In 2007, a class of graduate planning students at UBC’s School of Regional and Community Planning (SCARP) set off to find out how False Creek North is meeting the needs of those who call it home: The residents.

The study involved 24 students over four semesters. It included a community-wide questionnaire, a major community day and neighbourhood discussion, a students’ workshop at Elsie Roy School and a series of in-depth interviews.

All in all, over a thousand people in the community participated.

Under the guidance of Dr. Wendy Sarkissian of Australia and Larry Beasley, C.M.

The report is available by clicking here.
“The creative and questioning force in the research has been totally the students.”

- Larry Beasley
**BACKGROUND**

False Creek North (FCN) is internationally recognized as a master-planned community that has been successful in bringing people, notably families, into the downtown core. At the time of this study, over 10,570 residents lived in 5,450 households within the boundaries of FCN.

For pre-war generations familiar with the polluted industrial basin that was False Creek, this transformation would have been simply unimaginable.

In the early 1950s, council candidates even ran on the platform of filling in the creek (below left) to save the expense of building more bridges. False Creek had working industrial operations on its North Shore into the early-1980s (below right).
In 1968, a UBC Architecture Studio under the direction of Wolfgang Gerson and Walter Hardwick conceived a vision of a residential False Creek - a vision eventually realized in the mid-1970s on the South Shore by the City of Vancouver.

[See also Price Tags 8.]

At the same time, Marathon Realty, the real-estate arm of the landowner of the North Shore - the Canadian Pacific Railway - produced a modernist version that, thankfully, came to naught. But this was the first image of a comprehensively planned ‘megaproject’ for the old railway yards.
In 1974, Marathon revised its proposal, this time using a very Seventies vocabulary for the architecture and open spaces. Indeed, many of these ideas would subtly work their way into subsequent plans, as each iteration built on previous proposals. Marathon, however, would not be one of the developers. Given a downturn in the real-estate market and a demand for one-third non-market housing from City Hall, the company abandoned its rezoning and sold the land to the provincial government.
In 1980, the Province proceeded with the development of a major stadium on the site and established a Crown corporation - B.C. Place Ltd. - as developer for the lands. However, the Social Credit government was in an antagonistic relationship with City Council in disputes over densities, parkland and non-market housing.

After 1983, Stanley Kwok, project manager for B.C. Place, worked cooperatively with the city to proceed on the more limited North Park site near Chinatown. Though approved in 1986, soil contamination prevented the plan from proceeding.
Nonetheless, the point-and-podium tower form that evolved for North Park would continue on - as well as many of the requirements for public amenities and open space.
By 1985, given the ongoing recession and frustration in getting agreement for a comprehensive plan, the provincial government decided to instead use the lands for an international exhibition to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the City of Vancouver. **Expo 86** became one of the turning points in British Columbia’s history.
After Expo, the site was cleared and sold off in one parcel to Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing, the winner of the international competition. The original proposal was for a series of lagoons and islands in False Creek.
At this point, however, the land was now subject to the City’s planning and development bylaws. The Lagoons scheme was discarded, and through a cooperative planning process, the current plan evolved. It was approved by City Council in 1990.

[See also Price Tags 50.]
Though Concord Pacific Place is not yet finished, the first residents had moved in by the early 1990s. Enough time has passed to compare the intent of the project with the experience of those who live there.
The following text is taken from the summary remarks and report (available here) written by
Nancy Hofer
Christine Wenman
Jay Lancaster
Wendy Sarkissian
Larry Beasley

Thanks, from Price Tags.
“We know, because planning work like FCN is going on all over North America but is seldom studied after the fact, that the findings will be of interest to North American planners, architects and developers. But it will also be of interest to the academic community because this has become a very famous development in the world.
The most fascinating result is the extraordinarily high level of overall satisfaction that people expressed to us about their community. People have clearly told us what could be better but 96 percent said they would recommend the area to others to come and live here.

We have not seen this level of satisfaction in any other studies we have been able to find so far.
Our research has confirmed that the community has satisfied its intention to be very diverse – for example:

- 13 percent of the population is under the age of 19 years old
- 40 percent of households are renting
- 50 percent are households for whom English is not their first language at home.
Strong clusters of community are found among long-term residents (those who have lived in False Creek North for a decade or more), among dog-owners, strata councils and parents with young children.

The presence of young families with children is an identifying characteristic of the community.
Many residents appreciate the presence of children and note it adds to the sense of community that they feel, specifying that community grew stronger when the cooperative housing, with its high concentration of families, was built.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Downtown</th>
<th>West Point Grey</th>
<th>Dunbar Southlands</th>
<th>Kitsilano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children and Youth in Four Vancouver Districts (2001 Census)
The school and daycare services are rated highly by those who have children enrolled.
The density of children has created new problems: the elementary and daycare centres cannot meet demand and this lack has emerged as an important challenge for raising a family.
Residents want the full provision of family facilities at an adequate standard, including more elementary schools. Elsie Roy School, one of four proposed in the inner city, is highly rated but is the only one yet built and is full to capacity.

[See also Price Tags 51.]

The waiting lists for childcare are long, and this demoralizes families. People feel the City needs to fill in the missing childcare centres to meet community needs and standards.
Families rate their satisfaction with their buildings lower than do residents without children. In particular there were concerns regarding play space in the building itself and on the building grounds.
Also: more park provisions for older children and teens. People feel the Park Board needs to think creatively how they can add these things to the otherwise great parks in the area.
Community services receive high praise: the Roundhouse Community Centre is a well loved community hub,
But many residents find it difficult to meet people in a way that leads to long-term friendships and meaningful relationships. They would like to see more done to foster community through both design and management.

More events in the broader community and at the building level would be welcome.
The seawall is the most loved part of the parks system. Residents appreciated strolling or cycling along the water and being able to connect to other parts of the Vancouver park system, especially Stanley Park.
Many residents would like to see more amenities for relaxation in the parks and along the seawall, including benches, chairs, picnic tables, barbeques and weather protection.
Residents are overwhelmingly satisfied with local parks. Appreciated for their size, quantity and wide open spaces, the parks are well used and are considered one of the neighbourhood’s strongest attributes.

Although most residents choose to live in a downtown location for convenience, the seawall and open parks are reasons cited for choosing FCN over other neighbourhoods, such as Coal Harbour or Yaletown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What could be changed to better serve your recreational / leisure needs?</th>
<th>number of responses</th>
<th>percent of total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no changes</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more amenities for relaxation</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more recreational activities for adults</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more park or open space</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more recreational activities for children</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked what they would like to change about the park spaces, most residents chose no changes, however many would like to see more spaces and amenities for relaxation. Residents were allowed to choose more than one option.
Dogs are a significant point of contention and concerns must be addressed through both design and management.

One off-leash dog park is clearly insufficient.

Once adequate space is provided, however, residents would like to see more enforcement of fines for owners who do not respect on-leash rules or who do not pick up after their dogs.
Given the neighbourhood's inner-city location, False Creek North is perceived by residents to be surprisingly safe. Over 90 percent of residents feel safe or very safe in their buildings and outdoors during the day.

Perceptions of safety outdoors are somewhat lower at night, however, and residents would like to see more lighting to rectify the problem.
For the majority of FCN residents, the car-free life is the community's main draw. Most residents - 90 percent - travel on foot during their daily routines, but use a vehicle when traveling longer distances or shopping for large quantities of goods or bulky merchandise.

Only 15 percent of families indicate that mobility is a challenge to raising a family in FCN. Some note that the transit options are particularly good for teenagers, who can easily access activities located outside of the immediate False Creek North area.
Residents are less reliant on their car than their suburban counterparts, but few are willing to relinquish their cars completely – 90 percent of our sample reported owning at least one car. But our study found that some residents are at a crossroads of car ownership, in that they use their cars so little that they are considering giving them up completely and using the cooperatives or car rentals instead.
Traffic along Pacific Boulevard is a concern for many, especially seniors and parents who would like to see traffic slowed and reduced.
Different people talked about ongoing provisions to residents' standards for accommodating dogs, picking up litter, general open space maintenance and managing unusual noise problems.
When the visitor is ready to leave, the resident must accompany the visitor out to collect the pass. Many participants find the pass system to be a major hassle, especially because they cannot even guarantee that there will be an available spot.

Car break-ins in residential parkades are frequent, but residents say the problem could be easily addressed with separate entrance and exit gates, and with a second gate or arm that forces residents to wait until the gate closes safely behind them.

Visitor parking is a major point of contention for many residents. To allow visitors to park, most residents must come down to the street, let the visitor in and place a pre-issued pass on their dashboard.

The number of stalls for visitors is generally described as “grossly inadequate,” though at any time there are many unoccupied stalls, including those that are reserved 24 hours a day for commercial uses.
Elevators were another source of criticism, particularly in those buildings of 20 or more storeys which only have access to two elevators.

For those living in such buildings, the elevators were seen as inadequate.
Preference for architectural styles is clearly a matter of personal taste.

However, many residents respond to their building’s aesthetics with cool satisfaction rather than enthusiasm, and the majority are rather critical.

Taken as a whole, the collection of buildings in FCN is viewed by many to be too monotonous, gray and green.
Residents recognize that smaller living space is inevitable. Nonetheless, a commonly held view is that unit space should be designed more creatively, flexibly and efficiently.

There is such a variety of opinions regarding the design and layout of units — some enjoy the open plan kitchen, whereas others do not; some people use their enclosed balcony often, whereas others consider it a waste of space.

In light of this diversity, developers should design units for flexibility, and for ease of conversion or renovation after the unit is occupied.
How would you rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of your building?

- lobby design: 3.7
- elevators: 3.8
- outdoor open space: 3.9
- amenities: 4.1
- resident parking: 4.0
- visitor parking: 3.3
Unconventional shaped walls and windows are appreciated by some for their interesting architecture but they contribute to inflexibility, invariably making it difficult to arrange standard furniture in smaller apartments.

For some, the finer details of design, such as the placement of electrical outlets and overhead light fixtures, are not conducive to arranging standard furniture, which further reduces flexibility in use of space.
A frequently voiced complaint is that the design of the units, particularly those south facing and high up, almost necessitates air conditioning, which is largely viewed as unnecessary in Vancouver’s climate if buildings were designed for passive cooling.
Most participants are enthusiastic to suggest ways that the community could be rendered more environmentally friendly:

- Improving the performance standards of buildings
- Replacing fixtures with energy and water efficient appliances
- Improving frequency and convenience of public transit including wheelchair and stroller access
- Allocating more secure spaces for community gardens and hosting a local farmers market.
- Implementing more sophisticated recycling and composting programs
- Installing motion-detector lights in buildings
- Providing for green roofs
- Designing for more community and rooftop gardens and including them in locations that receive large amounts of sunlight and in places that are perceived to be safe.
Overall, residents are particularly satisfied with the proximity of FCN’s shops and services and their ability to access almost any need locally by foot: one-third of residents report that they do not have to travel more than a ten-minute walk in a typical week to meet day-to-day shopping needs. But the other two-thirds shop outside of FCN primarily for variety and affordability. There was a clearly voiced need for a greater diversity of shops and services that are affordable and reflect the range of incomes in the neighbourhood.
Renters and owner-occupiers alike say they feel a connection to and an “ownership” of the community.

It is virtually impossible to distinguish among different tenure types in buildings: non-market buildings blend almost seamlessly with those around them. This is a source of pride for both Vancouver planners and residents of social and cooperative housing, who say that they do not feel that their homes stand out as being different.
Residents want the full provision of affordable housing in the neighbourhood because affordability is getting worse all the time.

People see the undeveloped social housing sites and they want them finished.

People worry that there are no provisions for middle-income housing as prices continue to go up and worry it will ultimately push them out – especially families.
Overall, most are very satisfied with the policies that continue to shape the community’s development.

The most notable are: the provision of 25 percent of units for families; 15.5 percent of units for residents in social housing and housing cooperatives; a particular planning emphasis on children; 1.0 hectare of park space per thousand residents; a publicly accessible waterfront; a design that blends with and is appropriate to the existing downtown built form and the provision of shops, services, facilities and amenities for local residents.
But many residents are also concerned that FCN may be approaching the limits to how many people it can accommodate, and that more people will infringe on the qualities that make FCN what it is — a safe and livable community.
The findings from the False Creek North post-occupancy evaluation have been useful in highlighting what is and what is not working well for the residents of the compact neighbourhood.

It is our sincere hope that these findings will positively contribute to the satisfaction of residents in FCN and in other communities that aspire to be centrally located, high-density, pedestrian and family-oriented mixed-use neighbourhoods.”
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