

Vancouver's Temporary Modular Housing Program and the Challenge of Public Engagement in an Era of Urban Crisis

**by
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Abstract

Vancouver's Temporary Modular Housing (TMH) program was meant as an intervention to help address the housing needs of those experiencing homelessness; however, it faced significant community opposition. This research investigates the discrepancies between the public's expectations for involvement in decision-making and the government's stance toward engagement in this case and, more broadly, the role of public engagement in crisis response. The study revealed that, although the City of Vancouver made efforts to minimize engagement to expedite the delivery of TMH and prioritize what they considered equitable outcomes, these decisions resulted in heightened public mistrust in local government and opposition to the program. The research also suggests that while public engagement may be just one factor in delivering emergency supportive housing projects such as TMH, a municipal commitment to sustained public dialogue, transparency, and an explicit declaration of the public's level of influence can support the creation of enduring housing policies.

Keywords: housing; crisis; engagement; equity; Vancouver; Temporary Modular Housing

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

This study examines the role of public engagement in crisis response, such as that addressing the housing and homelessness crisis. It evaluates the effectiveness of the City of Vancouver's implementation of Temporary Modular Housing (TMH) and the gap, in this case, between the public's expectations for involvement in decision-making that affects them and the government's stance towards engagement on projects that aim to deliver equitable outcomes. The research suggests that although the City of Vancouver made efforts to minimize engagement in order to expedite the delivery of TMH and avoid public conflict, these decisions resulted in heightened public mistrust in local government and opposition to the program. I argue that while increased public engagement may not be necessary for improving the delivery of emergency supportive housing projects such as TMH, a municipal commitment to regular public dialogue, transparency, and an explicit declaration of the public's level of influence is valuable in creating enduring policies and breaking the cycle of resistance that often accompanies supportive housing proposals.

This research is divided into four main parts. First, it begins with a literature review that delves into the history of public engagement, planning, and government decision-making and examines the intricacies of centring democratic and equitable outcomes in crisis responses. Second, the thesis narrows its focus to TMH in Vancouver through a review of its history, an explanation of its delivery and engagement, and an assessment of its supporting City policies. The third section examines Vancouver's planning, engagement, and political history to paint a comprehensive picture of how the current state of public and municipal engagement expectations was developed. Finally, the fourth section takes a closer look at the municipal and public expectations for engagement on TMH specifically, with an aim to answer the research question.

1.1. Research Background

With Vancouver currently one of the least affordable places to live in the developed world (Gordon, 2016), there is general agreement that the city is in the midst

of a housing crisis (McElroy, 2019). However, what to do about this crisis is a contentious question. In 2016, Vancouver City Council adopted policy to underpin the development of supportive housing in the form of TMH. With those experiencing homelessness considered to be the most severely impacted by the housing crisis, this new policy was developed as one measure to address the housing needs of the city's most vulnerable residents (City of Vancouver, 2016a). Designed to provide more rapid relief than permanent developments for those living without a home, the prefabricated nature of TMH buildings allows them to be quickly assembled on vacant and underutilized land throughout the city.

Since Council's approval of TMH supporting policy, 13 of these buildings have been built in nine different Vancouver neighbourhoods, delivering over 800 units of housing (City of Vancouver, 2020). However, this approach has faced significant opposition at the community level, with many residents claiming that TMH was forced into their neighbourhood without their input. In the Marpole neighbourhood, which in 2018 saw the opening of the first TMH development outside of the Downtown Eastside, these concerns even escalated into street protests, a construction blockade, and an attempt to sue the City for lack of consultation.

1.2. Why Study Public Engagement through Temporary Modular Housing?

The City of Vancouver's development of TMH is a measure intended to address Vancouver's housing and homelessness crisis, but which resulted in significant community resistance and frustrations with the City's engagement processes. As such, the TMH case study provides a unique window to examine how public expectations for, and experiences of, engagement can be reconciled with those of government, particularly when decision-making processes are embedded within crisis response objectives.

While citizens increasingly demand public engagement opportunities to weigh in on issues impacting their communities, most research suggests they often feel that their contributions to these forums do not matter (Gordon & Schirra, 2011). In fact, a long history of dissatisfaction with planning process and outcomes continue to leave many residents with little trust in such exercises (Pollock & Sharp, 2012; Sharma Rani, 2020).

Government at all levels initiate various forms of public engagement for myriad reasons: to gain insight from citizens, to get guidance from subject matter experts on complex or controversial issues, and to conduct risk management (Doberstein, 2020). However, just as there can be suspicion among citizens, many decision-makers are also skeptical of the general public's ability to make meaningful contributions to the issues faced by government. In a 2009 survey of American municipal officials, virtually all respondents claimed to value public engagement as a concept; however, two-thirds thought that typical methods repeatedly attracted the same group of residents, whose engagement consisted of mostly complaining or championing "favourite solutions" (Gordon & Schirra, 2011). To a similar degree, municipal officials expressed willingness to conduct more public engagement if the public used these opportunities more constructively. In short, there is a demonstrated willingness among public officials and citizens to support public engagement, with neither group reporting much satisfaction with it.

Further exacerbating the polarization and divisiveness between citizens and government are current crisis-level issues, including climate change, pandemic, and housing affordability, which force planners and decision-makers to operate with increased urgency. The siting of supportive housing is a particularly contentious issue across the globe, with established residents frequently opposing new land uses which they consider to be a threat to property values, public safety, and other local norms (Scally & Tighe, 2015; Schively, 2007; Singer & Rosen, 2017). As such, public engagement is often a contested arena where wealthy and powerful stakeholders engineer unjust outcomes, such as the blocking of supportive housing projects (Scally & Tighe, 2015). The conflict arising from the discrepancies between the housing goals of government and the objectives of some residents has resulted in recent initiatives by provincial governments in British Columbia and Ontario that are meant to remove processes that slow down housing approvals. These initiatives bypass the powers of local governments as well as citizen engagement requirements in decisions related to certain housing proposals.

In the Vancouver region, where a growing number of residents are without homes, but supportive and below-market housing projects continue to receive significant community pushback, developing a critical understanding of the role of public input in responding to crisis, is particularly valuable. Therefore, my research question is: How

and why has the City of Vancouver engaged the public in the strategy formulation and implementation of TMH, and how did the City of Vancouver's expectations for public influence compare with those of neighbourhood residents?

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

The bodies of literature that I explore in formulating my conceptual framework are the communicative turn in planning, the post-political state of public engagement, defining crisis and crisis response, the conflict between democracy and equity, and policy entrepreneurship. The first topic, the communicative turn in planning, features an investigation into how this approach to engagement and decision-making has become idealized by many. The second concept delves into what some scholars believe to be the phase of engagement that has followed the communicative turn. This modern era of post-political decision-making carries the veneer of a deeply communicative process but without what some consider to be important spaces of decision-making and conflict. The third body of literature reviews the definitions of crisis and will provide a foundation for situating Vancouver's housing and homelessness crisis within the wider crisis literature. This section also provides a review of the literature on crisis response, connects the framing of crisis with two common crisis response pathways, and makes a case for increased participation in planning for crisis. The next body of literature suggests that this emphasis on participatory processes is not uncomplicated. This fourth topic provides a framework for considering both the equity in housing provision outcomes of TMH and the level of democracy involved in its development by exploring the tensions between these two ideals. The fifth and final body of literature investigates the policy formulation environment and unpacks both the messy conditions under which policy is made and the importance of a policy champion or policy entrepreneur.

2.1. The Communicative Turn

This section explores the historical factors that have shifted planning ideals and built public expectations for influencing government decisions that affect them. Many of these shifts are also evident in my research on the history of engagement expectations in Vancouver, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Up until the 1950s, not much thought was given to resident involvement and participatory planning in North America (Fainstein, 2010; Punter, 2003; Thomas, 2012).

According to Fainstein (2010), during this “ideal city” period, the ends were seen as more important than the means in planning; “early planners proceeded without much reflection about the process by which the ideal city was formulated—its implicit theoretical arguments dwelled on the nature of the good city instead of how one derived either the ideals or the means to attain them” (p. 58). She continues:

The method of making the necessary choices was not problematized. Rather, good planning was assumed to be guided by experts, who, on the basis of study and experience, would devise plans in the public interest. The public interest constituted the moral basis of planning, but its content was taken for granted rather than analyzed, and it was assumed that its realization would benefit all. (p. 58)

A movement towards a greater focus on participatory planning practices in North America began in the 1950s and 1960s. It was at this time when many national planning programs featured initiatives for clearing poor, minority communities through urban renewal and highway construction and, in doing so, destroyed vibrant neighbourhoods despite strong community opposition (Gans, 1962; Hall, 1988; Jacobs, 1961). The inequitable outcomes of this and other top-down planning processes led to the development of new, people-focused planning theories such as equity planning and advocacy planning (Scally & Tighe, 2015). Over the subsequent decades, this new approach grew into an expectation that citizens who could be affected by governmental programs should be able to contribute ideas to shape those programs before they became reality (Thomas, 2012). The change signified a shift from the technical-rational model of planning to an approach that emphasized new and often conflicting planning goals, particularly emphasizing the prioritization of vulnerable citizens in planning outcomes and enhancing citizen participation. According to Hoffman (1989), one response to the social unrest of the times was an influential movement within the planning profession which compelled planners and urban policy makers to become more concerned with the impacts of decisions on the politically powerless, especially those displaced by highway and urban renewal programs. For those within the movement, the moral justification for planning swung to addressing the disadvantages produced by poverty and racial discrimination, rather than merely producing a plan that aimed to maximize an alleged public interest (Fainstein, 2010). While this approach represented a shift away from the ideal city vision of planning, a reliance on expert influences remained prevalent—although now focused on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents.

This era also saw calls for democratic control of decisions made within bureaucracies. According to Lipsky (1980), this was in response to two perceptions: that “street-level bureaucrats,” including planners, made decisions affecting urban residents without regard to their knowledge, opinions, and interests and that public agency staff came out of sharply different social strata from those affected by their decisions. The latter view led, in the United States, to accusations of “internal colonialism,” particularly in the case of white personnel operating in black neighbourhoods. Citizen participation was to overcome injustices caused by lack of responsiveness and failures of empathy, as well as being a value in its own right through its furtherance of democracy (Fainstein, 2010).

The movement away from the technical-rational model of planning has often been called the communicative turn, a term with a variety of definitions that have been further complicated by its many mutations since its original core promise. These mutations include ‘communicative planning’ (Healey, 1993; Innes, 1995), ‘planning through debate’ (Healey, 1992b), ‘argumentative planning’ (Fischer & Forester, 1993), ‘collaborative planning’ (Healey, 1997), and ‘deliberative planning’ (Forester, 1999).

Although there are various definitions for these terms, most of them emphasize the significance of public input and the practice of planning and facilitating communicative interchanges between interested parties, whether stakeholders or the community at large, over issues of mutual concern (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). Other definitions include an “interactive and interpretative process undertaken among diverse and fluid discourse communities” (Healey, 1992b, p. 144) and a method for evaluating an individual's daily personal dilemmas in an urban environment by encouraging debate (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1992a, 1992b; Innes, 1992). According to Norris (1985), the communicative turn presents an approach where “communication will no longer be distorted by the effects of power, self-interest or ignorance” (p. 149). Many definitions also stress the importance of argument, debate, discussion, and deliberation in planning (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Healey, 1992a; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). According to Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones (2002), “The communicative turn in planning is not simply a theory but a ‘world view’ based on a participatory perspective of democracy and either a suspicion of or a more balanced attempt to situate free-market economies” (p. 12).

The communicative turn has faced criticism due to its foundation in the concept of communicative rationality. Some argue that it is an ethics first approach which relies on the "fiction of an idealized consensus" among community members as a basis for ethical decision-making when the real world is much less straightforward (Cooke, 2012, p. 812). According to Cooke (2012), a communicative approach doesn't mean that wider social objectives will be met: "A bottom-up approach to social and political theory does not obviate the need for a context-transcending perspective, and corresponding context-transcending conceptions of truth, justice, etc." (p. 819). This view is supported by Huxley and Yiftachel (2000), who feel that there is a tendency in some of the communicative literature to privilege communication at the expense of its wider social and economic contexts.

Communicative planning shares a commonality with the rational model, which sees planning as a mainly procedural field of activity (Taylor 1998) but instead of being expert-driven and top-down like the rational model, it more heavily centres community input. Under this approach, there is an assumption that "using the right decision-making process will enable planning (however defined) to further its progressive, even emancipatory, potential" (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000, p. 334).

According to Healey (1992a), supporters of the communicative turn "would like to believe that consensual positions can be arrived at, whereas contemporary social relations reveal deep cleavages, of class, of race, gender and culture, which can only be resolved through power struggle between conflicting forces" (p. 151). This perspective is supported by Harriges (2020), who asks, "Is there such a thing as the local vision—what the community collectively wants?" (para. 22). Levine (2020) argues that a communicative approach to planning is "elusive" because "there is no singular voice of *the* community" (para. 19). Harriges (2020) continues:

I don't want to indulge the notion that there is a singular public vision . . . just waiting to be discovered, and that the problem is simply that this survey fails to discover it. The reality is that there isn't one. The public consists of thousands of individuals with their own priorities, preferences, and experiences. (para. 27)

In Hrriges' (2020) critique of the communicative turn and the way public engagement is commonly carried out, they argue that the problem lies in engaging members of the public on topics outside of their expertise. They suggest that we should

tap into the valid forms of expertise that citizens possess instead of asking them to give input on questions they may not have the knowledge to answer, such as whether enough affordable housing has been built in a community or if a proposed apartment complex has adequate parking. According to Herriges, this type of engagement undermines trust in the planning process and does not constitute a meaningful transmission of priorities from the bottom up. Instead, it often serves as a political barometer or public relations tool which provides cover for elected officials to approve projects which they've already decided they want. Herriges argues that the real function of public engagement is to gauge the relative strength of political support or opposition, rather than solicit useful citizen input.

2.2. The Post-Political State of Public Engagement

Some scholars argue that after the communicative turn, we have entered a state of engagement that is considered "post-political" (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; McLuskie, 2023; Pollock & Sharp, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2010, 2011, 2016; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). In this state, public participation is more integrated into government processes than ever before, but it has been stripped of its political nature, with important decision-making being taken away from the process. In this environment, engagement no longer has the political dimensions that create room for public demands, conflicting interests, debate, and protest (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; Žižek, 2002), and therefore it loses much of its meaning.

At present, municipal governments involve the public more extensively in urban planning than at any time in history (Thomas, 2012). Public institutions are recognizing that their ability to make decisions increasingly depends on the active participation of the governed (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). Participation has become so ubiquitous that former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the current era as the "Participation Age" (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). According to Clinton, this era is marked by widespread expectation for voice and engagement, and "people whose voices were never heard [before] now can be heard."

Multiple indicators show a growing enthusiasm for citizen participation. In the last decade, the World Bank has invested \$85 billion in development assistance for participation (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). According to a 2009 survey conducted in North

American cities, almost all cities responded that they provide opportunities for civic engagement in community problem-solving and decision-making. Additionally, nearly three-fourths of the cities had instruments in place for citizen decision-making in strategic planning that year (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). Demand for the services of the International Association for Public Participation also tripled between 2005 and 2008 (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017).

Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017) describe the rise in public participation as being “profoundly paradoxical,” suggesting that “participation has spread precisely at the moment when an increasing number of decisions, because of their technical demands or their global scope, have become insulated from democratic decision making” (p. 5). This concurrent rise in engagement ideals with a reliance on insular expert knowledge has resulted in what Held (1993) and other scholars have described as a mismatch between scales of democracy and scales of decision-making. In Baiocchi and Ganuza’s (2017) critique of the current state of engagement, they suggest that at present, planners gather large quantities of public engagement data but in a context of depoliticized debate and discussion. They suggest that a new thinking about participation has replaced the traditional leftist vision, that was so prevalent during the communicative turn, which cast engagement as a counter-hegemonic project which sought to create participatory “problem spaces” (Scott, 2004) for conflicting interests and consolidated power from below. Instead, according to Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017), “participatory institutions today are based on a propositional logic that pushes aside the dynamic of demand and protest” (p. 24). Politics becomes something one can do without conflict and debate and thus without making decisions that divide and separate (Thomson, 2003).

Advocates argue that engagement is beneficial as it leads to better governance and helps citizens achieve their own individual and community goals, while fighting alienation, apathy, and disaffection. However, Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017) dispute these claims of empowerment by stating that many modern participatory processes are limited in their scope as they exclude conflict and protest, and feature terms of discussion that are often predetermined by those promoting participation. In their view, which is also supported by Scott (2004), those implementing engagement hold the power to set the parameters for conversation, decide on the topics, and create limits on whether rival views will be explored in debate. McLuskie (2023) cautions against the “rhetoric of democratization” (p. 1) that has accompanied many public engagement

efforts, suggesting that top-down narratives which “spin engagement as democratically rich” (p. 3) are actually overblown claims of public discourse, discussion and debate (Lee, 2015; Pollock & Sharp, 2012).

For Rancière (1998), the disavowal of the political is one of the tactics through which spaces of conflict and antagonism are smoothed over and displaced. Not only are spaces for conflict absent in the post-political state but according to Deutsche (1996), engagement is now approached in a way that assumes that the “task of democracy is to settle rather than sustain conflict” (p. 270). Interestingly, Pollock and Sharpe (2012) suggest that rather than being something to be removed quickly, contestation and conflict should be viewed as “appropriate reflections of the community” (p. 1). In their view, the messier process of providing a platform for contestation may be required to facilitate policy transformation.

In recent years, emergent literature across the social sciences has conceptualized contemporary processes of depoliticization using the terms “post-democracy” or “post-political” (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). The precise meaning of these terms is contested. Broadly speaking, however, they refer to a situation in which the political—understood as a space of contestation and agonistic engagement—is increasingly colonized by politics—understood as technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures that operate within an unquestioned framework of representative democracy, free market economics, and cosmopolitan liberalism (Swyngedouw, 2010). In a post-political environment:

Political contradictions are reduced to participatory processes in which the scope of possible outcomes is narrowly defined in advance. ‘The people’ — as a potentially disruptive political collective — is replaced by the population — the aggregated object of opinion polls, surveillance, and bio-political optimism. Citizens become consumers, and elections are framed as just another ‘choice’, in which individuals privately select their preferred managers of the conditions of economic necessity. (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014, p. 6)

Over the past few decades, the realization of the post-political state of engagement and government decision-making has occurred in parallel to the rise of neoliberalism (Swyngedouw, 2010). This transition is characterized by the growing power of corporate interests and a simultaneous emptying out of the power of democratic institutions to hold corporate interests accountable (Baicocchi & Ganuza,

2017; Pollock & Sharp, 2012; Scott, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2010). This is accompanied by a state of “do-it-yourself democracy” (McLuskie, 2023, p. 6) where civil society is now responsible for what until recently was provided or organized by the nation or local state (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). According to Žižek (2002, p. 303), “the ultimate sign of post-politics in all Western countries is the growth of a managerial approach to government: government is re-conceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension”. The result of these factors is a contradictory state of neoliberal-infused engagement where there is more public involvement than ever but also a weakening in the amount of conflict, meaning, and decision-making power that is embedded in this engagement (Swyngedouw, 1996, 2000).

Swyngedouw (2010) believes that periods of crisis, such as climate change, have unfolded in tandem with a move towards a post-political state of engagement, further hastening the “short-circuiting” of public engagement procedures. They suggest that under crisis conditions, “matters of concern are thereby relegated to a terrain beyond dispute, to one that does not permit dissensus or disagreement. Scientific expertise becomes the foundation and guarantee for properly constituted politics/policies” (p. 217). Comparisons can be drawn with the crisis literature, discussed in the next section, which suggests that the most common crisis response is the reactive approach, characterized by a concentration of power structures, a preference for technical short-term or temporary fixes, a minimization of public engagement, and a lack of willingness to address the root causes of the crisis (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020; Earle, 2016). The reactive approach to crisis response is the opposite of the proactive pathway which is driven by a diversity of perspectives and emphasizes public participation. The proactive pathway is thought to have more potential for creating transformative or trajectory-altering responses that directly address the root cause of the crisis (Mintrom & True, 2022).

As is outlined in Chapter 6, the City of Vancouver’s process for delivering TMH showcased many of the indicators of the post-political state of engagement by severing much of the key decision-making and thus topics of conflict from the public process. This approach contributed to public disaffection, further resistance, and missed opportunities for transformative policy change.

2.3. Defining Crisis and Crisis Response

With the city's housing and homelessness crisis frequently cited by the City of Vancouver and public supporters of TMH in rationalizing this housing type and providing grounds for its expedited delivery, I aim to evaluate the nuances of these crisis narratives as well as the complexities of this often used but seldom defined term. The term crisis has multiple interpretations in the literature. Crisis can refer to extreme events with large-scale magnitudes and impacts that result in systemic destabilization (Caball & Malekpour, 2018). Novalia and Malekpour (2020) define a crisis as a special event of external origin that disrupts the evolutionary dynamics of socio-technical or social-ecological systems. The United Nations defines a humanitarian crisis as “an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security, or well-being of a community or other large group of people usually over a wider area” (UNISDR, 2009). While most definitions of crisis focus on a specific event, Novalia and Malekpour (2020) add that “whilst the perceived threats of creeping stresses may be relatively low as compared to acute shocks, these may develop over time and engender a sense of urgency that is enough to be perceived as crisis” (p. 362). According to Grossman (2015), a crisis need not be perceived as a “total surprise to society to warrant urgent actions” (p. 58). White and Nandedkar (2021) add to this by suggesting that crises are less often one-off events than part of our modern lived condition that may never be solved but rather redistributed politically. While much of the literature considers crises in relation to pandemics and climate change, one urban crisis that has resulted less from a specific shock event is that of housing. This crisis has an encompassing geography with politicians in many countries discussing housing as an emergency in need of urgent policy intervention (White & Nandedkar, 2021).

According to Walby (2015, p. 14), crises are both real, in the sense that they create actual changes in social processes and socially constructed, in the sense that different interpretations of a crisis have implications for its outcome and response. There is a noticeable tendency for public officials to use crisis as an “empty signifier” (White & Nandedkar, p. 221), essentially a malleable claim that has political utility. Roitman (2014) highlights how crises have become less of a signifier of a critical decisive moment and more of a discursive practice to open up certain narrative accounts and limit others. Referring to the housing crisis specifically, Marcuse and Madden (2016) suggest that the

actual motivations for state response have more to do with maintaining political and economic order than with solving the crisis.

The housing crisis can be understood in various ways. According to White and Nandedkar (2021), “There may be a supply crisis, a demand crisis, a quality crisis, a distribution crisis, a credit crisis, a rental crisis, and so on, all of which differ spatially between local, national, and international contexts” (p. 230). The discourses associated with the housing crisis, particularly the acceptance of it as a problem and the reasons for its existence, play a critical role in shaping the selection and effectiveness of the public policy strategies deployed in response (White & Nandedkar, 2021). Put another way, the way a crisis is framed privileges certain policy responses.

The literature on defining crisis provides a lens through which to critically evaluate both the meaning and utility of considering housing in Vancouver as being in a crisis state. Furthermore, the crisis literature, which can be viewed in conjunction with my discussion on the post-political state and policy entrepreneurship literature, helps to understand how the housing and homelessness crisis was instrumentalized to minimize opportunities for engagement on TMH. The remainder of this section explores what the literature considers to be the two most predominant crisis responses, the proactive and reactive pathways.

The literature on crisis indicates that there are two main and opposing responses: reactionary responses that tend to maintain existing power structures, and proactive responses that can lead to systemic transformation by challenging dominant power structures (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). The reactive approach focuses on quick, technical, and short-term fixes that are often at odds with the long-term planning priorities in cities (Earle, 2016; Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). This pathway also often favours engineering solutions with high public visibility.

Reactive crisis responses are common in systems built on deeply established and long-standing structures (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). Under this condition, when disturbances arise which may present opportunities for adaptations or a challenging of the status quo, they are usually perceived as undesirable by those holding power (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). In characterizing the reactive response, Boin et al. (2009) have stated that “crises lend themselves more readily to ‘compartmentalization’ through

expert committees, making recommendations for policy reform within the confines of the policy community at hand” (p. 99). This indicates a policy setting that is hierarchically dominated by a tight group of elite experts (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). In following this pathway, power is centralized, with community involvement and change advocacy minimized. Such approaches tend to deliver superficial benefits and thus avoid the root cause of the crisis (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020).

Research has also suggested that controversial policy, which might not have been considered under non-crisis situations, is more likely to be passed during crisis situations by otherwise ambivalent legislators (Ahrari, 1987). These understandings of the reactive pathway are relevant to an analysis of TMH as the delivery of this housing type represents a short-term, temporary, and engineering based solution to the housing crisis, a controversial policy initiative, and a delivery process where community involvement was minimized. Furthermore, it is important to note that Housing First solutions, such as the TMH program, typically only shelter the most difficult-to-house of residents. This means that the program may not be addressing the needs of a large portion of individuals who are affected by the housing crisis. According to Baker and Evans (2016), focussing on Housing First approaches may actually serve to distract attention from the majority of people who remain homeless not because of their inability to navigate traditional treatment regimes, as with chronically homeless clients, but because of structural injustices built into housing and labour markets. While TMH can be understood as a life-saving measure for some impacted residents and, therefore, a crisis-averting intervention, it could also be suggested that its delivery avoids the root cause of the housing crisis, which is typical of the reactive response pathway (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020).

The proactive response is more likely to be driven by a diversity of perspectives formed through fluid and plural networks of committed actors (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). Under this approach, decision-making takes place in a decentralized governance that encourages contributions from local knowledge holders. This represents a shift away from a “politics of urgency” (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020, p. 363) towards what Medd and Marvin (2005) consider “governance of preparedness” (p. 45). With this method, crises are prepared for through locally driven, long-term thinking which is often characterized by an openness to alternatives, experimentation, and strong change advocacy (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020).

While typical crisis responses tend to fall somewhere on a spectrum between these two approaches, most scholars agree that even though crises present opportunities for transformative structural change, classic crisis responses have tended to more closely align with the reactive approach (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). In fact, history has shown that expectations for transformative change following large-scale disruption caused by wars, epidemics, or natural disasters have rarely been realized in practice (Lake, 2021). According to Lake, the desire for a “return to normalcy,” so commonly expressed in times of crisis implies a resumption of habits, systems, and ways of thought that, in turn, rely on and reproduce hegemonic structures and existing power relations, that in some cases even contributed to the formation of the crisis in the first place. As such, the status quo is maintained, with the root causes of the crisis seldom addressed. This is further emphasized by Rodgers (2011), who suggests that with few exceptions, the combined forces of ingrained habit, structural dominance, and cultural hegemony are more conducive to inertia and stasis than to radical change.

To counter this reactionary impulse, scholars emphasize the importance of social innovations and urban movements at the grassroots level and neighbourhood scale in responding to urban and environmental crises to produce proactive responses (Barthel et al., 2015; Blanco and Leon, 2017; Lake, 2021; Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). According to Novalia and Malekpour (2020), a continuation down the reactive pathway has the potential to instigate further negative consequences by “sending the system into a spiral of devolution where persistent governance failures and crises are recurrently reproduced” (p. 368). Dewey (2008) cautions against the seduction of quick fixes so often associated with the reactive approach and differentiates between a “planned society” reliant on “fixed blue-prints imposed from above” and a “*continuously planning* society” operating through “the release of intelligence through the widest form of cooperative give-and-take” (p. 321, emphasis in original). This approach is “mobilized through open-ended public debate, encompassing the broadest possible multiplicity of perspectives, and organized through a process of continuous experimentation rooted in fallibilism, provisionality, and a belief in the possibility of continuous improvement” (Lake, 2021, p. 4).

2.4. The Conflict Between Democracy and Equity

While the crisis response and communicative turn literature generally calls for increased democracy in developing crisis solutions, the democracy and equity literature critically questions the efficacy of idealizing democratic objectives. This body of literature is particularly relevant to my analysis of the TMH engagement objectives for both the City of Vancouver and neighbourhood residents as it suggests that equitable outcomes, perhaps characterized by the delivery of housing to the city's most vulnerable residents, could be constrained, not enhanced by increased democracy.

As Fainstein (2010) discusses, democracy focuses on the process of decision-making on public issues, including the type and accessibility of the process of public participation. Equity, on the other hand, refers to a distribution of both material and nonmaterial benefits that does not favour those who were already better off at the beginning. Participation is viewed as a key signifier of successful democratic practice (Fishkin, 1997; Fung, 2009; Verba & Nie, 1972). However, it has been suggested that traditional participatory mechanisms are inadequate in producing political and policy outcomes that equitably represent the needs and goals of all people (Arnstein, 2019; Innes & Booher, 2004; Verba & Nie, 1972).

According to Fainstein (2010), the initial demand for a more people-centred and participatory approach to planning came from low-income groups seeking equity. As time passed however, participatory mechanisms have primarily become a vehicle for middle-class involvement. Furthermore, while proponents of increased democracy maintain that a stronger representation of the interests of non-elite groups in participatory processes will improve the equitable distribution of benefits, there are few examples of this in action (Fainstein, 2010; Scally & Tighe, 2015). According to Herriges (2020), public participation has a “built-in power imbalance, in which public feedback tends to overrepresent groups with a lot of access to and familiarity with the political process—older, wealthier, whiter, and more politically engaged residents” (para. 1).

Today, democratic goals continue to come into conflict with equity goals (Scally & Tighe, 2015). While public decision-making has become more participatory than it has been in the past and authority is increasingly decentralized, inequality has grown. The critiques of participation include its failure to reduce these inequalities and cite instances

where it has been directly implemented to legitimate them. Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017) call cities' self-congratulation for citizen engagement "participatory boosterism" (p. 6) for failing to address questions of power, inequality, and politics. According to Fainstein (2010), this trend highlights the importance of applying the criterion of equity to policy evaluation if increased justice is desired. In an environment where "democracy has become the answer to every question and the solution to every problem" (Bronner, 1999, p. 18), calls for increased and more inclusive participation fail to adequately confront existing power imbalances (Fainstein, 2010). Like Fainstein, Pollock and Sharp (2012) state that it is difficult for engagement to be truly meaningful when it's embedded within larger power imbalances. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001), despite the many claims to the contrary, engagement is often no more than tokenism. Pollock and Sharp (2012) suggest that participation has become a form of "tyranny," with the main critiques being concerns over the citizen's capacity to negotiate on a level playing field with other stakeholders, the institutional structures and discursive spaces through and in which decisions are made, and the motivation for participation in light of policy agendas.

According to Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017), the idea of participation today occupies an exceptional position in the pantheon of policy prescriptions where, across the political spectrum, it has become a privileged solution for solving difficult problems and remedying the inherent flaws of democracy. However, Fainstein (2010) questions the effectiveness of engagement that ignores the reality of structural inequalities and hierarchies of power and wonders whether, in a historical context, citizens are good judges of their interests or the public good. In Fainstein's view, "after deliberation has run its course, people still make choices that are harmful to themselves or to minorities" (p. 30).

According to Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017), advocates for participation too often focus on the techniques of engagement, rather than the power structures (power, politics, and interests) in which decisions are made. They continue, "Scholars often view government machinery as ambiguous or peripheral to the process. The literature seldom shines light on the process of implementing participatory instruments themselves or the conflicts these efforts generate with administrators."

In response to those who call for deeper communication and engagement as the only remedy to the inequitable distribution of benefits, Fainstein makes the case that

under certain circumstances, state-led approaches may be the most equitable. To further emphasize this point, they highlight examples such as the New Deal and the European welfare states, “where paternalistic and bureaucratic modes of decision making produced desirable outcomes” (Fainstein, 2010, p. 32). As such, Fainstein (2010) suggests that the path to equity may not always involve a redistribution of power:

Although a commitment to democratic values for their own sake counters a call for benevolent despotism and leads us to wish for citizen input, we cannot deny out of hand that insulated decision making may produce more just outcomes than public participation . . . [And that] when reformers manage to hold state power, justice might be best achieved by allowing officeholders to make decisions. (p. 32)

It is important to emphasize that such desirable and equity-focused outcomes are not always the case with top-down government decision-making. As the communicative turn literature highlights, moments such as urban renewal, where heavy-handed governments avoided public processes only to marginalize particular populations further, were, in fact, the catalyst for more participatory decision-making.

2.5. Policy Entrepreneurship

While the ideal city and communicative turn eras emphasized rational processes for formulating and implementing policy, in today's world, decisions are often made within a much less straightforward environment of policy entrepreneurship (Baker & Evans, 2016; Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). According to Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) and Macnaughton et al. (2013) these multifaceted ecosystems require key contributions from “policy entrepreneurs” or “policy operatives” – individuals with unique skills and substantial influence – to move issues forward and help them compete with other pressing issues.

When examining Vancouver’s use of TMH as an intervention for addressing homelessness, it becomes apparent that the decision-making process behind TMH’s origins aligns with other research suggesting that modern policy-making does not adhere to a rational, linear process of knowledge exchange and implementation (Macnaughton et al., 2013). Such a rational process, which the public seemed to be asking for with TMH, is described by Macnaughton et al. (2013) as one where solutions or “products” are “evidence-based” and brought forward to address objectively determined needs and

then “placed into decision-making events” (Lomas, 2007, p. 130). Instead, the decision-making process could be understood within a much more complex context of “policy entrepreneurship,” which entails taking advantage of windows of opportunity and helping to bring together “streams of problems, politics, and policy ideas” (Macnaughton et al., 2013). The feasibility of TMH in 2016 was supported by the convergence of what Kingdon (2003) would call the political and problem streams. In particular, this involved the convergence of a Mayor who had promised to end homelessness by 2015 and who was nearing the end of their term, an increasing homelessness crisis, and a new, more supportive provincial government.

There are varying definitions of the term policy entrepreneur (Roberts & King, 1991). Popularized by Kingdon, policy entrepreneurs have been described as “meaning-makers” and “interpreters of problems” (Petridou & Mintrom, 2020, p. 947). With policy processes described as “chaotic” where “problems, policy solutions and participants flow in streams quite independently of one another” (Capano & Galanti, 2020, p. 4), policy entrepreneurs are said to be adept at navigating these streams and linking each of the spheres (Macnaughton et al., 2013). Policy entrepreneurs must find effective ways to present problems and solutions within the community of relevant actors who can contribute to debate on a given issue and form connections across disparate groups (Kingdon, 2003; Macnaughton et al., 2013). They are the problem framers, alternative specifiers, team builders, networkers and “couplers in a very complex policy process” (Kingdon, 2003; Mintrom, 2019, 2000). According to Kingdon (2003), policy entrepreneurs help policy problems and solutions survive competition with other pressing issues and capture the attention of decision-makers. The term policy entrepreneurship is at once a term that can be used to describe the complicated and messy policy and decision-making environment and the type of individual with the influence and skill set necessary to deliver policy within this environment.

Perhaps most simply put, policy entrepreneurs have been described as policy “champions,” “change agents,” and “advocates for policy change” (Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Mintrom & Rogers, 2022). The concept of change and innovation is common in the literature, with it suggested that policy entrepreneurship is most likely to be observed in cases where change involves disruption to established ways of doing things and significant policy change (Mintrom & Norman, 2009).

Mintrom and Norman (2009) propose that there are occasions when new challenges emerge which are so significant that the existing systems to address them are considered insufficient. Policy entrepreneurs capitalize on these unique windows of opportunity to advocate for major changes and present solutions in ways that bring together the "streams" of "problems, politics, and policy ideas" (Capano & Galanti, 2021; Macnaughton et al., 2013).

According to White and Nandedkar (2019), it is widely accepted that crises open windows of opportunity. As discussed in the crisis literature, these opportunities are often utilized to promote responses that advance particular ideological values or ideas, which often privilege particular groups. Kingdon (2003) further claimed that policy entrepreneurs can perceive these windows of opportunity and use them to promote their favoured policy solution onto governmental decision-making agendas. In Mintrom and True's (2022) theorization of the conditions under which policy change happens, which explored how COVID-19 created a policy window, they suggest that policy windows opened by crisis offer occasions to enact policies that have long been in waiting: "The policy window is an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems" (p. 144).

While the saying "never let a good crisis go to waste" implies that a crisis can always be exploited in ways that will advance a specific agenda and create policy change, Mintrom and True (2022) urge more caution. They suggest that for a crisis to "trigger specific policy change, there must be an alignment of political will and the availability of a viable and appealing policy response to the problem" (p. 146). As such, "policy entrepreneurs must be prepared, their pet proposal at the ready, their special problem well-documented, lest the opportunity pass them by" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 173).

As my later analysis will show, in the case of TMH, members of the public seemed to be calling for a rational, communicative decision-making process. However, the policy entrepreneurship literature claims that decision-making is seldom so orderly. With TMH, the public was asking for what Macnaughton et al. (2013) would call a "rationalist evidence-based approach" (p. 101). This way of thinking assumes that effective policy hinges on an ability to develop and apply systematic techniques or "technicist" approaches for addressing gaps between evidence and practice (Ward et al., 2012).

The public often believes that there are objective solutions available for clearly visible problems that those who use knowledge, such as policy-makers, can be convinced and supported to implement. This approach implies the existence of a methodical, evidence-based process for converting evidence into policies and practices (Macnaughton et al., 2013). However, Macnaughton et al. (2013) argue that the evidence-based approach is limited in its ability to fully understand the multifaceted nature of many problems. Instead, problems are complex and can be conceptualized in multiple ways, making objective understanding difficult. Furthermore, given this complexity and ambiguity, difficult social problems such as homelessness and mental health are subject to contestation, negotiation, and “claims making” (Humphreys & Rappaport, 1993; Kingdon, 2003), and are thus part of a process that is “intrinsically social and political in nature” (Macnaughton et al., 2013, p. 102). Greenhalgh et al. (2006) describe the policy-making process as a “rhetorical drama,” while Mintrom et al. (2013) state that “Those who study policy advocacy, framing techniques and the psychology of persuasion have long acknowledged that facts rarely speak for themselves” (p. 1220).

Macnaughton et al. (2013) claim that disciplines such as sociology, political science, and policy studies have been turning away from rationalist approaches to understanding policy decision-making over the past few decades. In their conceptualization of the policy process, Lindblom (1968) rejected the idea that policymakers conduct rational, comprehensive assessments of options and consequences when making policy choices. According to (Lomas, 2007), the policy development process is not simply a “technical exercise that places [knowledge] products into [decision-making] events in a linear fashion” (p. 130). Instead, “the process involves taking advantage of windows of opportunity within the complex policy-making world” (Macnaughton et al., 2013, p. 106).

The literature also discusses that policy entrepreneurs not only need a window of opportunity but also that specific approaches are key in ensuring that policy is lasting. Mintrom and True (2022) evaluated the effectiveness of certain policy entrepreneurship practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in creating enduring policy and suggested that “To the extent that policy change will stick in these instances, . . . will be due to certain propitious pre-conditions, which include policy advocacy efforts that long proceeded the onset of the pandemic” (p. 146). It is their view that these efforts made policy

entrepreneurs ready to seize the COVID-19 policy window. Making policies last beyond the crisis or window of opportunity that allowed for their implementation requires what Mintrom and True (2022) describe as “trajectory-altering” (p. 141) policy changes. However, they emphasize that not all policies created by policy entrepreneurs during times of crisis will be trajectory-altering. They suggest that such moments can open policy windows, but that doesn't guarantee trajectory-altering outcomes. Furthermore, and of relevance to my analysis of TMH, they caution that "If you seek temporary solutions, then that is the best you will get. If you seek major and permanent shifts, then you are more likely to secure policy change that is trajectory-altering" (p. 151).

2.6. Discussion

This section includes a focus on the historical evolution of planning ideals, specifically the shift towards emphasizing democracy and equitable outcomes. The change was a response to the pre-communicative turn eras of planning, which disregarded public engagement and endangered marginalized communities. The subsequent communicative turn is hailed by many as a shift towards a more deliberative and inclusive planning process that involved the voices of those communities who were not represented in most planning staffs at the time and who were so often impacted by the outcomes of planning projects. The communicative turn is also celebrated for its ability to improve equitable outcomes overall.

However, critics of the communicative turn question the reality of an idealized public consensus and claim that bottom-up approaches do not necessarily mean that wider social objectives such as improved equity will be met. Exploring the critiques of the communicative turn also provides a glimpse of the public expectations for engagement that arose for TMH and the subsequent negative consequences that occurred because of them. Specifically, the public was expecting a rational model where the right decision-making and engagement processes would lead to the decision that best suited them.

Furthermore, while proponents of the communicative turn suggest that all engagement is good engagement, it has also been proposed that when the public is engaged in areas outside of their expertise, the resulting public engagement data isn't always useful for decision-makers. This can foster public mistrust when their input isn't

implemented and ultimately make it seem like a government public relations tool rather than a sincere desire to involve the public.

The prevailing post-political world still holds vestiges of the participatory ideals which grew from the communicative turn era, but which must operate in a neoliberal environment where spaces of conflict and public influence have been stripped from decision-making processes. This paradox of public participation, as described by Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017), has been further complicated by the seemingly perpetual state of crises that often drives modern decision-making and is utilized by governments to rationalize the expedition of projects while minimizing meaningful public engagement.

While all definitions of crisis involve a sense of urgency, the crisis literature suggests that this urgency can stem from unexpected dramatic events, such as pandemics or extreme weather, or from creeping stresses that develop over time, such as climate change or housing and homelessness. While crises can have real impacts on society, the term crisis in itself is a malleable one, with often debated causes and impacts, that can be socially constructed for political utility. The political utility of crises is particularly present in the modern post-political state, where crises are used to rationalize the minimization of public engagement in order to expedite policy agendas, often in the name of supporting equitable outcomes.

The crisis literature describes the two opposing ends of the crisis response spectrum. At one side of the spectrum is the reactive pathway, which is what the TMH intervention can be thought of as most closely resembling. With this approach, community advocacy is minimized in favour of urgent expert-driven technocratic decision-making, policy processes that are hierarchically dominated, and solutions that are often short-term (or temporary) while being superficial in their benefits and thus avoiding the root cause of the crisis itself. It is believed that, while the reactive approach to crisis response is most common, a continuation down this pathway can lead to a spiral where negative outcomes are endlessly repeated (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020). Such a spiral has been demonstrated in cities like Vancouver, where crisis interventions in the form of supportive housing have led to increasing public mistrust in government and similar manifestations of public resistance occurring with each new project of this type.

Much of the literature makes a case for a movement towards the other end of the crisis response spectrum, the proactive approach. This approach, which carries with it many of the ideals of the communicative turn era, is thought of as having the potential to trigger systemic transformation and break free of the commonly repeated negative consequences produced by the reactive approach by moving away from a politics of urgency. The proactive approach encourages preparedness through long-term thinking, decentralized governance, and the contributions of local knowledge holders through deeply collaborative public engagement with the widest representation of community perspectives possible. Its success is said to be based on its spirit of experimentation, fallibilism, provisionality, and continuous improvement.

The ideal of increased democracy has been widely praised in the crisis response and communicative turn literature. However, studies have pointed out that this approach does not always lead to equitable outcomes, which means providing both material and non-material benefits to all individuals, regardless of their starting position (Fainstein, 2010); for example, providing homes for those experiencing homelessness is often not achieved through increased democracy. Moreover, while the communicative turn's move toward a more people-centred and participatory approach to planning was instigated by low-income groups seeking equality, modern public engagement is largely dominated by middle-class involvement (Fainstein, 2010). Ultimately, Fainstein questions the effectiveness of engagement that ignores the realities of structural inequalities, hierarchies of power, and the fact that citizens are not always the best judges of their own interests and the public good. As my analysis of the TMH case study will demonstrate, it is these assumptions that have contributed to the City of Vancouver minimizing public engagement to more expediently deliver projects which they believe will result in more equitable housing outcomes.

The communicative turn not only increased public expectations for greater participation but also emphasized that planning and government decision-making should be primarily based on rational and procedural practices. According to this approach, the use of appropriate decision-making tools and a thorough engagement process would lead to the best decision. The TMH case study highlights that the public's expectations for involvement and rational decision-making were high. Community members believed that a more robust, transparent and dialogue-focused approach would help address their

concerns while facilitating a response to homelessness that was less impactful on their neighbourhood.

However, according to the policy entrepreneurship literature, rather than being made in a linear and rational process, government decisions are more typically made within a complex policy entrepreneurship ecosystem, of which public engagement is only one element. It is within this messy decision-making environment that policy entrepreneurs seize windows of opportunity to address issues and advance their objectives. In the case of TMH, planners and decision-makers were contending with a series of factors, including a worsening homelessness crisis, a Mayor nearing the end of his term who was anxious to make good on their campaign promise of ending homelessness, and the possibility of funding from a new provincial government.

The literature also emphasizes that if policy entrepreneurs are to create policies that have lasting and trajectory-altering potential, advocacy efforts must be made long before the peak of the issue the intervention is meant to address. When policy entrepreneurship literature is brought into conversation with the crisis literature, particularly the emphasis on engagement and advocacy that is present in trajectory-altering policy approaches and the proactive crisis pathway, it presents a strong framework for evaluating how the City of Vancouver, as policy entrepreneurs responding to the housing and homelessness crisis, made decisions that instigated public mistrust and contributed to the negative consequences that often accompany supportive housing proposals in the city.

Chapter 3.

Methodology and Research Design

3.1. Content Analysis

My research content included materials related to three key points on the TMH decision-making and engagement timeline. This included City of Vancouver documents and other materials associated with their development of the TMH strategy, with a primary focus on two public hearings. The first of these public hearings occurred on December 13, 2016, at which City Council approved a regulatory framework for the delivery of TMH. The second public hearing was held on September 17, 2017. At this meeting, Council approved the granting of zoning and by-law relaxation authority to the Director of Planning and the Development Permit Board. This decision would allow TMH to be considered in all areas of the city, except low-density zones, without a rezoning process, and as a result, dramatically impact the type of public engagement required for future TMH sites. Documents and media analyzed for each of these public hearings included City staff reports and presentation slides, public correspondence, meeting minutes, and meeting videos. These materials helped me develop an understanding of the TMH decision-making timeline and a sense of the windows for public participation incorporated within it. Furthermore, and pertinent to my research question, this data helped to create a clear understanding of the expectations of both residents and the City of Vancouver regarding public engagement for TMH.

While reviewing the public hearing materials, I discovered three Vancouver City Council approved policies that required further examination as part of my content analysis. These policies were the *Supportive Housing Strategy* for Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addictions Supported Housing Framework (approved in 2007), the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy* (approved in 2011), and the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* (approved in 2017). The TMH public hearing documents frequently referenced these policies as evidence of past engagement and policy support for TMH. They also gave me insight into the history of supportive housing policies in Vancouver and how public engagement has influenced this history.

To further analyze the development of the city-wide TMH strategy, the third phase of content analysis focused on TMH-specific public engagement. In this stage, the Marpole TMH project was analyzed as it was the first TMH development in a low-density residential area outside of the Downtown Eastside and was also the most controversial. The data for this analysis was obtained from the City of Vancouver's Temporary Modular Housing website, which contains information on each TMH development, including fact sheets, public notification postcards, and presentation boards from engagement sessions. The purpose of this analysis was to provide information on the type and number of engagement sessions that occurred, analyze how the City framed these sessions, and evaluate what decisions were open to public input.

For the next portion of the content analysis, I used the Canadian Newsstream database to collect newspaper articles relating to the delivery of TMH in Vancouver. To create my dataset, I conducted a search using the words "Temporary Modular Housing" and "Vancouver." My intention was to analyze public opinions regarding the community engagement process for the Marpole TMH development. As such, I limited my search to articles focused on the lead-up to the opening of TMH in Marpole. To achieve this, I constrained my search to newspaper articles published before March 31, 2018, as Marpole's modular housing building opened in March of that year.

It's important to note that the opinions and expectations of residents related to TMH that have been gathered through my review of public hearing correspondence, speakers, and comments made to the media represent only a small portion of the actual public impacted by TMH. It is well-known that traditional engagement methods tend to attract similar groups of residents (Gordon & Schirra, 2011), such as homeowners and those who are securely housed and would thus not benefit from the changes proposed by TMH (Fainstein, 2010; Shin & Yang, 2022). Additionally, most engagement methods fail to gather input from supporters of the proposed changes, resulting in oppositional voices being the most represented. Therefore, with these limitations in mind, throughout the rest of this study, when referring to "residents" or "the public," it should be understood that this includes the most outspoken community members, without being entirely representative.

To explore how engagement is perceived and prioritized by the City of Vancouver, my content analysis also included a more global exploration of their

approaches to public participation. This section investigated the City's engagement messaging as well as City Council adopted policies, that are meant to drive their engagement and provided an opportunity for comparison between what the City claims to value about public engagement and what was delivered with TMH. To collect this data, I reviewed the City's "Citizen involvement" and "How we do engagement" webpages, as well as the report for the "Framework for Public Engagement."

A summary of all materials reviewed as part of the content analysis is provided in Appendix A.

3.2. Interviews

As part of my research, I conducted qualitative, in-depth interviews with City of Vancouver staff, a former City of Vancouver Council member, and an engagement consultant who was hired to aid the City in managing public processes for the implementation of TMH. I selected these individuals based on their involvement in engagement processes and their roles in TMH planning and decision-making. Qualitative field research, as compared to a quantitative survey approach, allowed me to obtain a more nuanced understanding of individual experiences and attitudes toward civic processes and public engagement. A semi-structured interview approach created room for unanticipated topics to arise during the interviews and allowed for the flexibility to modify my questioning as my understanding of the subject matter evolved both within and between interviews. This method also helped me to expand on any assumptions and cross-check data collected from the content analysis, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

3.2.1. Participant Recruitment

Seven representatives from the City of Vancouver were selected to participate in my research. This group was made up of a combination of past and present City staff and Council members. In identifying interviewees from the City of Vancouver, I relied primarily on purposive and snowball nonprobability sampling techniques. I predominantly used the content analysis portion of my research to identify staff and Council members who were cited in public City of Vancouver documents, quoted in newspaper articles, or made presentations at public hearings. Furthermore, I ended each of my interviews by

asking respondents whether there were additional individuals who were involved in the TMH public engagement or decision-making processes whom they felt I should speak with.

It is important to note that I was able to gain a certain level of access due to my position of employment with the City of Vancouver. This role allowed me to establish contacts and hold preliminary meetings in a more informal manner. However, I took steps to minimize any potential conflicts of interest, which are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.

3.3. Data Analysis Approach

I used a mixed-methods approach to analyze the data, focusing on both manifest and latent content (Babbie & Roberts, 2018). To do this, I explored the more explicit intentions expressed in interviews, City documents, public and City staff presentations, comments made to the media, public engagement materials, and official City policies. I also looked for less obvious themes within the materials that addressed my research question and were consistent with the literature review. These themes included values and expectations towards public engagement, the role of the housing crisis and equity considerations in shaping engagement narratives, and the manifestation of policy entrepreneurship in driving government decision-making.

In addition, I analyzed the materials using a grounded theory method. This involved generating analytic categories, observing patterns in the data, and identifying relationships between them (Babbie & Roberts, 2018; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, the inductive, grounded theory method allowed for new concepts to emerge during the analysis process.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

It is acknowledged that my current job as a Planner for the City of Vancouver might lead to the perception of a lack of objectivity when analyzing City of Vancouver data. It is therefore important to identify that my role with the City is not related to the delivery of TMH or the development of engagement policy, however I do facilitate public engagement.

I took measures to minimize potential conflicts of interest by not conducting interviews with staff from within my department, including supervisors or those who may be directly involved in my career advancement. Moreover, I disclosed my position of employment to all interviewees, whether they work for the City of Vancouver or are members of the public. In addition, as part of the consent process, I explained my research objectives, how the data will be used and secured, and how it can be accessed once the study is complete.

Chapter 4.

The Context for Engagement and TMH in Vancouver

To gain a better understanding of the background of TMH as a homelessness intervention in Vancouver and how public engagement influenced the City's implementation of it, this chapter provides a timeline of the development and implementation of TMH, as well as the housing policies that TMH was designed to address. This chapter also provides context for the public's expectations for engagement at the time when TMH was introduced in Vancouver by exploring the political and planning regimes that have shaped the city's public engagement culture. This exploration of planning history also contemplates the present state of engagement in Vancouver and grounds the City of Vancouver's engagement processes for TMH within their existing engagement principles and practices.

4.1. The TMH Decision-Making and Engagement Timeline

This section delves into the history and origin of TMH in Vancouver. It highlights how TMH was considered and implemented as an intervention to address Vancouver's homelessness crisis. It provides insight into the City of Vancouver's political and housing policy environments and explores the public's involvement and influence during the policy and TMH delivery processes.

The discussion outlines the timeline of important events related to Vancouver's implementation of TMH. This includes two public hearings and the public engagement processes that occurred during the development permit stage of the Marpole TMH project. Additionally, this section delves into the housing policies identified by City of Vancouver staff as essential to the delivery of TMH.

4.1.1. TMH as a Concept: The History of TMH in Vancouver

Based on my interviews and analysis of media documents, there is some debate on the origins of modular housing in Vancouver. As a concept, it began to show up on a regional level in 2008, when the Province of British Columbia and the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games agreed to

redistribute 156 temporary modular housing units from the Whistler Games across the province and repurpose them as what was called affordable housing units (Henderson, 2010). The structures were intended to provide homes for seniors and homeless residents of Chetwynd, Chilliwack, Enderby, Saanich, Sechelt, and Surrey.

It was also in 2008, that Michael Geller, an NPA candidate for Vancouver City Council, announced that his party was exploring the idea of "portable modular housing units" as a potential "quick solution to homelessness" (Hill & Rolfsen, 2008, para. 1). He claimed to have been considering this concept for 30 years (McCarthy, 2011). Geller and most of his NPA counterparts would not be elected in 2008; however, he continued to champion modular housing, a concept that was also supported by Vancouver's new mayor, Gregor Robertson (Robertson, 2009; Rossi, 2009).

In a March 2009 editorial in the Vancouver Sun, recently elected Mayor Gregor Robertson made a plea for the creation of "at least 500 units of interim housing available within the next year" (Robertson, 2009, para. 9). Among his suggested strategies for achieving this goal was the installation of modular housing on City-owned land. In April of the same year, the City of Vancouver put forward a Council backed funding proposal to the Province of British Columbia to support the construction of 190 units of prefabricated modular housing on two downtown sites (Howell, 2009; Rossi, 2009; Ward, 2009).

In July of 2010, Vancouver City Council supported a motion by then Councillor Kerry Jang, which asked City Manager Penny Ballem to seek expressions of interest from modular housing companies to build demonstration projects (Lee, 2010). The proposed modular housing on the two downtown sites never materialized, and after Jang's expression of interest motion, there was little movement in Vancouver on modular housing until 2013, when, on their own initiative, Atira Women's Resource Society built a 12-unit, three-storey building in the Downtown Eastside out of a dozen recycled shipping containers.

4.1.2. TMH Implementation: Key Events in the Delivery of TMH

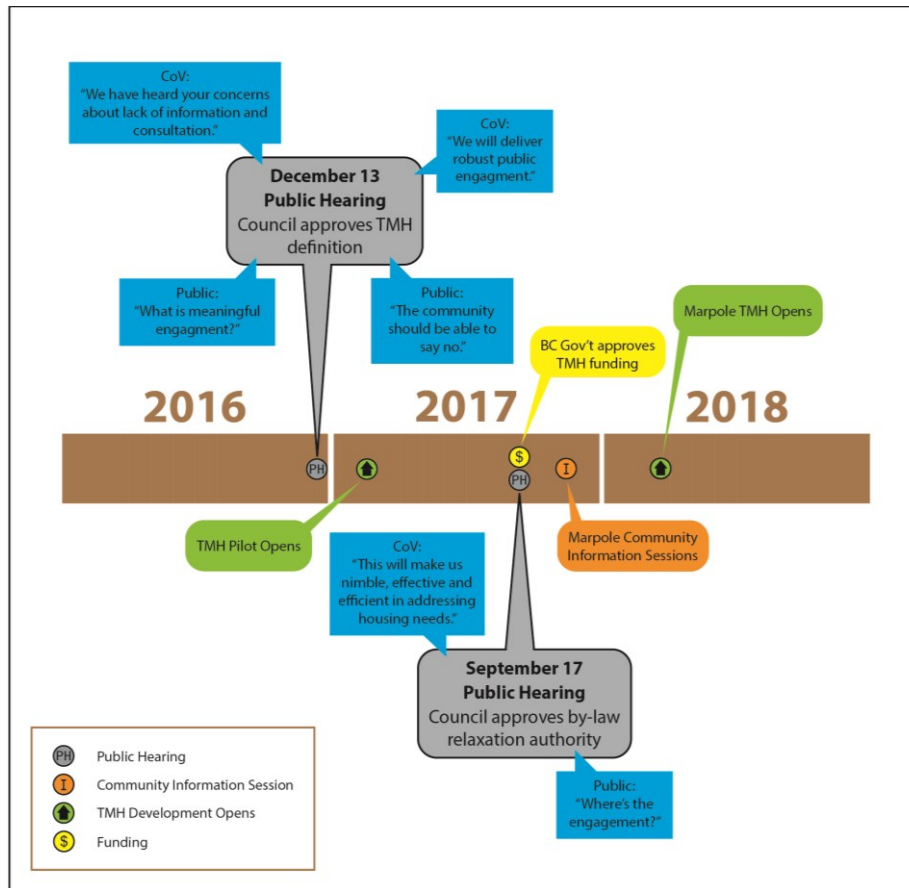


Figure 4.1. TMH Implementation Timeline

December 13, 2016 Public Hearing on TMH

The City of Vancouver only began to make significant progress towards constructing modular housing units in 2016, thanks to the combination of municipal political will and provincial government funding. This progress coincided with a time when ending homelessness had become a mainstream political goal, and Housing First programs like TMH were gaining popularity, not only in Vancouver but around North America (Baker & Evans, 2016).

The first of these strides towards TMH occurred at a City of Vancouver public hearing on December 13, 2016. It was at this meeting that City of Vancouver staff brought a report to Council which recommended amendments to the zoning and development by-law to include a definition for TMH (City of Vancouver, 2016a). Adding a definition of TMH to the zoning and development by-law was to serve as the first step in

establishing a mechanism for adding this type of use to existing zoning districts through a future rezoning process. As Randy Picarski, Assistant Director of Planning, stated in his presentation to Council, the change would provide “the regulatory framework that will allow temporary modular housing to be implemented more broadly” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). The report also asked for approval of TMH-specific design guidelines intended to “establish principles for TMH to ensure this housing type is of high-quality and well-considered design” and “to ensure an appropriate fit in various neighbourhood contexts” (City of Vancouver, 2016a, p. 7).

The meeting was originally meant to also consider a zoning amendment of four City-owned sites to allow TMH. However, on the day of the public hearing, City of Vancouver staff issued a memorandum to Council recommending that these proposed rezonings be removed from the public hearing agenda. Two reasons were provided for this revision. The first reason related to new information regarding the sites that had purportedly come to light since referral to public hearing (City of Vancouver, 2016c, 2016i). According to the memorandum, further review since referral highlighted that two of the sites had pre-existing lease agreements that required renegotiation, and a third site had a community garden license that covered a significant portion of the site (City of Vancouver 2016i). As stated in the memorandum, the leases and community garden license needed to be further assessed “before the sites could be considered for redevelopment” (City of Vancouver 2016i, p. 2). The second reason for the removal of the rezonings was related to the public hearing notification and public process. According to the memorandum, residents and neighbours of the sites proposed for rezoning, had “raised a number of legitimate concerns regarding the notification process” (City of Vancouver 2016i, p. 2). Furthermore, it stated that “several residents commented on the lack of public process in advance of the referral of all four sites to public hearing” (City of Vancouver 2016i, p. 2). The memorandum also included a promise to “engage with interested residents to provide more clarity about the proposals” (City of Vancouver 2016i, p. 2).

With these last-minute changes, what was ultimately unanimously approved by Council was the addition of the TMH definition to the zoning and development by-law and approval of design guidelines specific to TMH. By adding the definition to the zoning and development by-law, a key piece in creating the regulatory framework for

implementing TMH was put in place. However, at this point, a future rezoning and public hearing would still be required to apply the TMH use to a specific zoning district.

The recommendations in the report also sought Council's approval "for staff to continue to explore opportunities to enable additional temporary modular housing across the City on a priority basis" (City of Vancouver, 2016a, p. 2). Furthermore, the actions recommended in the report were meant to "provide the key elements of an implementation framework that enables a larger supply of TMH in zoning districts across the City" (p. 2).

There was no mention of resident engagement informing the recommendation before Council. The report simply noted that before the meeting, staff notified "on-site tenants and neighbours within a two-block radius of the proposed changes and the opportunity to address Council at the public hearing" (2016a, p. 5). In discussing the implementation of the proposed TMH development sites, the report noted the opportunity for additional engagement during the development permit process:

Prior to granting a time-limited development permit, a further notification process will occur when a specific TMH project is proposed. This will include notification of both existing residents on the site and surrounding property owners, and their opinions will be taken into consideration in the review of the development permit application. (City of Vancouver, 2016a, p. 5)

Also addressed was a desire to explore opportunities for new TMH sites, a process that would include "further engagement with our non-profit, government and private sector partners" (City of Vancouver 2016a, p. 5). However, such a statement appeared to prioritize "expert" opinions over those of the public.

While the staff report, which is dated November 1, 2016, and, as per typical City of Vancouver practice, was written long before the public hearing and thus was disconnected from any community response at the public hearing, was relatively quiet on engagement, the memorandum and staff presentation at the public hearing centred engagement more heavily. In referencing the memorandum in their opening remarks to Council, the Director of Planning, Gil Kelley stated, "In my view, the details that would apply to those [TMH] sites are not sufficient to conduct a thorough community consultation" (City of Vancouver, 2016c). In their opinion, there wasn't an opportunity "to engage the nearby neighbourhoods appropriately and robustly to this point." Moving

forward with TMH, Kelley stated that the City would “follow up and do that [public engagement] on one or more of these sites, or potentially other sites, in the future and come back to [Council] with a de novo hearing on those aspects that are specific [to the sites].” According to him, this allowed “the opportunity to engage those communities in a better way”. As part of the public hearing, the Assistant Director of Planning, Randy Picarski, reiterated Kelley’s emphasis on future TMH-related public engagement by claiming that “we have an opportunity to further engage the community in pursuing further sites for temporary modular housing as we move forward on a priority basis” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

Among the statements made by Kelley and Picarski at the public hearing were promises of future public hearings for specific TMH sites. As the forthcoming discussion will highlight, these public hearings never happened. While some engagement did occur after the 2016 public hearing, these processes were included much later in the approval timeline, as part of the development permit process, and therefore did not require site-specific public hearings.

Among the 15 members of the public who spoke at the 2016 public hearing and the 49 who submitted written comments, many were thankful for the memorandum, which removed the rezoning portion of the recommendation, particularly with the caveat that public engagement would be forthcoming. However, a few community members also challenged City staff and Council to define what they meant by meaningful consultation (City of Vancouver, 2016c). The public understandings and expectations for engagement expressed at this public hearing are further explored in section 5.1.1.

Based on the contents of the staff memo, public comments, and the overall tone of discussion at the public hearing, it can be concluded that there was a widespread desire among all present for increased public engagement in future TMH processes. While no official engagement-related mandate was set by Council at the public hearing, community members, staff, and Council members spoke of an engagement process that would be “appropriate,” “meaningful,” “thoughtful,” “genuine,” and “robust” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). This desire was further emphasized in the language used by both staff and Council throughout the public hearing. In her closing comments, Councillor Melissa De Genova showed support for future, site-specific engagement, stating, “I’m pleased to see that this may actually see us have consultation specific to sites, so I’m

quite happy about that” and “a lot more consultation, it has become obvious, was needed and thanks to all the people who came out to reiterate that.” She continued, “I think that if we have thoughtful consultation around specific projects, we hopefully will be able to attain a standard that is not only best practice for us here in Vancouver but will be world-class” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

In Councillor Tim Stevenson’s closing comments, he stressed the need for engagement to be emphasized in future TMH processes, “I think we have to be quite robust in this consultation,” he said. Furthermore, in stressing the unique need for engagement on TMH sites, he said, “The onus on the City for consultation is much higher than for other, more conventional sites” (City of Vancouver 2016c). In response to many of the public’s comments during the meeting, Councillor Adrienne Carr noted that the public had a “desire for genuine consultation,” which she called “an incredibly important point that should always be made and emphasized” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

In her closing comments, Councillor Andrea Reimer echoed other Councillors’ calls for further engagement but also situated this request within the challenges of the housing crisis:

Thank you for the responses of staff to those questions that were raised as a consequence of the input of the public. I think I heard some things very loud and clear tonight, and I know our staff heard those things too. One is that we are in a crisis around housing in this city. But it’s important to think about how we respond to that crisis and the movements we make to supply housing that doesn’t compromise the things that we hold dear. (City of Vancouver 2016c)

It could be argued that up until the December 2016 public hearing, public engagement was mostly an afterthought in the TMH decision-making process. While the pushback from this meeting resulted in promises of an increased emphasis on engagement as TMH projects moved forward, there was little specificity of what this would look like. The public hearing contained hints of what the City of Vancouver had in mind for future TMH engagement sessions, such as site-specific engagement processes and public hearings/rezonings, which never occurred, and development permit related notifications. At the same meeting, the public would offer glimpses into how they would like to be engaged in the future. The tensions between these perspectives will be

explored further in section 5.1., which looks at both the City's and the public's engagement expectations for TMH.

September 19, 2017 Public Hearing on TMH

While the 2016 public hearing included promises of a heightened focus on public engagement for future TMH processes, in 2017, Council made a decision that meant to reduce obstacles in delivering TMH, which included public engagement. In September 2017, nine months after the previous TMH-related public hearing, City of Vancouver staff returned to Council with a new modular housing related recommendation. This time, the decision at the public hearing was the approval of zoning by-law relaxation to delegate approving authority to the Director of Planning and the Development Permit Board for developments where at least 70% of all dwelling units are used for low-cost housing for persons receiving assistance (City of Vancouver, 2017a). According to the accompanying policy report, this amendment was meant to streamline the process for achieving TMH by reducing development approval times, which in turn would allow the City to be “as nimble, effective, and efficient as possible in addressing specific housing needs and opportunities as they arise” (City of Vancouver, 2017a, p. 1).

Simply put, while the 2016 public hearing provided a regulatory framework for allowing the implementation of TMH and broached the subject of rezoning specific sites to permit this housing type, the 2017 public hearing would allow TMH to be considered in all areas of the city except low-density zones without a rezoning application and the subsequent need for future public hearings. Public engagement would thus be pushed further along in the decision-making process, specifically to the development permit stage. The 2017 decision would later be challenged by Marpole residents, who claimed to have not been notified of the public hearing which essentially paved the way for TMH to be built in their neighbourhood (Omand & Fraser, 2017; Woo, 2017; Xu, 2017). According to one City of Vancouver staff member, part of the pushback was because this was a new type of process for the City: “The whole idea of delegated authority was very new, we had never used that power or authority ever.” Additionally, they claimed that “the fact that the decision-maker was actually a person and that person wasn't an elected official stung. Some people were not pleased about that. Which is why we were faced with a legal challenge on using that authority.” A further exploration of the public expectation for engagement on TMH is presented in section 5.1.1.

To address community feedback that informed the 2017 Council decision, the associated referral report's Public Input section cites public response to a TMH pilot project. The pilot, which opened in February of 2017, was a three-storey, 40-unit building located on the edges of the Downtown Eastside and Mount Pleasant neighbourhoods. In discussing this development, which the City claims “demonstrated a marked measure of success in addressing [housing] need” (City of Vancouver, 2017a, p. 2), the report states, “the City conducted an awareness, consultation and outreach program to inform Vancouver residents” (p. 5). Furthermore, the report refers to feedback received since opening, “the building has now been operational for nearly six months and records indicate that only one concern has been voiced” (p. 5).

The reported success of the pilot project was used to rationalize the delivery of TMH. The referral report's conclusion includes the following language, “Building upon the success of the City's first pilot TMH project, it is timely to take further steps to prepare for the expedited delivery of this innovative form of housing as specific needs and opportunities arise” (City of Vancouver, 2017a, p. 6).

The report also cites two TMH display events as examples of public engagement. These events took place in both the city's high-density urban core and in a lower-density, primarily residential neighbourhood. The first TMH display unit was made publicly viewable in downtown Vancouver's Robson Square as part of Re:Address Housing Week. The event was considered a key piece in shaping the City of Vancouver's primary housing policy, the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* (City of Vancouver, 2017d), which is discussed in more detail in the next section. The display was later moved to Trout Lake Park in the east Vancouver neighbourhood of Kensington-Cedar Cottage. According to one of my interviews with City staff, “We took a model of a temporary modular housing unit [to the community] after the public announcement that the province has come up with Rapid Response to Homelessness funding, and they had committed to deliver 600 [supportive modular] homes in Vancouver.” They claimed that the displays intended to “softly introduce what [TMH] would look like.”

The City of Vancouver saw the reportedly heavily trafficked displays as opportunities to introduce TMH to the public at a time before any specific sites had been announced, while also being a chance to ask questions and provide feedback (City of

Vancouver, 2016a). Purportedly, most of the comments collected from the estimated 1,000 people who viewed the display suite were supportive of the TMH housing form (City of Vancouver, 2017d). However, no detailed record of this input has been made publicly available.

The referral report's Public Input section also references future engagement which would take place with TMH, explaining that "as the City prepares to consider new sites and proposals for TMH, it is noted that the City's development permit approval process includes a rigorous and established practice for community notification, consultation and consideration of concerns. Council policies and all applicable guidelines would provide direction" (City of Vancouver 2017a, p. 5). The section goes on to state that:

With the amendments proposed herein, those established procedures would still be followed, and the process will provide a framework through which any community concerns or issues can be raised, considered and addressed where possible. As is typical, the Director of Planning or the Development Permit Board would make the final, unfettered determination and decision with respect to the required development permit. (p. 5)

It's debatable whether the TMH pilot project and display units could be considered a form of the robust, site-specific engagement that was asked for by the public and promised by the City at the 2016 public hearing. What is clear is that foregoing a rezoning process for TMH projects would significantly and seemingly intentionally alter the type and amount of public input that could be gathered. Typical rezoning applications include site-specific community notifications through postcards and site signs, a public open house, and a Council decision at a public hearing, which would also involve a neighbourhood notification process. These steps were eliminated by the 2017 Council decision. Furthermore, the public's window of influence would be significantly narrowed without site-specific rezonings, as they would have little opportunity to debate the allowance of TMH uses on certain parcels. Moving all engagement to the development permit process left the public with minimal opportunity to weigh what type of housing could be allowed on these sites and limited their influence to primarily cosmetic building features and operational details. According to one City staff member, speed rather than measuring public impact was the ultimate priority:

Zoning was also another piece that we were sorting out at that time. Because in order to deliver these [TMH buildings] quickly—the construction

is very quick on them and the production is pretty quick, too. But if we were to have gone through the rezoning process, which many of these sites would have required, that would have slowed us down tremendously. And so, we were looking for opportunities that would keep this out of the rezoning process and allow us to go through a regular development permit process as quickly as possible. And part of that was to seek Council's permission to delegate these in the zoning and development by-law in order to allow this type of housing.

Marpole TMH Community Information Sessions

On September 17, 2017, Vancouver City Council unanimously approved the by-law granting relaxation authority to the Director of Planning and Development Permit Board. This meant that a rezoning process was no longer needed for every TMH development. As a result, the City was able to proceed directly to a development permit for new TMH sites. This led to the initiation of 19 site-specific engagements through town hall-style meetings, referred to as Community Information Sessions in City documents. These sessions would be the most extensive public engagement processes during Vancouver's TMH development lifecycle.

In November 2017, the first and most contentious Community Information Sessions occurred in the Marpole neighbourhood, which was also the site of the first TMH development outside of the Downtown Eastside. The Marpole project had a total of four such sessions, with 650 residents attending (Chan, 2017a, 2017b; Ip, 2018; Xu, 2017). During the sessions, 288 people provided feedback, with a significant majority opposing the project (Lakić, 2018). The City of Vancouver also held meetings with community groups and individuals, including school principals in the surrounding Marpole neighbourhood, to supplement these sessions. Online feedback was also accepted. Despite these efforts, Marpole residents expressed their opposition to TMH and the associated engagement process in several ways, including street protests, a construction blockade, and an attempt to sue the City for lack of consultation (Bula, 2018; England, 2018; Frey, 2018; Howell, 2018a; Ma, 2018; Tanner, 2018; Xu, 2018).

4.1.3. TMH Supporting Policies

City of Vancouver representatives have indicated that the concept of TMH is supported by three key housing policies. The first two of these, the *Supportive Housing Strategy* for Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addictions Supported

Housing Framework and the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, were approved in 2007 and 2011, respectively. However, while many City representatives argue that these policies allow for the delivery of TMH, they do not directly mention modular housing. Instead, they provide broad housing values and general objectives, such as prioritizing the elimination of homelessness and including all neighbourhoods in this response (City of Vancouver, 2007, 2011a), but they do not specifically consider the concept or implementation of TMH. It wasn't until the third key policy was approved in 2017, the *Housing Vancouver Strategy*, that modular housing was explicitly mentioned in City policy. Furthermore, while most of these policies included some form of public involvement, the majority of these procedures were primarily aimed at informing the public about the proposed policy directions, with little evidence that the public actually influenced the policies. The next two sections give a summary of the intentions and engagement processes associated with each policy.

Supportive Housing Strategy for Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addictions Supported Housing Framework (2007)

Although the first TMH report that was submitted to Council in 2016 did not mention it, in my interviews, multiple City of Vancouver staff members referred to the *Supportive Housing Strategy for Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addictions Supported Housing Framework* as a key TMH enabling policy. According to these staff members, the policy "sparked a city-wide conversation" that involved community members in identifying appropriate locations for supportive housing.

The City of Vancouver introduced the *Supportive Housing Strategy* in a referral report in 2007 to respond to housing policies established in 1989 and 1995. These Council approved policies aimed to encourage social housing, including the development of supportive housing throughout all residential neighbourhoods in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2007).

According to the *Supportive Housing Strategy*, Vancouver required 13 new supportive housing buildings to be developed by 2017. Out of these, the report recommended that three buildings should be low-barrier housing and situated in the downtown core. The remaining 10 buildings were planned to be located throughout the city and would serve individuals with a mental illness and/or addiction and have higher barriers to tenancy than those in the downtown core (City of Vancouver, 2007). The

report suggests that these buildings should be constructed in zones that already support multi-family housing. The report further provides a map of such locations throughout the city to achieve these goals.

The referral report associated with the *Supportive Housing Strategy* provides no information on whether it was shaped by community engagement. However, it does describe a “neighbourhood relations” and engagement plan that would occur to inform the public of the strategy’s directions (City of Vancouver, 2007). Multiple interviewees considered the volume of neighbourhood contacts involved in this process to be significant.

Acknowledging that “supportive housing can be controversial” and the importance of providing “as much information as possible to the community” (City of Vancouver, 2007, p. 9), the *Supportive Housing Strategy* and its accompanying referral report detailed three types of public outreach. These included a public education and engagement campaign where the strategy was “circulated for public discussion to provide information about the needs for and location of future supportive housing” (City of Vancouver, 2007, p. 10). This stage also included what City of Vancouver staff called “big town halls where it wasn’t about a specific project, which becomes a lightning rod, it was around the policy.” According to the staff member, it was also about discussing where to locate supportive housing. These meetings took place over a two-month period in locations throughout Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2007).

Furthermore, the *Supportive Housing Strategy* detailed the protocols for engaging with the public once site-specific supportive housing applications began. At this period, it was assumed that most new supportive housing developments would be able to be built under existing zoning and would, therefore, not require a rezoning process. Engagement would occur as part of the development permit process. Additional protocols would be followed for projects which the City considered “complex” or “where the project might be perceived to have impacts on surrounding neighbourhoods” (City of Vancouver, 2007, p. 15). For complex projects, the community engagement process would include formal community notifications for each application and a pre-application education and engagement process (City of Vancouver, 2007).

The *Supportive Housing Strategy* also explained how neighbourhood concerns would be addressed during building operations. These tactics would involve the creation of an Operations Management Plan to describe the project and its programs, as well as the establishment of a neighbourhood advisory committee to collaborate with the building's management (City of Vancouver, 2007).

Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2011)

At the 2016 public hearing on TMH, the referral report presented to Council mentioned the City of Vancouver's *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, approved in 2011, as the key policy enabling TMH (City of Vancouver, 2016a). The strategy's objective of increasing the supply of affordable housing, specifically for low- and moderate-income households, was cited in the report as a rationale for TMH. The report also highlighted its aim of providing a variety of housing options across all Vancouver neighbourhoods.

Data from my interviews supports the notion that City staff saw TMH as a tool for implementing the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, even though it never directly references TMH but instead refers to broader, city-wide objectives for addressing homelessness. Multiple City staff members also pointed to the engagement process involved in developing the strategy as an indicator of public license for TMH.

Public Engagement on the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy* took place between April and mid-June 2011. Referring to this "multi-pronged consultation," the accompanying referral report states that the strategy had "been informed by staff from across the city, multiple stakeholders and members of the public" (City of Vancouver, 2011a, p. 2). However, even the official goals of this public engagement campaign seem to focus most heavily on informing and educating rather than deeply involving the community in decision-making. According to the strategy, the engagement goals were to "raise awareness of facts," "show progress," "mobilize citizens and community partners," and gather "input on strategies" (City of Vancouver, 2011a).

Approaches to engagement included the *Talk Housing with Us* website, which the City described as allowing the public to "learn about housing issues, find out about upcoming events, provide feedback on draft strategies and share their ideas on solutions to housing challenges" (City of Vancouver, 2011a, p. 3). Broad public consultation

initiatives also included a renter's roundtable, a housing unconference, which was described as intending to "draw on the creativity of Vancouver citizens in developing solutions to our housing challenges" (p. 2), and two community dialogue sessions. According to the policy report, 400 people participated in the engagement sessions, and 2,400 unique people visited the *Talk Housing with Us* website (City of Vancouver, 2011a).

Before the public process, the City of Vancouver conducted stakeholder workshops and focus groups with government, non-profit, academic, and private-sector organizations to discuss housing delivery. This input informed the draft *Housing and Homelessness Strategy* that was presented to Council on February 1, 2011. During the meeting, Council directed staff to begin a public engagement process on the draft strategy. However, since the public process happened after the strategy had already been drafted, the accuracy of statements such as "the strategy was shaped by engagement," which is suggested in the referral report (City of Vancouver, 2011a), can be questioned. It seems that the public process could be more accurately referred to as informing, rather than true engagement.

Housing Vancouver Strategy (2017)

The *Housing Vancouver Strategy* was the City's updated housing policy following the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*. The final updated strategy and its accompanying 3-Year Action Plan would not be approved by Council until two months after the September 2017 public hearing on TMH. However, my interviews have shown that City staff and representatives consider this policy process to be key in demonstrating public support for TMH. Furthermore, the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* includes multiple references to TMH and features directions to "create a process to expedite affordable modular housing developments" and "take urgent action to increase the supply of supportive housing using the Housing First model with temporary modular units" (City of Vancouver 2017e, p. 53).

While the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* was yet to be finalized at the time of the 2017 public hearing on TMH, the meeting's accompanying referral report lists this strategy, and the emerging directions that surfaced in its development, as key enabling policies. In reviewing the engagement practices that supported the delivery of the strategy, direct reference to modular housing is apparent. This contrasts with previous

housing policies which spoke broadly of addressing homelessness throughout Vancouver but never mentioned modular housing specifically.

Engagement on the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* occurred over a 14-month period, beginning in 2016, with what the City called a “multi-phase stakeholder engagement process,” which they claim “emphasized deep conversations with key practitioners, thinkers, and leaders from Vancouver and across the globe (City of Vancouver, 2017f, p. 49). The intention of this process was to “deepen our understanding of peoples’ experiences and learn national and international best practices to address housing affordability” (City of Vancouver, 2017f, p. 4).

Much like with the previous *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, the early drafting of the new housing strategy focused heavily on engaging with housing experts. Such initiatives included workshops and dialogue sessions with “expert and community groups” and engagement with national stakeholders through discussions with Federal, Provincial, and Municipal staff members (City of Vancouver, 2017f). Among the emerging directions that surfaced from this early process was a desire to increase opportunities for modular housing.

Before starting the public engagement process, the results of expert engagement sessions were presented to Council in March 2017. Following this presentation, City staff were directed to engage with the public on the given directions, similar to the process adopted in the previous housing strategy.

Broad public engagement with residents involved two online surveys that received over 10,000 responses. Additionally, The Big Conversation, a one-day workshop, was attended by nearly 200 Vancouver residents. During this event, participants discussed their housing challenges and shared their visions for the future of housing in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2017e). Engagement activities were also integrated into other planning processes and open houses.

The public engagement process also included Re:Address Housing Week, which occurred from October 24 to November 1, 2016. The event was described in a City of Vancouver report as “sparking an ongoing legacy of discussion” (City of Vancouver, 2017g, p. 10) and was billed as bringing together “local and global experts on housing, affordability, and community development to discuss global issues around housing and

cities” (City of Vancouver 2017d, p. 17). Re:Address Housing Week also featured what was perhaps the public introduction of TMH in the manufactured modular form that would ultimately be implemented in Vancouver. It was at this event that the City of Vancouver and the provincial government partnered to display a typical unit of this housing type. In addition to the modular housing display unit, Re:Address Housing Week included a public event attended by 110 people titled “Innovative Housing Design and Construction Part I: The How’s and Whys of Modular Housing” (City of Vancouver, 2017e).

4.2. The Communicative Turn and Engagement in Vancouver

4.2.1. NPA/Technocratic Era

The trajectory of citizen participation is similar in Vancouver to other parts of North America, where up until the second half of the twentieth century, little thought was given to the role of residents in the development of land (Punter, 2003; Thomas, 2012). These ideal city themes of managerial governance and technocratic, top-down planning were particularly apparent during the Non-Partisan-Association’s (NPA) political dominance of Vancouver’s City Hall between 1937 and 1972 (Hutton, 2019). According to Punter (2004), the NPA’s party members, who included the City’s Mayor and the majority of Council, were “drawn from Vancouver’s social and business elite, favoured business leadership, efficient and lean government, and generally discouraged public participation” (p. 13). Beasley (2019) notes that Gerald Sutton Brown, who served as Vancouver’s Director of Planning from 1965 to 1972, did not believe in community engagement, and was hence aligned with the NPA’s approach.

However, during the NPA era, several significant projects in diverse neighbourhoods impacted a broad swath of Vancouver demographics, generating widespread opposition from residents. It was this period that built a greater appetite for engagement among residents and forced the City to reconsider its planning approach to a more communicative process that included increased resident participation. These oppositional times would see the NPA’s technocratic approach clash with public opposition to a proposed freeway development, along with overlapping fights against urban renewal in the Chinatown-Strathcona neighbourhoods and resistance to

downtown and westside mega project proposals, bringing them out of favour with local voters. According to Beasley (2019), “Neighbourhoods, which had accepted a lot of change under the long, benevolent dictatorship of the NPA and its bureaucrats, began to rebel” (p. 28).

4.2.2. TEAM/Engagement Era

By the late 1960s, the NPA was being challenged by the formation of what was considered a more progressive and engagement-friendly civic party, the Elector’s Action Movement (TEAM), with Vancouverites electing TEAM party members as Mayor and to a Council majority in 1972. Beasley’s view that the voting public was looking to curb the pace of change in their neighbourhoods as part of a more thoughtful and presumably community-centred planning process is echoed by Punter (2010), who credits the TEAM victory at the municipal polls to a “loss of faith in the NPA by downtown development interests and westside middle-class voters, who were looking for a more considered and ordered approach to growth and redevelopment of their city” (p. 26).

Under TEAM, the pace of development in Vancouver immediately slowed. One of their first acts, under TEAM Mayor Art Phillips, was to review plans for the rapidly densifying West End neighbourhood and change the zoning so that high-rise development came to a halt. Furthermore, plans for towers in Kitsilano, West Point Grey, Langara, and other areas disappeared because, according to Beasley (2019), the TEAM Council “favoured the opinion of residents—that low-density, single-family neighbourhoods should be preserved as is” (p. 30).

According to Punter (2010), with the election of a TEAM Mayor and Council majority, the City’s leadership “had a more considered and sensitive approach to development, advocated more participatory planning policies, and a more inclusive vision for the future of the city, which appealed to younger, better educated, more urbane and environmentally conscious electorate” (p. 14).

Advocates of the TEAM approach argue that after their election, Vancouver experienced a progressive movement led by urban thinkers and activists who introduced modern thinking and reform, with public engagement at the heart of this movement (Beasley, 2019; Hutton, 2019). According to Hutton (2019), TEAM was influenced by

larger movements of protest across the Western world, by the emergent values of what Daniel Bell (1973) termed “post-industrial society,” and by a larger ecological consciousness in the region. From Beasley’s perspective, “Our attitudes were not just born out of the political assessment we faced. We were children of the 1960s; the time of radical action, community involvement, and breaking down social and government barriers; the time of liberalizing everything. We fundamentally believed in public engagement” (p. 96). And Ray Spaxman, who, according to Beasley (2019), had been hired as the Director of Planning because he knew how to connect with residents, “had pressed that into our thinking from his first days at city hall (p. 97). Furthermore, in their view, it was also a time when the City held a strong belief “in opening up all our procedures and arrangements for everyone to see and become part of – this principle of transparency put us on the side of angels” (p. 97).

According to Beasley (2019), the technocratic leadership of the NPA during the 1950s and 1960s had a significant influence on the way the public and bureaucracy responded. This influence resulted in the creation of a new political culture in Vancouver, where residents now expect to be involved and engaged on initiatives that have a direct impact on their lives.

While some claim that TEAM’s political successes were directly related to their satiation of the public’s appetite for engagement, as Punter (2010) notes, TEAM’s achievements were also related to their freezing of development in middle-class neighbourhoods whose residents had become disenfranchised by the amount of proposed and actual change during the NPA era. In fact, TEAM’s efforts show elements of post-political public engagement, where, in response to constant opposition, local officials felt the need to bring citizens into the City’s processes to neutralize or contain that political threat. However, their engagement processes mostly led to outcomes that appeased middle-class residents rather than addressing questions of urban equity and conflict. Although TEAM’s commitment to “wide and incessant public engagement” (Beasley, 2019, p. 39) holds some promise for creating what the crisis and post-political literature describe as trajectory-altering and proactive responses that result in durable policies that outlive the issues they address, one wonders how projects that centre on housing equity, such as TMH, would have fared under TEAM’s leadership.

Even as questions of urban equity persist, so has Vancouver’s reputation, which materialized after the NPA was in power in the 1950s and 1960s, as a city where public involvement has played a significant role in shaping urban outcomes (Compton, 2016; Hutton, 2019; Stiem, 2016). Vancouver has been described as a city shaped in part by a deep planning culture, and by an engaged civil society (Hutton, 2019). Beasley (2017) suggests that a key tenet in Vancouverism, a term some consider him to have coined, is public engagement and that “At its heart, the process of Vancouverism is inclusive” (p. 39). Punter (2003) describes Vancouver’s planning environment as a “close-knit community in agreement about the need for a considered approach to urban development.” However, as real estate development and social inequality have intensified in recent years, aided by Vancouverism’s focus on dense, livable, postindustrial urban living, there are signs that some residents feel that their voices are not being heard.

4.3. Situating the TMH Engagement Process within the City of Vancouver’s Engagement Vision

Among the issues that my research contends with is how the City of Vancouver’s present concept of engagement accords with the TMH public engagement process. To understand how engagement is perceived and prioritized by the City, this section explores their engagement messaging as well as the City Council adopted values, principles, and tools, that are meant to drive engagement. Ultimately, it provides a comparison between what the City claims to value about public engagement and what was delivered with TMH.

4.3.1. The Framework for Public Engagement

Engagement at the City of Vancouver is guided by what they refer to as the *Framework for Public Engagement*. This tool was adopted by Council in January 2016 and aims to provide consistent and innovative engagement practices while also increasing its reach and measurability (City of Vancouver, 2016e). It was developed over four years by the Engagement Task Force, which was composed of Vancouver residents from diverse backgrounds, such as those involved in community advocacy and organization, planning, communications, and engagement (City of Vancouver, 2014). The group was formed to provide recommendations for enabling neighbour-to-neighbour

engagement, increasing civic literacy about engagement and opportunities for public participation, and enhancing how the City and residents engage with each other (City of Vancouver, 2016g).

According to the City, the goal of improving public engagement has been an important area of focus for many years. This began in 1996, 16 years prior to the forming of the Engagement Task Force, with the instigation of an engagement evaluation process. The review, which included the Better City Government Council initiative, resulted in 16 recommendations for engagement process improvements (City of Vancouver, 2014).

The *Framework for Public Participation* includes three key engagement pillars: the Core Values for Public Participation, the Public Engagement Spectrum, and the Guiding Principles for Public Engagement.

4.3.2. Core Values

According to the City, the Core Values for Public Participation are applied when staff design public engagement processes. They invite the public to hold the municipal government accountable to these values when participating in one of their public engagement processes (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

The seven Core Values are drawn from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and include commitments on who should be involved in engagement and allowed to influence decision-making, how engagement is designed and communicated, and how engagement outcomes are reported. Based on my review, it seems that most of the Core Values were not upheld in the TMH process.

The Core Values include a belief that “people who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process” and a promise that the City will seek out and facilitate their involvement, as well as the involvement of those who are interested in the decision but not directly impacted (City of Vancouver, n.d.). The Core Values also promise that “the public’s contribution will influence the decision.” However, in the City’s delivery of TMH, adherence to these values was mostly absent. In reality, many community members impacted by the project were excluded from the decision-making process and did not have a say in the outcome they desired. The consequences

of such an imbalance in expectations are explained by the IAP2, which cautions that without an alignment between public expectations and those of the group seeking input the result could be high levels of controversy, hostility, and frustration for all of those involved (IAP2, 2016). The IAP2's warning was a foreshadowing of what was to come with TMH.

The TMH process also failed to demonstrate Core Values which pledged to “seek input from participants in designing how they participate” and promote “sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants” (City of Vancouver, n.d.). According to the IAP2 (2016), the ladder value is about recognizing that “participants bring their values to the public participation process” (p. 21) and designing engagement that acknowledges these values and makes the process reflective of a diversity of stakeholder needs.

Despite promises made in the Core Values to include the public in developing engagement processes that suit them, my research failed to produce any examples of this being done. The 2016 public hearing on TMH presented an opportunity for the City to incorporate this value, as the public made it clear of their desire to be significantly involved in future engagement. With this knowledge, the City could have held discussions with the public on how best to involve them, but such conversations never took place. Instead, engagement for TMH was designated to occur as part of the development permit process, and thus bound by a set of standard City engagement protocols that didn't allow for the public to have a say in designing the process and, ultimately, limited their ability to influence the decisions they seemed to care about the most.

The City's Core Values also include a commitment to communication by vowing to provide the public with “the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.” However, during the TMH process, many residents felt that the City didn't live up to this commitment and claimed that they weren't given enough information to fully understand the TMH approval process, were confused by the information that was provided, or directly accused the City of being undemocratic and lacking transparency (Bula and Xu, 2017; City of Vancouver, 2016a, 2017c; England, 2018; Hemrich, 2017). In addition, the Core Values feature promises of transparency through tracking and reporting back to the public how their input is being used through a pledge to “communicate to participants

how their input affected the decision” (City of Vancouver, n.d.). According to IAP2 (2016), this value builds trust and accountability, promotes enduring engagement involvement, and helps identify opportunities for mid-course adjustments to engagement mechanisms. With TMH, there is no record of a process for reporting back to the public on the information that was gathered through engagement.

4.3.3. Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles expand on the Core Values by providing a more detailed set of objectives for designing and measuring public engagement. According to the City, the Guiding Principles are to be used in planning and evaluating community engagement processes (City of Vancouver, n.d., 2015). When the updated principles were approved by Council in 2016, the accompanying report stated that “these principles should be used as the evaluation framework for the review of every engagement project” (City of Vancouver, 2015).

There are 28 Guiding Principles, divided into categories based on how engagement processes are mandated, resourced, structured, and communicated, as well as who they hope to involve, how they’re involved, and how closure is provided to engagement participants.

The Guiding Principles build on the Core Values, with more specific and measurable objectives. For example, the Guiding Principles echo a similar Core Value by aiming to ensure that “everyone potentially interested or impacted by an initiative has an opportunity to be involved” (City of Vancouver, n.d.). They also delve more deeply into this commitment by promising that engagement processes will “have a balance of proactive and reactive techniques to ensure that input is representative and to involve everyone who wants to be.” Other Guiding Principles which follow this theme of prioritizing public involvement and authority and distill the City’s Core Value promise that “the public’s contribution will influence the decision” are directions to ensure that “input is obtained from those impacted both negatively and positively by an initiative” and “the roles of participants are defined and communicated.”

Building on the Core Value that suggests that engagement is not only a right of the public but that the City will actively seek out input from those who are interested or

impacted by a decision are Guiding Principles which feature promises to make efforts to create an engagement process where “diversity is promoted” by including “under-represented and hard to reach communities.” Also included is a commitment to ensuring that “barriers to access, such as physical, economic, or language constraints are recognized and overcome” (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

There are also several Guiding Principles which could be linked to the Core Value of promising to “communicate to participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way” (City of Vancouver, n.d.) and stress the importance of defining the public’s role in the engagement and decision-making process. According to the City of Vancouver, these principles include commitments to:

- Ensure that the credibility, purpose, and objectives of the public process are clear.
- Repeatedly clarify the scope and goals of the public process.
- Implement effective, inclusive, and comprehensive communication strategies that cover all necessary issues.
- Use clear, concise, objective, and jargon-free language in all written communications.
- Address relevant existing policy and procedures, history of the issues, alternatives, and pros and cons in engagement materials.
- Regularly communicate the process schedule, milestones, progress-to-date, and opportunities for involvement.
- Ensure transparency and address conflicts and imbalances of knowledge to maximize participation in the process.

The Guiding Principles also reiterate and expand on the Core Value of allowing participants to provide input on how they are involved in engagement processes by committing that the public will be “involved in making changes to processes in which they are participants.” They also touch on a desire to manage outrage at engagement sessions, with a principle that states a desire to ensure that the “tone of the process fosters creativity and encourages civility and mutual respect among all parties.”

Multiple Guiding Principles relate to the resourcing of engagement initiatives, such as the promise that “the process has adequate resources (financial, staff, community) to achieve the stated mandate,” that “community resources are used

effectively and efficiently,” and that “assigned staff are trained in the community engagement process.”

The Guiding Principles also include direction on how engagement processes are reported on and evaluated and how their result is communicated back to the public. This includes a desire to ensure that “participants are convinced that a process has achieved its mandate at its completion,” as well as that “the process is evaluated to identify successes and shortcomings, and the results are communicated to the participants;” and that “affected communities are informed of the process outcomes.”

Like with the Core Values, it appears that the TMH process did not follow the Guiding Principles closely. While the Guiding Principles promise to involve the public by giving them a say in decisions that affect them and work with them in designing the engagement process, with TMH, opportunities for engagement and public input were limited, with no evidence of efforts to collaborate in designing the engagement process. Furthermore, while the Guiding Principles include promises of clear and accessible communication throughout the engagement process and clarity of engagement objectives, as will be highlighted in the Data Analysis chapter, many residents, both in the early public hearing stages of TMH and the later Marpole development permit process, felt that the City was unclear on why decisions were being made and who should be making them.

4.3.4. IAP2 Spectrum

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is presented on the City’s website as a tool for educating the public on their level of influence on a decision being reviewed as part of the engagement process. According to the City, the Spectrum helps the public “understand their role in the decision-making process, and to hold [the City] accountable to the process.” Furthermore, the page suggests that the Spectrum is used by the City to outline the objectives and promises associated with different types of engagement (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

When the Spectrum and *Framework for Public Engagement* were adopted by Vancouver City Council in 2016, the associated staff report stated that the Spectrum “clearly outlines the outcome and expectations involved in different kinds of public

involvement and offers a credible common language that can be used by participants and decision makers” (City of Vancouver, 2016e, p. 12). According to the staff presentation made at the Council meeting, “What’s important to remember is that while the influence the participant has on the final decision increases as you go along the Spectrum, so does the participant’s level of commitment and responsibility” (City of Vancouver, 2016h).

Indeed, the Spectrum does have the potential to be a powerful tool for defining the question being put to the public and their window of influence on the decision. With the Spectrum presenting five types of engagement, each with an increasing impact on the decision being made, it explicitly explains the level of public influence in each type. For example, at the Inform level, which is considered the level with the least public impact on the decision, the goal of public participation is to “provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions” (IAP2, 2016, p. 31). At this level, the promise to the public is “we will keep you informed” (p. 30). According to the City, examples of engagement at this stage include social media channels, 3-1-1 (the City’s tip and information phone line), and Van Connect (the City’s app for submitting maintenance requests and public comments) (City of Vancouver, 2016e).

At the next level, the Consult stage, the public is allowed to provide some input. The goal at this stage is “to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions” (IAP2, 2016, p. 31). The promise to the public is to keep them informed and “listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision” (p. 30). The City listed open houses, surveys, focus groups, crowdsourcing, and public hearings as examples of engagement at the Consult level of the Spectrum (City of Vancouver, 2016e).

Skipping to the other end of the Spectrum, or the level with the most public impact on the decision is the Empower stage. The goal at this stage is “to place final decision-making in the hands of the public” (IAP2, p. 30), which includes the promise to implement what the public decides. According to the City, examples of the Empower level include citizen juries, ballots, boards, and task forces (City of Vancouver, 2016e).

4.3.5. The City of Vancouver's Present Day Engagement Messaging

How the City of Vancouver currently approaches and conceptualizes engagement is presented most publicly on its website, specifically in the "Citizen involvement" section and the "How we do community engagement" subpage. These pages summarize the City's perspectives on engagement, drawing primarily from the *Framework for Public Engagement*. The content suggests that engagement is a top priority for the City, referring to it as a "fundamental civic goal" as well as an area to be grown and carefully supported (City of Vancouver, n.d.). Additionally, the pages reference Vancouver's history of prioritizing engagement, calling public involvement "a vital part of the democratic process" and claiming that "Vancouver citizens have a long tradition of participating in city government and community affairs" (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

On its engagement webpages, the City defines community engagement, which they also refer to as public engagement, public participation, and public involvement, as an opportunity for the public to participate in making decisions that affect or interest them (City of Vancouver, n.d.). The webpages suggest that the City's goals for community engagement are "to create an engaged city that brings you and other people together to: address issues of common importance; solve shared problems; and create positive social change." According to these pages, involving the public helps them to "make better decisions," as well as to create plans or projects that: "maximize benefits, minimize negative impacts, satisfy a wide range of stakeholders, and are easier to carry out."

Upon reviewing the language used, it appears that the City of Vancouver prioritizes community engagement and considers it to be a foundational aspect of Vancouver's history and identity. According to the City, they believe that involving the public in decision-making processes helps in making better decisions, as well as making projects easier to carry out, and results in outcomes that are more beneficial to all residents. However, the decision-making and engagement processes for TMH seem to contradict these ideals by mostly excluding the public from the process.

4.3.6. Staff Input

One staff member with a significant amount of engagement experience with the City, including work on TMH, lamented the City of Vancouver's lack of an engagement policy. They suggested that providing "a backbone of a policy" could help address some of the unevenness in the City's engagement implementation. According to them, such a policy, which other cities have adopted, would lay out steps for "the way you should go through and design your engagement process." This could include a set of core requirements for providing engagement and a procedures manual to act as a step-by-step guide for conducting engagement. For the staff member, "a policy around planning and asking good questions is useful" and would contrast with the City's current ad hoc engagement planning process where "oftentimes, people are just making it up."

As per the staff member, other cities have policies for assessing whether engagement is necessary. Such policies help avoid conducting engagement when there is little opportunity for public influence, an exercise that can erode public trust in city processes, as it may lead the public to believe that they have more influence than they actually do. In the staff member's opinion, "we can do a lot of harm when we're not asking ourselves some questions and engaging when there is an opportunity to engage."

When comparing Vancouver's engagement practices to those of other cities, another staff member expressed some "despair" about the state of engagement in Vancouver. They felt that "other cities make more of a clear commitment to engagement" and demonstrate a desire for it to be "meaningful," which, in their view, includes having documented engagement standards and offering engagement training for staff.

The staff member stated that one of the roadblocks to conducting good engagement at the City is that the skills necessary to conduct it aren't appreciated. In their view, "part of the challenge is that [engagement] is seen as really a soft thing . . . [which] anyone could do." They suggested that engagement is sometimes seen as less important than other project objectives and highlighted the TMH process as an example of this. It was also their perspective that the City's various departments, such as Planning or Engineering, "come in with very different ideas of how to do [engagement]." The result, they said, "is a lack in a common engagement language or a common approach [to engagement]."

According to another staff member, the unevenness of the City's engagement implementation is related to a lack of policy, internal communication, and resources: "There doesn't seem to be a connection between everyone that's doing this work, and there are no rules as to how to do [engagement] and how to report back." According to them, certain teams have the resources and capacity to handle engagement independently, while others need support from the City's communications and engagement teams. For this staff member, there is a big desire among different departments to receive strategic engagement advice, but there isn't always the capacity for that. They said that "projects are prioritized based on where's the opportunity [for public influence]" as well as how controversial the topic is and how much media attention is expected. The "riskier and more high profile" projects get the most attention.

Multiple City staff also stated that engagement and public relations often get confused in the City of Vancouver. According to one staff member, engagement is sometimes used as a screen when, in their opinion, elected officials need to take responsibility for key decisions. They asked, "Where does leadership step in?" and suggested that officials need to make the hard decisions, even if they're unpopular. Instead, they felt that many officials use engagement as an excuse by saying, "We need to do engagement on this" but, in their view, "If we know we need to disincentivize people from doing one thing and incentivize them to do another, and regulation is the way to do that, leaders need to start making that hard decision." They suggested that in some cases, leadership should make the decision first and that a public process could follow it: "Then, how do we soften that in different ways? And by soften, I mean, how do you build understanding, awareness, and support for doing the thing? Which isn't necessarily engagement." According to the staff member, the directive for engagement at the City is often to "go build support for this project," but "that's not really what engagement is." To clarify, they added, "Sometimes you need to make a decision and have a PR campaign around it, but don't call it engagement." Furthermore, they felt that sometimes, engagement is seen as a tool to shield officials from public opposition or that its ability to bring all parties together is overblown, especially when crucial decisions have already been made before the engagement events occur. In the City staff member's words:

I also feel sometimes that leaders hide behind consultation in a way or say, 'We should do consultation.' And there's almost this expectation that

consultation will make everyone think it's good, or agree, and you know, kumbaya moment, kind of thing, and that's not necessarily what happens, especially if the opportunity for influence is a lot narrower than what people are expecting.

According to one staff member, "As a City, a lot of what we're doing is just trying to communicate, and we cast it as engagement, so people think they have a say, but actually they don't." They suggested that rather than calling this type of process "engagement," the City could be "really committed to doing very good transparency."

With TMH specifically, one staff member said, "It was kind of a desire to have engagement be this cotton wool around all your tough decisions. It's like, 'Oh well, we consulted, we were good, we did a consultation.'" However, this research participant felt it important to clarify that with this approach, "you're not actually consulting, you're informing."

Another staff member called the City's typical engagement approach a way of "providing cover versus actually bringing community voice into the picture." Furthermore, they suggested that it has been hard to follow the *Framework for Public Engagement*, given the current pace of development in the city. According to them, recent processes have involved a simultaneous push to get projects underway and completed at an "incredible pace," while also trying to engage with the public. They continued, "It's such a machine, and it's very difficult to really hold to some of these [engagement] principles or approaches or strategies when that kind of pace is happening."

4.3.7. Discussion

The City of Vancouver has stated that they prioritize engagement as a crucial aspect of their decision-making processes. They believe that engagement is worthy of attention and support. However, after reviewing their web-based engagement materials and their *Framework for Public Engagement*, which includes a series of Core Values, Guiding Principles, and a commitment to working with the IAP2 Spectrum, along with interviews with those involved in public engagement at the City, it appears that these ideals are not always put into practice. The City's engagement materials claim to be guided by ideals of community involvement. However, this was contradicted by their implementation of TMH, which is congruent with the paradox present in much modern post-political engagement, characterized by a rise in public process and a simultaneous decline in public influence.

As discussed, adherence to both the Core Values and Guiding Principles was minimal with TMH, and the City demonstrated little willingness to commit to a level of public influence on the IAP2 Spectrum. Furthermore, while outwardly, these ideals are intended to provide a road map for public engagement (City of Vancouver, n.d., 2015, 2016e), internally, staff suggested that the City lacks tools for consistently implementing these engagement objectives and in some cases, has intentionally avoided commitments contained within the policy.

In describing its approach to engagement, the City of Vancouver frequently uses vague, feel-good platitudes that make sense conceptually but lack metrics or a process for their implementation or evaluation. Included in the Core Values are expressions such as “people who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process” or the promise that “the public’s contribution will influence the decision.” While these statements are in line with public engagement best practices as per IAP2, without clear agreement on what is on the table to decide and the level of influence the public will have, these statements are mostly meaningless. The IAP2 Spectrum could act as a workable metric to alleviate some of this vagueness and is presented as a tool for better defining the public’s level of influence on the decision, as well as offering a “common language” around engagement. However, the Spectrum is rarely referenced by the City in their public engagement processes.

Chapter 5.

Data Analysis and Findings

5.1. Engagement Expectations

This chapter examines the divergent expectations for public influence that arose throughout the delivery of TMH and the political and policy contexts that shaped these expectations. It begins by exploring the public reaction to TMH throughout the three most public moments in the TMH timeline and demonstrates the communicative-rational desires for engagement and decision-making influence that were held by the public.

The second part of the chapter discusses the City of Vancouver's perspective towards engagement based on data gathered from interviews with City staff, a former City Councillor, and a TMH engagement consultant. This section highlights the turn towards equity-centred decision-making that scholars like Fainstein have described in recent years. It also highlights the complex crisis-driven policy entrepreneurship and post-political environment in which TMH was implemented.

5.1.1. Public Expectations for Engagement on TMH

The spectrum of public desire for being engaged on TMH can best be understood by exploring the discourse that surrounds three key moments in the TMH decision-making and engagement timeline. The first of these was a December 13, 2016, public hearing, at which City of Vancouver Council approved the adding of a definition of TMH to the Zoning and Development By-law. It was also at this meeting that the concept of TMH was introduced on a neighbourhood level, with the proposed but rescinded motion to rezone specific properties to allow for TMH. The second period on the TMH delivery timeline centred around a public hearing on September 17, 2017. During this hearing, Council relaxed zoning provisions to allow the Director of Planning and the Development Permit Board approving authority for TMH (City of Vancouver, 2017c). This streamlined the TMH process by eliminating the need for a public hearing and allowing projects to be approved without a rezoning application. The final period began shortly

after the 2017 public hearing, with the public announcement and subsequent engagement on a development permit application for two TMH buildings in the Marpole neighbourhood. This final period of study ends with the opening of TMH in Marpole in March of 2018.

December 13, 2016, TMH Public Hearing: Hopes of Meaningful Engagement

During the public hearing on December 13, 2016, 22 Vancouver residents registered to speak about TMH. However, only 15 of them actually addressed Council. This reduced participation may be due to the removal of the specific TMH site rezonings from the agenda. Additionally, 49 pieces of written correspondence were submitted to the Council.

The majority of those who spoke at the public hearing were thankful for the deletion of the proposed rezonings from the Council agenda. Many speakers also equated the removal of the rezonings to a “slowing down of the process” and a move intended to create space for public engagement or, in one speaker’s words, a “good faith promise to pursue meaningful discussion and consultation with the community” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). Nine of the 15 speakers and six of those who submitted written comments also referenced an expectation of future engagement (City of Vancouver, 2016c, 2016d).

Four speakers asked for future engagement on TMH to be “meaningful,” and one asked for the process to include “real conversation” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). While many speakers hoped for genuine and impactful consultation, there was also a sense of cynicism that such an outcome could be achieved. Some of this cynicism stemmed from the timing and method of notification for the public hearing. Referring to the City’s notification process and the meeting’s proximity to the December holidays, speaker Tanya Campbell said, “I hope that this community conversation is a real conversation and not just another letter that makes it into our mailbox at this time of year [the December holiday season]” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). According to Campbell, City staff were disingenuous in their presentation to Council when they suggested that the community consultation process had already started before the public hearing, “I have concerns,” they said, “[with the] presentation from staff. They said words like, ‘We’re going to continue consultation.’ There was no community consultation.” In Campbell’s

view, “if anybody thinks we’re going to continue community consultation, it needs to start” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

“What does meaningful consultation mean?” asked speaker Alicia Barsallo, “does it mean holding another open house and people go and look at writings that they don’t have the technical knowledge to fully understand?” According to Barsallo, meaningful consultation would involve a more extensive dialogue: “Why can’t meaningful consultation mean a forum where you have a speaker in favour and a speaker against, and you invite the community to have an open debate?” Furthermore, Barsallo felt that the community should have ultimate influence on the approval of projects, asking Council, “Why can’t the community be allowed to say no?” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

When asked by Councillor Melissa De Genova about their definition of meaningful consultation, speaker Tanya Campbell also championed a dialogue-focused approach. According to Campbell, meaningful engagement would involve a “back and forth” process of “sitting down and actually talking,” where participants are “not being talked to but actually having a dialogue.” Referring to the City’s communication process prior to the public hearing, they said, “Right now, it’s just been through text. It would be good to actually sit down and make a plan.” Campbell was less definitive than Barsallo, who asked for the public to have the ability to overrule a project: “It’s not a saying no, we know there’s a housing crisis, but we need to have a conversation [about] how this fits in our community.” Campbell was critical of the City’s top-down approach to implementing TMH, which they suggested resulted in missed opportunities for understanding the nuances of their specific community. Campbell said that the planners behind TMH don’t “live with us” as opposed to “these new neighbours” who “will be living with us, and we need to make sure they belong... [Campbell stops herself, presumably before saying ‘belong’], that we all work together in our homes” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

Many of those who commented also had concerns about the City’s notification process. Some residents felt they were notified of the public hearing at the last minute. Furthermore, many were disappointed with the distribution radius of the notifications and that the public hearing occurred so close to the December holidays. Patricia Mayrs, who submitted written comments in advance of the public hearing, described some of these concerns: “The City did not send the information out to all residents; it also is trying to get this through in a very short time, just before Christmas. It seems that the City is

trying to railroad an unfortunate plan through our neighbourhood in a manner that precludes discussion” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). Others described “the very short notification period” as “discouraging” and asked for “additional community consultation events before making any decisions.” One resident said they were “surprised that this proposal has come to our attention at such short notice.” In one letter, a community member wrote: “The City gave us very short notice to prevent us from organizing as neighbours,” and added, “The timing of this proposal is wrong; December is a hectic month for many families and getting to this meeting with short notice is simply wrong.” In their written correspondence, resident William Lane offered, “We were not given any time to respond fully to the proposal. That in itself is troubling as it seems Council has an agenda to push this through. We received the letter by mail on December 2nd. Bad road conditions and commuting in the city is on everyone’s mind.” Many individuals suggested that the timeline for notification and input was too short. According to written correspondence by Tim Lehman, “10 days’ notice is unacceptable.” Lehman continued, “We do not appreciate the pre-holidays compressed time frame attempt to push this through.” Resident Bree Cropper wrote:

I am very disappointed with the timing of this Public Hearing. I received my letter on December 2 and the Public Hearing on this issue is December 13. I have had only 11 days to consider the impacts that these Housing Developments will have on my family and community. This is unacceptable. I believe that it would be much more appropriate to begin Public Consultation post-holiday season in January/February—I assume this will be a long consultation process in order to consider all the needs of the community? (City of Vancouver, 2016d)

The previous comments imply a cynicism and lack of trust among community members that arose from how the City notified residents of the public hearing, as further explained in written correspondence from Andy Nguyen Ho:

We feel disrespected in regard to the mail itself, the lack of information, and the lack of warning for the amount of time we have to work. The fact that there was no indication of how important this amendment is, and the lack of translation in the letter, makes us feel that this was meant to happen behind our backs. We wish to have more time to not only attain more information from the developer, but to also communicate to whomever it was in charge of the letter to make sure this doesn’t become a problem again. (City of Vancouver, 2016d)

Other commenters expressed the feeling that the notification letters contained limited and potentially confusing information. This was alluded to by Susete Helena, who

spoke at the public hearing, saying that the community was “freaked out because we didn’t know what’s going on” and “we look forward to a meaningful conversation in the future about what’s really going down” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). Tanya Campbell expressed similar sentiments: “Let’s be clear, a letter came to our home. It was not easy to read. 10 days later, we’re here.” In written comments submitted by Duncan Isberg, they said, “While we hope this proposal will make no material difference to the owners at (address redacted), we have no way of knowing what the implications might be” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). In Melissa Walter’s letter, they stated, “The community has questions about the proposed by-law change that need to be addressed.” Brenda Rudko offered in their written comments that “this proposal arrived very suddenly and with limited information with which to make an informed choice”. Tim Lehman commented that “The plan is scant on detail” in written remarks, while Rudi Leibik requested that “these proposals be presented to area residents for discussion and clarification before any re-zoning is approved.” Furthermore, they suggested that:

Ultimately, any sites that are chosen for development, in this neighbourhood and elsewhere, deserve the careful consideration and consultation of area residents, and homeowners. Rushing changes through, with little information or communication, is never the way to build consensus and community support. Let’s do this right—please slow the process down and postpone any rezoning until the community has had the chance to participate fully in the process. (City of Vancouver, 2016d)

The fact that the notification postcards were only written in English was also a concern for many of those who commented.¹ In addressing Council, Stephan Kesting requested that future notifications “go out in multiple languages,” noting that their neighbourhood contained a number of Tagalog, Mandarin and Cantonese speakers (City of Vancouver, 2016c). In Wallace Choy’s written correspondence, they noted: “They have not communicated with us as neighbours, the letter is only written in English, the majority of the area residents speak/read/write very little English and only as a second language, so they don’t know what’s going on” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). According to Tim Lehman, “the draft as written, wasn’t sent with any header to explain its importance to have it translated into Cantonese, Mandarin, Viet, Tagalog, and Punjabi for homeowners.” Andy Nguyen Ho stated, “The mail sent to us was inadequate in the

¹ The practice of including a header on public notifications, stating the importance of the content and asking for translation is now common practice for the City of Vancouver.

amount of information given and was also not labelled or translated for my parents, who do not speak or read English.” In Bree Cropper’s letter, they noted:

This public notification was sent out only in English and without any other language, identifying the contents of the letter as being important and in need of translation at the very least. This community is extremely diverse in background, and many people do not speak English as their first language, let alone have the ability to read it. Since the proposal will affect the entire local community drastically, why is this multicultural community not being engaged by our language and culture?” (City of Vancouver, 2016d)

Additionally, there were concerns that the notification postcards were limited to a two-block radius around the potential TMH sites² and were only sent to homeowners³. In April Davies’ letter, they state: “I found out about the plan for the new housing in this area from a friend. That is so wrong on many levels. We live in this community and this will affect everyone in the Trout Lake area. Not just the two blocks that you have decided to send the notices to.” They continued, “Please take the plan back and look at the community as a whole and how this will affect the community and the people living here LONG term” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). In Bree Cropper’s letter, they stated: “This public notification was only sent to a very limited number of households with relation to each site.” Furthermore, in their view, “These proposed sites if approved, will fully and seriously change the nature of this entire neighbourhood . . . Why was your public notification not sent to a broader radius of East Vancouver residents . . . that will be drastically altered by these proposed developments? Is further public consultation planned to engage our entire neighbourhood surrounding the three proposed sites here?” (City of Vancouver, 2016d)

In Stephan Kesting’s comments to Council, they noted that the notification letters “only went out to homeowners, as far as I can tell” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). According to Kesting, “many long-term residents, including people who’ve rented there forever, didn’t know about it. It was only through people talking and going door to door that they were notified of this.” Moving forward with future consultation, they urged the City to send notifications to “renters as well as homeowners”. According to Wallace Choy’s

² A two-block radius is the City of Vancouver’s standard notification parameter for rezoning applications.

³ City of Vancouver protocol for rezoning applications now includes the notification of tenants and homeowners.

letter to Council, “only the property owners received the letters, not the renters/tenants whom [sic] are equally important in the matter. I understand some of the property owners have not made their renters/tenants aware of this proposal which will affect their quality of life if this proceeds” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). According to Tim Lehman’s letter, “Long term tenants/lease residents were not forwarded any information.”

September 17, 2017, TMH Public Hearing: Where was the Engagement?

Although the September 17, 2017, public hearing was a crucial decision-making point for the approval of TMH throughout the city, it didn't receive as much public attention as the hearing held nine months prior. Only three members of the community spoke at the public hearing, compared to 15 at the 2016 meeting. Additionally, 11 pieces of written correspondence were submitted, compared to 49 at the previous public hearing.

The quieter public response likely can be attributed to the broad regulatory nature of the recommendations before Council. The 2016 public hearing included specific sites being considered for rezoning. While consideration of these sites was pulled from the agenda on the day of the hearing, notification letters still went out to neighbours surrounding the sites. As the recommendations before Council in 2017 impacted city-wide regulations but included no immediate site-specific rezonings, there were no neighbours to notify. The City’s notification process for city-wide policy would form the basis of much debate during the Marpole development permit process and is analyzed further in subsequent sections. Presumably, the City of Vancouver did notify those who were part of the previous public hearing and signed up for project updates, as is standard City of Vancouver practice.

The lack of community representation at the 2017 public hearing was identified by one of the speakers who said, “I’d like to point out that there weren’t more people who submitted emails or who came out because they did not know about this public hearing, and they did not understand the impact of what this amendment could mean to their neighbourhood” (City of Vancouver, 2017b).

Two of the three speakers present at the public hearing expressed their opposition to the amendment. Mark Freeman, who also spoke during the 2016 public hearing, was the first speaker. Freeman shared two reasons for their opposition. Firstly,

they were disappointed because the consultation that they felt was promised during the previous public hearing was never carried out. According to Freeman, “Now nine months since the temporary modular housing thing happened last December, there’s been no consultation, nothing’s happened. No one from the City has come to talk to us” or “given us information on temporary housing” (City of Vancouver, 2017b).

Freeman’s second concern was specific to the amendment being proposed, which would delegate authority to the Director of Planning or the Development Permit Board to relax zoning provisions to facilitate the approval of TMH projects in certain zones. Freeman’s worries stemmed from the fact that the decision “puts all the power within an unelected body” and that “there’ll be no public hearings anymore.” According to Freeman, the result would be an accelerated approval process without public hearings, and therefore “no opportunity for the public to come out and express concerns in a realm where change could happen” (City of Vancouver, 2017b).

The second speaker, Sandra Medeiros, was unclear on whether they were supportive or opposed to the amendment but stated that their priority was understanding the process for choosing sites and alluded to the fact that they had not been given all the information they required. They asked for “more transparency” in delivering TMH, “particularly if they were in residential areas” (City of Vancouver, 2017b).

The final speaker, Ellen Yeung, was strongly opposed to the amendment. Similarly to what was expressed by Mark Freeman, they felt that “rezoning the land should continue to require public hearings” and that “relaxing such a rule sets a dangerous precedent.” Like the second speaker, they requested greater transparency from the City: “I ask that Council continue to be transparent and democratic and consult and listen to those affected nearby, instead of sidestepping political accountability by delegating controversial decisions to unelected City staff.” Furthermore, they requested that “the City be more transparent in informing the public about where exactly they’re planning to have the sites in the City” (City of Vancouver, 2017b).

Yeung, like Mark Freeman, expressed concerns that the future engagement discussed during the 2016 public hearing never occurred:

My uncle’s neighbours by Copley and Vanness Streets had strongly denounced the City’s lack of consultation regarding TMH in their

neighbourhood last December during the public hearing. The City in turn promised consultation. Where is it? Now, quietly trying to pass this amendment without directly informing the residents near Nanaimo Skytrain Station or anywhere else throughout the City that this is happening, or where TMH could be placed, is so deceitful. We need an open and fair process for selecting sites for TMHs across the City that involves listening to affected residents. I fear that giving discretionary power to City staff to impose TMHs goes against this philosophy. (City of Vancouver, 2017b)

Community members who submitted written correspondence, also expressed concerns about delegating responsibilities to City staff and were cynical of the intentions behind it. According to correspondence from Stephan Kesting, who also spoke at the 2016 public hearing, “This has all the appearance of an attempt to pull a fast one and slip an amendment that effectively insulates the mayor and City Council members from having to face the music on what could be very unpopular amendments, given the potentially catastrophic effects that dropping this many units into residential areas could cause” (City of Vancouver, 2017c). In referencing the volume of community pushback at the 2016 public hearing, and the future engagement that would occur through the development permit process, Kesting stated, “By slipping this amendment into place, mayor and Council wouldn’t have to go through it again, would they? Yes, there might be ‘consultation’ down the road, but it wouldn’t be binding, and it wouldn’t allow the residents of affected areas to express their displeasure directedly to the faces of their elected representatives.”

This pessimism was echoed by the written comments of Joel Massey, who stated, “Modular housing needs to meet current zoning and building by-laws and not skirt around them by putting judgements at the discretion of un-elected individuals” (City of Vancouver, 2017c). Bilyana Ward, who also spoke at the 2016 public hearing, stated in an email to Council, “Changing a by-law that requires the City to hear from us can mean there is no recourse for discussion going forward. It can be very damaging.” In written correspondence from Bree Cropper, they questioned the potency of future engagement and lamented that the engagement promised in 2016 would never materialize:

The amendment proposed does not assure us that our specific concerns regarding broad public consultation will be met going forward. In the Policy Report regarding the amendment, the Director of Planning will be asked to merely ‘consider the impact of livability of neighbourhood residents’ and ‘notify property owners . . . deem(ed) necessary’. This mere notification is

not the robust consultation process that we were assured of. We are very concerned that the consultation will be reduced to notification, and only English speaking homeowners at that. (City of Vancouver, 2017c)

It's worth noting that there was a small amount of written correspondence in support of the 2016 and 2017 Council recommendations. Most of these commenters were happy to see the City taking steps to simplify and speed up the process for approving TMH or, as one resident put it, remove “bureaucratic hurdles that customarily prevent anything being done with any speed” (City of Vancouver, 2016d). Two commenters also referenced the housing crisis and urged the City and its residents to take more proactive measures to address it (City of Vancouver, 2016d, 2017c).

Marpole Stage: Right Idea, Wrong Location

Aside from the TMH pilot project, and the brief foray into exploring specific sites that ended at the December 2016 public hearing, the introduction of the Marpole development permit application was the first time a TMH proposal landed on the ground at the neighbourhood level. While it's possible that Marpole residents caught wind of the previous public hearings on TMH, they would not have been notified directly and would most likely, as is often the case, have shown little interest prior to there being an application for a building in their neighbourhood. According to one City of Vancouver staff member, “I don't think people were actually paying attention much until we started to select sites.”

To further understand the tenor of public perspectives on the Marpole TMH project, I conducted a review of newspaper articles that reference TMH and Vancouver up until March 31, 2018. This was done with the understanding that the Marpole project opened in March of the same year. The articles include quotes and summaries of public opinion gathered from protests, interviews, and media releases.

The articles revealed several things about the public's expectations for engagement on TMH in Marpole. Many residents believe that there should have been more consultation before the announcement of the Marpole development permit application. They felt that a site-specific rezoning application, including a public hearing, should have been conducted to approve the Marpole TMH instead of the buildings being approved by the Director of Planning or Development Permit Board through a development permit process. Some people expressed concerns about the lack of direct

notification to Marpole residents, via postcards, regarding the public hearing held in September 2017. Multiple residents were worried about the nature of engagement and the level of influence they would ultimately have as part of the development permit consultation for the Marpole site. They suggested that a more dialogue-based approach to engagement could involve residents in selecting specific TMH sites. Finally, many residents expressed fear that the Marpole TMH project would house tenants who they thought would put their children at risk and suggested the City should have been more transparent about sharing information on future tenants. Moreover, it was frequently suggested that the City's method of delivering TMH had eroded their trust in City processes and their elected representatives.

In the remainder of this section, I delve deeper into the themes of resident opposition towards TMH in Marpole and claims that the City of Vancouver's process for TMH was an act of bullying. Additionally, I will analyze data obtained from a freedom of information request (FOI) submitted by a member of the Vancouver media. The FOI request provides more quantifiable evidence of the resistance to TMH in Marpole and the expectations of residents regarding engagement.

Public hearing rights, consultation, and resident notification

Many Marpole residents objected to the outcome of the September 2017 public hearing, which removed the need for site-specific rezonings for TMH buildings (Stueck, 2018). Furthermore, a resident group calling themselves the Caring Citizens of Vancouver Society, which professed to represent 6,000 local residents (England, 2018), filed a petition with the Supreme Court of British Columbia in December of 2017. The petition claimed that the City failed to provide proper notice of the September 2017 public hearing (Howell, 2017; Ip, 2018; Tanner, 2018). This assertion implies a belief that Marpole residents should have been individually notified of the public hearing, as was done for the development permit and is standard practice for most rezoning applications.

Xu (2017) traced the history of the community group's legal action against the Marpole TMH project. According to their article, by December of 2017, residents had raised more than \$60,000 to support their legal costs, with a goal of \$90,000. Xu states that the group's indignation was rooted in "their belief that the City did not properly consult with residents about the housing development" (Xu, 2017, para. 1). Quoted in the article is resident Chis Qiu, spokesperson for the Marpole Residents Coalition.

According to Qiu “[the City] broke the law. They don’t have authorization to ignore the public hearing section . . . and Gil Kelley [the City’s General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability], doesn’t have the authorization to approve [the Marpole TMH development]. There should be an injunction and they need to stop the project” (para. 1). In the same article, Gloria Liu, a Marpole resident, claimed that “The City needs to take every group’s voice into consideration” (para. 3), suggesting a belief that more thorough public engagement should have occurred prior to the development permit application.

Hager (2017) referenced the viewpoint of Ann Mukai, one of the Marpole residents protesting the project, who said that the Mayor and Council did not consult with the neighbourhood before choosing the site. In another article by Robinson (2017), a resident called the City’s lack of consultation “really disturbing” (para. 6).

Long Tran, who lived three blocks from the proposed Marpole TMH site, claimed in one article that they received a postcard from the City on October 27 informing them about the TMH project (Howell, 2017). According to Tran, residents should have known about the project well before Mayor Gregor Robertson announced it on October 26. “Is that what democracy is?” asked Tran, who also said “we are not against homeless people and, personally, I was one of them; I was a stateless and homeless refugee. I’ve tasted that” (para. 9). On a similar theme, in an article by Robinson (2017), resident Mike Burdick’s comments are summarized to express that “it’s not that the residents don’t support housing homeless people. They don’t support it on that block” (para. 3).

The opposition to supportive housing projects such as TMH often suggests that residents would support this housing type if it were located elsewhere. This was made explicit in Marpole by Derek Palaschuk, a spokesperson for the Caring Citizens of Vancouver Society, who felt that there was community support for the construction of modular housing and the need to solve homelessness in Vancouver. However, they believed the Marpole TMH project to be “the right idea but wrong location” (Omand, 2017, para. 4). This sentiment was echoed by a group known as “Right Idea, Wrong Location,” who organized protests against the Marpole TMH project and presented a petition to the City with over 5,000 signatures in opposition to the project (Howell, 2017).

The legal assertion that Marpole residents should have been notified directly of the September 2017 public hearing was ultimately dismissed by Court of Appeal Justice

David Franklin Tysoe, who stated that the City had adequately provided notice. “I do not think that this that the small amount of opposition at the hearing indicates, as the appellant contends, that the notice was inadequate,” said Tysoe in their reasons for judgment (Ip, 2018, para. 4).

On the day following the ruling by the Court of Appeal, the opposition to the Marpole development permit once again escalated into protest, at which “a handful of protesters blocked driveway entrances to the proposed TMH site, forcing the delay of planned site preparations” (Woo, 2017, para. 1). Some of the protesters carried signs with slogans such as “Return my public hearing right” and “We want a say” (Woo, 2017). Others expressed feeling “blindsided” by the announcement and by the speed at which the project was moving (Omand, 2017; Woo, 2017).

In response to the construction blockades, the City of Vancouver was successful in an injunction, which, according to them, was filed “to prevent protesters from blocking access to the site and stopping construction from beginning on this urgently needed housing project” (Lakić, 2017, para. 8). In response, Luo Binshun, spokesperson for the Caring Citizens of Vancouver Society said that they were “disappointed with the City’s legal steps” and suggested that by creating a dialogue with the City through “a sit-down with the mayor” that the two groups would be able to find “a quick and reasonable solution” (Lakić, 2017, para. 10).

It is challenging to speculate on what a “quick and reasonable solution” would entail. However, based on the concerns expressed by the public to the media, it can be assumed that the ideal solution may have involved allowing the public to have a say in the type of tenants that would be housed in the buildings, which will be discussed later in this section. Alternatively, it could have involved relocating the proposed site.

Bullying

Several news articles have reported that residents accused the City of Vancouver of using “bullying tactics” to push through the Marpole TMH project without public consideration, as well as their use of a legal injunction to remove protesters and allow construction crews access to the site (Chan, 2017; Ip, 2018; Lakić, 2017). One resident, Luo Binshun, expressed disappointment with Mayor Gregor Robertson and Vision Vancouver’s “reckless and hasty decision making . . . to bypass the democratic

rights of Vancouverites” (Chan, 2017, para. 4). Binshun also criticized the use of the injunction on what he described as “a peaceful protest . . . requesting a public hearing and consultation” (para. 4).

In a letter to a Vancouver newspaper, Carol Hemrich (2017) accused the Mayor of blocking them from any consultation and suggested that they misjudged the community by assuming that they “would not take action when he treated them with disrespect and arrogant disregard” (para. 4). They continued, “Robertson has either forgotten the language of the oath of office he swore in 2014 or felt it wasn’t meant to be taken literally: to govern with fairness, transparency and respect for all residents . . . to uphold the core values of equity and inclusion” (para. 5).

Tenants and transparency

The proposed Marpole project faced opposition from many residents due to a lack of information provided about the future tenants of the building. The City of Vancouver released a report in September of 2017 which stated that their preferred tenancing plan for TMH would require at least 20% of the tenants to fall under the "Service Level 3" classification. This category includes individuals with a criminal history (Chan, 2017; England, 2018; Howell, 2018b; Woo, 2017; Xu, 2018). According to an article by England (2018), the Caring Citizens group believed it to be “unacceptable for the City to refuse to say how many people designated Service Level 3 . . . [would be] living steps away from schools” (para. 8). “I don’t want to bring that anywhere near my child” (para. 17), said one resident (Bula and Xu, 2017). The Caring Citizens of Vancouver Society accused the City of “ramming through the development with no meaningful public consultation, particularly on the proposed tenant mix” (Chan, 2017, para. 6).

With the TMH buildings to be located near two neighbourhood schools, many residents suggested that transparency regarding the future tenant mix was an important safety issue. However, they claimed that the City had withheld this information. According to spokesperson Derek Palaschuk, the Caring Citizens had lobbied the City for information about the tenant mix but only found it through their own research into City reports (England, 2018). Palaschuk believed that the City's lack of transparency began with a "flawed public hearing process" (England, 2018, para. 10) during the September 2017 public hearing. He stated that "we've seen this from the very beginning, the lack of

transparency and the lack of openness . . . created concern for us. Because there are children involved, and education, the transparency is very, very important" (para. 11). Palaschuk suggested that the City's notification process should have included information about the perceived impacts of the project and recommended that they post information online regarding any potential risks to the community and resources for addressing specific issues. Palaschuk further stated that "the community's trust in the City remains low because of its refusal . . . reveal the tenant mix" (para. 12). In their view, more transparency would have created an opportunity for dialogue between residents and the City. "Once you admit it, then you can start dealing with it, and the community can start doing what they think is necessary" (para. 13), they said. Palaschuk was further quoted by Chan (2017) stating:

It is because these temporary modular housing units will include housing for individuals with a criminal history, who have a high likelihood to re-offend, that we are asking City hall to stop the development and to engage us in an open, honest, transparent consultation process, so we can welcome a project like this into our community without having to worry about the well-being of our children, seniors, and homes. (para. 7)

According to a statement by the Caring Citizens of Vancouver Society, the group was asking for a "proper consultation process" that would include "negotiation of the tenant mix and the accountability structure" (Chan, 2017, para. 8).

Many residents spoke of being willing to welcome the new TMH residents into the Marpole neighbourhood, if the engagement had occurred differently (Chan, 2017; Hemrich, 2017). In Carol Hemrich's letter, they asked readers to "think of a different scenario," one in which neighbourhoods are treated by the City of Vancouver as "kind and non-judging individuals and families, who would be very accepting to welcome vulnerable people who need a safe and caring community to live in." They further ponder if a "respectful and transparent approach," where the neighbourhood was "approached openly by the people who would be selecting prospective tenants and onsite managing the operation of these housing units." They suggest that if such an approach were taken, Marpole residents would have responded with, "What can I do to help?" By not taking this approach, they felt that "all sense of trust and respect for the office of the mayor has been shattered." They describe this moment as a "lost opportunity" (Hemrich, 2017, para. 6).

Freedom of information request

In 2018, journalist Saša Lakić carried out a freedom of information (FOI) request to determine the general sentiment of Vancouver residents towards the City's proposal to accommodate homeless people in TMH. Lakić's findings are consistent with the data I collected from newspaper articles, indicating that expressed public opinion regarding TMH was mostly negative. Lakić collected data from November 2017 to January 2018, which included feedback from Community Information Sessions for five out of the first six TMH projects. Of the 565 responses received, 415 were against the City's plan to house Vancouver's homeless in these complexes, representing an opposition rate of almost 75% (Lakić, 2018).

The FOI request also revealed data specific to the Community Information Sessions for the Marpole TMH project. The data indicated that out of a total of 288 public responses, only nine showed support for the project, while two were neutral. The majority in opposition cited two primary concerns: the perceived lack of consultation and transparency from the City of Vancouver, and the proximity of the housing project to neighbourhood schools (Lakić, 2018).

Like with the 2016 and 2017 public hearings on TMH, both the media coverage and FOI data demonstrate overwhelming opposition from Marpole residents who chose to contribute feedback. However, like with the public hearings, some showed their support at the Marpole development permit stage. Documented in the media articles were several counter-protesters who supported the projects. Like those who commented at the public hearing, supporters addressed Vancouver's housing crisis and were thankful that the City was moving quickly with what they considered to be a response. According to one supporter, "We have a serious homeless problem, and things need to happen quickly, and I appreciate the fact the City is making things happen quickly" (Howell, 2017, para. 7).

Discussion

At a public hearing in December of 2016, the new housing concept of TMH was introduced to many Vancouver residents. However, a number of community members in the affected area expressed surprise and disappointment at the lack of public engagement prior to the public hearing. In turn, they asked for greater engagement

before a decision was made on TMH sites and requested that future engagement be “meaningful” and “real” (City of Vancouver, 2016c). From the feedback received at this stage, it was clear that meaningful engagement should involve clear communication along with dialogue and debate where residents have an equal position of power as those within the City of Vancouver. This would allow opportunities for the public to shape, locate, and approve TMH projects. Additionally, it was requested that future public notifications regarding TMH projects should be distributed well in advance of key decisions, over an area larger than two blocks, not close to holidays, be written in clear and easy-to-understand language, translated into a variety of languages, and distributed to homeowners and renters.

In the early stages of the TMH timeline, many residents were skeptical about the City's ability to provide meaningful engagement. This was due to a few reasons. Firstly, there had been no engagement on TMH before the public hearing. Secondly, they felt that at the public hearing City staff used insincere language that suggested engagement had already occurred. Thirdly, the public hearing notifications did not meet the residents' expectations. All of these missteps eroded residents' trust in the City's process, which continued to grow with each step in the TMH timeline. At the public hearing, the City of Vancouver agreed to the public's demands for improving the clarity of notification materials and promised that further and more robust engagement on TMH would follow.

Public trust in the City's process for delivering TMH decreased further when the issue was brought before Council at the September 2017 public hearing, with public engagement again being the primary concern. Residents expressed displeasure that the engagement promised during the 2016 public hearing never occurred. They felt that all households potentially impacted by the decision should have been notified of the public hearing, even though the decision did not involve any site-specific applications. Furthermore, the Council decision would eliminate the need for public hearings on TMH projects and further limit opportunities for future public input. This process change unsettled many residents who believed that decisions as significant as the location and approval of TMH buildings should not be made by unelected bodies such as the Director of Planning or Development Permit Board, who, in their view, were less accountable to the public.

During the 2017 public hearing, residents also requested increased transparency, including the City's rationale for advancing TMH and details on the selection process for specific project sites. They also restated their request from the 2016 public hearing to have influence on the locating and approval of TMH projects.

When a development permit application was submitted for a TMH project in the Marpole neighbourhood, many of the concerns raised during the public hearings were reiterated. Residents believed there should have been more public engagement prior to considering the Marpole TMH site. They also voiced their preference for TMH project approvals to be made at public hearings rather than by unelected bodies, such as the Director of Planning or Development Permit Board. Marpole residents again lamented the City's decision to remove the need for specific TMH projects to be approved at public hearings and felt that they should have been directly notified of the 2017 public hearing, which allowed for this change. Transparency was again a common concern, with many residents expressing disappointment about the lack of information from the City and TMH operators regarding the type of tenants who would occupy the Marpole TMH buildings and their potential impacts on the neighbourhood.

Ultimately, with each step along the TMH decision-making and implementation timeline was a subsequent increase in the erosion of public trust. Many of the same concerns about needing more engagement, public influence, and greater transparency were raised during the three key stages of the TMH timeline: the 2016 and 2017 public hearings, and the Marpole Community Information Sessions. Despite promises by the City to address these concerns through a more thorough engagement process at each of the public hearings, little effort was made to define the nature of this engagement or the level of influence on the engagement spectrum.

5.1.2. The City of Vancouver's Expectations for Engagement on TMH

Based on my interviews with City of Vancouver staff members, a Councillor, and an engagement consultant, as well as a review of City reports and public hearing materials, it is evident that the TMH decision-making process was complex and messy, reflecting a challenging policy entrepreneurship environment. While public engagement was part of this process—although with much less decision-making power than the public was asking for—from a City of Vancouver perspective, it was just one element in

an ecosystem of political will, provincial government funding, housing policy, and the perspectives of City planners and decision-makers on the value of public engagement in contributing to the provision of rapid housing for Vancouver's most vulnerable residents. The following section discusses each element of this ecosystem and evaluates its impact on the City of Vancouver's consideration of public engagement in delivering TMH.

Council and City Manager Pressure to Address Homelessness

While the public seemed to want to be involved in debating whether TMH was a reasonable solution to the housing crisis, internally, City of Vancouver staff were under significant pressure to deliver TMH. Many City staff members spoke to this pressure and noted that Council “wanted to be seen as doing something on homelessness.” At the time when TMH was formally introduced to the public, in late 2016, the Vision Vancouver party dominated Council was reaching the end of their 10-year run. Adding to this pressure was Mayor Gregor Robertson's far-from-realized 2008 campaign promise of ending street homelessness.

A quote from Mayor Robertson in early 2018 shows a strong interest in delivering affordable housing in his final term, “I think we've made huge progress. We still have lots more work to do. The housing affordability crisis is at the front of that with the inequities we have now as a city related to housing, and that is something we hopefully make big gains on this year, in my final year as mayor” (Fumano & Colbert, 2018, para. 16). According to my interview with a City Councillor, “We were trying to line up ducks because we also knew we only [had] so much time in our term left so you're trying to make sure you can get stuff done.”

Provincial Government Funding for TMH

The pressure to deliver TMH quickly was influenced by the potential identified in 2016 and the subsequent delivery in 2017 of funding through the BC New Democratic Party (NDP) government's Rapid Response to Homelessness program. This program provided \$66 million in time-limited funding specifically for the delivery of 600 units of TMH in Vancouver. During the first TMH public hearing in 2016, staff and Council were uncertain about the funding, but there was a sense that it could be delivered. According to the Councillor I interviewed, “We knew there was an election coming up in 2017 and we didn't anticipate the [provincial] Liberals funding modular, but we thought it was

possible if there was a change of government [to the NDP]”. Furthermore, another City staff member noted, “We knew it was coming; we were having conversations with BC Housing and the Province, and the idea was like, find sites, so you can go, go, go.”

Describing the process for obtaining the funding, one City staff member said:

We wanted to demonstrate proof of a model that could be delivered quickly on-site, on budget, and as scheduled. And so, once we demonstrated that by opening [the TMH pilot project] in February of 2017, through what was then known as the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency or VAHA, we took that model and then went to the Province, as we do typically every year and say, ‘can you please fund hundreds of units of housing? We really need this.’ But we went that year and said, ‘Can you please fund this kind of housing [TMH]? We really need it.’ And I think it was just a perfect storm of an NDP government entering later that year and the conditions to support this model . . . which became the funding bucket from BC Housing that would deliver modular housing.

Multiple City staff members described the delivery of TMH as a "directive" from Council, amidst political and funding pressures. One senior City staff member who was heavily involved in the delivery of TMH alluded to the fact that the Mayor and Council saw the planning process, and presumably, the engagement that is often associated with it, as an obstacle to providing housing. According to this staff member, "This was about, in my view, the politics of action planning. Vision as a council didn't like the word planning so much as they liked the word action. And so, planning meant long, slow, tedious process stuff. Action meant delivering on what the people elected us to do."

This was a period at the City of Vancouver where, from the point of view of the staff member, planning was not seen as a priority. From their perspective, the City Manager at the time felt that “planning is not the value here [when it comes to the provision of core-need housing], delivery and action is the value here, and planning is getting in the way.” To further make their point about the tension between planning processes and Council’s desire for action on housing, they stated that the City Manager very much followed a “command and control” approach to development that emphasized that “bureaucracy is not in charge, Mayor and Council are in charge.” Under this directive from Council to prioritize the delivery of supportive housing, City staff looked to produce TMH with urgency. According to one staff member, “We were under so much pressure from Council, from Vision, to say you got to make this happen, I can't believe it's taking this long.”

These time pressures minimized the City’s ability to provide public engagement on TMH sites. According to one City staff member, they were “kind of reactive. We didn’t have the time to have those broader conversations in the community.” Multiple staff members expressed regret about their process for engaging the public during the early stages of TMH. In the words of one staff member, “I think it was all done so fast, like boom, boom, boom; bring us the policy, bring us the sites; that we probably didn’t do a good enough job of, one: exploring the sites, and two: doing some work with the community.” Another senior staff member stated that they weren’t surprised by the community pushback, given the rushed approach, but felt powerless to make changes under the pressure from Council. In explaining this, they stated, “You’ve got two choices, one is we take this forward . . . and it’s going to be a shit show at the public hearing, or let’s delay this report by another month [to give time for engagement].”

With a clear mandate from Council to rapidly deliver this type of housing, City staff set off on a program to streamline the process for providing TMH and reducing barriers to its delivery.

Lack of TMH Policy

Through public notification materials, Council reports and presentations, and in interactions with the media City of Vancouver staff, Council, and the Mayor all described TMH as a tool for addressing the City’s housing crisis. However, during the early days of TMH, the connection between TMH and the housing crisis was only tangential. At the time, City representatives knew very little about TMH. According to one former City staff member, questions such as “who these projects would house,” “how tenants would be selected,” “what kind of tenant support would be provided,” and “who would operate the buildings” were yet to be answered. This limited knowledge of what would be delivered by TMH could be said to demonstrate a scenario where the City liked the concept of TMH but was unclear on what crisis it would be solving.

A City staff member explained that there was limited knowledge about the issues that TMH was supposed to address at the beginning due to a lack of guidance on the overall components of the project. TMH was described as a “project in search of a policy” during its early stages. The staff member went on to say that it is challenging to implement projects without a policy in place. In their view, “you can’t put the cart in front of the horse,” but at the beginning of the TMH process, “the cart was so far in front of the

horse that the horse wasn't even in the barn . . . The horse, in my view, was still in the gestation stage." The staff member explained that conducting authentic public engagement is difficult without a proper policy in place. They emphasized that "You have to be sure, in public input, that what you're asking for is a meaningful question," while also having enough information about the project to inform the public about what is happening. In their view, for successful engagement, it's important to know "What are the questions we're trying to answer?" and "What problem we're trying to solve?" They suggested that, in the case of TMH, they didn't know the answer to these questions, and during the early stages of its development, "we were trying to solve so many problems that it became impossible to describe what the project was." In their view, effective engagement requires that those implementing it spend time developing a policy to understand the nature of the project they are proposing "so you're actually able to go and give information and respond to questions [from the public] in an authentic way." In the early stages of developing TMH, the staff member suggested that the engagement was not authentic but rather a directive from Council.

According to this staff member, it was the combination of Council pressure for the expedient delivery of TMH and the lack of policy that led to the public fallout. To emphasize this point, they admitted to some regret when considering the public processes associated with TMH but described the circumstances as representing a "real challenge as a bureaucrat." They explained, "When you have an ill-thought-out project and a desperate council that wants to see action quickly . . . you've got to move something forward . . . good or bad."

The City of Vancouver Created a Structure to Minimize Engagement

City staff worked with their legal teams to create a supportive environment for TMH's quick approval. According to one staff member, "It was a whole conversation about, how do we expedite? We need this housing; we need it fast; it's a temporary solution to help address the crisis." Another staff member elaborated on this process, "We did a lot of work at the time . . . with Legal about how to expedite these pieces, and that's how we came up with the superpowers". In using the term "superpowers," the staff member is referring to a policy created specifically for TMH. This policy allows for developments where 70% of the proposed dwelling units are used for low-cost housing for persons receiving assistance, like TMH, to be considered in all areas of the City

except low-density zones without the need for a rezoning application and future public hearings (City of Vancouver, 2017a). Without a required rezoning, decision-making authority was passed from Council to the Director of Planning or the Development Permit Board. According to one City planner:

Zoning was also another piece that we were sorting out at that time. Because in order to deliver these quickly—the construction is very quick, and the production is pretty quick, too. But if we were to have gone through the rezoning process, which many of these sites would have required, that would have slowed us down tremendously. And so, we were looking for opportunities that would keep this out of the rezoning process and allow us to go through a regular development permit process as quickly as possible. And so, part of that was to seek Council's permission to delegate these [decisions] . . . in order to allow this type of housing.

This granting of discretionary power to the Director of Planning and the Development Permit Board to relax the provisions of the Zoning and Development By-law for supportive housing was the first of its kind for the City. One staff member described this “blanket rezoning” as a “radical sea change” in the City’s approach to delivering housing.

There was also some intentionality in the designating of TMH as temporary. According to one City staff member, this temporary approach could help shield TMH from public attention by using an existing loophole in the zoning by-law which permits temporary uses:

And so on the question of public engagement, I can tell you that in the backroom . . . there were conversations kind of like, well, when you're doing broad zoning changes across the city, we do all kinds of minor changes to improve the zoning by-law that don't get an awful lot of advertisement, don't get a lot of discussions, and don't really get to be controversial. And one thought was, there are all kinds of temporary uses in the by-laws; is this just one of those? And if it were, one way to do this would be to literally take a look at every residential zone in the city and say temporary modular housing could be in and just amend all the by-laws saying this is permitted use.

In response to the significant public opposition to TMH that was voiced at the 2016 public hearing, Randy Picarski, the Assistant Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver at that time, admitted that the City had been preoccupied with other factors instead of public engagement. Their focus was primarily on finding easily developable sites for TMH. According to Picarski, “This was, in this round, frankly, trying to find low-

hanging fruit that we thought we could get through relatively quickly and perhaps that was, in our ambition, where we tripped up on some of the public process and the communication” (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

Cynicism Towards the Public’s Role in Delivering TMH

While the City’s desire to streamline the process by minimizing public engagement was partially driven by an objective to deliver TMH more quickly, many City staff members and the Councillor and engagement consultant I interviewed expressed cynicism towards the public’s role in addressing homelessness. When considering the function of the public in the TMH decision-making process, many City staff members questioned the value of gathering feedback from certain residents on issues related to supportive housing. A major theme in these interviews was concerns that providing a forum for public opinion on potential TMH tenants could cause harm to those experiencing homelessness. According to one staff member, “From an equity standpoint, how do you centre the dignity of a group that you’re trying to find solutions [for]?” They continued, “I think that there’s a nuance to some of these topics that really deal with how to open it so you’re not inflicting more harm.”

Furthermore, it was their view that at certain times, the needs of vulnerable populations should be prioritized, and engagement campaigns should thus emphasize informing the public about the project rather than seeking their approval. In their words:

It's like all these people are dying, we know a lot about why, and have a lot of knowledge and ideas on how to change that. So, at what point do you centre that? And then, if it's an educational exercise [and] also identifying what are the key things that are heard; and is there a misunderstanding there; and what's the opportunity for communication?

The Councillor I interviewed expressed reluctance towards allowing public input on the suitability of certain locations for TMH. Their concern was that bringing such a decision to a public hearing or engagement session would be akin to questioning the right of those experiencing homelessness to housing. According to the Councillor, “I guess that comes down to a political or ideological decision right, whether or not people’s right to housing should be put on trial at a public hearing.” In their opinion, “someone’s absolute right to access housing” should not be up for public debate. Furthermore, they set some parameters on the utility of public engagement. In their view, engagement should not only involve giving the public the power to decide on a project’s

approval. Rather, it should primarily aim to find ways to reduce public concerns and perceived harms related to the project:

We'd gone through this with the shelters. Every year, we'd go through this process where we'd want to open up the heat shelters or the low barrier shelters, and every year, the neighbours would get upset that there's no public hearing process. So, what you're really consulting with the neighbourhood about is how do we mitigate [public] concerns? Not how do we not do this? And to me, for modular housing, the way we needed to go was to stop putting sites on the table and start putting the idea that this is going to happen, so how do we mitigate it? Like, a harm reduction approach with the neighbourhood.

City staff members had a similar opinion as the Councillor concerning whether supportive housing uses should be considered any differently than other private property residential uses, which most often don't include an enhanced public engagement process. According to them, "We've tried to say, you shouldn't treat it differently because it's just housing. It's just housing for people that are living in poverty, and maybe they have some mental health and addiction issues." While many community members felt that such issues constituted enough difference for there to be a deeper engagement process, according to City staff, "you shouldn't treat it differently [because of these issues], but then we treat it differently." When discussing whether supportive housing should include enhanced engagement with a pre-application process, they stated:

Honestly, I think what we've learned is that we should treat this like how other housing developers move forward with their housing. They don't necessarily do a robust engagement on condos or other market rental places unless it's to market it and sell them. So maybe we shouldn't be processing these differently and skip the pre-application because, you know, we're trying to destigmatize people experiencing homelessness. And really, this model of pre-application engagement just further entrenches the 'they' and 'us' because there's some folks that are quite steadfast in their opposition, in spite of maybe nothing happening [referring to the commonly raised concern that supportive housing may have a negative impact on personal safety, or result in increased property crime, drug activity, noise, or odd public behaviour].

When exploring whether public engagement on TMH caused further harm to stigmatized groups, one staff member commented, "There's certain topics that bring out some stereotypes or opinions around folks and are dehumanizing people." This was further emphasized by the Councillor, who stated:

[What] if every house in this City, let's say the house on your block got sold and before the new neighbours could take possession . . . there was a hearing to decide if they would be appropriate neighbours? If that existed for each and every piece of property in the City, we would be at each other's throats pretty fast, right? Providing this opportunity for us to talk about all the things that create friction between us and our perception of who our new neighbours might be is not a healthy process for a city. The fact that we allow it at all and particularly for people who are most vulnerable and most outside of the majority understanding of their day-to-day lives is, I would argue, an inhumane process . . . [and] unlikely to result in a healthier city, a healthier democracy, better housing, or any of the things we say at a meta-level we're trying to do.

In general, there was a disconnect between what residents and City staff viewed to be a fitting level of public influence for TMH. One staff member said, "What the community wants to be involved in is actually not appropriate. You don't get to pick your neighbours." In discussing the decision-making power that many community members were asking for with TMH, the Councillor suggested that such an approach lacks accountability: "If you have veto power over your neighbours, that's a lot of power, but where's your accountability to the people you've just made homeless or extended the homelessness of?" They continued, "I think that is a very critical relationship when we're thinking about public engagement. I don't think it's bad to give people more power." But in their view, a system needs to be in place to ensure that there is a level of accountability to vulnerable populations with this increased power. It was the Councillor's opinion that engagement processes lacking accountability are ineffective representations of democracy:

I do think giving people absolute power, so veto, like delegating authority to a majority who show up, without any accountability for that whatsoever, is a very dangerous situation, and that is essentially what's happened at the public hearings . . . [where] if seven people show up for and six show up against, Council is going to vote and in the opposite direction . . . that's just not, I don't think, any modelling of democracy.

According to one staff member, a key purpose of engagement is to change public opinion, but they also expressed skepticism about the feasibility of achieving this objective. In their view, despite implementing an enhanced engagement process for TMH, which included pre-application meetings, it remained difficult to sway the community's sentiments. They provided further information to elaborate on their perspective:

Having gone through [the delivery of] many buildings of supportive housing, people's fears of supportive housing don't change in a matter of a year of regulatory process. Typically, if they change . . . it happens after the building is completed, and several years after, or even a year after, or two years, three years after the building is just there, and they don't even notice it's there, and it's really just embedded as part regular community.

Window of Influence

As is outlined in the TMH Decision-Making and Engagement Timeline section of this study, the public's opportunity to influence the TMH project changed significantly from when it was first introduced at the December 2016 public hearing, to the Marpole Community Information Sessions that took place in 2017. According to a staff member who was working in the City's communications department when the Marpole TMH project was presented to the public, there wasn't "a ton of [public] influence at that time." The staff member explained that the locations for the project had already been chosen, and most of the significant decisions had been made by the City. The public's input at that time was limited to the contents of a Good Neighbour Agreement for each site. This agreement is typically formed between a housing provider and the City and explains how the provider intends to create a positive relationship with the community and how they will address community concerns.

However, the staff member noted that the public appeared to be less concerned with the specifics of the Good Neighbour Agreement and more interested in giving input on who would be living in the buildings. In response to this desire, the staff member rhetorically asked, "Who's decision is that?" This implied that the tenanting of the buildings was not open for public discussion. They suggested that it's common for the public to want to have the final say over a project or "to be involved to say no." However, they felt this to be exemplary of a common public misunderstanding around what is on the table for public decision-making and what engagement means.

My interviewees also credited multiple outside forces for their impact on narrowing the public's window of influence. According to one City staff member, "With temporary modular housing, we had access to this money; we knew we could make it happen; it will house close to 1,000 people; they can only go on specific sites because of X, Y, Z; there's only X amount of sites . . . you know, there's not much influence." Referring specifically to TMH, they said, "sometimes there isn't opportunity [for engagement]".

While the value of engagement was emphasized by staff and council at the 2017 public hearing, it seemed apparent, at least based on the comments made by City staff, that public input was secondary to the needs of the housing crisis. When Dan Garrison, the Assistant Director of the Housing department, was asked by Councillor Kerry Jang about the importance of ensuring neighbourhood fit for TMH projects, he responded in a way that emphasized City staff's order of priorities for TMH:

We are doing this initiative to respond to some fairly serious needs in the community around homelessness. We have a large number of folks on the street, and that continues to be a really serious priority for the City. That said, we are looking at making sure we're really outreaching to the communities that are where these projects will be located. (City of Vancouver, 2017b)

My interviews with representatives from the City of Vancouver uncovered an internal cynicism towards public input. This was demonstrated by a reluctance to engage on topics related to the future TMH tenants or debate with the public about whether the projects should be undertaken at all. According to the Councillor I interviewed, in some circumstances, engagement should follow a "harm reduction approach," where the goal is to address the public's project-related concerns but not give them veto power over the project itself. For this interviewee, such an approach can reduce the severity of the public's worries: "I think the question is really about mitigating any real or perceived harm to the surrounding community." According to them, the type of consultation that was appropriate for TMH centred on site management issues, such as whether there would be support staff in each building, along with topics including traffic and parking impacts and garbage pickup. Putting it another way, they suggested, "If what they are concerned about is how whatever they perceive is happening inside [of the TMH buildings] spills out of that space into their space, that's a reasonable discussion about how you mitigate that." However, they emphasized, "it's not a yes or no question . . . it's not a veto question; it's a how-do-we-do-this question."

As per City staff, to set parameters on what was open for engagement, they were cautious not to use the term "consulting" with the public. According to one staff member, they would say, "We're engaging with you, but we're not [consulting]." They believed that the word "consultation" could be interpreted in various ways, and some might assume that they are seeking permission to carry out their project. Instead, they felt that they were direct with the public in communicating that the TMH project would be approved

and sought public input on what the community would like the project to look like. In their view, the statement made to the public was, "The project will go ahead, but we want your opinion on how it should look and what's important to you." When discussing effective public engagement in general terms, the Councillor I interviewed felt that "clarity of expectation" is important, "if the public thinks when I'm saying consulting, I mean veto and they're not getting veto, they're going to be pissed off, right?"

In reference to the TMH process, City representatives acknowledged the importance of engaging with the public to mitigate concerns and manage their expectations for influence. However, it could be argued that these goals were not achieved with TMH. As discussed in this study's Public Expectations for Engagement section, the public expressed an expectation to be deeply involved in the TMH decision-making process. This was made most clear at the 2016 public hearing, where multiple attendees requested meaningful engagement, with some referring to the community's right to object to or veto the approval of projects. Throughout this event, City staff and Councillors expressed their support for more engagement with the community, which they referred to as "thorough community consultation" and made promises to "engage nearby residents appropriately and robustly." Furthermore, during the 2016 public hearing, staff and Council did not directly refute the public's request for veto power. It is possible that the City's use of the term "consulting" may have given the impression that the public had more influence than they actually did, according to the City's own definition. However, this situation also highlights that different people can have varying understandings of engagement terminology. Therefore, discussing such matters can be useful in clarifying and aligning expectations. Additionally, at the public hearing, there were many references to staff going back to the community and engaging on a site-by-site level with the potential for a rezoning and public hearing process for each specific site. As a result, the frustrations that surfaced during the Marpole stage of TMH delivery could partially be attributed to the City's lack of efforts to directly address public expectations or mitigate their concerns earlier in the process.

While many residents were unhappy about the engagement that was promised at the 2016 public hearing never occurring, at the 2017 hearing, the City was somewhat more direct in setting engagement expectations. By making it clear that future engagement would be occurring through the development permit process, it meant that issues related to land use would be removed from the discussion, and the public's

feedback would only be taken into consideration for site-specific issues related to each development. However, the language used in both the staff presentation to Council and in their response to Council questions remained vague as to the public's role. In their presentation, staff described engagement as "an opportunity for the public to comment and make submissions" and expressed that they would "work closely with the community to listen to interests and concerns" (City of Vancouver, 2017b). In describing how public input would be used, City staff stated that "Anyone with interest can provide comment, and that input would be considered in any decision" (City of Vancouver, 2017c). During the 2017 public hearing, staff emphasized the types of concerns that could be addressed through the development permit process. These focused on areas such as developing operation and management plans, creating Good Neighbour Agreements, and addressing issues related to ensuring "the fit of the building in the neighbourhood" (City of Vancouver, 2017c).

During both public hearings, members of Council emphasized the need to mitigate public concerns related to each TMH development and ensure "everyone is happy with what is proposed" (City of Vancouver, 2016c, 2017c). This suggests a focus on informing the public about decisions rather than empowering them to be involved in the decision-making process. Councillor Carr asked for future engagement sessions to be a chance for the community to "have an opportunity to ask questions and have questions answered." They also highlighted the importance of sharing information to alleviate public worries: "I think that those bits of information are really important to allay people's concerns because, in the absence of information, people can be worried about all sorts of things." Their emphasis on engagement as a sharing of information continued, "I also have confidence in the people of this city that they want to see a solution to homelessness. They just want to be well-informed about what the solution will be. So that's our job to get out there and make sure they're well informed."

According to City staff, they "really wanted to be honest from the get-go about what kind of feedback we were seeking from the public," this included having a "preamble on the Marpole postcard saying, 'we're looking for your feedback on this proposal, such as your interests and priorities on things like site placement.'" Indeed, the notification postcards for the Marpole Community Information Sessions were very direct in their language. For example, the headline stated that "The lot at 650 West 57th Ave is *Planned* as a site for Temporary Modular Housing" (City of Vancouver, 2017h). The

postcards also mentioned that “The City of Vancouver, in partnership with the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (VAHA) and BC Housing, *is building* Temporary Modular Housing on various sites across the city” and that “The buildings *will* be in place for up to five years.” However, as one staff member noted, the primary call to action on the postcards is the perhaps vaguer request for residents to share their “interests and priorities.”

The City had received assistance from an engagement consultant during the Marpole process. Based on my interviews, the consultant observed that public resistance to TMH decreased significantly after Marpole. They believed that the lack of trust and community fallout that occurred with Marpole could have been avoided. According to the consultant, many of TMH projects that followed Marpole proceeded smoothly because the City, with their help, modified engagement practices to find ways to address common concerns that emerged with each community.

The consultant also highlighted the importance of defining the public's opportunity for input and stressed that this had not been done prior to them becoming involved at the Marpole Community Information Session stage. Their approach to engaging with the public was to acknowledge their concerns but also make it clear that they had no direct influence over the final decision. For instance, they would use engagement language like, "We understand that you perceive this as a threat to your community and the safety of your children, but we are going to proceed with the project regardless." It was their view that despite the initial conflict that arose when the Marpole TMH was first introduced, their work with the City helped reduce some of that tension. To achieve this, they identified areas where the public could influence the project and tried to match them with community needs. The process involved defining the public's window of influence by finding out "what were the possibilities for scope of engagement?" and areas where the public was “feeling threatened.”

Many of those interviewed considered the level of public influence on TMH against the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum. The Spectrum describes five general modes of public participation that fall on a progressive continuum of increasing influence over decision-making in a given civic engagement process. At one end of the Spectrum is the Inform level, where community members are largely passive participants, with little opportunity for two-way dialogue or

shared authority between the public and decision-makers. According to the Spectrum, as most initiatives at the Inform level fail to satisfy core IAP2 principles, including the promise that contributions from the public will influence the decision, this level is typically considered non-engagement (IAP2, 2016).

Stepping up along the Spectrum, at increasing levels of public influence, are the Consult, Involve, and Collaborate levels. At the most influential end of the Spectrum, the Empower level, the engagement goal is to place final decision-making into the hands of the public (IAP2, 2016, p. 32). When the objective is to empower, the development and management of the engagement process, as well as ultimate decision-making authority is turned over to the public.

Applying the IAP2 Spectrum to engagement on TMH, one City staff member claimed that the engagement process for Marpole was “nowhere near Empower,” particularly based on the public’s minimal influence “on whether a decision for this [TMH development] should go forward.” However, according to the consultant, in the case of Marpole, they claimed to have developed an engagement plan that took the public to the Empower level. While not granting the public agency on whether TMH should be built, it was the consultant’s view that the engagement empowered them to make decisions on site-specific details important to them. As such, the community was included in the development of a parking strategy, a facility management plan, and the creation of a Community Advisory Committee. According to the consultant, the engagement process involved asking the community questions like “The plan says we’re going to put the parking lot here; is there a better place to put it?” The strategy was to “empower the community to the greatest extent possible.”

Within the public’s window of influence were aspects of the project that one City staff member called “olive branches.” These were things “we could give the community and were within our purview.” Such items included addressing the presence of needles in a nearby park by adding a needle collection box and offering landscaping and lighting features that addressed public space safety concerns. According to the staff member, they “were trying to use what we heard as tokens, or olive branches, for the community and for the neighbourhood.”

Although these “olive branches” demonstrate an effort made by the City to mitigate public concerns, it's important to note that these initiatives were introduced towards the end of the TMH decision-making process and implementation timeline. This came after a considerable amount of tension and mistrust had already developed between residents and the City. The consultant claimed that their “collaborative” approach to engagement could have saved the City a lot of grief earlier on: “I think had we started off working at the Collaborate [level of engagement], we wouldn't have had the problems that we had.” According to them, the process was at the Inform level of engagement when they took over. In their mind, the City caused harm to the engagement process by having “no scope of engagement,” meaning there wasn't a clearly defined window where the public could influence the project. The consultant felt that the City's original approach was purely at the Inform level and provided no room for community dialogue. In their view, the City's approach was to say, “Here's what we're putting into your community, and we're just giving you information.” According to the consultant, the City “should have worked harder at finding the scope of engagement.”

When I pressed the consultant on whether the engagement that occurred for TMH could actually be considered to be at the Empower level, when the type of influence that was granted to the public seemed inconsistent with what they were asking for, the consultant explained that the public reaction changed once they arranged the meetings differently from how the City had previously. In their opinion, after explaining why the TMH sites were selected, the public became less interested in influencing that decision. According to them, “we knew there was an absence of understanding in terms of why those sites were selected,” so “when we told them about all of the considerations that had to go into selecting a site for this very specialized kind of housing and all of the considerations and limitations,” the “resistance [to TMH] softened a great deal.” They suggested that this was because “people started thinking about [things like] proximity, site servicing, costs, fees for hooking up utilities, having space for parking and access to emergency services.” They felt that once they explained these complexities to the public, their tone changed away from thinking that the City “plunked this here because they didn't like them or because it was the cheapest site.” They continued, “When they started to find out that we had considered what their concerns might be, the resistance started to soften.”

Discussion

The City of Vancouver faced a complex mix of factors and objectives in delivering TMH. When the concept was first introduced at a public hearing in 2016, the City Council, which was dominated by the then Mayor's Vision Vancouver party, shared a desire to deliver on their campaign promises and make a significant contribution to the City's supportive housing stock. There was also increasing concern about the City's housing and homelessness crisis and the expectation that a more supportive housing-friendly centre-left NDP provincial government would come to power. When the NDP was elected and launched the Rapid Response to Homelessness program, which pledged \$66 million to the City of Vancouver, it put pressure on City staff to quickly deliver 600 units of modular housing.

This urgency, coupled with a Council that was perceived to have little interest in long planning processes, limited the opportunity for City staff to effectively engage the public on TMH. This was partly because it didn't give them enough time to hold meaningful engagement or even to fully understand the modular housing concept. In this context, City staff set out on a path to minimize engagement, including granting "superpowers" to the Director of Planning and Development Permit Board, allowing them to approve TMH projects without public hearings. By avoiding public hearings and moving any engagement on TMH to the development permit process, the City reduced the public's window of influence or "scope of influence," as expressed by the engagement consultant who assisted the City on TMH processes. Land use discussions were removed from the engagement equation despite the public's desire to provide input on site selection and tenanting, as these decisions had already been made by the development permit stage. Furthermore, designating the use as temporary was seen as a way to minimize community opposition.

As noted in the TMH Supporting Policies section of this study, multiple City of Vancouver representatives felt that the previous engagement processes associated with loosely TMH-supporting policies, including the *Supportive Housing Strategy*, the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, and the *Housing Vancouver Strategy*, provided sufficient public license for TMH. Furthermore, they were skeptical of the value of public engagement, feeling that it could slow down the delivery of TMH and further stigmatize homeless populations who could potentially be tenants. In some cases, they believed

that the needs of vulnerable populations should be prioritized over engagement, especially when opinions conflicted.

It was also suggested that the engagement process for supportive housing should be similar to that of other projects in the city, that deliver housing at market rates. Some City representatives felt that the focus of engagement should be on a harm reduction approach or on mitigating public concerns instead of involving the public in the decision-making process for approving a project on a specific site.

Although the importance of setting clear expectations with the public was discussed by many City staff and Councillors, with TMH, the City was inconsistent and often ineffective in doing so. For instance, City staff made big promises regarding engagement during the 2016 public hearing but never defined what engagement meant to them. This led to differing expectations about the type of engagement that would be delivered, and the amount of public influence associated with it. However, the City was more direct in explaining the public's influence during the 2017 public hearing and in their messaging for the Marpole Community Information Sessions. Despite this growing transparency, the City consistently ignored the public's engagement requests, such as their desire to have decision-making power on projects or more information on site selection and tenanting criteria. Furthermore, although the City was more direct in explaining the level of public influence at the 2017 hearing, many community members expressed concerns about being unaware of the meeting. This was because sites of future TMH, such as the Marpole neighbourhood, weren't directly notified of the public hearing.

After the initial pushback at the first TMH Community Information Sessions in Marpole, the City hired an engagement consultant who claimed to elevate the engagement process from the Inform level to the Empower level on the IAP2 Spectrum by finding ways to appease the public. While some of these engagement initiatives may have created goodwill by offering "olive branches" to the community, it is clear that the community's desire for influence was greater than what was offered. As a result, this approach to engagement could more realistically be seen as what Sherry Arnstein (2019) would describe as "tokenism" or "placation" rather than "empowerment." Nevertheless, it seems that the engagement that occurred based on the consultant's approach was the first time that the City listened to the public's TMH-related concerns

and made steps to address issues that had previously been ignored, such as the public's desire for information on how sites were selected.

Chapter 6.

Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

In this chapter, I will explore several themes that emerged from the TMH data. These themes include conflicts between the public and the City's expectations for engagement, the post-political state of engagement, policy entrepreneurship, differences in engagement during policy development and implementation stages, the helpful and harmful impacts of engagement, and the City of Vancouver's engagement policy.

The public wanted to have more say in the approval of TMH for specific sites and the selection of tenants. They believed that public engagement should be dialogue-focused, putting the City and the public on equal footing and that it should have an impact on the decisions that matter to them. However, the City of Vancouver preferred a more limited role for the public in the approval process. They believed that increased public engagement would slow down the approval time for TMH, lead to less equitable outcomes, and further stigmatize those experiencing homelessness.

To expedite the approval process for TMH and reduce public opposition, the City adopted an approach that is representative of the "post-political" state of much modern public engagement. Under this approach, engagement is attenuated, with opportunities for debate and conflict on meaningful issues removed from the process and the public only engaged on topics that have little significance to them. The City's handling of TMH has demonstrated that avoiding moments of conflict and missing opportunities for real and empathetic community listening during the initial stages of the decision-making process can lead to increased resistance later on. A more proactive crisis response approach could have reduced some of this resistance while also promoting more impactful or "trajectory-altering" policies that continue beyond both the project's lifespan and the window of opportunity in which they were developed, as outlined by Mintrom and True (2022, p. 141).

The City's delivery of TMH was marked by both the positive and negative aspects of policy entrepreneurship. On the one hand, they were able to take advantage of

political support and provincial funding to quickly advance the projects. However, on the other hand, in their eagerness to exploit this policy window, they showed a lack of interest in gathering public support. This resulted in what Yan described as "civic costs" (Fumano, 2017), such as feelings of exclusion, disrespect, and loss of trust in the government among residents.

The implementation of housing projects in Vancouver has led to several conflicts, with TMH being just one example. As demonstrated by TMH, these conflicts can be fueled by differences in the type of engagement that occurs during policy development and implementation stages. The City often secures what it considers to be public license for projects through city-wide policy engagement processes that ask the public to consider high-level priorities, such as the need to address homelessness in all neighbourhoods (City of Vancouver, 2007, 2011a, 2011b). However, these processes lack local stakes as they don't consider specific project sites, which can lead to conflicts during the rezoning and development permit stages, when impacted residents feel that they are being notified and involved for the first time.

Public engagement can improve projects, make decisions more long-lasting, build community trust, and fight public alienation, apathy and dissatisfaction (Pollack & Sharpe, 2012; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; IAP2, 2016). However, the extent to which these processes result in more equitable outcomes is unclear (Fainstein, 2010). The City of Vancouver's approach to delivering TMH serves as an example of a city that prioritized equitable housing outcomes over extensive public engagement. Even so, the strong negative reaction of the public to TMH also highlights the potential harm that engagement can cause by further stigmatizing already vulnerable populations.

After conducting interviews and reviewing documents from the City of Vancouver, it is evident that the City has an admirable and ambitious *Framework for Public Engagement*. However, many of the tools within the framework are seldom put into practice due to the City's hesitance to commit to a specific level of public influence and communicate its engagement objectives to the community. Additionally, the City could benefit from having clear policies and procedures for conducting engagement, which could enhance the consistency of its engagement efforts.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore each of these themes in greater detail.

6.1.1. The City of Vancouver and the public had different ideas on the window of influence for TMH

The research shows that throughout the ideation and delivery of TMH, the City of Vancouver and the public had very different ideas on what role public engagement would have on the most pertinent TMH decisions. Ultimately, the public wanted more influence on decisions such as approving TMH for specific sites and determining who should be tenanted the buildings. These requests were established at the very first public hearing in 2016 where the public repeatedly asked for “meaningful” and “real” engagement (City of Vancouver, 2016c, 2016d). By this, they meant engagement that was dialogue-focused, had an impact on the decisions they cared about, and supported a decision-making process that was rational, consensus-based, communicative, and placed the City and the public in equal positions of power. For many members of the public, a mutually agreeable solution could be achieved through earlier, more extensive, and better communicated engagement that elevated what Levine (2020) calls “the authentic voice of the community.”

In the beginning stages of the TMH process, the public expressed a desire to have a meaningful say in decision-making, and initially, the City appeared to heed these wishes. This was demonstrated at the 2016 public hearing when the City slowed down the TMH approval process by halting the rezoning of specific sites, which the public saw as a “good faith promise” to pursue meaningful engagement. However, while at this meeting, the City pledged to deliver a thorough public process, in the end, it largely disregarded the public's aspirations to be involved. Instead, it prioritized equitable housing outcomes and perceived a public process involving site selection and tenanted, factors that the public was most intent on influencing, to be contrary to these objectives. Furthermore, the City feared that engagement on these issues could further stigmatize already vulnerable populations. Consequently, the City adopted a characteristically post-political public participation strategy that involved avoiding sites of conflict while still promising further engagement.

6.1.2. TMH engagement exemplifies the “post-political” state

By the City designating engagement on TMH to the development permit stage, the resulting public process would occur after the most controversial issues had already been decided on. This created an engagement space that lacked any real meaning and, therefore, potential for public conflict. While the City made promises of “robust engagement” when first introducing TMH to the public at the 2016 public hearing (City of Vancouver, 2016c), they never made efforts to outwardly define the public’s level of influence and create identifiable stakes. By doing so, they failed to identify what Scott (2004) refers to as the “problem space,” where rival views are explored through a process of defining the contours of debate and public involvement and determining legitimate questions to ask the public.

The difference between what was promised in terms of a thorough engagement process and what was actually delivered with TMH was quite stark. This serves as an illustration of the paradoxical state of engagement in Vancouver and more broadly, as described by Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017). In the current neoliberal post-political state, there is more expectation and delivery of formal public involvement than ever but also a weakening in the amount of debate, discussion, conflict, meaning, and decision-making power that is embedded in this engagement (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016; Swyngedouw, 1996, 2000). Vancouverites now expect to be engaged more than ever, thanks to the evolution of the communicative turn globally and the TEAM era of engagement locally (Beasley, 2019; Thomas, 2012). However, as described by Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017), participation has spread at precisely the moment when an increasing number of decisions rely on a few expert opinions and have become insulated from democratic decision-making. With TMH, this mismatch between the scales of democracy and the scales of decision-making (Held, 1993) resulted in engagement that had little meaning, especially when compared to what the public was asking for. While the TMH process lacked debate, discussion and decision-making authority, which is an indicator of a depoliticized state (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017), the public was calling for these elements. Instead, attempts were made by the City to remove conflict from the TMH process, with the window of public influence and terms of engagement vaguely communicated by those promoting participation. However, the TMH process showed that while opportunities for conflict were removed from key decision-making moments, this created

further public conflict later in the engagement process, although by this time, the public had little influence.

As emphasized in the post-political and crisis response literature, public engagement procedures tend to be bypassed during periods of crisis (Novalia & Malekpour, 2020; Swyngedouw, 2010). With Vancouver's housing and homelessness crisis as a catalyst, this was no different with TMH. However, the Vancouver TMH initiative also showcases the potential of engagement processes that break free from the post-political state and instead adopt a more proactive form of crisis response. Rather than viewing public conflict as something to be resolved quickly, the proactive approach encourages debate and discussion as a natural part of the community (Deutsche, 1996; Pollock & Sharp, 2012). This approach, supplanted with an emphasis on real and empathetic listening, shared learning, and the involvement of the broadest possible range of perspectives, has been shown to create opportunities for trust-building and even bring about transformative structural changes to address the root causes of crises (Deutsche, 1996; Healy, 1992; Lake, 2021; Ma, 2018). Further research could explore the correlation between proactive processes and the potential for creating transformative or "trajectory-altering" policy changes (Mintrom & True, 2022, p. 141), which not only create enduring policies but also mitigate community resistance to supportive housing projects. It is important to note that simply increasing engagement does not always lead to more equitable decision-making (Fainstein, 2010; Scally & Tighe, 2015). Therefore, future research could also focus on proactive approaches to engagement that do not further stigmatize already vulnerable populations, such as tenants in supportive housing.

6.1.3. TMH was delivered in a complex and messy policy entrepreneurship environment in which public engagement was only one of many considerations, but the City's process for engagement had "civic costs"

While the public had expected a linear and rational approach to engagement and decision-making, the TMH process and policy entrepreneurship literature illustrates that decision-making is often not so straightforward. My research shows that TMH materialized from a complex ecosystem of political will, provincial government funding, and a desire to rapidly provide housing for Vancouver's most vulnerable residents. While each of these forces put pressure on City staff to seize what Macnaughton (2013)

describes as “windows of opportunity” for delivering TMH, there was also, as detailed by scholars such as Fainstein (2010), a turn towards prioritizing equity in housing and service provision over public engagement processes that would not ensure equitable outcomes.

Considering the record of public engagement processes, as traditionally applied, of not providing equitable housing outcomes, I am not suggesting that there should have been more influential engagement in the implementation of TMH. However, it can be argued that the City of Vancouver's approach to engagement made the execution of TMH more challenging than necessary and resulted in additional civic costs.

The City demonstrated a lack of willingness to listen to the public's requests for engagement influence and transparency throughout the TMH process. Beginning with the first public hearing in 2016, the public asked for meaningful and real engagement, which would give them "a right to say no" to TMH proposals. While the City never directly confirmed the amount of influence the public would have at this public hearing, they did respond with promises of a thorough and robust public engagement process. At the subsequent public hearing in 2017, the community made the same requests and asked for more information on tenancing and site selection. These requests were ignored, and it was at this stage that the City made changes to a by-law, which reduced the need for public engagement on TMH and narrowed the community's window of influence to include issues related to each site's development permit. Consequently, when the TMH development permits were introduced in Marpole, many residents complained that their voices had been ignored up to that point.

While influence on the tenancing and selection of TMH sites may not necessarily be the public's right, if the City had been better at demonstrating an interest in the public's concerns and provided a rationale for limiting their influence instead of avoiding conflict, there could have been more opportunities for community learning throughout the process. This might have softened the public's resistance. This hypothesis is corroborated by the TMH engagement consultant I interviewed who believed that when their more direct and transparent approach to engagement was employed, the City finally started to address some of the public's concerns, albeit superficially. Furthermore, the public resistance to TMH did lessen after the City adopted this approach for later

Marpole engagement sessions and subsequent TMH development permit applications in neighbourhoods outside of Marpole.

The City, acting as a policy entrepreneur, took advantage of the growing housing and homelessness crisis in Vancouver to establish funding and political support for TMH. However, their strategy of creating a system that allowed for faster approval of TMH may have contributed to what Novalia and Malekpour (2020) have referred to as "the spiral of devolution." This describes a situation where persistent governance failures and crises are repeatedly reproduced, leading to a reactive crisis pathway. The City's expedition of TMH not only contributed to this spiral of devolution or cycle of resistance to supportive housing projects but also to what Yan described as "civic costs" (Fumano, 2017), such as the erosion of trust in government. According to Yan, the City's approach was heavy-handed and fast-paced, leading residents to feel disrespected and wanting more fairness in discussion. In their view, the City could have been more proactive in explaining the benefits of TMH and introducing it in a way that didn't make Marpole residents feel targeted.

In delivering TMH, the City's process also lacked some of the hallmarks of effective policy entrepreneurship. According to Mintrom et al. (2021), policymakers who want to change public opinions about certain policies must develop arguments that support this change. It seems that the City did not attempt to understand or alter the public's views on TMH. Furthermore, as Mintrom and True (2022) suggest, for policy to be enduring, there must be efforts in policy advocacy that long precede the onset of the crises the policy is meant to address. According to IAP2 (2016), in addition to the need for input from technical subject matter experts, "the effectiveness and sustainability of decisions tend to endure more when other factors such as local knowledge and perspectives and sensitivity to community context are also factored into decision-making" (p. 13). Anderson (2018) suggests that public engagement should address the public's concern about being left out of the process. According to the author, the public doesn't necessarily need to win, but rather, they need to feel heard and not forgotten. In their view, to build social license, the engagement program must go beyond the typical public meetings and require more time and care. However, with TMH, many residents alluded to a feeling that it was meant to happen behind their backs and a sense of being disrespected by the City's timelines for engagement, the quality of its communication

with them, the limited information provided to them, and the lack of translation of public engagement materials.

Ma (2018) argued that the City of Vancouver lacked a thorough understanding of certain neighbourhood nuances when introducing the Marpole TMH development permit. This lack of understanding led to local resistance which Ma ascribed to culturally-based stereotypes towards anticipated tenants of supportive housing (here, those experiencing homelessness are assumed also to be drug users). According to Ma, these culturally-based fears, which the author describes as irrational, combined with the City's poorly planned project announcement before outreach, were significant drivers of public resistance. Ma suggested that the City should have made an effort to build genuine trust with the community by regularly engaging in authentic listening and outreach about civic matters, such as homelessness, before contemplating specific projects. According to Ma, this doesn't mean a prolonged consultation process for individual projects but rather a regular trust-building dialogue to minimize resistance.

6.1.4. Discrepancies between engagement at the policy development and implementation stages contributed to community resistance and mistrust, and this is an ongoing issue with the City of Vancouver

During my interviews, several City of Vancouver staff and representatives expressed their belief that the public engagement processes for developing Vancouver Coastal Health's *Supportive Housing Strategy*, the *Housing and Homelessness Strategy*, and the *Housing Vancouver Strategy* gave public authorization for the delivery of TMH. However, these policies were city-wide initiatives with minimal reference to the TMH or the sites where it would be built and were supported by primarily informational engagement processes. Therefore, the promotion of the engagement that occurred for these policies didn't include directly notifying residents living near the future TMH sites. This diffuse notification process may have contributed to many Marpole residents claiming that they first heard about TMH when development permit applications were announced for their neighbourhood. Additionally, Vancouver City Council approved a city-wide by-law during a public hearing that removed the need for TMH projects to undergo a rezoning process, with this decision-making event also lacking site-specific notifications. This change and its approval process encountered significant opposition during the development permit stage for Marpole's TMH project.

Vancouver residents frequently voice their frustration at not being informed about city-wide policies until the implementation phase, when a rezoning application or development permit is proposed for a site. As a result, they often suggest that notifications for policy development processes should occur in the same manner as for development permit or rezoning applications. These notifications typically include the mailing of informational postcards to impacted households and a large sign erected on the project site (City of Vancouver, 2023a, 2023b). Some planning practitioners believe that this public reaction is common and that while many residents share a similar high-level vision for addressing the needs of their city, by involving them downstream in the decision-making process, projects become a "hyper-local" vote of approval based on how they impact private property, rather than their adherence to agreed-upon policy priorities designed to achieve a broader public good (Cescato, 2024; Flon, 2024; Walcott, 2024).

6.1.5. Sometimes engagement is helpful and sometimes it is harmful both to the community and future supportive housing tenants

As documented in my interviews with City of Vancouver staff and representatives, many worried that engagement on the tenure of TMH buildings could lead to the further stigmatization of vulnerable homeless populations and future TMH tenants. Research has demonstrated that land use decisions for supportive housing projects and their associated engagement processes and public hearings can open up opportunities for often intense neighbourhood resistance to stigmatized residents (Doberstein, 2020; Tighe, 2010). Furthermore, certain engagement approaches have been shown to reinforce inequalities by giving a platform to harmful stereotypes and faulty assumptions about various citizens and communities (Doberstein, 2020). Indeed, one eventual TMH tenant confessed to feeling unwelcome and "like a second-class citizen" due to the way the community resisted the project (Jannif, n.d., para.16).

Public participation has been credited for its ability to satiate the public's desires to participate in decisions that affect them, facilitate understanding of the problem or opportunity for both the public and the decision-maker, and improve the ultimate decision being made (IAP2, 2016). According to the City of Vancouver (n.d.), involving the public helps them to "make better decisions," and create plans or projects that are "easier to carry out," while helping them "maximize benefits, minimize negative impacts,

and satisfy a wide range of stakeholders.” But such broad statements assume that the outcomes of engagement are always positive or as Fainstein (2010) put it “engagement has become the answer to every question and the solution to every problem” (p. 29).

In reviewing the City of Vancouver’s approach to TMH, it would seem that engagement was not seen as a way to make better decisions, maximize benefits or reduce negative impacts. Perhaps the opposite was true, where the City felt that engagement would lead to public resistance, result in less equitable decisions, and have stigmatizing impacts on vulnerable populations.

6.1.6. The City of Vancouver’s engagement policies are minimal and inconsistently applied, which contributes to the ad hoc nature of most engagement

The City of Vancouver’s views toward public engagement are outlined within their *Framework for Public Engagement* as well as their “Citizen involvement” webpage. Explained within these materials is a series of Core Values and Guiding Principles, which draw heavily from IAP2, and are meant to be tools for designing and evaluating engagement and making sure that it is “consistent” and “innovative” (City of Vancouver, n.d.). However, there is very little evidence that the City’s engagement practices are planned and evaluated against these criteria. This is evident in both the implementation of TMH and in the way employees discussed their involvement in other engagement processes at the City.

With TMH, there is no evidence of a commitment to the Core Values and Guiding Principles that promise to involve the public in decision-making processes and ensure that their contributions influence the ultimate decision. By ignoring these ideals, which are taken from the IAP2 Spectrum, the City appears to have overlooked the warnings of the source material. While the City doesn’t state it in their documents, IAP2 notes that to uphold these values, there must be alignment between public expectations and those of the group seeking input. They suggest that engagement without this alignment could result in high levels of controversy, hostility, and frustration for all involved (IAP2, 2016). Furthermore, Anderson (2018) indicates that when the public is made to feel as though they have more input than they actually do and their input is ultimately ignored, they feel “abused, disrespected, undervalued, and duped” (para. 21). Taking these cautions into

account, with TMH, the City could have taken steps to align their expectations for engagement with those of the public, or at the very least clarified the public's window of influence.

Based on my review of the Core Values and Guiding Principles, it appears that the City has created a roadmap that, if followed, could have helped hold them accountable to the public and avoided some of the engagement pitfalls that occurred with TMH. However, each of the commitments outlined in these documents relies on the City providing a clear definition of the decision being engaged on and how the public can influence it. As was demonstrated with TMH, without these definitions, many of the Core Values and Guiding Principles become lofty and meaningless promises that only serve to frustrate the public. The third pillar of the City's *Public Engagement Framework* is the IAP2 Spectrum. The Spectrum ranks various approaches to engagement based on five levels of public influence, and according to the City, it helps outline their promises and define public expectations for these approaches. The City claims to use it to let people know what type of influence they can have on a decision. However, the Spectrum is only one of three pillars, and the other two, the Core Values and Guiding Principles, cannot be achieved without a commitment to engagement processes that rank on the more influential side of the Spectrum. For instance, a Guiding Principle that pledges to allow public input to affect decisions seems insincere when the City is merely informing or consulting with the public, without providing any actual influence. The TMH case is a good example of this, where the City predominantly engaged the public at the Inform level, the lowest level on the Spectrum and offering little room for public influence.

Some of my interviewees corroborated my analysis of the three pillars of the *Framework for Public Engagement* by stating that setting the level of influence on the IAP2 Spectrum is an important starting point. As part of this process, planners and decision-makers would determine whether engagement needs to be conducted or not, which is a process that is embedded into policy in other cities. Such a process helps to avoid the harm that is done to public trust and the potential exercise of further stigmatizing vulnerable populations when engagement is conducted without a genuine intention of gathering information from the public. Furthermore, some City staff expressed the opinion that if the public is not going to have much influence on certain City decisions, then public processes on those decisions shouldn't be referred to as engagement. Therefore, it is essential for the City to determine the level of engagement

they are willing to commit to in order to avoid raising public expectations that cannot be fulfilled, which can lead to a loss of public trust.

A lack of guidance from engagement policy was referenced by multiple City staff when considering the TMH process and engagement more widely at the City. They pointed out that internally, the City doesn't have the necessary tools and policy to consistently implement the *Framework for Public Engagement*. This has led to a situation where there is minimal coordination among those involved in engagement work and consistency in the engagement delivered. Staff suggested that a “backbone of a policy” could help address some of the unevenness in the City’s engagement implementation. According to them, such a policy, which other cities have adopted, would lay out steps for designing and carrying out an engagement process. Instead of “just making it up” as they often do, the policy would include core engagement requirements and a step-by-step guide for conducting engagement.

6.2. Conclusion

I was initially interested in this research because of my strong appreciation of the need to find more proactive ways to address Vancouver’s housing and homelessness crisis but also my dismay in seeing projects with outwardly equitable and compassionate outcomes see continual resistance from residents. I have witnessed seemingly identical engagement scripts be recited in public processes throughout the region, including during the early stages of TMH and in 2021 for one of Vancouver’s most controversial rezonings, a 129-unit permanent modular housing project in the Kitsilano neighbourhood. This extended public hearing process was largely due to a significant number of public speakers in opposition. More recently, the District of North Vancouver held a four-night public hearing, its longest in history, with 114 public speakers, for a 65-unit supportive housing development. As a result of projects like these and many others, I have observed a growing cynicism towards the value of public contributions in some planning circles, along with a concurrent decline in the level of trust residents have in local governments. These perceptions have been further heightened by my work as a rezoning planner with the City of Vancouver.

However, even with mounting professional cynicism and public mistrust in government, the ideals and volume of engagement continue to increase, with many still

believing in its value for democracy and decision-making. While I feel that the housing and homelessness crisis requires swift and decisive responses, there also seems to be a crisis of public mistrust in government, polarization, and social cohesion, that swift and decisive crisis responses which lack transparency and public voice often fuel. As such, with this thesis, I was compelled to investigate the role of public engagement in crisis response. To achieve this goal, I decided to study the City of Vancouver's delivery of TMH, an initiative meant to provide rapid housing to some of Vancouver's most vulnerable residents but also one that faced significant public opposition. By analyzing this case study, I aimed to explore the conflict between crisis response and public engagement. The research question guiding this work is: how and why has the City of Vancouver engaged the public in the strategy formulation and implementation of TMH, and how did the City of Vancouver's expectations for public influence compare with those of neighbourhood residents?

In 2016, during the first public hearing for TMH in Vancouver, City of Vancouver staff admitted to prioritizing the delivery of TMH over public engagement. However, particularly due to the public hunger for involvement that surfaced at the public hearing, they made several grand and appeasing promises of future engagement and acknowledged the need to develop engagement for TMH that surpassed standard City processes. The engagement was expected to be "meaningful," "thoughtful," "genuine," "robust," and "appropriate" (City of Vancouver, 2016). While the City expressed a desire to engage "communities in a better way" and included reference to site-specific engagement processes, not much detail was provided about what the engagement process would look like or what meaningful engagement meant to the City and, ultimately, future opportunities for public influence would be minimal.

There is little evidence of any engagement on TMH between the 2016 and 2017 public hearings. Moreover, during the 2017 public hearing, the City passed legislation that would restrict engagement on TMH without notifying affected residents. The legislation allowed TMH to be considered in all city neighbourhoods except for low-density zones without requiring a rezoning application and subsequent public hearings. This pushed public engagement to the end of the TMH approval timeline, which occurred as part of the standard development permit process. However, at the development permit stage, the public's window of influence would be significantly narrowed with many critical decisions, such as site selection, already made.

In the months following the 2017 public hearing, the City of Vancouver conducted Community Information Sessions for a TMH development permit application in the Marpole neighbourhood. These sessions were town hall-style and supplemented with online comment forms and meetings with community groups. These were the only site-specific engagement processes that would occur for TMH. However, the public's influence was mostly limited to site management, parking, and traffic-related issues.

According to several representatives of the City of Vancouver, a substantial amount of engagement to support TMH had already taken place during the housing policy stage before the first public hearing in 2016. Additionally, two TMH display events were held in the autumn of 2016 to gently introduce the concept of modular housing to the public and gather their feedback. However, no potential sites for TMH had been announced at this point. This highlights the conflicts that can arise based on how engagement is conducted during the policy development stage versus the implementation stage. Many staff members believe that these earlier policies provided public approval for the delivery of TMH, even though they were not based on engagement that specifically targeted residents living in the areas of future TMH sites and mostly failed to mention modular housing or future project sites directly. Rather, they engaged a wider swath of Vancouver residents on broad city-wide issues, such as prioritizing the elimination of homelessness and including all neighbourhoods in this response. This unfocused approach to engagement at the policy development stage often leads to conflict during the implementation of projects, at the rezoning or development permit stage, when impacted residents feel as though they are being notified and involved for the first time, as was the case with TMH.

Furthermore, although some public involvement was incorporated in the development of these housing policies, most of the processes focussed on informing the public of the proposed policy directions, with little evidence that the public had influence on the policies themselves. Moreover, during the early ideation stages, housing experts from various levels of government were the primary participants in developing these policies, rather than impacted residents, despite claims that engagement was a crucial component of the process.

The 2017 public hearing report also cited public response to a pilot project in the Downtown Eastside and Mount Pleasant neighbourhoods as evidence of public license

for TMH. According to the City, the pilot process included an “awareness, consultation and outreach program,” meant to inform residents of the development and the TMH concept.

The City's plans to involve the public in TMH decision-making were influenced by a significant level of cynicism towards the value of public input. Additionally, there was opposition to the public being involved in controlling vulnerable populations' access to housing. City representatives were also concerned that public engagement processes on TMH could worsen the stigmatization of vulnerable populations by exposing future residents to discriminatory language. Such prioritization in the City's decision-making processes shows a turn towards equity in delivering housing, as described by scholars like Fainstein (2010).

The City's approach to TMH engagement aligns with the crisis and post-political literature, which indicates that governments' most typical crisis responses are reactive in nature. Such responses are generally characterized by technocratic decision-making, temporary solutions, and either a decrease in public engagement or its delivery in an attenuated form. Usually, these processes avoid conflict and prioritize performative public engagement activities without real public influence. When first introducing TMH, the City promised a robust engagement process, but it was hesitant to define and commit to any significant level of public influence. This mismatch between the scales of democracy and the scales of decision-making, as described by Held (1993), resulted in engagement that had little meaning, especially when compared to what the public was asking for.

After conducting interviews with various City of Vancouver staff, a Councillor, and an engagement consultant, as well as reviewing public hearing reports and staff presentations, it became evident that the decision-making processes surrounding the delivery of TMH were complex and difficult. While public engagement was a part of the process, it had much less decision-making power than what the public was asking for. The City of Vancouver considered public engagement to be only one component of a complex ecosystem that included political will, provincial government funding, and housing policy. According to the policy entrepreneurship literature, advancing projects within such a multifaceted environment requires skilled policy entrepreneurs. The City's delivery of TMH was marked by both positive and negative examples of policy

entrepreneurship. On the one hand, they were able to seize a window of opportunity made available through political support and provincial funding to deliver TMH quickly. However, their reactive approach demonstrated little interest in gathering public support or understanding public concerns, resulting in civic costs such as feelings of exclusion, disrespect, and loss of trust in government among residents. This could potentially contribute to the "spiral of devolution," where similar public opposition to government actions is continually repeated (Novalia and Malekpour, 2020).

In reviewing the City's *Framework for Public Engagement*, which includes the Core Values, Guiding Principles, and IAP2 Spectrum, it would seem that the City had created a roadmap which, if followed, might have led to avoiding some of the engagement pitfalls that were experienced with TMH. However, the effectiveness of these tools is contingent on the City's willingness to engage the public and give them some influence on decision-making. Outwardly, the framework signals a commitment to innovative and consistent engagement practices and a desire to involve the public in decision-making processes that affect them. However, despite drawing heavily from IAP2 engagement principles, which warn of the controversies that can arise when engagement expectations between the public and government are not aligned or clearly communicated, the TMH engagement process showed a significant misalignment between public and government expectations. In this case, the City stoked tension and mistrust by creating unrealistic expectations by promising engagement while being unclear about the level of public influence.

When TMH was introduced to the public at the 2016 public hearing, many community members in the affected area expressed surprise and disappointment at the lack of public engagement before the public hearing and were skeptical of the City's intentions to deliver significant engagement moving forward. In turn, they asked for more engagement before a decision was made on TMH sites and requested that future engagement be meaningful and real (City of Vancouver, 2016c).

Public skepticism increased during the 2017 public hearing and the Marpole development permit process. The public felt that the engagement promised during the 2016 public hearing never occurred, with several residents expressing concern that all of the households who would potentially be impacted by the decision were never notified. Many residents were also uncomfortable with Council's decision to remove the need for

TMH projects to be approved at a public hearing, which further limited opportunities for public input. They believed that important decisions like locating and approving TMH should not be made by unelected bodies such as the Director of Planning or Development Permit Board, who were less publicly accountable.

Throughout the process of delivering TMH, the public demanded transparency from the City. They wanted to know more about how potential TMH sites were being chosen, the City's decision-making process, and the rationale for moving forward with TMH. They also sought information about the type of tenants who would occupy the buildings and how they might impact their neighbourhood. Furthermore, many residents felt that TMH was unexpectedly brought into their neighbourhood without proper explanation, leading them to believe that the City had intended to implement it without their knowledge. Throughout the process, the public expressed feeling disrespected because of the City's inadequate communication, timelines for engagement, and failure to translate engagement materials.

Overall, residents were asking for engagement that was dialogue-focused, allowed room for debate, and had an impact on the decisions they cared about. They wanted a decision-making process that was rational and communicative, and which placed the City and the public in equal positions of power. For many members of the public, a mutually agreeable solution could be achieved through earlier, more extensive, and better-communicated engagement. This would allow opportunities for the public to shape, locate, and approve TMH projects.

In answering my research question, it is clear that public engagement played only a minor role in the City of Vancouver's delivery of TMH despite the public's strong desire for thorough involvement. The City favoured limiting public influence, and as a result, they took measures to minimize engagement. This decision was partly driven by a belief that public processes would slow down the delivery of TMH, result in less equitable outcomes, and further stigmatize individuals experiencing homelessness.

The TMH case study is an example of a reactive crisis response that was applied in an expedited and temporary manner and at the cost of public engagement processes and, ultimately, public trust. It demonstrates that while TMH may have achieved equitable housing outcomes, bypassing public processes to avoid conflict can ultimately

result in the conflict being pushed to later stages in the project cycle or potentially, future housing projects. Based on this research and to conclude this thesis, I suggest two recommendations that could improve future public processes for supportive housing. These recommendations are as follows:

- **Invest in proactive neighbourhood strategies that involve the public early in the process rather than after key decisions have been made but be transparent about the extent of public influence.**
- **Create an engagement policy manual that includes direction on whether to engage at all.**

The remainder of this section explores these recommendations in further detail.

Invest in proactive neighbourhood strategies that involve the public early in the process rather than after key decisions have been made but be transparent about the extent of public influence

As Ma (2018) suggested, some of the conflicts involved in the Marpole TMH development could have been prevented if the City spent more time building relationships and making efforts to understand the nuances of the community. According to IAP2 (2016), in addition to the need for input from technical subject matter experts, “the effectiveness and sustainability of decisions tend to endure more when other factors such as local knowledge and perspectives and sensitivity to community context are also factored into decision-making” (p. 13). This would require regular and continuous discussions with the public and an emphasis on engaging in authentic listening, shared learning, and outreach about civic matters, such as homelessness, before contemplating specific projects.

According to multiple City of Vancouver staff members, engagement at the City often takes place after crucial decisions have already been made, with the engagement used to make these decisions more publicly acceptable. However, as was shown with TMH, this approach doesn't always eliminate public resistance. In fact, the City's attempt to prevent conflict and stigmatization of future TMH tenants only led to these issues arising later in the process. To address conflict and avoid providing a platform for stigmatization, it may be best to proactively engage in early and continuous public

dialogue sessions. Furthermore, involving the public early in the decision-making process, as opposed to later, as the City of Vancouver did with TMH, allows conversations to focus on community priorities and the broader public good rather than becoming a "hyper-local" vote of approval based on assumptions about how proposed projects will impact private property (Cescato, 2024; Flon, 2024; Walcott, 2024).

Proactive engagement processes hold the potential to go beyond the post-political state. While post-political approaches seek to avoid conflict and minimize engagement, a more proactive crisis response embraces the complexities of public conflict. Advocates of this approach argue that by promoting open-ended public debates with genuine and empathetic listening, and by incorporating a wide range of perspectives (Lake, 2021; Novalia & Malekpour, 2020), opportunities can arise for building trust and making transformative changes that address the root causes of crises (Deutsche, 1996; Healy, 1992; Lake, 202; Ma, 2018). Additionally, many scholars and engagement practitioners believe that proactive crisis response approaches can become "trajectory-altering" when they result in the adoption of impactful and sustainable policies that outlast the project's lifespan and the initial window of opportunity in which it was created (Mintrom & True, 2022).

Further research could explore the relationship between proactive processes and the development of long-lasting, transformative policies that can help residents feel more comfortable with proposed solutions and reduce resistance to supportive housing projects within the community. It is important to note that simply increasing engagement does not always result in more equitable decision-making (Fainstein, 2010; Scally & Tighe, 2015). Therefore, future research could also focus on proactive approaches to engagement that do not further stigmatize already vulnerable populations, such as supportive housing tenants.

It is recognized that engaging the public early and consistently can help to establish trust and reduce the cycle of resistance to supportive housing projects. However, it is also acknowledged that community agreement, support, and influence may not always be the primary goal, particularly for projects prioritizing equitable outcomes. Therefore, planners and decision-makers must determine the level of public influence they are willing to commit to and clearly communicate it to the public. This will help prevent creating unattainable expectations that could result in the loss of public

trust. Furthermore, if public processes are only meant to be conducted at the Inform level of the engagement Spectrum, then transparency should be the main priority of those managing the process.

Create an engagement policy manual that includes direction on whether to engage at all

As per the suggestion of City of Vancouver staff, creating a “backbone of a policy” could help address the unevenness in their implementation of engagement. Instead of conducting engagement in an ad hoc manner where they’re “just making it up,” a policy manual would list the City’s core requirements and ethics for providing engagement along with a step-by-step guide for conducting it.

The policy manual should include a clear process to guide planners and decision-makers in determining whether engagement is necessary or if the focus should be on transparency and communication instead. Such a process would help prevent harm to public trust and the exercise of further stigmatizing vulnerable populations when engagement is conducted without a genuine intention of gathering information from the public.

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Appendix.

Content Analysis Documents and Media Review

TMH Implementation

City of Vancouver Policy Report – Temporary Modular Housing Definition and Regulations: Proposed Amendments to Existing City-Owned CD-1 Sites, and Design Guidelines (Approved by Council December 13, 2016)

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20161101/documents/p1.pdf>

City of Vancouver Staff Presentation – Temporary Modular Housing: Definition, Regulations, and Design Guidelines (Public Hearing December 13, 2016)

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20161213/documents/phea2presentation.pdf>

Public Hearing Correspondence December 13, 2016

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20161213/phea20161213ag.htm>

Public Hearing Video Stream December 13, 2016

<https://csg001->

[harmony.sliq.net/00317/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=3495342,000&startposition=3325](https://csg001-harmony.sliq.net/00317/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=3495342,000&startposition=3325)

Public Hearing Minutes December 13, 2016

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20161213/documents/phea20161213min.pdf>

City of Vancouver Policy Report – Amendment to the General Regulations to Delegate Discretionary Relaxation Powers to Expedite the Delivery of Low Cost Housing for Persons Receiving Assistance (Approved by Council September 19, 2017)

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20170726/documents/pspc-UrgentBusiness1.pdf>

City of Vancouver Staff Presentation – Expediting the Delivery of Low Cost Housing (Public Hearing September 19, 2017)

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20170919/documents/phea2Presentation.pdf>

Public Hearing Correspondence September 19, 2017

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20170919/phea20170919ag.htm>

Public Hearing Video Stream September 19, 2017

<https://csg001->

[harmony.sliq.net/00317/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=3495174,000
&startposition=2708](https://csg001-harmony.sliq.net/00317/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=3495174,000&startposition=2708)

Public Hearing Minutes September 19, 2017

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20170919/documents/phea20170919min.pdf>

City of Vancouver's Temporary Modular Housing Website

<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/temporary-modular-housing.aspx>

Factsheet Temporary Modular Housing: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/temporary-modular-housing-factsheet-west-59-and-heather-street.pdf>

Notification Postcard: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/650-w-57-notification-flyer.pdf>

Community Information Session Presentation November 2, 2017: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/presentation-tmh-heather-and-59th-November-2017.pdf>

Community Information Session Presentation November 6, 2017: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/tmh-heather-and-59th-Nov-6-2017.pdf>

Presentation Boards for Community Information Sessions November 2 and 6, 2017: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/presentation-boards-for-community-information-sessions.pdf>

Comment Card Community Information Sessions November 2 and 6, 2017: 7439 and 7460 Heather Street (Marpole)

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/temporary-modular-housing-comment-card.pdf>

TMH Supporting Policies

Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012-2021: A home for everyone

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/housing-and-homeless-strategy-2012-2021pdf.pdf>

Housing Vancouver Strategy

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20171128/documents/rr1appendixa.pdf>

Housing Vancouver 3 Year Action Plan 2018-2020

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20171128/documents/rr1appendixb.pdf>

Housing Vancouver Strategy: Annual Progress Report and Data Book 2018

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2018-housing-vancouver-annual-progress-report-and-data-book.pdf>

City of Vancouver Engagement Policies and Guidelines

Citizen Involvement Website

<https://vancouver.ca/your-government/citizen-involvement.aspx>

Engaged City Task Force – Framework for Public Engagement

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20160120/documents/pspc6.pdf#page=15>