

# **The Urban Politics of Vancouver's “Greenest City” Agenda**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This study is about entrepreneurial urban strategies to reconcile environmental and economic objectives in cities pursuing “green” economic development. It looks at Vancouver's goal to become the “greenest city in the world” from the aspiration's origin in the 2008 civic election to the adoption of the Greenest City Action Plan in July 2011. Using content analysis and interviews with key participants I identify an economic and entrepreneurial ethos in the project's discourse and proposals, and a selective and contradictory response to the ecological crisis. I gather evidence that an urban regime is forming to reconcile the project's contradictory economic and environmental objectives, while promoting Vancouver as a “green” destination for investment and residents in a neoliberalizing global economy. This study adds to our understanding of entrepreneurial urban responses to the ecological crisis and of strategies to reconcile conflict between the economy and environment in urban politics.

**Keywords:** inter-urban competition; environmental politics; urban entrepreneurialism; urban politics; urban regime theory

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## List of Acronyms

EAC	External Advisory Committee
GCAP	Greenest City Action Plan
GCAT	Greenest City Action Team
GHG	greenhouse gas emissions
NUP	New Urban Politics
NEPUD	New Environmental Politics of Urban Development
VEDC	Vancouver Economic Development Commission
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

# 1. Introduction

This study is about urban strategies to reconcile environmental and economic objectives in cities pursuing “green” economic development. I seek to answer this question: Why did the City of Vancouver develop a plan that proposes urban economic development and inter-urban competition as a response to the ecological crisis? To do so, I examine two transformative pressures faced by many North American cities in the early 2000s: competitive neoliberal globalization and the ecological crisis. The neoliberalization trend is characterized by (1) a “new urban politics” (Cox 1993) where elites and coalitions of public and private interests coordinate to attract highly mobile transnational capital and residents and grow the local economy, and (2) an “entrepreneurial turn” (Jessop 1998) that has led cities to adopt the language and practices of business. The widely documented and discussed ecological crisis encompasses climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion and is largely the result of past economic activity by advanced market economies (Stern 2006; IPCC 2007; North 2009; While et. al, 2009). The normalization of neoliberalism (Keil 2009) and the imperative of economic growth (Jackson 2011) pose a formidable challenge to those wishing to mitigate and adapt to ecological change through altered urban economic development and other strategies. Despite this challenge, new constellations of local interests are coordinating resources and capacities (Jonas et. al, 2011) to build support for an agenda of urban change that relies on an optimistic narrative of the ecological crisis and the reconciliation of contradictory environmental and economic objectives.

Specifically, this study is about how and why the City of Vancouver developed a comprehensive plan to become the "greenest city in the world" by 2020, a strategy called the *Greenest City Action Plan*. This plan includes goals and targets for the city, specific and prioritized policy recommendations, and proposals for partnerships and coordination with nongovernmental actors. I identify an ethos of optimistic and confident entrepreneurial urbanism within the Greenest City project and a persistent concern with competitiveness and economic growth. I consider the tensions among the initiative's objectives and participants and investigate the motivations for an urban agenda to become the "greenest city". In sum, my research situates the Greenest City project within wider trends in global urban politics and BC's environmental history, highlights internal contradictions and tensions that limit its coherence as a combined environmental and economic plan, and evaluates new entrepreneurial strategies intended to transform economic practices for various and contradictory objectives. Before fully turning to my research I introduce Vancouver and the Greenest City initiative, explaining why this is a worthy case for investigation.

The City of Vancouver is a municipality of about 580,000 in British Columbia, Canada. It is the core of a larger metropolitan region with a governance body including 21 other municipalities called the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Vancouver is the social, economic and cultural center of the region, which has over 2 million residents. The city contains major offices for the forestry, mining, finance, and digital technology industries and other key sectors include textiles, food, oil and gas, education, tourism, and film and television production. Many local firms in these sectors have worked to reduce their environmental impacts and/or promote their activities with environmental language (Vancouver 2011).

In part because of political and economic decision-making and partly because of its natural setting and amenities, Vancouver is widely recognized for its leadership in livability and environmental issues, energy efficiency, sustainable land use, and participatory planning (Punter 2003; Harcourt & Cameron 2007). *The Economist Intelligence Unit* placed Vancouver as the world's most livable city from 2002 to 2010 in its Global Liveability Survey.<sup>1</sup> Factors used by the survey include the natural environment, health care, stability and infrastructure. Vancouver also ranked highly in the Mercer Worldwide Quality of Living Surveys during the 2000s. In the most recent Mercer Quality of Living survey, the city tied for fourth highest-ranked in the world and first in North America.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in Vancouver and nearby Whistler, further drawing international attention to the city. Local officials used the event to highlight the livability and environmental qualities pointed to in the rankings and promote the local economy. This makes the Greenest City initiative a worthwhile case for study as firms, residents, and political and financial decision-makers respond to these qualities in making decisions about the location of investment and residence. Additionally, because of Vancouver's reputation and purposefully promoted image, politicians and technocrats in many other cities look to Vancouver to inform their local environmental and economic policies. By the summer of 2011, over 1600 cities made contact with Vancouver's government about the Greenest City initiative (Interviewee 3 in Table 3, in an interview with the author). These inquiries suggest other cities may adopt strategies and actions similar to those planned in the GCAP and

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.eiu.com/site\\_info.asp?info\\_name=The\\_Global\\_Liveability\\_Report](http://www.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=The_Global_Liveability_Report)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mercer.com/qualityoflivingpr#City\\_Ranking\\_Tables](http://www.mercer.com/qualityoflivingpr#City_Ranking_Tables)

discussed in other Greenest City documents. Decision-makers and other interested actors in those inquiring cities can use the findings from my study to better understand the Greenest City's narrative and strategies and determine whether they would be useful for meeting their environmental and/or economic objectives. To finish introducing this case, I briefly summarize its history and elements.

The Greenest City initiative began as an idea proposed during the 2008 civic election campaign of Vision Vancouver. In January of 2009, newly elected Mayor Gregor Robertson assembled an advisory committee to recommend targets and actions to help Vancouver become “the greenest city in the world” by 2020. The advisory committee, known as the Greenest City Action Team (GCAT), had two co-chairs, Mayor of Vancouver Gregor Robertson, and an environmental lawyer and professor from the University of Victoria, David Boyd. It included two City Councillors and other individuals selected according to their interest and experience in the fields of “climate protection, transportation, land use, green energy, food security, environmental health, biodiversity, economic development, and finance.” (Vancouver 2011, p. 2). The GCAT was directed by City Council to prepare two reports: one called the *Quick Starts Recommendations* report on immediately implementable actions toward reaching the 2020 goal and another developing specific goals, targets and recommendations, entitled *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future*. In the second report, targets were selected for ten goals and organized into three themes: “Green Economy, Green Jobs”, “Greener Communities” and “Human Health” (See Table 1 Long-term goals of the Greenest City initiative, as presented in the Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future report (Vancouver 2009a)). External advisory committees (EAC) and a public consultation were organized to refine the recommendations and targets. City Council approved a draft plan in January 2011

and in July 2011 adopted the final *Greenest City Action Plan* (GCAP). Drawing from a definition by the United Nations Energy Program, this final plan defines the term “green” as “activities that restore or preserve environmental quality, reduce energy, materials and water consumption, de-carbonize the economy, and minimize or altogether avoid the generation of all forms of waste and pollution,” while also including the local food sector (Vancouver 2011, 31).

Theme	Goal	Long-Term Goal
Green Economy, Green Jobs	Green Economy Capital	Secure Vancouver's international reputation as a mecca of green enterprise
	Climate Leadership	Eliminate Vancouver's dependence on fossil fuels
	Green Buildings	Lead the world in green building design and construction
Greener Communities	Green Mobility	Make walking, cycling, and public transit preferred transportation options
	Zero Waste	Create zero waste
	Easy Access to Nature	Provide incomparable access to green spaces, including the world's most spectacular urban forest
	Lighter Footprint	Achieve a one-planet ecological footprint
Human Health	Clean Water	Enjoy the best drinking water of any major city in the world
	Clean Air	Breathe the cleanest air of any major city in the world
	Local Food	Become a global leader in urban food systems

**Table 1 Long-term goals of the Greenest City initiative, as presented in the Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future report (Vancouver 2009a)**

The discourse and proposals of the Greenest City agenda, from the original identification and promotion of the overall objective to the approval of the final plan, reveal a contradictory combination of entrepreneurial and environmentally focused urbanism in pursuit of multiple goals. The result is a partial and economic response to the ecological crisis that proposes a “green” economic transformation to prolong growth and attract capital and residents from other cities. The plan anticipates and attempts to

reconcile conflict between local economic and environmental interests through its expressive discourse and proposals for environmentally reformed economic practices. All together, patterns of global and urban neoliberalization, action and inaction from higher-level governments, local regime politics, and changes in the relationship between business, government and environmental activists and nonprofits make this a worthwhile case for investigating responses to the ecological crisis by neoliberalizing cities.

## **2. Literature Review**

To understand why Vancouver's entrepreneurial responses to the ecological crisis are narrated in the way they are and set out in combination with contradictory economic objectives for both private and public interests I examine three thematic groups of scholarly literature. First, I engage scholarship that sets out the scope and urgency of the ecological crisis, highlighting the risk to cities and the global movement of people and capital, and the unsuitability of transformed economic growth as a crisis response. Second, I discuss scholarship on entrepreneurial urban politics and neoliberalization to better understand the pressures and constraints that affect the GCAP and those engaged in its production and promotion. Third, I look at literature on symbolic regime formation to determine how ideology and expressive politics play a crucial role in the co-production of changes to the local economy sought by both private and public interests.

### **2.1. Ecological Crisis and the Economy**

To understand the tension between the economic and environmental objectives of the Greenest City initiative, I turn to literature related to the ecological crisis and its economic dimensions. First, I look at research that establishes the urgency and significance of the ecological crisis. Second, since the Greenest City initiative identifies economic growth as a motivation for and consequence of its strategies, I discuss the most recent literature available on the relationship between economic growth and the



ecological crisis. In this work, I purposefully examine scholarship by researchers cited in the Greenest City documents to explore the selective incorporation of their research. Third, I discuss literature that identifies approaches to the ecological crisis that reject the norm of economic growth and challenge its feasibility and desirability.

Research has confirmed with considerable significance the risks posed to cities and communities because of climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Further, in the years prior to and during the Greenest City planning process numerous reports and studies were released by governments and organizations based on this research that underscored those dire implications and forecast strategies in response. In 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its *Fourth Assessment Report* reiterating the serious risks of global warming and outlining possible trajectories for future warming and change. Evidence of climate change was unequivocal and the IPCC pointed to serious risk for human environments, health, and wellbeing as a result of global warming. Notably, while reports commissioned by individual governments expressed grave concern over climate change, many pointed to the economic possibilities arising from the need to adapt to or mitigate ecological change. Along with the GCAP, examples of this are the UK's *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* (Stern 2006) and the *Climate Prosperity* report series by Canada's National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE 2008).

Although the financial crisis in 2008 slowed emissions growth, energy demand and atmospheric pollution rebounded to unprecedented highs by 2010, largely the result of economic expansion in non-OECD countries (IEA 2011). As the ecological crisis became more pronounced, and especially after the financial crisis in 2008, a consensus emerged among many global governments that “transformed economic growth” was the

best approach to both mitigate and adapt to ecological change, like global warming and fossil resource depletion, while attempting to stimulate economic activity. The idea that expanding but transformed economic activity can be used to meet environmental objectives is a key assertion of the Greenest City initiative. Scholars (Victor & Rosenbluth 2007; Harvey 2007; Jackson 2009c; Kallis 2011; Victor 2011) have critiqued plans that seek to reconcile economic growth with environmental objectives and argue that indefinite economic growth is incompatible with ecological (and other) limits. Peter Victor (2011) summarizes the pro-growth argument echoed in the Greenest City work, writing:

The view remains widespread that a combination of new technologies, a shift from goods to services, and more reuse and recycling, will decouple economic growth from throughput, especially critical components such as fossil fuels, allowing growth to continue while resource inputs and wastes decline. It is argued that these changes will be prompted by market signals and judicious public policy so that any call for lower economic growth, let alone no growth, or even worse, degrowth, are unnecessary and misguided (p. 1).

In addition to the GCAP, the widespread belief that responses to the ecological crisis can advance economic growth objectives is expressed in the United Nations Environment Programme “Green New Deal” strategy (UNEP 2009), the UK’s Stern Review (Stern 2006) and the federal “green” stimulus introduced in 2009 in the United States.

The reason proposals like those above are incompatible with ecological limits is that economic growth relies on material resource and energy inputs, increasing labour productivity, and the output of waste and pollution like greenhouse gases to accumulate surpluses. As such, the promotion of economic growth to meet environmental objectives is untenable, since efficiency improvements under conditions of growth will only lead to

relative reductions in material throughput and pollution and will inevitably exhaust non-renewable energy and resources. Tim Jackson (2009a) summarizes the structural challenge of more efficient, but continued, growth:

The dilemma of growth has us caught between the desire to maintain economic stability and the need to remain within ecological limits. This dilemma arises because stability seems to require growth, but environmental impacts 'scale with' economic output: the more the economy grows, the greater the environmental impact – all other things being equal (p. 43).

While plans like the GCAP and those above propose the deployment of yet-to-be-developed technologies to achieve efficiencies or completely eliminate waste and pollution, the technological improvements necessary to keep atmospheric pollution within the limits outlined by the 2007 IPCC report are unrealistic and unlikely to lead to the absolute reductions necessary to avert dangerous and irreversible warming (Jackson 2009a, 2011; Victor 2007).

Fundamentally, the decoupled economic system proposed in the GCAP and elsewhere relies on non-polluting energy sources, reductions in material throughput, and the sale of non-material services, rather than material products. Tim Jackson (2011) describes this decoupling response to the ecological crisis as an economic growth model based around product-service systems that reduce the need for personal ownership and lower the material intensity of economic activity. This de-coupling approach is a central recommendation of the GCAP (Vancouver 2011). The central question for assessing the coherence of such models is whether or not economic growth can be maintained or accelerated while effectively responding to the ecological crisis. Researchers like Jackson (2009a; 2011) and Peter Victor (2010) – both of whom are selectively cited in

the *Bright Green Future* report (Vancouver 2009a) – argue it cannot. Jackson (2011)

writes:

Social logic, questions of scale, and the laws of thermodynamics are all a significant stumbling block to the changes hoped for by those with well-meaning intentions for continued growth with drastic reductions in material intensity. However much material efficiency you squeeze out of the economy, eventually you'll reach a limit, at which point continued growth will push material throughput up again. (p. 47).

Pointing to research on the declining labour productivity in personal and social services in Europe since 1995, Jackson (2011) argues that a “different engine of growth” emphasizing de-materialized services would slow, rather than maintain, economic growth expectations. He notes that these sectors have contributed minimally to conventional measurements of economic growth in Europe. Jackson also points to the increasing use of voluntary and part time labour in the de-materialized service sectors, particularly among social enterprises. However, the UNEP definition of a green job emphasizes “decent” employment that is full-time, pays a living wage, and is unionized (UNEP 2008). The UNEP’s 2008 report on green employment says a job “that fails to pay a living wage... can hardly be called green” (p. 39). Notably, the GCAP definition of a green job explicitly draws on the UNEP’s definition, but is “expanded to allow for non-union and part-time workers” (Vancouver 2011, p. 31). Further, it contains no discussion about a living wage or the unionization rights of green workers as set out by the UNEP. Decoupling strategies may promote urgently needed low-carbon economic activities and lead to job creation, but the structure and quality of that work will vary. Based on these points, such strategies delay rather than reconcile the confrontation between economic growth and ecological limits, while selectively pursuing job creation goals.

Other considerations further call the desirability of continued economic growth into question. Victor (2011) points to a burgeoning academic debate challenging the link between improvements in well-being, welfare or happiness and economic growth. This connection is repeatedly asserted throughout the Greenest City documents without acknowledging this debate (Vancouver 2009a, 2009c; 2011). Also disputed is the technological optimism that undergirds the claim that de-materialized economic growth of the kind proposed in the GCAP is possible. Giorgio Kallis (2011) summarizes research that shows renewable energy technologies yield less of an economic surplus than conventional sources, that the decoupling of economic growth is not happening when attempted, and that efficiency improvements have led to increased consumption, diminishing their environmental benefits (p. 874).

Unequally distributed effects related to ecological change are producing and will continue to produce disagreements among national states over the global availability of resources. These tensions are relevant because they complicate conventional neoliberal patterns of economic growth and activity, particularly the transnational movement of people and capital central to globalized capitalism (Harvey 2004, 2007). Armed services in the US and Canada have looked at the strategic implications of the economic, social and political disruptions related to ecological change, particularly their impact on cities, infrastructure, and critical resource and food supplies. In early 2010, the US Pentagon's *Quadrennial Defense Review* (US Department of Defense, 2010) recognized the current and potential impacts of climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation on global instability and conflict, highlighting its urban, infrastructural, and food dimensions and effects of the global movement of people and goods. Similarly, the Canadian historian Gwynne Dyer pointed to the risk of ecologically driven conflict in his

book *Climate Wars*, suggesting cities would be facing new challenges, among them the migration of climate refugees, disruption to port infrastructure and global trade, and the need to adapt public infrastructure (Dyer 2008). The global instability and conflict arising from ecological change is likely to restrict or transform both the transnational movement of people and capital that drives inter-urban competition and the availability and demand of new export markets. Since, as I show in this study, the globalization of Vancouver's economy is a key theme in the Greenest City initiative, these anticipated disruptions further challenge the viability of economic growth that relies on globalized inter-urban competition and transnational trade.

Based on these writings – which show the commonness of contradictory beliefs and imperatives – the greatest challenge to directly confronting the incompatibility of economic growth and the ecological crisis is ideological. This ideology is deeply embedded in the existing institutions and practices of firms, government and individuals in cities like Vancouver. In other words, in capitalist economies, “[economic] growth is not an option, but an imperative stemming from the structure of basic institutions” (Kallis 2011, p. 875). The structural need for permanent growth central to advanced capitalist systems (Jackson 2011; Harvey 2005, 2007) is in direct tension with the changes needed to address the ecological crisis. In cities that have normalized market principles and internalized them among their residents, developing responses to crises that do not involve or tolerate market principles and economic growth will prove very challenging and will necessitate considerable ideological and cultural change.

Yet, despite the hegemony of growth-focused capitalism, alternatives to strategies relying on economic growth continue to be theorized. These are, in general, either low-growth, no-growth, or degrowth approaches to economic activity. Such

models draw on early work by the economist Herman Daly who made the case several decades ago for a 'steady state economy' (1973). Simply put, such an economy would have a constant stock of physical capital, and economic activity would remain within the regenerative capacity of the ecosystem. More recently, Schneider et. al (2010) defined de-growth as "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term" (p. 512). Such approaches are not introduced in the Greenest City initiative despite their scholarly and popular circulation during its drafting period and the citation of researchers advocating de-growth in the *Bright Green Future* report (Jackson 2009 and Victor 2008, cited in Vancouver 2009a). A vigorous debate about the viability of economic growth was also taking place among academics and policy-makers. In 2008, the "first conference on socially sustainable economic degrowth for ecological sustainability and social equity" was held in Paris and issued the "Degrowth Declaration" (Research and Degrowth, 2010). The participants declared, "the global economy has grown beyond ecologically sustainable limits... if we do not respond to this situation by bringing global economic activity into line with the capacity of our ecosystems... the result will be a process of involuntary and uncontrolled economic decline or collapse" (Research and Degrowth, 2010, p. 525). Their prescription is degrowth in the wealthiest parts of the world – places like Vancouver and Canada. Many characteristics of degrowth (as described by this group) are echoed in the Greenest City report, such as an emphasis on quality of life rather than consumption, innovation, de-materialization, collective health, sharing, and equity. Yet, these characteristics are in tension with the GCAP's principal emphasis on economic growth, private enterprise, and competition. The Degrowth Declaration also addresses the social and political consequences – both local and global – of involuntary economic contraction and the ecological crisis, which

are scarcely acknowledged by the Greenest City initiative. In contrast, the *Bright Green Future* report maintains an optimistic economic growth imperative, and seeks incremental but expansionary economic transformation rather than a managed reduction in economic growth (Vancouver 2009a, p. 3).

Nonetheless, the Greenest City initiative does propose an alternative to conventional practices for competitive economic growth. More specifically, Vancouver's planned economic strategy may be most similar to the "selective growth" scenario modeled by Victor (2011). This scenario attempts to assess the possibility that "economic growth can continue indefinitely provided it is concentrated in activities that have the lowest impacts" (Victor 2011, p. 4). Victor notes that the time scale will determine the viability of such a strategy – ie. can the economy adjust faster than the environmental constraints? Modeling work done by Victor (2011) shows that a selective growth approach offers modest and short-term potential for reducing GHG emissions while maintaining economic growth. However, the overall substitutability of high-carbon economic activity with low-carbon economic activity is limited, and GHG emissions are projected to begin rising after several years of continued growth. The implications of fossil fuel and other resource shortages were also not incorporated in this model. These shortcomings as a response to the ecological crisis encourage additional attention to the particular strategies and objectives of the Greenest City plan and alternatives to it.

Indeed, a number of divergent alternatives are available and were advocated in the 2000s. While the Greenest City initiative's economic objectives take for granted the desirability and feasibility of indefinite (if "decoupled" or "selective") economic growth, many writers and communities were challenging the centrality of this objective before and during the Greenest City planning process. Commentators like Jeff Rubin (2009)



and Thomas Homer-Dixon (2006) criticized the domestic orthodoxy of growth and globalization and warned of severe ecological and economic disruption and risk. Anthony Perl and Richard Gilbert (2008) warned of risks to fossil fuel-based transport systems and called for urgent and coordinated responses akin to the industrial transformation in Allied countries during the Second World War. Writers and activists like Richard Heinberg (2005, 2009, 2011) and Robert Hopkins (2008) argued for rapid changes in society to adjust to declining resource and energy availability; others like Dmitri Orlov (2008) and James Howard Kunstler (2006) suggested such declines and transformations were inevitable and likely to be socially and politically disruptive. Motivated by these anticipated disruptions, grassroots-led Transition Town groups prepared “energy descent” scenarios in North America and the United Kingdom (Hopkins 2008), typically without the support of urban policy-makers.

While some of these alternative literatures and projects clearly informed the Greenest City process, the plan largely adopts growth-oriented strategies that promote incremental, rather than radical changes. The orthodoxy of economic growth, private enterprise, international trade, inter-urban competition, and market principles are reinforced – rather than challenged or fundamentally transformed – by the plan’s responses to the ecological crisis. In the next section, I examine the literature on urban neoliberalization and urban entrepreneurialism, looking particularly to the impact of neoliberal practices on urban responses to the ecological crisis.

## **2.2. Neoliberalization and Urban Politics**

Key to understanding the optimistic narrative and selective responses of the Greenest City initiative are new forms of urban politics related to the pressures of

neoliberalization and its normalization in cities like Vancouver. Scholars like David Harvey (2005, 2007), Roger Keil (2002, 2010), Bob Jessop (1998) and Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002) have pointed to new patterns of neoliberalization that restructure cities and national states according to market-oriented, entrepreneurial and individualistic principles. As discussed in the previous section, the imperatives of permanent growth and competition central to the neoliberal ethos are incompatible with ecological limits. Further, even if the technological optimism that promises to reconcile economic growth with ecological limits proves successful, it must contend with the economic and political pressures of neoliberalization. Tim Jackson (2011) cautions that, “Economic incentives and social logic conspire against technological improvements... instead there is a need for profound transformation of the economic system itself” (p. 155). Such a transformation of the economic system, however, is occurring on neoliberal terms, rather than to primarily meet the challenge of the ecological crisis. The transformation focuses instead on the pursuit of urban economic growth and competitiveness, new strategies of accumulation, and innovative combinations of private and public interests for the purposes of economic development. Part of this transformation can be understood as a strategy to reconcile conflict between economic and environmental objectives and overcome resistance to strategies based on economic growth. As a result, a ‘new environmental politics of urban development’ (NEPUD) (Jonas et. al 2011) is emerging to coordinate environmental and economic objectives in conditions of global inter-urban competition. Similarly, urban entrepreneurial strategies, identified earlier in cities seeking post-industrial economic revitalization (Harvey 1989; Hall and Hubbard 1996), are being re-imagined and deployed by cities seeking “green” economic growth and investment (While et. al 2004). I discuss these literatures to

develop the case that the Greenest City initiative is emblematic of this neoliberal, entrepreneurial ethos.

The NEPUD builds on the widely documented 'new urban politics' (Cox 1993) proposed in the 1990s, in which local interests coordinate to expand local economic activity and attract highly mobile capital to immobile cities. This literature was related to the entrepreneurial and competitive strategies deployed by local coalitions to advance a style of urban governance described as the "entrepreneurial city" (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Harvey 1989; Jessop 1998). With such strategies, the public sector seeks local economic transformation and development by adopting practices previously associated with business and advancing norms of competition, speculation, and profit. This adoption was related to the 'rolling back' of managerial and social-welfarist practices by states (Harvey 1989), along with the 'rolling out' of neoliberal 'growth-first' and market-oriented policies and institutions (Peck and Tickell 2002). While these two forms of urban neoliberalization are ongoing and face contestation and resistance, Roger Keil (2009) also points to a third phase of 'roll-with-it' neoliberalization. In this phase, Keil identifies a normalization and naturalization of neoliberal concepts among both elite and ordinary urban citizens. This phase sees ordinary citizens co-creating, sustaining and resisting internalized neoliberal ideas, while elites advance 'reformed' neoliberal practices in response to regulatory and other crises in the urban system. In this phase, neoliberalization is understood as an internal and participatory process rather than an imposed or external force. Recent urban responses to the ecological crisis, like the Greenest City initiative, develop in this context of ongoing and normalized neoliberalization, and "green" entrepreneurial responses are constrained by the market logics of competition, risk-taking and profit.

In the scholarly literature, the more recent idea of a NEPUD identifies processes of restructuring and governance that link economic and environmental objectives and produce new patterns of inter-urban competition (Jonas et. al 2011). The NEPUD sees cities competing for investment by adopting various local responses to the threat and consequences of environmental and economic change. For example, the adoption of new “green” infrastructure and land use policy may draw highly mobile capital and residents from other places based on concerns about the relative impacts of ecological change. Similarly, firms and individuals providing “green” or low-carbon products or services may be drawn by local regulation and conditions, such as selective development incentives or training programs. Conversely, aggressive and punitive carbon control measures or substantial and speculative investment in adaptation measures for ecological change could discourage investment (Stern 2006). Jonas et. al (2011) also anticipate representational strategies around “self-congratulatory low-carbon boosterism” within the NEPUD. Low-carbon lifestyle promotion, new branding campaigns, international trade missions, and “green” events and conference facilities are examples of strategies to attract particular residents and investment. A self-congratulatory place-promotion approach is clearly evidenced in the Greenest City initiative – which proposes strategies such as those above – and particularly in its ‘Green Capital’ branding and economic development strategy. These practices evoke the urban boosterism identified in the earlier NUP literature during the 1980s and 90s, while incorporating the low-carbon and environmental policy dimension characteristic of the NEPUD. Jonas et al write, “if promoting the post-industrial city in the NUP was about ‘no more factories’, in an era of resource constraint and climate change the preferred message is ‘no more carbon’” (Jonas et. al 2011, p. 2548).

The imperatives of economic growth and competition that are central to the new urban politics and normalized neoliberalism are fundamentally at odds with what researchers like Victor (2011), Jackson (2011) and Daly (1973, 1996) say is possible while remaining within ecological limits and preventing dangerous global warming. However, the internalization and prioritization of neoliberal values by elite and ordinary actors mean responses to the ecological crisis continue to emphasize and prioritize economic growth despite evidence of that incompatibility. Further, as While et. al (2009) note, strategies that work to accelerate inter-urban competition are likely to be prioritized over other concerns. More generally, Keil (2007, in While et. al 2009) argues that combined environmental and economic strategies may provide the flexibility to pursue economic goals under a guise of environmental protection. Keil (2009) later argues that the widespread internalization of neoliberalism is likely to produce proposals for “reformed” neoliberal practices emphasizing ecology, democracy, and collective action, so as to keep core neoliberal values in play during economic and ecological crises. This is consistent with the proposed trajectory of the NEPUD, where Jonas et. al (2011) anticipate new entrepreneurial urban regimes engaged in reconciling the tensions between urban economic development and environmental agendas by promoting reformed accumulation strategies. In Vancouver, there is evidence that local interests are coordinating to reconcile the economic and environmental tensions related to the Greenest City agenda and advance the entrepreneurial strategies it recommends. In the next section, I discuss literature on urban regime formation, looking particularly at the promotion of ideological change and the transformation of local economic development strategies.

### **2.3. Expressive Politics and Urban Regime Formation**

The measures proposed by the Greenest City initiative have significant implications for the relative standing of Vancouver in its inter-urban competition for capital and residents and the nature and magnitude of its economic growth. As such, both private and public sector interests concerned with local urban development and engaged with globalized capitalism have incentive to be involved with the plan's development, promotion, and implementation. As the literature on the ecological crisis suggests, entrepreneurial pro-growth and market-oriented strategies are likely to be contested and alternative approaches to the ecological crisis proposed. Conversely, economic interests that will not gain from green economic transformation, such as local firms engaged in resource extraction or carbon-intensive activity like cement production, are likely to resist these approaches. Members of the public, too, may oppose new costs or disagree ideologically with the promoted values and proposed changes. Media and political figures are likely to take a position opposing or supporting the proposed changes. In response, there is evidence that an urban regime of public and private interests is developing in Vancouver to confront this resistance through ideological and expressive work. This regime is coordinating governmental and nongovernmental capacities to reorient economic activity, re-create Vancouver's image, and reconcile tensions in the plan's objectives. To better understand this work, I examine the literature on the symbolic politics of urban regimes and regime politics in Vancouver.

Transitions in urban governance from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989) have led local elites to adopt various tools and strategies to produce local change that promotes economic growth and inter-urban competitiveness. Research on growth machine theory (Molotch 1993) examined the coordinated transformation of cities

by urban elites to maximize the potential for economic growth. Clarence Stone (1988, 1993) proposed urban regime theory as a more sophisticated framework for understanding how private and public interests coordinate dispersed resources and capacities to produce local change. These theories were brought together under the idea of a new urban politics (Cox 1993), discussed above, which emphasized the entrepreneurial strategies deployed by immobile regimes to attract highly mobile capital. In writing about the NEPUD, Jonas et. al (2011) point to a new generation of entrepreneurial urban regimes with features similar to those of the coordinated public and private interests engaged in the Greenest City.

Regime theory begins with the proposition that governing capacity is not easily captured through the electoral process. Despite an electoral mandate to make Vancouver the “greenest city in the world,” Vision Vancouver required a coalition of public and private interests to mobilize the resources and power necessary to produce change and build public support and involvement. Competing priorities and understandings were introduced to the planning process by involving multiple contributors from across sectors, civic departments, and the public. As such, some recommendations and discussions in the Greenest City documents contradict or are in tension with one another. The tensions between their environmental and economic objectives are the most salient, exacerbated by a political tradition in BC and Canada of pitting environmental policy against economic growth and employment. These conditions encourage strategic coordination among local interests to overcome these constraints to produce change. In other words, the motivation for strategic cooperation among local interests, Stone (1989) writes, is “not so much domination and subordination as a capacity to act and accomplish goals” (229). To do so effectively “governments must

blend their capacities with those of various nongovernmental actors” (Stone 1991, 7). The capacity to implement the broad, complex, and contradictory GCAP requires a degree of coordination facilitated by an urban regime.

Writing about Vancouver, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (2008) identifies existing patterns of political coordination by governmental and nongovernmental actors and describes the city’s unique regime politics. He argues that the regime system in Vancouver is socially progressive, fiscally conservative, and pro-development. It works to construct a civic culture that is “activist, tolerant, and entrepreneurial,” drawing in diverse civic, business, and community groups to “constantly re-invent the city” (Brunet-Jailly 2008, p. 386). This ongoing re-invention is the product of continual and participatory re-negotiation between citizens, business, and government, he adds. The re-invention of Vancouver as the ‘greenest city in the world’, and the re-negotiation of economic and environmental policy by local interests, represents a new articulation of the “sustainable open regime” described by Brunet-Jailly. Emerging networks of green enterprise and finance, particularly in consumer products, construction, energy, and food, assume a prominent position in this re-negotiation, alongside an array of community and environmental interests. This is not surprising considering the objectives in the Greenest City agenda and is anticipated in the literature on the NEPUD. As Jonas et. al (2011) write, “The drive to develop a low-carbon urban political economy is likely to involve the mobilization of strategic urban political interests and actors to undertake specific governance projects and investment activities consistent with state carbon reduction goals and outcomes” (p. 2542). During the planning phase being investigated in my study, where the crisis is emotively framed and selective actions are promoted for future approval, the mobilization of local interests is more ideological than instrumental.



Urban regime formation is at this point concerned with overcoming objections and tensions, transforming local values about economic growth and activity, and promoting a particular image of Vancouver.

To this point, Stone (1993) argued that while regimes are concerned with the quantity of growth, they may also “stress basic values about the quality of growth and the conditions under which economic investment or development should occur” (201). The NEPUD sees variations in environmental policy and responses to the ecological crisis as ways for urban regimes to differentiate cities from one another and attract investment (Jonas et al 2011). Key concerns of the Greenest City initiative are the environmental impacts of economic growth and the promotion of investment and development that meets its overall objectives. Local interests, Stone argues (1993) can mobilize to produce not simply economic growth as a goal in itself, but to ensure growth conforms “to the regime’s broader values about what the city is or should be” (202). While the Greenest City initiative promotes economic growth rooted in values like cooperation, compassion, and environmental stewardship, it also maintains and normalizes neoliberal values like competition, efficiency, profit, and financialization (Vancouver 2009a, 2011). Interests mobilized for Greenest City work also affirm what the city should be, namely, the “greenest” among its urban peers. As such, the interests coordinating to change Vancouver are engaged in ideological and symbolic work.

Stoker and Mossberger (1994) proposed a model of symbolic regime formation organized around values, ideology and expressive urban politics. These regimes seek local change by transforming the values and priorities held by decision-makers and ordinary people. Symbolic regimes accomplish this by manipulating ideas and images to develop a shared understanding of purpose and articulate the rightness and appeal of

an agenda (p. 209). This approach recognizes an expressive dimension of politics in which communication and representation are critical. Emotive symbols are invoked to help mobilize popular participation and sustain political activism. In other words, “politics and policymaking are about saying as well as doing things” (Stoker and Mossberg 1994, 203). In the Vancouver case, such a regime actively and emotively frames the ecological crisis, and promotes selective responses according to a particular set of values, intentions and concerns.

The NEPUD challenges existing values and understandings as cities adopt new environmental agendas and respond to new patterns of inter-urban competition re-aligned by ecological and economic pressures. Symbolic regime formation may provide a means for local interests to create, re-direct or sustain particular ideological changes, though motivations may differ. For instance, as the boundaries and trajectory of economic restructuring are contested, business leaders may be motivated to promote changes favourable to their economic interests; participants from community and environmental groups may be motivated by genuine social and ecological concerns, civic pride, personal advancement, or a sense of inclusion. Jonas et. al suggest elected officials and city managers may be motivated by the political capital that could be gained from being seen as a leader on environmental issues (2011, p. 2542). Stoker and Mossberger suggest that for some participants a key motivator may be the civic pride that arises from being, “world-class,” in the “vanguard,” or “outcompeting other localities” (1994, p. 203-4).

The traditional openness of Vancouver’s regime politics (Brunet-Jailly 2008) suggests a multiplicity of motivations for participating in the expressive dimension of the Greenest City project. Residents were engaged in symbolic co-creation and contestation

through hierarchies of engagement ranging from online consultations, social media and public events, to the external advisory committees and the Greenest City Action Team. Arguing that urban residents increasingly internalize neoliberal principles in the “roll-with-it” phase of neoliberalization, Roger Keil’s work (2009) suggests public engagement and regime participation would serve to further embed and normalize neoliberal values in the Greenest City work. The internalization of these principles may also facilitate the incorporation or diminution of contradictory or critical voices, such as those local interests advocating rapid economic degrowth or re-localization, by framing the ecological crisis in neoliberal terms. However, ideological transformation may promote “reformed” neoliberal values, such as de-coupled economic growth or markets for carbon pollution, further maintaining neoliberal hegemony despite the ecological and economic crises, as anticipated by Keil (2009). Similarly, a diverse group of ordinary Vancouverites engage the symbolic regime politics alongside elite participants, in which they also co-create and contest local change by promoting normalized neoliberal values and practices.

To conclude this section, scholarship on the ecological crisis and economic growth anticipates formidable contradictions between the economic and environmental objectives of the Greenest City initiative. Yet, the normalization of neoliberal concepts such as economic growth and inter-urban competition among elite and ordinary Vancouverites challenge the uptake of alternative approaches. The NUP literature draws attention to the likelihood of urban regime formation to coordinate local interests to promote economic expansion and attract mobile capital and residents in a competitive global economy; the NEPUD adds an environmental dimension to this competition and the pressure of the ecological crisis. Strategies to reconcile the ecological and economic

imperatives of the Greenest City initiative may be assessed as symbolic regime formation, revealing salient features of an expressive politics that hopes to transform local ideology and image. Yet, the openness of Vancouver's regime politics and the "reform" impulse in roll-with-it neoliberalism may be opening new spaces for contestation and alternatives. In sum, these literatures establish the underlying tensions and contradictions in an agenda of "green" economic growth and provide a framework for assessing the strategies deployed to reconcile them.

### **3. Methodology**

I designed this research study to investigate the entrepreneurial strategies deployed by cities to coordinate environmental objectives with economic growth and competitiveness objectives. I seek to answer this question: Why did the City of Vancouver develop a plan that proposes urban economic development and inter-urban competition as a response to the ecological crisis? I develop the City of Vancouver's Greenest City initiative as a case to closely study a single example of a multi-faceted economic and environmental planning process, from the framing of the ecological problem to the promotion of particular irreconcilable actions and representations. To help understand the contradictions that arise in this case, I examine scholarly literatures on the ecological crisis, especially as it relates to economic growth and its alternatives; on neoliberalization and urban politics related to the competitive and ideological dimension of environmental politics and urban development; and on symbolic regime formation and urban regime politics in Vancouver. Using the concepts explored in the literature review, I identify features of the Greenest City initiative, endeavour to explain the contradictions and tensions within the plan's discourse and recommendations, and identify an agenda of ideological transformation and place-promotion advanced by a symbolic urban regime.

To accomplish this, I use a qualitative, mixed-method approach, relying on multiple data sources. Primarily, I conducted an analysis of documents related to the Greenest City initiative. Table 2 provides a break down of the analyzed documents.

Secondly, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with a range of participants in the Greenest City process. In total, 362 minutes or about 6 hours, of interview data was recorded. All interviews were greater than 45 minutes in length. Table 3 provides an index of the respondents interviewed, and identifies them numerically to conceal their identity. These methods are appropriate because there is a rich and publicly available documentary record that captures the initiative's values, priorities, and representations at various stages, and interviews provide individual observations and insight into the motivations behind particular features of the documents and process.

I selected documents for analysis dating from the 2008 election campaign to the approval of the final plan in July 2011 (see Table 2). Documents analyzed included the electoral campaign statements that set the scope and overall objectives of the Greenest City initiative, first linking economic growth and competitiveness with a hopeful and optimistic response to the ecological crisis. Following this initial framing, the GCAT was assembled to produce the *Quick Starts Recommendations* report, which set out prioritized and quickly implementable actions for the City. This document also strengthened the ideological framing of the Greenest City agenda, setting out identifiable values and priorities while developing a particular understanding of the ecological crisis. The GCAT continued this ideological work in the longer and more in-depth *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future* report. These documents set the tone and scope of the planning and engagement process that followed, with City staff drawing considerably from its content as they developed the GCAP. Next, I analyzed draft and final copies of the GCAP that set out planned actions based on the framing, values and recommendations of the earlier Greenest City documents, as well as materials created by the City and the VEDC to promote the Green Capital branding strategy.

I also selectively examined newspaper stories related to the development of the Greenest City initiative, Vision Vancouver and the 2008 civic election in Vancouver, and the background of Greenest City Action Team members. Newspaper content was selected by searching for relevant keywords in the Lexis Nexis database and on the website of the *Globe and Mail*.

<b>Analyzed Document(s)</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Date Released or Received by Council</b>
2008 civic election campaign materials	Vision Vancouver	Fall 2008
<i>Quick Starts Recommendations Report</i>	GCAT	April 2009
<i>Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future</i>	GCAT	October 2009
Green Capital promotional material	City of Vancouver / VEDC	Various through 2009 & 2010
Report to Council on Final Draft of GCAP	City staff	July 2011
Greenest City Action Plan	City of Vancouver	July 2011
Newspaper articles related to Vision Vancouver and the Greenest City initiative	Various	2008-2011

**Table 2 Documents analyzed, with source and dates**

To strengthen the validity of my findings and identify other manifestations of the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature review, I conducted six semi-structured interviews. Respondents were sought out from the GCAT and EACs, emphasizing key decision-makers and participants whose involvement encompasses both an economic and environmental dimension. Respondents were selected because they represented political, academic, business, labour, or community interests related to the research question. These included a current and a former politician, a representative of a green enterprise networking and event foundation, an individual involved with the local food

movement and food industry, and a representative from a major labour organization. A city staff person involved with the public engagement process and communication of the Greenest City project was also interviewed.

	<b>Interviewee's Participation in Greenest City</b>
1	GCAT Member; Advisor in Green Transportation EAC
2	GCAT Member, Elected Official
3	GCAT Member
4	Adviser in Green Economy and Climate Leadership EAC
5	Adviser in Local Food EAC
6	City staff person, working in Greenest City public engagement and communication

***Table 3 Interviewee numbering with type of participation in the Greenest City initiative***

Informed by theoretical concepts identified in the literature review and the findings from my document analysis, I developed a script for semi-structured interviews. The script sought to check my previous findings and further develop my understanding of the tense relationship between the plan's economic and environmental objectives and the motivation for its particular strategies and representations. I also sought statements about the plan's objectives, values and framing of the ecological crisis to contrast responses between the interviewees and the documents. Following the interviews, I transcribed the relevant sections to make the data available for analysis.

I used the document analysis and interviews to help understand the framing of the ecological crisis, the selective and contradictory actions proposed in response, and strategies to reconcile conflict and facilitate adoption of the plan's recommendations by Council. Using concepts and models drawn from the literature review I identify plausible explanations for the promotion of particular values and recommended actions, and relate this to the political context in Vancouver. Analyzing the composition and features of local



interests involved with the Greenest City initiative, I also develop evidence of an urban regime formed to confront and reconcile contradictions and tensions through ideological change.

Before turning to my analysis of the Greenest City initiative, I discuss relevant aspects of the political context in Vancouver, covering recent tensions between environmental and economic interests in British Columbia and Canada and the relationship between Vision Vancouver and green enterprise.

## **4. Background: Ideological Conflict and Environmental Politics**

To better understand why the Greenest City documents narrate and respond to the ecological crisis as they do, it is necessary to establish some background for the urban and environmental politics of Vancouver in 2008. This discussion contributes to an improved understanding of the potential motivations for participants and reasons for the introduction of contradictory concepts and recommendations. In 2008, when the Greenest City initiative was proposed, national environmental and economic politics was a space of considerable ideological conflict. Provincially, British Columbia had developed strategies to reconcile economic and environmental conflict – in part for the purposes of economic growth and competitiveness – in its 2006 Climate Action Plan (BC, 2006). As researchers have documented, this reconciliatory approach had grave equity implications, worsening inequality among provincial residents as a result of policies designed to promote economic competitiveness and attract investment (Lee 2011). A divisive legacy of ideological conflict in BC from the 1990s, related to the environmental impacts of economic development, informed the reconciliatory strategies of Greenest City project. Many key individuals working on the Greenest City Action Team were involved in these regional and national conflicts, making them relevant to my investigation. I first examine how those historic tensions inform the attitudes and values of elite decision-makers involved in the Greenest City initiative. I then examine the relationship between Vision Vancouver and select green business and finance interests

involved in the Greenest City initiative, a discussion that provides insight into the composition of the Greenest City Action Team and the values and actions they promote.

#### **4.1. National and Municipal Elections in Fall 2008**

During Vancouver's 2008 municipal election the Vision Vancouver party and its mayoral candidate Gregor Robertson made the environment and the economy key aspects of their campaign. In Vision's campaign platform, Robertson and his party committed to make Vancouver the "greenest city in the world" if elected (Vision Vancouver, 2008). The earliest articulation and promotion of the Greenest City agenda by Vision Vancouver incorporated urban entrepreneurialism and economic development: Vision promises to meet its "greenest city" goal by "working with local business, non-profits, schools, and community groups," and "will set realistic targets, measure our success, and help create green jobs and a greener economy" (Vision Vancouver 2008, pg. 11). The Greenest City Action Plan is also consistent with other campaign commitments by Vision Vancouver and the Mayor, who promised to reduce or hold constant tax rates, to develop and promote favoured economic sectors in partnership with other governments and business, to reform and minimize bureaucracy, and to variously promote entrepreneurship. (Vision Vancouver 2008).

The municipal election took place in November 2008, during an ideological struggle at the federal level over the relationship between the environment and the economy in the context of widening global financial instability. In September 2008, the collapse of a US housing bubble was the catalyst for a sustained global financial crisis. After reaching historic levels that summer, petroleum prices plummeted. A federal

election was called in early September 2008 and national partisan conflict centered on two transnational crises: climate change and a worldwide recession.

During the national election, all the parties either proposed neoliberal and entrepreneurial responses to the ecological crisis or used neoliberal principles to argue against intervention. In October 2008, UNEP introduced its “Green New Deal,” emphasizing economic growth, financialization, and ecological modernization. This bolsters the case for the presence of “roll-with-it” neoliberalization as developed by Keil (2009), as neoliberal values and practices were a “natural” response adopted by all official parties in Canada and promoted internationally. Nationally, no major party questioned the orthodoxy of indefinite economic growth or addressed its inherent ecological contradictions as outlined by writers like Herman Daly (1973) or Peter Victor (2007). In framing by the federal Conservative government, the ecological crisis was placed into conflict with the economic crisis; economic growth and job creation took precedence over environmental action. In contrast, yet still adopting a neoliberal framing, the centrist Liberal Party explicitly connected its environmental proposals to economic competitiveness and recovery. Similarly, the left-wing New Democratic Party invoked “reformed” neoliberal principles in its promotion of a carbon-trading market, while arguing against new taxes on carbon pollution. The Conservative campaign condemned both approaches, claiming either would trigger a recession in Canada and threaten national unity (Campion-Smith, 2008). In the end, the Conservatives received a plurality of votes and – after challenges from the other parties – returned to government.

The national election pointed to a consensus among the major political parties rooted in normalized neoliberalism, promoting either reformed neoliberal practices to meet combined environmental and economic goals, or prioritizing competitiveness and

economic growth over any serious response to the ecological crisis. The Conservative government adopted the latter view and proposed minor or even harmful actions in relation to issues of climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Several interviewees told me that federal politics, particularly inaction on global warming, compelled them to address the ecological crisis locally and underscored the importance of ideology in environmental politics (1, 2, 3, 5). The mutually exclusive “jobs or environment” framing deployed by the Conservative party was considered particularly pernicious by several respondents. As a result, this experience encouraged ideological work by public and private interests to anticipate and reconcile similar conflict at the local scale and to secure public support for local change.

## **4.2. “The War in the Woods”: Ideology and Environmental Politics in British Columbia**

Historic conflict over the management of forestry resources in BC highlights the difficulty of reconciling economic growth with ecological limits and demonstrates the viability of ideological strategies to re-frame conflict and overcome resistance. Many early participants in the Greenest City initiative were involved in these conflicts between the environment and the economy during the 1990s in British Columbia and Vancouver. After the NDP came to power in 1991, environmentalists concerned about provincial forestry policy came into sharp conflict with powerful corporate and labour interests in the province. The NDP drew key political support both from environmental activists and labour groups, a circumstance that constrained their ability to produce policy outcomes satisfying one or the other constituency. Feeling disenfranchised, environmental activists engaged in civil disobedience, such as blockades and occupations, and government and business retaliated with lawsuits and other forms of intimidation. Threats of violence

were reported from both sides of the conflict. One GCAT member (Interviewee 3) recalled physically aggressive intimidation between union members and even threats of rape against female environmentalists. She described it as “a really terrible, really divisive time” for unions and environmental organizations that benefited the transnational corporations extracting resources within the province.

In an analysis of BC’s environmental political culture in the 1990s, Salazar and Alper (1999) describe this conflict as a new cleavage “beyond the politics of left and right.” They point to the role of ideological strategy and resistance in both producing and reconciling conflict. The provincial NDP drew support from both environment and labour interests, a circumstance that some interviewees told me the forestry industry exploited. One GCAT member (3) called the conflict a “wonderfully scripted opportunity for [resource corporations] to divert attention from what they were actually doing.” Another member of the GCAT (2) reported that a colleague was at “the conference where the forestry industry came up with the whole concept... the slogan of ‘jobs or the environment’.” She considered this framing successful, adding, “It was bought by the workers, by the labour unions, by the NDP government, by the public, by you-name-it.” Several other interviewed participants directly recalled the “jobs or the environment” framing in the 1990s.

From another analysis, Bruce Shelvey (2001) points to a critical role for ideology in his summary of scholarship on reconciliatory strategies in BC’s environmental politics. He writes that BC has “experienced a series of ideological battles over how the forests will be understood” and that outcomes will be “determined by a region’s dominant worldview” (2001). Shelvey points to neoliberal trends re-defining ideological norms in BC, such as de-regulation, competitiveness, and globalization. This re-definition

facilitated ideological strategies by forestry firms, most notably the framing of their work as “free-market environmentalism” as a means to continue their extraction of forestry resources while maintaining social license.

Salazar and Alper (1999) also point to strategies of cooptation by the NDP to neutralize or diminish opposition from environmentalists (29). These included incremental or symbolic concessions by government to diminish the political damage from policies that favoured economic development and resource extraction over environmental concerns. Similarly, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, while the Greenest City Action Plan may diminish many environmentally destructive practices, it does not directly confront prevailing economic imperatives. Rather, through its discourse and recommendations, the Greenest City seeks to minimize disruption to the neoliberal priorities of the local economy, namely the promotion of indefinite economic growth by government, private profit and ownership, and expanded international trade and mobility. As the shift in ideological norms made available new strategies to confront resistance by environmental organizations in the 1990s, my data and analysis show Greenest City participants similarly relied on ideology to build support among the public and to confront resistance from alternative business and environmental interests.

The 1990s’ “War in the Woods” continues to affect relationships between business, labour, government and environmentalists in BC. The period clearly informs current decision-making by participants in the Greenest City process: two interviewees report actively working to avoid repeating the conflicts of the 1990s in their Greenest City work. This conflict is further significant since at least four members of the Greenest City Action Team played key roles in government, labour, or the environmental movement during the 1990s. One interviewee (2) said of the period, “if you’ve been working or

volunteering around the environmental movement in this province you lived through the jobs or the environment framing. We spent an entire decade hearing that we could either have jobs or we could have clean air, clean water, salmon and other things. It was brutal". This sharply contrasts with the Greenest City's framing that explicitly connects job creation and economic growth with proposed actions. This ideological connection, bolstered by internalized neoliberal principles, is an understandable strategy in the context of nonlocal and historic conflicts between the environment and economy that were also rooted in – and partially reconciled through – ideology.

### **4.3. Vision Vancouver and Green Enterprise**

The results of combining economic and environmental objectives in Vision Vancouver's election campaign diverged sharply from the results at the national level, and suggest the local reconciliatory potential of expressive politics. The day after the national election and a month before Vancouver's civic election, a columnist wrote in Canada's national daily newspaper the *Globe and Mail*, "It may be some time before we again see a political leader in Canada brave enough to build a campaign platform around saving the environment" (Mason, 2008). The columnist continued, saying, "The party that won last night's federal election was the one that barely mentioned the environment, except when it was to disparage the green policies of its opponents." (ibid.). Yet, in Vancouver, a coalition of parties that emphasized a combined economic and environmental strategy was elected the following month with considerable support. All of the Vision Vancouver candidates were elected, including mayoral candidate Gregor Robertson. While this research does not seek to explain the result of that election, it suggests the local appeal of green economic transformation,



entrepreneurship, and an ambitious environmental agenda. It also suggests national conditions differ significantly from those at affecting Vancouver's electoral politics. I argue that the politicization and informal coordination of a network of green enterprise and philanthropy interests is key among these differences, and that this network constitutes part of a symbolic urban regime pursuing local change. While leadership from Vision Vancouver in 2008 was decisive in the development of the idea of the Greenest City initiative, a wider constellation of interests was also instrumental in creating and promoting that agenda. As such, the Greenest City initiative is a useful case for exploring the new environmental politics of urban development and symbolic urban regime formation to reconcile economic and environmental objectives.

Vision Vancouver was the newest of the three major civic parties seeking election in Vancouver. Prior to the municipal election in 2005, a group of members broke away from the traditionally leftist and labour-aligned COPE to form Vision Vancouver. Vision proposed a center-left alternative to COPE, drawing on green and social enterprises in Vancouver for support and fundraising. COPE was more critical of development and business interests and more closely aligned with labour and humanitarian interests than Vision. Vision represented a new ideological alignment that desired similar ends to COPE, but emphasized entrepreneurialism and economic transformation to achieve them. Notably, the environment was a much more prominent issue within Vision. Vision Vancouver's Mike Magee said of his party's approach, "We're trying to achieve a new place where the old labels fall away... We're quite clearly positioned as a progressive centrist party with strong social values and strong environmental values." (Bula, 2008 December 12). The Greenest City initiative is a

manifestation of this “new place” described by Magee, although his comments neglect the clear entrepreneurial and economic focus in the breakaway group.

Despite differences in tactics and ideology, COPE and Vision formed an alliance, including the municipal Green Party as a more junior partner, before the 2008 election to oppose the governing Non-Partisan Association (NPA). The agreement reflects the constant renegotiation of the “sustainable open regime” that Brunet-Jailly (2008) described in Vancouver, encouraging an activist civic culture characterized by unexpected and diverse coalitions. While Brunet-Jailly identified two main centres of power in Vancouver, a social democratic group and an entrepreneurial and neoliberal group, the Greenest City initiative suggests a “green neoliberalism” may be developing to coordinate some interests from both power centres and represented politically by Vision Vancouver.

The selection of Vision’s Gregor Robertson as the coalition’s sole mayoral candidate solidified values of social democracy, environmentalism, and entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism within the coalition. Robertson, at the time an elected provincial politician for the social democratic NDP, was the founder of a well-known organic juice business called Happy Planet Foods. One local journalist wrote that the Gregor Robertson-led Vision Vancouver party “epitomizes the new generation of green enterprise” (Bula, 2008 September 2). After joining the coalition and backing Robertson, the Green Party’s park board candidate said, “Vision is running the greenest mayor we’ve ever had. Gregor Robertson could be a Green Party member.” (Bula, 2008 September 10).

Further contributing to its reputation of green entrepreneurialism, Vision Vancouver drew considerable financial and moral support from a local network of green enterprise, philanthropy and elite networking organizations branded *Renewal*. This relationship is relevant to understanding the Greenest City initiative since many of its key participants – including the co-chairs and other members of the GCAT— have formal roles within the network; the ethos and objectives of the Greenest City initiative and the network overlap so considerably; and the policies and framing of the initiative have implications for the network’s businesses, investments, and supported organizations.

When Vision took office in late 2008, *Renewal* included the philanthropic foundations Endswell and Tides Canada, the investment bodies *Renewal Partners* and the *Renwal2 Investment Fund*, and the *Renewal Land Company*. The investment arm focuses on organic food, green consumer products and green building products, all areas in which marketing indicates there is “significant growth and a dearth of capital available to entrepreneurs” (Ebner 2010). The philanthropic arm has supported a range of environmental, health, community media, local food, legal service, and other organizations in British Columbia. Endswell alone has provided financial support to over 120 Vancouver-based nonprofits<sup>3</sup> and key Greenest City participants have held significant leadership roles in several of these organizations.

*Renewal* also organizes innovative philanthropic and for-profit collaborations in the social enterprise and investment sector. These include events, networking,

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.renewalpartners.com/>

professional development, and real estate. Examples include the Social Venture Institute Hollyhock, an annual social enterprise summit, and PlayBIG, described by Renewal as an “intimate gathering... for people with discretionary capital of \$15 million or more” to discuss “innovative approaches to deploying capital through investment and philanthropy to affect positive social and environmental change.”<sup>4</sup> The Hollyhock retreat centre on Cortes Island, affiliated with Renewal and its events, is perceived as so closely tied to Vision Vancouver that some local media and critics refer to Mayor Robertson’s closest allies as the “Hollyhock Mafia” (Bula 2008, 12 December).

The business that Robertson co-founded in the 1990s, Happy Planet Juice, received early funding from Renewal Partners, a relationship celebrated and highlighted in Renewal’s online marketing.<sup>5</sup> While Robertson was establishing Happy Planet, he kept his main residence on Cortes Island and stayed in an apartment owned by Renewal’s Joel Solomon while in Vancouver (Bula 2009, 1 June). Beyond the mayor, there are several other relationships between Renewal and organizations run by individuals within Vision Vancouver, including communications and polling firms (Bula 2008 12 December, 2009 1 June). Mike Magee – who has filled several roles with Vision including Chief of Staff to the mayor and campaign manager – reported that his consulting firm did one fifth of its business with Renewal Partners, and “considerable work” with Tides Canada (Bula 2008, 12 December). Martha Burton, a senior vice-president at Endswell and Renewal Partners, as well as an advisor to Tides Canada and

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.renewalpartners.com/collaborations/conferences/playbig>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.renewalpartners.com/investments/stories/happy-planet>

a director of the Renewal Land Company, serves on the Executive Board of the Vision Vancouver Electors Association, as treasurer. Along with Solomon, Burton is a director of Interdependent Investments Ltd., a company that has received \$1.2 million in payments from the Endswell Foundation and contributed to Vision's election campaign. Renewal also engaged the 2008 election, contributing \$60,000 to Vision and Robertson's election campaigns (Bula 2009, 1 June). These ties and financial contributions show the politicization of an existing green enterprise network in Vancouver. This network contributes considerable nongovernmental resources and support to an urban regime producing local change that may benefit their businesses and investments. Renewal, as well as firms and individuals associated with it, play a significant coordinating and resource provision role in this regime and because of this role I more closely examine the origins and ideology underlying its work.

The US-born Carroll Newell founded Renewal and Joel Solomon, also from the United States, later joined its leadership. Both Newell and Solomon inherited a substantial amount of wealth in the 1970s, Newell's arising from the consumer plastics firm Newell Rubbermaid and Solomon's from Tennessee real estate development. Newell later re-located to British Columbia, where she established a charitable foundation called Endswell and an investment firm called Renewal Partners. Newell met Solomon on Cortes Island, northwest of Vancouver, and they formed a financial partnership in 1993. Today, these groups partner with, invest in, and provide grants to entrepreneurial environmental and social organizations and businesses in British Columbia (See Bula 2009, 1 June).

The work of Renewal reflects the "reformed" neoliberal practices and local ideological transformation central to both Vision Vancouver and the Greenest City

initiative. On the first point, Renewal’s investment, granting, and event programming advance environmental and social objectives through a strategic allocation of wealth and investment returns. In its own words, Renewal describes its goal as “stewardship of wealth and influence” for the “common good”.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Renewal develops entrepreneurial and cross-sectoral partnerships, often blending not-for-profit and for-profit activities and organizations. Their marketing emphasizes business development, market exchange, capital accumulation, innovation and philanthropy as a means to meet environmental and social objectives.

On the second point, Renewal advances a particular type of ideological transformation through its work. Renewal representatives describe their work as producing “a new model”, “a revolution” and a “sea change”.<sup>7</sup> Renewal’s mission statement summarizes the objective of its work as “to help shift the culture of business from the dominance of the quarterly bottom line, to one in which the long-term future of the human and natural world is an integral part of financial success.”<sup>8</sup> The Greenest City documents and interviewed participants adopted similar language and framing, referring to “a revolution,” “transformation,” “new models,” “cultural change” in business and across society, and the need to “re-think, re-evaluate, and re-imagine” everyday practices (Vancouver 2009a, 2011; Interviewees 1 and 3). As with the Greenest City initiative, Renewal’s call for significant transformation seeks to selectively change practices and measurement in the context of a core economic objective. For the

<sup>6</sup> <http://RenewalPartners.com>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Greenest City, the objective is economic growth; for Renewal, it is “financial success” and the altruistic management of wealth and influence.

Vision Vancouver itself represents a coming together of environmental and economic interests. Some of its leadership and financing is drawn from a local network of green business, centered on Renewal Partners and the philanthropic work of Joel Solomon. This network has a particular understanding of the ecological crisis and the responses needed, is involved in the framing and production of the Greenest City initiative, and may benefit from its implementation. Understanding the local and political context helps to explain the motivation and political strategy underlying the discourse of and actions proposed by the Greenest City initiative. Elite participants seek to avoid the conflicts seen in BC during the 1990s and maintain economic growth while avoiding the contemporary tension between economics and the environment seen at the federal level. Locally, green finance and philanthropic interests can be seen coordinating behind Vision Vancouver to advance a selective, neoliberal response to the ecological crisis that may also serve their private interests. In the tradition of Vancouver’s sustainable open regime (Brunet-Jailly 2008), this burgeoning coalition combines diverse – though fundamentally incompatible – objectives to diminish conflict and permit local change.

## 5. The Greenest City Initiative

The Greenest City initiative has multiple, incrementally developed components and key participants that point to a pattern of urban regime formation related to green enterprise and historic conflicts over environmental politics. In this chapter, I will briefly reiterate how the components relate to one another, elaborate on the composition of the Greenest City Action Team, and provide a detailed discussion of the narrative and strategies in the Greenest City initiative. The selective and contradictory responses introduced in the GCAP reaffirm the inherent incompatibility between key principles of normalized neoliberalism and the GCAP's stated environmental objectives. My analysis of these responses provides evidence of the entrepreneurial and ideological strategies promoted by local interests to reconcile conflict and produce local change through expressive politics. The various phases of the Greenest City initiative each lead toward its partial and contradictory final plan and contain indications of regime formation and normalized neoliberalism that make its outcome more understandable. Before assessing the narrative and actions in detail, I review the planning process and its documents below.

The political framing during the 2008 campaign and the documents produced by the GCAT provide the ideological foundation for the Greenest City initiative. The 2008 Vision Vancouver campaign platform introduced the goal to become “the greenest city in the world” and first linked the project to an economic agenda (Vision 2008). Next, the two visioning documents prepared by the GCAT, the *Quick Start Recommendations* and



the *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future* report, framed the crisis by introducing an apocalyptic potential and a contrasting narrative of prosperity, comfort, wealth, and competitive victory. The latter outcome is understood to be the product of purposeful and innovative coordination by public and private partners in pursuit of complementary economic and environmental objectives. Following the approval of *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future* at Council, staff were directed to begin a public engagement process and begin work on a final plan that would meet the goals and targets laid out in the *Bright Green Future* report. To accomplish this, local stakeholders were recruited to External Advisory Committees (EACs), established for each of the ten Greenest City goals. These committees met throughout 2010 and early 2011 and made significant refinements and contributions to the targets, recommendations, and strategies included in the final plan. Input from the general public was drawn into the planning process through innovative engagement strategies, involving unconventional partnerships with nongovernmental actors and new technologies like social media and online voting. The final GCAP drew from all the previous components to recommend a selection of entrepreneurial actions. The GCAP, however, was only approved in principle and as a plan of *potential* actions; most recommendations require a separate motion by Council approving a more specific and developed policy and in some cases additional commitments from higher levels of government or private sector partners are needed. As such, ongoing ideological and coordinating work is required to facilitate implementation of the plan, pointing to an enduring role for a symbolic urban regime. Next, I discuss the GCAT and its critical role in framing and guiding the overall initiative, before turning to the selective and contradictory responses promoted in the GCAP.

## 5.1. Greenest City Action Team

In late 2008 and early 2009, the mayor recruited seventeen local business and political elites to the GCAT and charged them to develop a vision that would allow Vancouver to become the “greenest city in the world”. This visioning work set the overall ideological tone and was instrumental in directing and informing all the Greenest City work that followed. Examining the GCAT’s participants helps to understand the initiative’s discourse and recommendations and the values and interests underlying them. Informal relationships and coordinated work among participants to promote and build public support for this type of response point to a symbolic urban regime interested in fulfilling the Greenest City mandate.

The GCAT represents a selection of diverse elites generally engaged in either the economic or environmental dimension of objectives identified in Vision Vancouver’s campaign (Vision 2008). All held past or current leadership roles in organizations or government doing work broadly related to the environment or business; none were devoted to a singular environmental issue. The members of the GCAT included a former Premier of British Columbia and Mayor of Vancouver, a former provincial deputy Minister of Advanced Education and former deputy Minister for both Health and Finance, both a former and a current City Councillor, the first Manager of the City of Vancouver’s Sustainability Office, the Vice-President of Sustainability for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, former chairman of BC’s major electric utility BC Hydro and former executive at the fuel cell energy firm Ballard Power Systems, and the CEO of Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, one of Canada’s largest member-owned financial institutions. Other members were prominent environmental lawyers, sustainability consultants, and business and union leaders.

Business elites included the vice-president of Golden Properties, a Vancouver-based property investment firm with a background in software and property development in California and China; the CEO of Novex Delivery Solutions, a green-branded courier firm; a Principal from HB Lanarc Consultants, and a Director from the Sustainability Solutions Group, both planning, development and design consultancies. David Suzuki, a well-known Canadian scientist and broadcaster was also appointed to the GCAT.

Considered as a group, GCAT members collectively held statuses with a spectrum of local boards, committees, civic organizations, universities, businesses, and government. All of the members held status with more than one organization, many with an environmental or green business focus, and often across sectors. These included government, nonprofits, foundations, corporations, financial entities, universities, and industry groups. While most of these interlocking relationships are shared at the local level, some members are also connected through provincially and nationally constituted bodies, notably the National Roundtable on Energy, Environment and the Economy and former Prime Minister Paul Martin's Advisory Committee for Cities and Communities. These multiple, interlocking relationships and roles in areas related to the Greenest City's objectives contribute to the informal coordination of capacities and resources cited by Stone (1989) as instrumental in the operation of an urban regime. Next, I look more closely at the background and worldviews of individual members and their relationships to one another, identifying further evidence of a shared agenda and the coordination of symbolic work related to reconciling economic and ecological imperatives.

David Boyd was the principal author of the *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future* report and the group's co-chair, along with the Mayor. Boyd is an environmental lawyer and the former executive director of the Sierra Legal Defense Fund (now

Ecojustice). Boyd is a central figure in the GC process, has ties to other members, and has written similar reports in the past. Notably, Boyd authored the *Sustainability within a Generation: A New Vision for Canada* report in 2004 for the David Suzuki Foundation, a Canadian environmental policy and advocacy organization. David Suzuki, a zoologist, broadcaster, environmentalist and member of the GCAT created the BC-based organization in the early 1990s. Setting a target year of 2030, Boyd argues two main points in his 2004 report: Canada should strive to be the “world’s most environmentally friendly nation” and Canadian economic efforts should focus on “generating genuine wealth” to supplement economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (Boyd 2004, pg. 2). As in the Greenest City case, his report in 2004 does not challenge the orthodoxy of continued economic growth or anticipate a moment when growth would stop. Similar to the narrative of the *Bright Green Future* report, Boyd’s 2004 proposal is described as a “bold new vision” that calls on Canada to “reconcile our values” by “developing and implementing an ambitious new environmental, economic, and social agenda” (Boyd 2004, pg. 53). Boyd argues for the de-coupled model of economic growth described in Chapter 2, writing that “reducing consumption of resources [does not] mean the end of economic growth, since we can exchange more dollars while using less resources” (Boyd 2004, pg. 6). That Boyd’s previous publication on this topic adopted this ideological perspective suggests the perspective informed the Mayor’s decision to have him co-chair the Greenest City report.

More recently, David Boyd and fellow GCAT member David Suzuki co-wrote *David Suzuki’s Green Guide*, which was co-published in the fall of 2008 by D&M Publishers and the David Suzuki Foundation. D&M is a Vancouver-based publisher that has released works by other GCAT members; several other members have also worked

with or advised the David Suzuki Foundation. These literary partnerships and informal relationships point to a shared, or a least complementary worldview among GCAT participants. While this does not reveal a unified opinion within the Team, it suggests similar understandings pointing to a symbolic regime seeking change and leadership through expressive politics directed at decision-makers and the public.

Part of the interest in reconciling economic growth and responses to the ecological crisis arises from participants' roles in historic conflicts in BC and Canada over the use of the environment for economic purposes. Six members were directly involved in this conflict during the 1990s as politicians, activists, or professionals in the forestry industry. Notable among them was Mike Harcourt, who was the Premier of British Columbia from 1991 until 1996, key years of tension in the "War in the Woods". While Premier, he formed the Commission on Resources and Environment in an attempt to reconcile conflict between environmental and economic interests by inviting stakeholders to negotiate agreements through consensus. His tenure was dominated by these conflicts, which remained tense at the time of his resignation in 1996.

My interviews with other GCAT members highlighted their participation in nongovernmental organizing during these conflicts in the late 1980s and 90s. Several first met each other while setting up two new organizations in response to these tensions, Forest Futures (now the Dogwood Initiative) and the Labour Environmentalists Alliance Society (now Toxic Free Canada). Both of these groups later received support from Tides Canada, the charitable foundation co-founded by Joel Solomon of Renewal Partners. Aspects of this organizing work were described as reconciliatory, focused on diminishing conflict and building a shared agenda between economic and environmental interests. One interviewee (3) told me that the purpose of these environmental groups

during the 1990s was to “build bridges between environmental organizations and unions” and “figure out how we can work together, rather than having these divisions.” By contrast, the interviewee described the Greenest City work as “about green jobs as opposed to jobs versus the environment,” a shift she described as a change in “consciousness”. Highlighting the effect of the “War in the Woods” on her worldview, she describes the period as having considerable personal and public importance, adding that she intends to research the conflict and its contemporary consequences in pursuit of a graduate degree. This multi-decade organizing shows an enduring set of values and an informal network of relationships among GCAT participants, building the case for a symbolic regime undertaking ideological work to avoid similar conflict.

Another GCAT member was vice-president at a forestry firm in the late 1990s and tasked with reviewing the company’s operations in response to environmental criticism. An article in the *Globe and Mail* said the company had been “stuck in an highly polarized ideological battle, defending its logging practices as the right and the only approach” (Matas and Lush 1998). In a strategy echoed in the Greenest City work, neoliberal concepts laid out a path toward reconciliation in conflicts over forestry. For example, Matas and Lush reported that “rather than a battle between right and wrong the [vice-president’s] review team came to see the war in the woods as a traditional marketplace, where no one rules. Everyone including the government and the environmentalists competed furiously but also co-operated when necessary” (ibid.). In the article, the GCAT member said that this approach meant, “You can suddenly drop your weapons. You can say, the environmental groups have some really good ideas over here... and the government actually knows what it is talking about on these issues” (ibid). This entrepreneurial approach – involving partnership and coordination,

competitive norms, and market logics -- shows a normalized neoliberalism among the GCAT's elite participants. In sum, involvement in the "War in the Woods" by GCAT members established a shared, prior experience of conflict and reconciliation between environmental and economic objectives, formed enduring informal relationships and shared values among participants, and provided entrepreneurial and ideological strategies to be deployed for Greenest City objectives.

Other features of the GCAT membership draw attention to potential motivations for participation. Some GCAT participants have a strong ideological interest to resolve the economic and environmental conflict as it may support their personal or professional work. The diversity of these participants shows that multiple interests, and not strictly economic ones, are served by participation in the GCAT. For instance, if conflict prevents action on environmental concerns and if there is no social license for economic development because of those concerns, the reconciliatory strategies proposed by the GCAT could serve to benefit both environmental and economic interests. However, the fundamental incompatibility of continued economic growth and environmental limits mean that any such reconciliation must be temporary and partial. This requires ongoing ideological and expressive work to continually overcome arising contestation and alternative approaches. A symbolic regime perspective draws attention to the motivations of participants' on the GCAT to generate the support and capacity for local change, while diminishing conflict.

Several GCAT members work for, operate or are otherwise affiliated with businesses that would likely be affected by the actions proposed in the initiative. Many of the involved businesspeople explicitly associate their work with environmental objectives. These businesses include Canada's "first environmentally responsible

courier” service, a manufacturer of electric batteries for vehicles, two sustainability and planning consultancies, and an international property and technology investment company. Additionally, the CEO of Vancouver City Savings Credit Union (VanCity) is a member of the GCAT, which proposes in the *Bright Green Future* report several innovative financial mechanisms to be provided by that institution. Boyd and the VanCity CEO also sit on the advisory board of the Renewal2 Investment Fund, part of the green finance and philanthropy network whose ties to Vision Vancouver were identified above. Renewal2’s investments focus on organic food, and consumer and building products marketed as “green” and serve to gain from the economic transformation proposed for Vancouver. GCAT members have also held past board positions with VanCity, the Vancouver Board of Trade, and the business faculties of local and national universities. One is a member of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, an invitation-only organization of CEOs that promotes market-solutions to environmental problems. Other members are former and current elected officials that may gain political capital if seen to reconcile conflict, develop the economy, create jobs, or respond to the ecological crisis (Jonas et. al, 2011).

Some affiliations draw attention to the place promotion agenda of the Greenest City and the symbolic regime supporting it. At the time the GCAT was drafting its two major contributions, several members were working with the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC). Signifying the importance of the Olympics to the initiative, the Vice-President Sustainability at VANOC was selected as a member of the GCAT. The place-promotion and branding aspects of the Greenest City initiative are closely tied to the Olympics as a spectacle of global competition and achievement, evidenced in comments by interviewees (1, 2, 6), in all the



analyzed documents, and in the Green Capital branding program developed to coordinate economic development opportunities arising from the Olympics and the Greenest City project. Scholarly literature on urban entrepreneurialism and urban regime theory draws particular attention to the role of the Olympics in transforming cities for economic development and inter-urban competition (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Other participants may also have an interest in seeing Vancouver promoted as a “Green Capital,” for both personal and professional reasons. Living in the “greenest city” or simply in a city that expresses similar values to one’s own may further motivate participation. All interviewees expressed pride or personal satisfaction in having participated in the Greenest City project.

In sum, the Greenest City Action Team established the initiative’s underlying values and identified the need for local ideological transformation and the reconciliation of conflict between the environment and the economy. Characteristics of its membership – such as their other affiliations and past experiences in environmental politics – show that very diverse interests that are not exclusively economic are working together to create the capacity and support for mutually beneficial change. In the next section, I turn from the composition of the Greenest City Action Team to discuss the content and implications of what they produced together.

## **5.2. The Narrative of the Greenest City and a “Bright Green Future”**

Though the goal to be the “greenest city in the world” was set by Vision Vancouver, it was the Greenest City Action Team’s two major contributions that established the underlying narrative and ethos of the initiative. The *Quick Starts* and

*Bright Green Future* reports set out an entrepreneurial narrative, along with neoliberal values and concepts, that support a particular set of responses. Jessop described this type of crisis response by cities as "entrepreneurial measures narrated in entrepreneurial terms" (Jessop 1998, p. 80). Their content reflects the normalization of neoliberal concepts among urban elites involved with the GCAT and sets out an optimistic and economistic understanding of the ecological crisis, prescribing entrepreneurial strategies aimed at economic competitiveness and development. This early ideological work was used to frame future consultation and established the dominant criteria by which recommended actions would be advanced and assessed. Since most recommended actions require separate approval from Council to proceed, the expressive politics of this framing remain a critical part of implementing the plan. Ongoing ideological transformation will be needed to facilitate future passage by securing public support and overcoming resistance and alternatives to the entrepreneurial strategies proposed. I discuss this narrative, emphasizing its contradictions and evidence of neoliberal normalization, before turning to a thematic analysis of the recommendations.

The *Quick Start Recommendations* report was released in April 2009, shortly after the GCAT formed, with the intent that its recommendations be implemented before the Winter Olympics in February 2010. In that report, the GCAT compels aggressive action to turn an urgent crisis into an economic opportunity. Its first lines encompass the fundamental tension and ideological narrative that I am investigating:

The future of humanity hinges on cities dramatically reducing their devastating impact on the planet. This urgent and monumental challenge is being met with bold environmental policy changes and by unprecedented investment in green enterprises, creating real economic benefits for cities that aggressively develop best tools and practices (Vancouver 2009c, p. 1).

The problem, apocalyptically framed, is understood to be global in scope and encompassing all of humanity, while requiring a response from cities to ameliorate. Setting out the overall trajectory of the Greenest City project, responses are understood to be two-fold, necessitating both environmental policy and economic investment. This initial document sets out how inter-urban competition poses both risks from inaction and economic rewards from "aggressive" action. The risk of "losing ground, and opportunities to more ambitious cities" is introduced here and a course of action proposed: the drafting of "a focused plan" and the mobilization by "city hall, citizens, businesses and community groups to take action" (Vancouver 2009a, p. 1). This is, it later adds, the "right thing to do" because of a "collective responsibility to future generations" (p. 3).

After this, the report promptly shifts from a narrative emphasizing ethics to one emphasizing economics, urging the adoption of different kinds of economic growth. Urgent change is needed, the GCAT argues, because the global economy is undergoing a "green" transition. According to the GCAT, the transition means that the environmental impacts of economic growth are lessened, innovation produces new economic and employment opportunities, and health and wellness are promoted. It warns that other cities have recognized that "green is no longer the colour of sacrifice; it's the colour of money and job creation." (p. 3). If Vancouver wishes to compete in this transforming global economy the GCAT argues that it must "become a bigger magnet for trade and investment in green business" (p. 3). The report then turns to introduce its 44 recommendations, what it calls "an ambitious but pragmatic list of smart, green policies and actions, most of which can be initiated immediately" (p. 3). The place promotion opportunities of the Olympics are cited as a reason for the project's urgency: "Vancouver is already in the world's spotlight... [the Olympics] will be an opportunity to promote the

city to prospective residents and potential businesses as an international exemplar" (p.1).

Most recommendations are economic development initiatives, demonstration or testing projects to be installed by the city, or suggestions for advocacy to be conducted by the Mayor's office. Several recommendations propose awards, contests and granting programs to be developed by the City, as well as social marketing and behaviour change initiatives. New municipal policies are also proposed, including a "Right to Know" bylaw for toxins, an edible landscaping policy and updated waste reduction policies. A "Green Tape Review" is also proposed, citing complaints from residents and businesses regarding regulation that inhibits the use of environmentally preferable green technology and practices.

Several ideas are incorporated into the final GCAP plan, including the drafting of a "green economic development strategy" building on the City's history of investment from the Asia-Pacific region and the creation of a "sustainability precinct" in East Vancouver for the demonstration and testing of policies, practices, and technologies. By February 2010, 31 of 44 recommended actions were underway, with only six being held for additional planning. Staff reported that \$390,000 of existing operating budget resources were committed to the *Quick Starts* recommendations, which had leveraged approximately \$910,000 in funding from other public and private partners.

The most significant contribution from the GCAT is the *Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future* report. This report frames the ecological crisis at length, with emotive language, and narrates and categorizes pathways for responses, advancing the entrepreneurial and competitive tone of the project. While the *Quick Starts* report begins

this process, the *Bright Green Future* report does so with more detail, speculation, and symbolic language, setting out a larger framework that incorporates the earlier *Quick Start* recommendations. Seven specific dimensions in the report – air, water, food, mobility, waste, access to nature, and buildings – and three more abstract dimensions, encompassing the others – green economy, climate leadership, and lighter footprint -- became the goals for the overall project. Undated, longer-term goals are also set out in this document; these goals are more aspirational and envision urban life as the world's "greenest city".

The report is introduced with an emotive appeal in a letter from the GCAT. They write that the project to become the greenest city is an "audacious and exciting challenge" and claim that it must be done "in a way that capitalizes on the tremendous economic opportunities presented by the global shift to a cleaner, leaner economy" (2009a, p. 4). The plan is described as a "path to prosperity" that would make Vancouver the world's "Green Capital" and show unequivocally "that when it comes to economic – and ecological – competitiveness, Vancouver means business, but not business as usual" (p. 4).

An economic optimism, in tension with its apocalyptic rendering of the ecological crisis, is clear in the GCAT letter. A peregrine falcon that landed outside the Team's meeting room is described as "the living embodiment of Vancouver's greenest city aspirations." Continuing, the Team expounds those aspirations:

To be the best in the world. To be a source of inspiration, optimism, and hope. To demonstrate that concerted efforts can turn back the tide of ecological damage that humans have inflicted on the natural world and restore nature's wonders. And we must do so in a way that capitalizes on the tremendous economic opportunities presented by the global shift to a cleaner, leaner economy (Vancouver 2009a, 4).

As the report proceeds, it discusses each 2020 target and its associated long-term goal. In the individual sections, each target is linked to the overall narrative of competition and prosperity. An entrepreneurial discourse also links each section, identifying the potential for cost-savings, efficiency, public-private partnerships, intergovernmental coordination, place promotion and image construction, and the demonstration or testing of products and practices by government. The imperative to attract capital and residents from other places threads together the sections, and appeals for leadership punctuate the document. Innovation is consistently proposed and valorized, often through “Bright Green Ideas” boxes that propose specific projects or policies based on work in other cities. In these ways, it is an emblematic document of the new environmental politics of urban development (Jonas et. al 2011). In adopting this tone and proposing the strategies it does, it anticipates conflict between environmental and economic interests, as seen during the 1990s, and works to reconcile them through a contradictory project of economic transformation and place-promotion.

The use of these documents throughout the planning process makes them relevant for understanding the recommendations that followed. These documents set the tone, values, and context for the External Advisory Committees and public engagement process. One interviewee (6) told me, “The [*Bright Green Future* report] was the starting point for the working groups in order to flesh out what the actions were... it was a really useful process to have an external group [the GCAT] frame the conversation and push us in a way”. A participant from two EACs (4) told me that the overall challenge and objective was “pretty well laid out” by staff in the early meetings. Their work at the EACs, the interviewee said, was “really driven by the goals and targets that had been set out. It was pretty clear... what they wanted to get to.” The reports were also made available to

the public and recommendations and other content from the reports were incorporated into an extensive online consultation.

Some participants said to me that the narrative and ideological work at this stage was necessary to secure public support and permit implementation. One member of the GCAT (1) said: “it’s the change in the early stages that is social as much as it is political as much it is technical.” Opposition from the public to policy changes like those proposed for the Greenest City project, he said, is “partly ideological, but mainly it’s about the suggestion that... people’s day-to-day lives – would change in some way they’re not comfortable with. It produces an anxiety.” Other GCAT members felt anxiety in recalling the environmental and economic conflicts during the 1990s and recognized the potential for intense and even violent conflict in environmental politics.

In part due to this anxiety, the *Bright Green Future* report adopts an optimistic and even forcefully cheerful tone, emphasizing lifestyle enhancement and economic opportunity. The use of language further underlines the values promoted, as proposals and the project are repeatedly described with terms like “audacious”, “ambitious”, “bold”, “responsible”, “hopeful”, “optimistic”, and “inspiring” (Vancouver 2009a, 2009c). The result is a partial and sometimes contradictory proposal for the ecological crisis that normalizes neoliberal concepts of growth, profit, globalization and competition, while neglecting many pernicious aspects of the ecological crisis. In sum, these documents describe an apocalyptic problem, then set out a narrative of urgent creativity, experimentation and fierce global competition for the possibility of local economic prosperity and growth. In the next section, I closely examine the selective and contradictory responses in the final Action Plan, informed by this narrative, and identify neoliberal and entrepreneurial features.

### 5.3. Selective and Contradictory Responses

This section provides my findings from the document analysis and interviews as they relate to the entrepreneurial strategies of the *GCAP* and the tension between its environmental and economic objectives. Fundamentally, the *GCAP* pursues what Jackson (2009c) calls the “myth of decoupling”, working to grow the economy while diminishing the harmful environmental consequences of doing so. Drawing substantially from the *Quick Starts* and *Bright Green Future* reports, the *GCAP* operationalized many proposals, targets, and recommendations; provided baseline methodologies for the targets; and added clarity and detail to the previous, more visionary documents. Each goal area included prioritized actions to be delivered within three years, short and medium term strategies to meet the 2020 targets, and a list of actions already underway. Altogether, these responses seek to transform local practices, especially business activity and consumption patterns, to meet both economic and environmental objectives.

Evidence of an internalized neoliberal ethos is most visible in five thematic dimensions of the *GCAP*: (1) competition, (2) economic growth, (3) the application of market principles, (4) issues of scale and globalization, and (5) place-promotion. Entrepreneurial strategies proposed for nearly all the Greenest City goals incorporate innovation, technology, public-private partnerships, and new accumulation opportunities. Scholarly literature identifies these as neoliberal strategies (Jessop 1998), which I argue are understandably promoted in the *GCAP* because of the normalization of neoliberal concepts and historic tensions between the environment and the economy. These particular strategies and the coordination of interests around them in a symbolic urban regime make Vancouver’s Greenest City initiative an example of the new environmental



politics of urban development proposed by Jonas et. al (2011). I will now examine each dimension in turn, drawing evidence primarily from the final Greenest City Action Plan.

### **5.3.1. *The Competitive City in Response to Crisis***

Competition takes two forms in the Greenest City initiative. First, the plan explicitly seeks to better position Vancouver to attract highly mobile capital and residents at the expense of other places. Inter-urban competition is an important consideration in the initiative's overall narrative and the final plan proposes numerous entrepreneurial strategies to promote and develop competitive advantages for Vancouver. Second, competition is promoted as a normative value and practice that permeates the project in various ways. The symbolic competition to become the "greenest city in the world" is the clearest competitive appeal, engaging the title of the initiative itself in its discursive strategy. Internal competition is also encouraged for local residents and firms through competitive awards, grants, and programs of selective, symbolic recognition such as green licensing and shared branding. Next, I will look more closely at both these outward and inward forms of competition.

The initial document by the GCAT concludes with a warning about inter-urban competition: "As our international neighbours grow more innovative, our prosperity relies on our ability to attract and retain creative people and innovative businesses that energize our economy" (Vancouver 2009c, p. 29). The Team builds on this competitive dimension in the *Bright Green Future* report, writing that cities that transform their economies earlier than others will "reap tangible and long-term benefits in terms of green jobs, improved health, and prosperity" (Vancouver 2009a 5). They elaborate on their understanding of these competitive conditions in the Executive Summary:

In the highly competitive, highly mobile modern world, the elements that make a community healthy also make it wealthy. Functionally, a compact, efficient city... with a light environmental footprint is cheaper to run and easier to maintain. The bright, creative people who are the key to conceiving and expanding a globally competitive economy also gravitate to the most desirable – most livable – cities (p. 6).

One advisor to the green economy EAC told me that competitiveness was much discussed in their committee meetings: “it was definitely about how do we maintain what we have and potentially attract those cluster companies that can really start to develop more of a base here” (Interviewee 3). This involved drawing in both skilled workers and capital, and preventing the departure of existing firms, workers, and capital. To accomplish this, the Greenest City documents propose the “de-coupling” of economic activity, policies that favour businesses with lower environmental impact, and the promotion of a wealthy low-carbon polity emphasizing health and lifestyle. The EAC participant, however, told me that such proposals are complicated by non-environmental competitiveness challenges facing Vancouver:

There’s all sorts of barriers to attracting companies here and attracting workforce. We’ve got an extremely expensive property cost for people looking to rent or buy, food costs are high, taxes are high... There was definitely a sense [that] wages and salaries are high here... it’s expensive for businesses to pay people to work here, but at the same time people can earn more money down in the States or other parts of the world. So talent is being sucked out or businesses get to a certain point and then they will... sell to a larger firm (Interviewee 3).

Still, the advisor considered inter-urban competition in this dimension less relevant for ordinary residents: “I don’t know if anybody really cares what San Francisco is doing or Tokyo or whatever.” In contrast, they added, “But the people who are actively working for Mayor Robertson would like to get themselves on the map in terms of being a very competitive city and attract talent and investment from outside... [If] the reputation can be boosted to be the leader in this area, then they have benefits to gain. The competition

can promote that in a sense in terms of attracting [talent and investment]" (Interviewee 3).

Throughout, the documents variously and frequently refer to the overall objective as a challenge, a competition, and a race, implying the possibility of victory. Crucially, failure is understood not as an inadequate response to the ecological crisis, but as being outcompeted by a peer city in securing competitive advantage. This competitive imperative points to a NEPUD also evidenced in other cities (Jonas et. al, 2011) and show a strategic fusion of environmental and economic objectives to secure competitive advantages.

The language of competition is also used in a less strictly economic way. Competition is used playfully and as a means to motivate both local and nonlocal actors to similarly respond to the ecological crisis. This competitive impulse hopes to motivate action and behaviour change among local residents and firms, other governments, and comparator cities. Competition is intended to play a social, cultural and symbolic role. Friendly "zero waste challenges" are proposed for neighbourhoods in the City of Vancouver, but also among regional municipalities and with international cities. Other examples include a competitive grant program to provide funding to nonprofits and social enterprises working in areas related to the plan's targets and a Greenest City Mayor's Award to celebrate particular achievements.

Overall, the phrase "greenest city in the world" plainly has a deliberate discursive function, appealing to naturalized competitive impulses and local pride. An academic member of the GCAT labelled the title "political framing," adding "I had a little scepticism about it. It's overreaching... And there's a real danger, too, not to be taken seriously."

However, this GCAT member praised the deliberateness of the competitive approach: “[Competition] was always there. The mayor establishing the idea right from the beginning: we are going to be the *greenest*, not just *greener*. That was a deliberate attempt and a good strategy for a leader” (Interviewee 1).

Despite this overall competitive emphasis, some strategies outside the green economy section appeal to values of sharing, communalism and cooperation. These include the promotion of a public bike-share, community kitchens and gardens, tool libraries and other arrangements not based on competitive, private accumulation. Nonetheless, both in the discourse and the proposed strategies, competition among individual firms, cities, and residents is the prevailing theme and points to an internalization of neoliberal principles that valorize competition among discrete actors for private gain.

### **5.3.2. *Economic Orientation: Prosperity from Growth Without Consequences***

The economic trajectory set out by the GCAP promotes the decoupling of economic growth from its environmental consequences. This introduces key contradictions and tensions and produces only a partial response to the ecological crisis. An emphasis on prosperity and wealth also places the GCAP at odds with scholarly literature that points to significant vulnerability and risk, unequally distributed, arising from the ecological crisis. Specific actions propose new and experimental combinations of private and public efforts to attract and generate economic opportunities, create jobs, and reduce costs for the city, residents, and local firms.

The economic emphasis is evidenced in comments from the deputy city manager introducing the final GCAP report to Council. He writes: “This action plan will enable us

to save money in our operations, create economic opportunities in our city and our businesses, and further establish our international reputation as a vibrant and innovative city” (Vancouver 2011, p. 1). He adds, “Given our current financial constraints it’s imperative that we strategically use our financial and staff resources to achieve economic and social objectives while achieving our Greenest City goals” (ibid.). The remainder of staff comments prefacing the report underscore the entrepreneurial perspective, calling for economic development, innovation, and partnership with the private sector, nonprofits, and other levels of government.

In the body of the plan itself, the green economy chapter is most directly related to the economic orientation of the plan, although an entrepreneurial and economic perspective is present throughout. The green economy goal is “to secure Vancouver’s international reputation as a mecca of green enterprise.” Two targets for 2020 are set out, a doubling of the number of green jobs over 2010 levels by 2020, and a doubling of the number of companies “actively engaging in greening their operations over 2011 levels by 2020.” Throughout, a general impetus for economic growth is evident. The Vancouver Economic Development Commission (VEDC) in collaboration with other city staff drafted this section. Membership on the Green Economy EAC was drawn from the VEDC.

The involvement of the VEDC in the creation of the GCAP underscores the importance of partnership, both in practice and as a narrative device. Three types of partnerships were identified in the Greenest City process: public-private, intergovernmental, and partnerships between community groups and business. In particular, the GCAP strongly and repeatedly encourages the participation of local firms. This is clearly stated by this quote from the plan: “It is critical for the success of the

Greenest City initiative that Vancouver companies maximize their efforts to green their operations as well as grow jobs“ (p. 23). The crucial role of involving nongovernmental resources in producing local change further points to regime formation in organizing within the NEPUD.

Three main features characterize the economic orientation of the plan: city-led business development for selected sectors, a de-coupling of economic activity from environmental consequences, and a speculative role for the city in delivering private profit. First, the GCAP identifies six “key green clusters” of economic activity to be supported and promoted by the city and its partners. They are (1) clean technology, particularly related to energy; (2) green buildings; (3) material management and recycling; (4) local food, particularly processing and manufacturing; (5) sustainability services and education, with particular reference to consulting and carbon finance; and (6) greener traditional industries, particularly eco-fashion. The various entrepreneurial strategies proposed for economic development, job growth, and inter-urban competition throughout the plan tend to focus on these clusters. Notably, several GCAT members have ties to these sectors, especially in energy, buildings, consulting and finance. Similarly, many EAC members are affiliated with businesses and nonprofits doing work in these sectors. This suggests a coordination of public and private interests, with varied motivations, in pursuing the Greenest City targets.

These are among the entrepreneurial strategies for economic development fielded by the EAC and identified as “highest priority short term actions” for the city to undertake (pp. 25-26):

1. Create a Green Enterprise Zone (GEZ) in two districts the city wishes to promote new development in, the downtown Eastside and False Creek Flats. This area would be promoted as “the greenest place to work” in the world.
2. Develop and support economic hubs for each key green cluster, ideally within the GEZ. Examples provided include incubators, accelerators and research facilities. The first of such proposals are a “food processing enterprise incubator” and a “clean technology centre.”
3. Support select local businesses by developing new procurement programs, improve relationships between purchasing managers and those companies, and use public assets such as land and events to demonstrate and market local products and services.
4. Conduct international trade missions to market local technologies and services and identify new export markets. Partnerships with major international companies are recommended to accomplish this.

Additionally, the plan prioritizes the development of a business engagement program that aligns the Greenest City work with economic development messaging so as to “achieve prosperity and job growth” while meeting environmental objectives (p. 25). To accomplish this, it recommends hiring a Green Business Development Officer to coordinate with industry associations, business improvement associations, the City, and firms with more than 10 employees. The officer would also create and promote a network of relevant service providers to advance the GCAP targets.

Other recommended actions include hiring incentives for green businesses, coordination with schools to deliver training and education for those businesses, and the development of new incentives and finance mechanisms to coordinate private investment with funding opportunities from other levels of government. A role for the city in promoting loosely defined “eco-industrial networking opportunities” is also identified. Examples of this in the GCAP include the sharing of parking or logistics facilities and the co-location of related industrial practices for efficiencies in resource throughput and the densification of industrial land.

Prioritized actions around neighbourhood scale renewable energy systems are among the most significant entrepreneurial strategies in the GCAP. By 2014, in partnership with developers, energy utilities, energy systems operators, and other key stakeholders, the City plans to co-create four new renewable energy systems in high-density development projects, support the conversion of a major industrial or institutional energy system to renewable, and expand research and development into district energy. This strategy draws on the experience Vancouver had in developing a neighbourhood energy utility in the South East False Creek neighbourhood. The plan also directs the City to partner with senior government and industry to develop new financing and regulatory approaches to introduce district energy into existing buildings.

Such projects will be of considerable use in meeting the environmental objectives laid out in the plan. However, the construction of new advanced energy systems, technology demonstrations, and enterprise districts point to the contradictions between the imperative of economic growth and the fundamental need to reduce material throughput and dangerous pollution. These reductions must be absolute, not relative, if Vancouver wishes to meet its environmental objectives. The GCAP proposes strategies



that lead to relative efficiencies through the adoption of new technologies and practices. Under the conditions of economic growth that it also proposes, this approach will not produce the absolute reductions necessary to meet its environmental objectives. Tim Jackson writes that “simplistic assumptions that capitalism’s propensity for efficiency will allow us to stabilize the climate or protect against resource scarcity are nothing short of delusional” (2009c, p. 86). As such, the GCAP contains a fundamental contradiction that is overlooked, or minimally contested, because of the naturalization of a neoliberal ethos and the ongoing ideological work by a symbolic urban regime whose members variously gain from the proposed policies and discourse. In the next section, I further examine the appeal to efficiency, business practices, and market orthodoxy in responding to the ecological crisis.

### **5.3.3. *The Blueprint for Transformation: Market Principles and Ecological Modernization***

The transformation of economic practices is necessary to meet Vancouver’s environmental objectives, as claimed by the GCAP and supported by the scholarly literature. The GCAP notes the open-endedness of this necessity, writing, “There is no blueprint for transforming our modern, industrialized city” (Vancouver 2011, p. 107). Yet, the dominance of private enterprise and ownership, commercial exchange, profit, and price signals in the recommendations suggest a blueprint of neoliberal market principles has already been adopted. Because of this, the possibilities for economic transformation are more constrained than implied. To date, the indiscriminate and habitual application of market principles to social and natural existence is among the key causes of the ecological crisis. Despite this, market logics of efficiency, exchange, enclosure and pricing are significantly promoted by the GCAP.

First, efficiency is a key value in the GCAP, understood to enable economic growth while reducing material throughput. This appeal to efficiency diverges from the principles of abundance, re-distribution, contraction, and resilience central to alternative approaches to the ecological crisis (Research and Degrowth, 2008; Heinberg 2007, 2011; Hopkins 2008). The notion of efficiency continually invoked in the documents' discourse and policy recommendations was also highlighted in my interviews. One interviewee made a direct link to efficiency in the overall program of the Greenest City, noting its appeal to public and private interests:

Green, at its base, is about the challenge of... overusing resources... It's about efficiency, wise use, making a lot less go a whole lot further. It's quite attractive to cities who are struggling with budgeting. It's quite attractive to business (Interviewee 2).

Efficiency in energy and resource use as a competitive advantage is used to encourage the involvement of business. On this, the GCAP report reads: "Companies that consume less energy and produce less waste face lower operating costs, and can access contracts from the increasing number of larger organizations that have sustainable purchasing requirements" (Vancouver 2011, p. 23). The appeals to cost-savings, however, are in tension with proposals for new costs, fees, and other requirements introduced to meet environmental objectives. Efficiency-related cost-savings are but one dimension of the economic transformation proposed, and the effects on firms and individuals will be unevenly distributed.

While efficiency is indeed necessary to meet the city's environmental objectives, it will not produce the absolute reductions in material throughput and harmful pollution planned by the GCAP. Considered alongside the plan's imperative to expand local

economic activity and extend its global reach, efficiency will only lead to a relative decline in environmental harms.

Second, the strategic use of prices and innovative finance is invoked throughout, suggesting a blueprint constrained by the naturalization of market principles. The plan proposes “green incentive and financing mechanisms” with attention to strategically aligning these incentives with programs offered by other levels of government (p. 26). The GCAP highlights the inexpensive price of energy in BC, in part due to the use of hydroelectric power, as an obstacle to meeting its environmental goals. As such, the low price of power means residents and businesses are less likely to respond to price signals and reduce energy use. The plan identifies the lack of incentive for landlords and developers to incur costs to meet targets when tenants of space incur many of the cost-savings. Due in part to this pricing and incentive problem, the plan proposes innovative finance and pricing mechanisms. Prioritized actions include the development of financial tools for promoting building retrofits and the inclusion of price signals through permit fees and grants to encourage energy efficiency in new and existing buildings. The plan claims that the use of financial tools permits more aggressive regulation by the City while increasing affordability for residents. Two such examples are the Home Energy Loans Program (HELP), for one and two family homes, and a Multi-Unit Residential Retrofit Financing program. HELP would develop a “menu” of energy efficiency upgrades that can be paid for over time by homeowners through utility bills, simplifying the process of borrowing and pre-selecting potential projects and technologies. The City of Vancouver, VanCity Credit Union, BC Hydro, and Fortis BC have collaboratively implemented a version of the program since it was proposed. The multi-unit program coordinates work by the City, utilities and major financial institutions to enable financing for a building’s

collective property and in-unit energy efficiency upgrades. The introduction of electric vehicle infrastructure in existing buildings is also proposed under this mechanism. Additionally, the plan proposes an expansion of a solar hot water incentive, which provides subsidies for the installation of solar thermal systems in new homes. Other utility and government programs are also promoted in the Plan, and as gaps are identified the City intends to “be creative” in developing partnerships to deliver these new incentives (p. 53).

Such strategies are part of a process of ecological modernization highlighted by Roger Keil (2009) as a potential trajectory for roll-with-it neoliberalism. Ecological modernization seeks to use rational management, institutional arrangements, and regulatory practices to proactively reduce the ecological risk and harms of activity. New measurement standards, common metrics, benchmarks, and shared data sets are proposed in the GCAP to improve environmental performance through the rational management of risk and harm arising from economic activity. In doing so, environmental problems are quantified and standardized, enabling them to be incorporated into market systems and engaged through rational management. At other scales, this is seen in marketplaces for carbon credits, the purchasing of offsets, and the commodification of natural resources. Locally, this reinforces the naturalization of neoliberal practices as a response to the ecological crisis, while drawing in financial and other nongovernmental partners into entrepreneurial strategies to enable local change.

#### **5.3.4. *Issues of Scale: Global, National and Local***

Another critical contradiction in the GCAP’s work is the tension between expanding and contracting the geographic scale of Vancouver’s economic activity and environmental harms. While strategies are proposed to re-localize parts of Vancouver’s

economy, efforts to develop local export-oriented businesses and foreign markets dominate many issue areas. Further, questions around jurisdiction introduce issues of scale, as the power and fiscal resources to make changes needed to meet GCAP targets often rest with other governments. Next, I look at several tensions arising from issues of scale.

First, it is not clear what is precisely being referred to in the phrase “greenest city”. The initiative’s discourse further complicates this understanding, invoking neoliberal concepts and language that conflate and obscure divisions between public and private as well as local and nonlocal actors. In other words, what comprises the unit competing for the title of the greenest city? The territorial city and local and nonlocal firms and residents are variously referred to in the context of the “greenest city”. These actors conduct activity both inside and outside the territory of Vancouver; moreover, the GCAP includes proposals for activities in China, India and the US, and calls on local firms to extend their work geographically. Similarly, Bob Jessop argues that cities may be concerned with different forms of competitiveness, in some cases competing for inward investment of nonlocal capital and in others working to support the inter-urban competitiveness of local capital (1998, p. 82). Both inward and outward competitiveness strategies are simultaneously proposed throughout the GCAP. These two concerns are in tension in the GCAP’s goal to become a “mecca of green enterprise.” Invoking the analogy of mecca suggests attraction, or pilgrimage, of outside capital as opposed to the development of local capital. This question of what comprises the “greenest city” is not fully resolved or identifiable.

Second, strategies for international trade missions and strengthened relationships with major transnational corporations are further at odds with objectives to

localize economic activity and support small business. While calling in some sections to emphasize domestic markets, in others the GCAP promotes new international trade missions, collaborations with transnational companies, and the development of international export markets. While these objectives are not completely contradictory, the urgent narrative of the ecological crisis and the language in other target areas pulls them into tension. For instance, while the GCAP promotes a reduction in per capita vehicle miles travelled and calls on individuals to reduce their ecological footprints, it also proposes annual international trade missions, coordinated with major global companies, to regions including the US, China, and India, for the six key green clusters. Writers including George Monbiot (2006, 21 September) have argued that nearly all non-essential air travel must cease because of its highly substantial contribution to atmospheric pollution. Yet, this tension is unaddressed and unresolved in the GCAP.

A third tension concerns the location and type of job creation related to the GCAP. A member of the Green Economy EAC told me that this tension influenced the selection of recommendations, referring to the rigidity of the prevailing transnational division of labour. I was told that within the EAC there was a

...realization that certain sectors will create more local jobs than others. A lot of clean tech development – you might do the R&D here, which is only a few jobs. But the manufacturing happens overseas. So, it's about construction jobs and agriculture jobs which happen locally. I think that's why [the City] ended up choosing the priority areas [they did] (Interviewee 3).

This points to a naturalization of neoliberal concepts, like the transnational division of labour, by EAC participants. It also underscores the difficulty of measuring the costs and harms of “green” economic activity. Currently, the environmental and social effects of goods manufactured overseas are not fully considered by local measurements. For

example, if a low-carbon technology is researched in Vancouver but produced in Tianjing, which should be considered the “greenest city”? These questions are unaddressed by the GCAP and lead to tensions between its discourse and recommendations.

A fourth tension concerns the attraction of individuals to Vancouver. While substantial attention is devoted to attracting highly skilled and affluent transnational residents, there is no discussion of accommodating low-skilled or low-income migrants moving as a result of environmental change or related threats. There is also little discussion about the effects of particular proposals on nonlocal people, despite appeals in the discourse to global community and collective responsibility. Recent scholarship suggests that environmental change will increasingly be a driver of migration, especially in low-income coastal countries. In a summary of that scholarship, Black et. al (2011) write that:

Whether movement occurs within or between countries, there is a need to prepare for it and in some cases enable it. It is important to deepen our understanding of how migration will affect other types of social change, such as the evolution of cities, the formation of 'poverty traps' and the coexistence of cultures. Current policy frameworks should take account of these factors to avoid having to deal later with impoverishment and displacement under high-risk conditions.

The GCAP does not take this into account, placing this dimension of the plan in tension with its narrative of a comprehensive and compassionate response. With this exclusion, the appeal to migrants is a selective one, and underscores the economic emphasis of the initiative.

### **5.3.5. Place Promotion and the Ecological Crisis**

In creating the concept of NEPUD, Jonas et. al (2011) refer to “the growing centrality of carbon control in discourses, strategies and struggles around urban development and place promotion” (p. 2539). In addition to carbon control, other issues are drawn into Vancouver’s place promotion and urban economic development strategies. These include language and initiatives that promote local “lifestyles” with lower environmental impact and improved health and recreational opportunities, while also highlighting Vancouver’s natural environment. The image of comparatively favourable urban conditions for green enterprise and investment are emphasized throughout the Greenest City documents. The GCAP explains the need for this approach by claiming that “strategies for the global context are... essential, to attract the best and the brightest to Vancouver and build strong export markets” (Vancouver 2011, p. 24). The *Bright Green Future* report explained the place promotion element of the “greenest city” initiative as a “savvy economic strategy” that will help attract “highly mobile investment dollars, entrepreneurs, and talented workers” (p. 11). Similarly, Vancouver is repeatedly represented as a prime destination for entrepreneurship, in one instance forecasting that the city will become the “go to’ place for aspiring green entrepreneurs” (Vancouver 2009a, p. 22).

In this way, the GCAP is a clear place-promotion strategy, reacting to the inter-urban pressures of the NUP described by Cox (1993) and strategically using environmental policies to achieve competitive advantages, as anticipated by Jonas et. al (2011). Promoting Vancouver as a destination for highly mobile capital and affluent, skilled residents requires the cultivation of an image of prosperity, comfort and optimism that is in tension with the global conditions of risk, deprivation, and conflict to which the



GCAP is responding. Since such strategies are intended to prolong the viability of growth-dependent transnational capitalism, the intent is fundamentally at odds with the ecological imperative also pursued by the plan. The place-promotion aspect of the Greenest City work had two key phases evidenced in the documents and interviews: the strategic use of the Green Capital brand during the Winter Olympics and the post-Olympics extension of that branding programme alongside other promotional and representational actions.

The Green Capital brand was conceptualized in the *Bright Green Future Report* and further developed by the VEDC and the GCAP. While the Greenest City work overall is understood as a strategy to promote Vancouver internationally and attract highly mobile capital and residents, the Green Capital program is explicitly designed for this purpose. Notably, the Winter Olympics were strategically used throughout the planning process to promote the Greenest City initiative and the reputation of Vancouver as a “Green Capital”. And, as the interviews showed, Gregor Robertson’s status as a former green entrepreneur is significant to participants in the Greenest City process.

The planning for Green Capital began shortly after Vision Vancouver took office in December 2008. A local politician I interviewed (2) told me that incoming Councillors and the Mayor were surprised that no economic development or place-promotion strategies had yet been planned for the Olympics. They described the Green Capital as “a triple program” to enhance the economic development function of the city, establish a place-promotion strategy, and execute actual economic development work. The Olympics were considered a significant opportunity to secure provincial and federal funding to execute the economic development and branding program that may not have otherwise been available and thus became an early focus of the Greenest City initiative.

While it was developed for the Olympics, the GCAP seeks to extend and strengthen the Green Capital brand, using a purposefully cultivated and exported economic reputation to meet Vancouver's goals. One strategy serves to blur the line between the private and public representations of the City, calling for the extension of the branding program to private enterprise. A short term action intends to "create brand equity for [local] green firms" by offering the use of the Green Capital brand in their own marketing and business development work (Vancouver 2011, p. 26). As mentioned above, this further complicates the unit comprising "the greenest city", especially if the Green Capital brand is permitted for use outside the physical territory of the city or is used online.

Many of the GCAP's recommendations are identified as having reputational or symbolic advantages for the City. As an example, the green transportation section promotes their actions as follows:

Sustainable transportation choices support a strong economy by enabling the exchange of goods, services, and ideas throughout the city. This positions Vancouver as a place where the world wants to live, work and do business, and supports our role as a Pacific gateway. It also increases our reputation as a tourism destination, creating jobs, and opportunities for residents (p. 58).

This is similarly evident in the green economy section, where the proposed Green Enterprise Zone is tentatively labelled "the greenest place to work' in the world" (p. 5).

Scholarly literature on the ecological crisis points to its many deleterious effects and their unequal distribution among individuals. As mentioned previously, the Greenest City initiative introduces a narrative of the future inconsistent with this literature and selectively engages these effects in its promotional strategies. This promotional work has a selective audience, targeting highly skilled, affluent workers and businesses in

targeted green clusters. As such, it is a partial response that emphasizes economic development opportunity over other aspects of the ecological crisis, such as the migration of vulnerable people or the need to reduce long-distance air travel.

As shown above, my analysis finds evidence of a tension between the environmental and economic objectives in the Greenest City agenda and identifies an underlying ethos emphasizing entrepreneurial urbanism, competition, public-private partnership, and economic growth. This ethos leads to a selective, neoliberal framing of the ecological crisis, optimistically proposing to de-couple the local economy from environmental consequences while playing up global trade, competitiveness and prosperity. In doing so, the agenda obscures urgent social and nonlocal aspects of the ecological crisis. However, this ideological orientation may overcome other tensions in the agenda and enable interventions that would otherwise be more resisted by some businesses or environmental activists, especially those influenced by a history of tense and conflict-ridden environmental politics.

## 6. Conclusion

In the Greenest City initiative, local interests co-created a plan that is a partial and optimistic response to the ecological crisis. While the GCAP may diminish many dangerous practices and provide local environmental, lifestyle and employment opportunities, it fails to confront the most fundamental features of neoliberalization that prevent an effective response to the ecological crisis. The initiative ideologically frames the crisis and its response to minimize disruption to imperatives of indefinite growth, efficiency, private profit, and expanded international trade. I have provided evidence that the Greenest City initiative is an entrepreneurial and ideological response to the ecological crisis purposefully designed and promoted to reconcile conflict between economic and environmental interests and coordinate resources for local change and place promotion among governmental and nongovernmental actors through urban regime formation. Following the arguments of researchers like Peter Victor (2007, 2010) and Tim Jackson (2009c, 2011) I reject the possibility of continued economic growth because of resource and environmental constraints. The inclusion of economic growth in the Greenest City initiative is, however, understandable given the internalization of neoliberal concepts in advanced capitalist cities like Vancouver, the history of conflict in regional environmental politics, and the network of green enterprise coordinating around Vision Vancouver and the Greenest City project. In addition to its genuine and ambitious environmental objectives, the entrepreneurial strategies may also create new jobs and economic opportunities, while developing technologies, products, and services that may reduce the risk and effects of global warming, resource depletion, and environmental

degradation. Nonetheless, in promoting economic growth, even when that growth is relatively more efficient, the GCAP's economic objectives fundamentally contradict its environmental ones, as it cannot produce absolute reductions in material use or pollution.

The NUP and NEPUD point to the larger implications of this work in urban politics and policy-making already evidenced by the 1600 other cities that have contacted the City of Vancouver about its plans. Inter-urban competition will pressure other cities to adopt competitive, entrepreneurial strategies like those in the GCAP to maintain their relative economic position and attract capital and residents from other cities. Possible trajectories for this can be anticipated by my findings, such as mega event-based place promotion or the serial production of green enterprise zones by competitive cities. Ongoing inaction on the ecological crisis by some national governments and regional economic instability may intensify or accelerate this competition among cities. Should the GCAP serve to superficially or temporarily avoid intense conflict between economic and environmental interests its strategies may become more appealing for cities that do not wish to or, more fundamentally, cannot disrupt prevailing economic practices and the structural imperative of growth. Elected officials facing public pressure in other cities to respond to the ecological crisis may adopt a similar narrative of economic opportunity, competition, and prosperity, further normalizing that approach.

Should indefinite economic growth remain a central imperative of inter-urban competition in the NEPUD, these strategies will contribute to, rather than diminish, the worsening ecological crisis. However, if entrepreneurship and competition lead to innovative combinations and practices focused on absolute declines in material use and pollution, while involving vulnerable nonlocal people and those resisting or contesting

neoliberalization and growth, the NEPUD may pressure many cities to adopt such practices. To re-orient competition and entrepreneurship, however, new post-growth economic models, like those organized around re-localization and de-growth (Heinberg 2007; Hopkins 2008; North 2009; Jackson 2009c; Victor 2011), must overcome the naturalization of neoliberal principles. Further research into similar strategies outside Vancouver is recommended to better understand how the ecological crisis affects inter-urban competition and how normalized neoliberalization constrains possible responses to the ecological crisis in other cities. In the future, scholarly attention to the results of the GCAP's implementation and the ongoing coordination of public and private interests to that end will also be needed to test my findings and evaluate the effectiveness of the GCAP as both a response to the ecological crisis and a strategy for economic growth and transformation.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A.

### Chronology of the Greenest City Initiative

Date	Event	Related Individuals or Organization
October 14, 2008	Canadian federal election	Public
November 15, 2008	Vancouver civic Election	Vision Vancouver, public
February 2009	Mayor announces GCAT advisory committee	City of Vancouver
April 2009	Council receives <i>Quick Starts Recommendations</i> report	GCAT
October 2009	Council receives <i>Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future</i> report	GCAT
February 2010	Council adopts long-term goals in <i>Vancouver 2020</i> report; approves staffing and resources to develop a <i>Greenest City 2020 Implementation Plan</i> , consulting the public and external advisers	Council, City staff, EACs, public
February – March 2010	Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games	City of Vancouver, public, partner organizations
June to October 2010	“Talk Green to Us” public engagement program	City staff, public, EACs, 130+ partner organizations
December 2010 – March 2011	“Talk Green Vancouver” public engagement program	City staff, public, EACs, 130+ partner organizations
January 2011	Council receives draft GCAP report and update on planning and engagement; staff tasked with developing a final <i>Greenest City Action Plan</i>	Council, City staff, EACs, public
July 2011	Council adopts the <i>Greenest City Action Plan</i>	Council

## **Appendix B.**

### **Script for Semi-structured Interviews**

1. How did you get involved with the Greenest City Planning process?
2. Tell me about your work with the Greenest City planning process. How did you contribute?
3. What challenges or opportunities do you understand this plan to be responding to?
4. Tell me about the people and groups involved with creating this plan.
5. Tell me about the partnerships needed to make this plan work.
6. Can you recall any obstacles to developing this plan?
7. Do you anticipate any obstacles to implementing this plan?
8. What do you think makes the Greenest City plan an effective (or ineffective) sustainability strategy? What do you think makes the Greenest City plan an effective (or ineffective) economic development strategy? How do you think these objectives relate to one another here in Vancouver?
9. The plan identifies a competitive global “green economy” in which Vancouver must compete. Which cities (regions/countries) are we competing against? Why do you think competition is considered in this plan?
10. The targets focus on 2020. Why do you think this year was chosen over other timelines?
11. Why is the objective to be the “Greenest” and not simply “Green”?