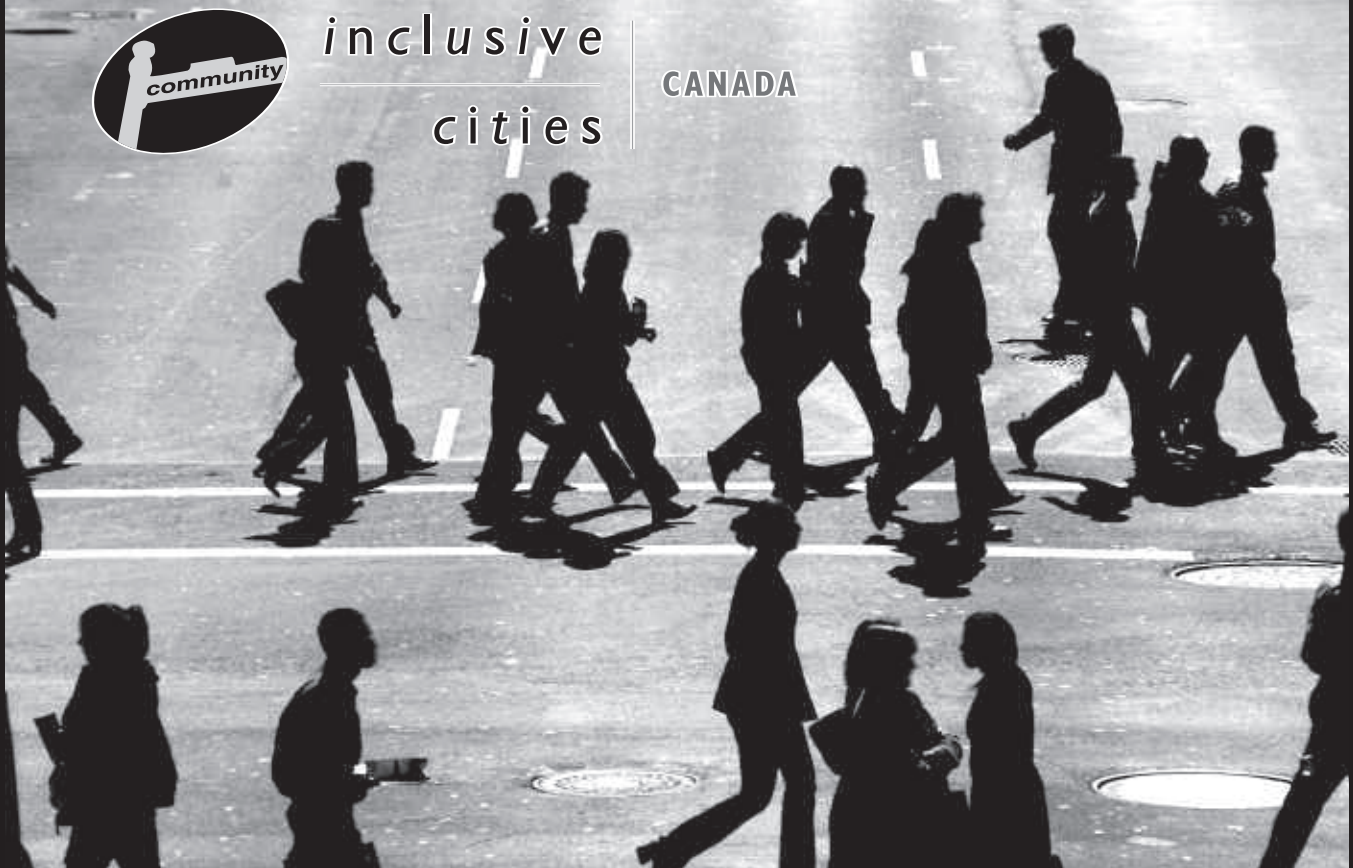
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Inclusive Cities Canada:

A Cross-Canada Civic Initiative

Inclusive Cities Canada is an innovative and timely initiative designed to examine and enhance social inclusion across Canada. The goals of Inclusive Cities Canada are to strengthen the capacity of Canadian cities to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people, and to ensure that community voices of diversity are recognized. The Inclusive Cities project creates unique partnerships between community leaders and elected municipal politicians.

SPARC BC is participating in the Inclusive Cities Canada project in partnership with community leaders and elected officials in Vancouver and North Vancouver. Our cross-country efforts have allied us with social planning organizations in Edmonton, St. Johns, Burlington, and Toronto. By collaborating in this fashion, we have the opportunity to explore the processes and practices that make our cities better places to live.



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CANADA

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