# The Changing Suburbs: The Migration of Podium-Tower High Density Housing to Coquitlam

**by**

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## Abstract

Originating in Vancouver, the podium-tower building typology has become a popular development model that has spread around the world. The popularity of the podium-tower arose from the successful revitalization of Vancouver's post-industrial waterfronts and became a symbol at the root of the term "Vancouverism". The typology's ability to achieve high density residential neighbourhoods while also maintaining and promoting vibrant and active streetscapes has made it popular with urban planners, while the high-rise residential towers have proven popular with developers for the marketable views. This research focuses on the Vancouver style of podium-tower development and its migration to the suburban community of Coquitlam. Coquitlam's experience with the podium-tower typology illustrates the challenges of implementing podium-tower polices, and attracting development in both new and old neighbourhoods. The research explores the relationship between planning policies and the market for commercial office/retail and residential housing in a mixed-use building typology.



**Keywords**: Mixed-Use, Vancouverism, Podium-Tower, Urban Planning, Coquitlam

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| FSR | Floor Space Ratio (Floor Space Ratio refers to the buildable floor space calculated from permitted density. A density of 4.0 is multiplied by the lot area to determine the buildable floor space) |
| GVRD | Greater Vancouver Regional District |
| RTC | Regional Town Centre |

# Chapter 1.

# Introduction

We shape our buildings and they shape us… - *Winston Churchill*

In the mid-2000s the podium-tower typology was popularized by the term "Vancouverism" and quickly began to spread to other cities around the world. Originating in Vancouver in the early 1990s, the podium-tower is a mixed-use building typology that consists of two parts: 1) a street fronting podium typically ranging from two to four storeys that can have retail and office businesses, or street oriented townhomes, and; 2) a narrow high-rise residential tower located above the podium with a height of 20+ storeys. The podium-tower, which was the result of a collaborative planning process aimed at finding creative solutions to solve issues associated with residential densification, has been praised for its ability to increase housing density and enhance the public realm through vibrant and active streetscapes. It has also been criticized for becoming an over-replicated concept that results in a monotonous cityscape of concrete and glass. In Metro Vancouver, podium-tower development is occurring across the region in the inner suburbs of Burnaby, North Vancouver, Richmond, New Westminster, Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, and Coquitlam. In Coquitlam, there are six neighbourhoods where podium-tower development is permitted today.

Podium-tower policies were first adopted by Coquitlam in the early 1990s for the City Centre area, which was largely undeveloped at the time. Planning for the area was

guided by the Regional Town Centre (RTC) concept, which was a regional planning initiative that envisioned a series of compact high density mixed-use centres spread across Metro Vancouver and connected by rapid transit. In 2002, the city included podium-tower policies in neighbourhood plans that would guide the redevelopment of the Lougheed and Burquitlam neighbourhoods, also located adjacent to a future rapid transit line[1]. In the mid-2000s, Coquitlam experienced a boom in podium-tower development in the City Centre and policies permitting podium-tower development were soon adopted to revitalize the declining Maillardville and Austin Heights neighbourhoods and for redevelopment of the post-industrial Fraser Mills site. These neighbourhoods do not have existing or future plans for rapid transit and represent a departure from the City Centre, Burquitlam and Lougheed plans, which proposed podium-tower policies based on the principles of transit-oriented development.

Observing the rise in popularity of this building form and its migration and the inclusion in neighbourhoods with differing housing and commercial needs raises questions about the appropriateness and widespread application of a homogenized podium-tower development model. This research investigates how and why the podium-tower housing typology became and has remained a widespread development model in the city of Coquitlam.

The podium-tower took off in Coquitlam during the mid-2000s, although policies promoting this form had been in place since the early 1990s. Vancouver also adopted podium-tower policies in the early 1990s and experienced rapid growth in the False Creek

1 Construction of the Evergreen Line rapid transit system has been pending for over two decades. Today in 2014, it is currently under construction with an estimated completion date of 2016.

and Coal Harbour neighbourhoods. Although podium-tower development was slow to progress in Coquitlam during the 1990s, a few projects were constructed. Interestingly, the architectural design of these early podium-towers in Coquitlam were distinctly different compared with podium-tower development in Vancouver, despite the two cities having very similar design policies. However, by the mid-2000s, the boom in podium-tower development in the Coquitlam City Centre neighbourhood reflected the podium-tower design style present around False Creek. Migration of the Vancouver style podium-tower to Coquitlam represented more than just a design shift, as it also signified a shift in the original intent and purpose of the Coquitlam City Centre plan. The original podium-tower concept of this plan was intended to have a significant retail and office component. This has been replaced by the predominantly residential Vancouver podium-tower model. Rather than becoming an employment hub in the region, Coquitlam City Centre is becoming a predominantly residential neighbourhood similar to False Creek.

This research disentangles the events and processes relating to the migration of the Vancouver style of podium-tower and the popularization of this development model in Coquitlam by:

- Identifying the emergence and migration of podium-tower policy and development;
- Understanding the differences between and evolution of podium-tower design in Vancouver and Coquitlam; and
- Determining how podium-tower policy evolved in Coquitlam over time

This research also explores how the migration of the Vancouver style of podium-tower is related to the planning systems of Vancouver and Coquitlam, and the effect of regional trends in planning, the market, and architecture. These factors are explored through the following key themes:

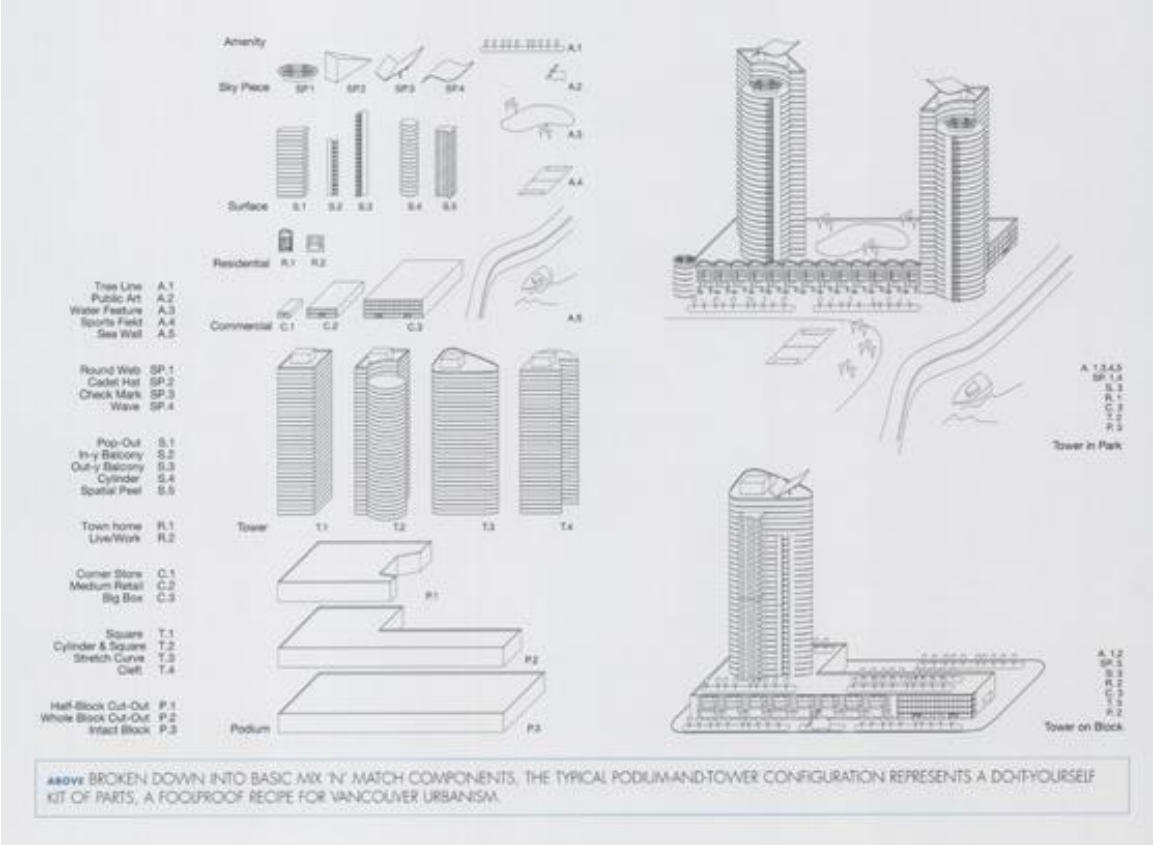
- Plan implementation and the role of discretionary versus regulatory policies;
- Regional policies and the influence on the migration of podium-tower development to Coquitlam;
- The role of market forces and their ability to influence policy development and implementation; and
- Architectural design trends and their linkage to policy and market forces.

Historic and regional context is provided to gain insight into how the implementation of regional and municipal planning policies are dependent on residential and commercial market forces. Coquitlam's experience and history with podium-tower development reveals the complicated interplay and power struggle between urban planners and developers, with planners representing planning principles and developers representing the demands of the market. This research also explores how Coquitlam planners have used innovative planning policies to achieve benefits from development, through density bonusing polices that extract community amenities from developers in exchange for development approval. My intention is that the analysis of Coquitlam City Centre and its history will foster an understanding of the issues and challenges of policy implementation and impart some insight into the externalities that bend and shape policy over time, as well as the need for policy to remain flexible and adapt to changing conditions in pursuit of planning ideals.

## 1.1. The Podium Tower Housing Typology

The podium-tower housing typology is an architectural style defined by a podium at ground level with a narrow point tower located above. The podium fronts the street and is typically three to four storeys in height. The podium can be inhabited by commercial space or townhouses, both of which can activate the ground plane. The point-tower is set back from the street and typically ranges from 20-40 storeys in height (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Overview of Podium-Tower Typology**




Source: Bogdanowicz, 2006, p.298 © 2006 Canadian Architect Used by permission.

# Chapter 2.

# Literature Review

The literature framing the research question focuses on five key areas: Vancouverism, planning ideals, suburban competitiveness, planning theory and practice, and office suburbanization. The purpose of the chosen literature is to provide a conceptual framework and rationale for analyzing the exportation and migration of the podium-tower housing typology. Vancouverism provides background for the emergence of the podium-tower typology as well as a rationale for its success and desirability for replication in other places. The literature on planning principles focuses on planning ideology including new urbanism, population density, and mixed-use building types, and how the goals of these principles may have led to the emergence and migration of the podium-tower typology. Literature on suburban competitiveness provides insight into the economic principles of the housing market and their possible effects on the migration of the podium-tower typology as a means of gaining economic advantage over competing cities. Planning theory and practice describes the difference between regulatory and discretionary planning models and provides context revealing how Vancouver and Coquitlam were able to produce different styles of development with similar guidelines. The literature on office suburbanization provides evidence for the difficulty in implementing regional plans and the role that the market played in the development of regional town centres. Combined, this literature provides rationale and background for the research question and also informs the methods of research and analysis as explained in later sections.

## 2.1. Vancouverism

### 2.1.1. What is Vancouverism?

The term “Vancouverism” first emerged in the early 2000s from American architects and city planners as a way of describing the ability of Vancouver to increase residential densities, create public spaces, and preserve mountain views through planning policies (Boddy, 2005). This collection of planning principles and objectives resulted in a pleasing and friendly urban environment that was meant to stem urban sprawl, flex the “competitive advantage of an urban lifestyle”, and make the “residential city a reality” (Bogdanowicz, 2006:23). The model has been successful mainly for its role in transforming inner-city development. When many cities were struggling with inner city decline, Vancouver became “the poster child of urbanism in North America” (Berelowitz, 2005:1). Other factors contributing to the success of Vancouverism is a planning model that extracts amenities from developers, which contribute to the public realm by enhancing the urban look and feel of the city.

Most importantly, it is the architectural style of the tall, thin tower on a podium that has become the dominant feature of Vancouverism (Bogdanowicz, 2006). The first podium-tower developments in Vancouver were constructed in the mid-1990s. Fifteen years later, this model, also referred to as the “Vancouver Model”, is being exported internationally (Boddy, 2004; Bogdanowicz, 2006). Boddy cites Seattle, Bellevue, San Diego, Tehran, Bombay, and Dubai as cities that have adopted the “Vancouver prototype” (Boddy, 2004:18). Bogdanowicz claims that the exportation of the Vancouver model is due in part to the fact that Vancouver developments provide a planning model that can easily be deconstructed into “bullet points” that provide ”a kind of point-form urbanism” (Bogdanowicz, 2006:23). These bullet points identify key factors that contribute to the

perceived success of the podium-tower typology such as the enhanced public realm and preservation of view corridors, while also noting some of the external factors specific to Vancouver including geographic location with ocean and mountain views, and an influx of immigration and investment from Asia which stimulated a condo boom (Bogdanowicz, 2006). The podium-tower typology has emerged throughout the Metro Vancouver Region and, while literature focuses on the exportation of the Vancouver Model at an international scale, it has been overlooked at a regional level.

### 2.1.2. Emergence of the Podium-Tower Typology

The focus of this research project is to better understand the underlying factors that have contributed to the popularity of the podium-tower typology as a model for suburban condominium development. Part of understanding the current popularity of the podium-tower typology as a suburban form begins by reviewing literature that examines the emergence of this typology in an urban environment and literature that critiques its success.

For a housing form that is widely accepted by Vancouver developers today, it is hard to imagine the podium-tower typology being met with resistance. However, in San Francisco, land owners, developers, and architects originally resisted the idea of the point-tower on a podium while citizens and city planners supported the idea (Boddy. 2004). Similar resistance was received from developers in Vancouver (Boddy, 2004), but the possibility of selling condos that generate five times more revenue than new offices provided the proper incentive to encourage developers to embrace the podium-tower typology (Bogdanowicz, 2006). One reason developers were reluctant to build slim towers is that they are more expensive to build than bulky towers (Bogdanowicz, 2006). It is the

willingness of purchasers to pay for the views allowed by this building type that in return covers the increased costs of construction (Bogdanowicz 2006).

This form of development met the goals of Vancouver city planners, while also meeting the needs of the development community, representing a fusion of developer ambitions and Vancouver city council and planning department requirements (Punter 2003). The balance was maintained by developers being satisfied that the increased cost of building tall skinny towers was offset by the increased revenues and the city planners achieved the creation of an enhanced and vibrant public realm. A diverse and vibrant public realm was achieved through the construction of a continuous street-wall of apartments and townhouses providing eyes-on-the-street through a reinterpretation of New Urbanist ideology, while achieving the effect of masking the recessed residential tower (Bogdanowicz 2006). Boddy states that the podium-tower typology is the true "New Urbanism" as it will shape "the way more people live than any variation on early-twentieth-century American suburbia" and "will save more energy, house more people, and make finer neighbourhoods than all other over hyped neo-nineteenth-century projects combined in a few years" (Boddy, 2004:19). These are attractive goals for city planners who are striving to implement policies that encourage sustainability principles. Under these circumstances, the podium-tower housing typology has becomes a popular choice for planners and developers. A key attribute to the emergence of this typology is the city's ability to encourage developers to create architecture with importance on the quality of design.

The emergence of the podium-tower typology can in part be credited to Vancouver's strong political will and planning direction. As Larry Beasley states, "We have an unusual attitude about development here. Our attitude is if you don't measure up, we're

not afraid to say no in this city" (Senbel, 2005). The political will to say no to developers complements the relationship that the city planning department has with developers, which Lorinc describes as a "nurtured [and] collaborative approach to development approvals" that allowed them the opportunity and ability to "persuade builders to design narrow-point towers rising out of two or three-storey pedestals" (Lorinc, 2006:292). It is this collaborative approach to development that has resulted in developers, planners and politicians reaching consensus on a model for development.

### 2.1.3. Criticism of the Podium-tower Typology

Criticisms of the podium-tower typology are in part due to its success. Bogdanowicz suggests that the success of the model within Vancouver has resulted in too much of a good thing at the expense of a healthy and diverse city (Bogdanowicz 2006). This point is repeated by Giaimo who criticizes the architecture as being "a product qualified only by its incessant sameness" (Giaimo, 2008:163). In Coquitlam this form of development is just beginning and it is too soon to know if it will be criticized for making the same mistakes. However, it will be useful to make comparisons with Vancouver and see how closely this urban form is being replicated in Coquitlam. Another concern comes from Boddy who points out the possibility that Vancouver could lose "conventional business and commercial functions to competing suburbs" (Boddy 2004:18). This is explored further in the section on Suburban Competitiveness.

## 2.2. Planning Principles

In 1980, Coquitlam was designated a Regional Town Centre by Metro Vancouver as part of the *Liveable Region Strategic Plan.* This plan proposed that Coquitlam would

"accommodate a large share of the region's future higher density commercial and residential growth with a high level of transit access and interconnection" (GVRD, 1999:11). The city then embarked on a process to update its planning policies to reshape the City Centre area into a mixed-use, high density neighbourhood that would be able to take advantage of the proposed Evergreen Line Sky Train extension. It is within this context that it is important to identify influential planning policies and the subsequent effects that they may have had upon the formulation of planning policies as well as exploring their role in the migration of the podium-tower typology from an urban to a suburban location. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate the principles of new urbanism, density, and mixed-use development in order to understand the effect that these planning principles have had in shaping the development of suburban communities like Coquitlam.

### 2.2.1. New Urbanism

The concepts of new urbanism "emerged in the 1980s as architects and urban designers sought ways to re-create what were felt to be the best physical qualities of traditional neighbourhoods and small towns" (Larice and Macdonald, 2007:309). These concepts advocate for a new type of suburb with a purpose of lessening dependence upon the automobile and creating walkable and livable neighbourhoods with multi-modal transit opportunities. There are several terms that prescribe this "new suburb" such as "traditional neighbourhood development, neotraditional design, pedestrian pockets, and transit-oriented developments" (Ryan & McNally, 1995:98). Russell, whose research focuses on American suburbs, suggests that what is uniting suburbia is "a vast civil engineered network of roads" and "that architecture or design is deployed" for the sole purpose of "attract(ing) the passing motorist" (Russell, 2005:99). In a response to auto-oriented urban sprawl, new urbanism attempts to use architecture and design to create "housing for a

diverse population, a full mix of uses, walkable streets, positive public space, integrated civic and commercial centers, transit orientation, and accessible open space" (Calthorpe, 1991: para 27). These principles have been defined in the 'Charter of New Urbanism' created in 1996 to serve as a guide to help encourage positive design and development of cities and towns (Larice and Macdonald, 2007).

Understanding the emergence of new urbanism and the different elements that help to construct this concept are important for understanding and analyzing the policies that were created in the early to mid-1990s, and which facilitate the podium-tower housing typology. Grant attributes the precursors of new urbanism to Jane Jacobs and her influence over the creation of "mixed-use, connected street patterns, and walkable communities", Duany and Plater-Zyberk's advocacy for traditional neighbourhood design with "complete communities, mixed-use town centres and traditional building types," and Calthorpe and Kelbaugh's promotion of transit-oriented development suggesting that "designers and planners use access to public transportation as an organising mechanism for determining land uses and densities" (Grant, 2009b:12).

Today the principles of new urbanism apply in both an urban and a suburban context. Originally it was intended to encourage more livable, walkable communities at a low density. However, in Vancouver these principles have been applied in an urban context and have proven to be successful at creating livable neighbourhoods while also increasing residential densities. As Punter states, "the policy relevance of new urbanism increases as it broadens its program to include urban intensification, urban villages, livable downtowns, and the retrofitting of suburbia (Punter, 2003:xx). In a 2004 Vancouver Sun article, Larry Beasley, former Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver, states "the tower-townhouse prototype -- developed by local architects like Richard Henriquez, Paul

Merrick and James Cheng -- was a modernist form that provided the mixed-use vibrancy in Vancouver sought by anti-modernists such as urban theorist Jane Jacobs, who is a huge fan of Vancouver's downtown" (Ward, 2004).

Several principles of new urbanism are reflected in the podium-tower design such as mixed-use, safety, and the seamless integration of architecture into the urban landscape, all of which is being achieved through design. As Arthur Erickson states, "It's very important to have people living next to the street so there isn't that vacuum between high-rises and the street, which is what happens in Toronto" (Lorinc, 2006:292). The townhouse units located in the podium are adjacent to the street and with the point tower set further back it helps to achieve a sense of human scale. Erickson also emphasizes "the important thing is that there have been regulations that don't allow a building to go up unless it has those townhouses, which are the eyes on the street" (Lorinc, 2006:292). It is the "eyes on the street" that helps create a sense of safety in keeping with new urbanism design principles. Erickson also touches upon the role of the city to adopt regulations requiring developers to achieve a base level of design standards. Analyzing Vancouver policy documents for evidence of new urbanism principles, including the ability to encourage developers to adhere to them, is an important component of this research project, particularly how Vancouver has served as an example for policy formulation and podium-tower development in Coquitlam.

Literature by Grant indicates that Canadian suburbs have had limited success in implementing the principles of new urbanism, smart growth, and sustainability and attempts to evaluate the implementation of theory to determine how it is translated onto the ground (Grant, 2009b). A key element in the implementation of policy is balancing the interests of planners with the interests of the developer. In Vancouver, "the official

development plan represented a fusion of developer ambitions and council and planning department requirements" (Punter, 2003:200). This may be a rare case, as Grant suggests that in practice it is more often the developer's interests that pre-empt the aspirations of planners (Grant, 2009b).

In Coquitlam, the new urbanism principles of a mixed-use, walkable town centre is concentrated around a future rapid transit connection in keeping with transit-oriented development principles. It may be that when many communities struggle to achieve the goals of new urbanism, it is a regional acceptance and familiarity of these principles, both on the part of planners and of developers, that has allowed Coquitlam to achieve them quite readily. Since the idealistic principles of planning theory "rarely survive in practice" and policies that cater to market preferences are more likely to be successful (Grant, 2009b:29), it will be interesting to discover how Coquitlam planning policies influenced the development of the podium-tower typology in relation to the level of developer acceptance.

### 2.2.2. Density

In Coquitlam, high density residential development is occurring around the proposed Evergreen Line, and the purpose of this research project is to determine the role of policy, planners, and developers in the formulation of policies that are currently guiding development in Coquitlam neighbourhoods. Understanding how podium-tower development in Coquitlam fits into this process is a key aim. An important principle that is being associated with new urbanism today is the importance of increasing residential densities. However, this goal of urban planning is not well represented in the principles of new urbanism. In the early 1990s, high density residential development was not a principle of new urbanism as its main application was for small towns and suburbs, and in the Charter of New Urbanism it is stated that "appropriate building densities" be located

within walking distance of transit connections; however, no definition of an appropriate density is discussed (Larice and Macdonald, 2007).

Hall states that new urbanism should be about the function and not only the form, and therefore focus on "transit-oriented developments… deliberately designed at densities higher than conventional automobile-oriented suburbs… that are above all grouped around good transit" (Hall, 2005:125). Today, as concepts of new urbanism, smart growth, and sustainable development fuse together (Grant, 2009b), density has become one of the key planning principles that have directed planners in the process of policy development and implementation as they strive to address issues of sustainability. Another important shift in the application of new urbanism is the way that Vancouver integrated these principles to create pedestrian friendly streetscapes and urban spaces, while also increasing residential densities.

Density is also becoming the means for achieving sustainability targets that also enhance the public realm. Mixed-use developments achieve this while increasing residential densities, serving to support the expansion of transit services. This can be achieved through an integration of sustainability principles and planning policy in the same manner as the Vancouver official development plan, which "represents a fusion of developer ambitions and council and planning department requirements" (Punter, 2003:200). In Vancouver, "city planners insisted on continuous street-wall apartments and townhouses to provide a traditional streetscape, and the developers were able to accommodate the majority of their housing units in high-rise towers where the spectacular views would command premium values" (Punter, 2003:200). This has allowed Vancouver to create an active and vibrant public realm through strict design guidelines that ensured high-quality architectural design with elements of new urbanism that also "resulted in over

40,000 people moving into the downtown between 1995-2005" (Lorinc, 2006:292). The ability of Vancouver to increase residential density and achieve high quality design is an example of how other cities can achieve higher densities, while also creating an attractive public realm. These goals are partly achieved through density bonusing strategies that require developers to provide civic amenities and enhancements to the public realm in exchange for more buildable floor area (Lorinc, 2006). This drive for increased densities is reflected in the common goal of the planning profession to improve environmental quality, encourage the development of transit-oriented communities, and reduce the urban footprint (Churchman, 1999).

The urge for density is further evaluated by Filion, who assesses the effectiveness of policies that encourage the intensification of urban development with the intent of becoming walkable transit hubs (Filion, 2001). Filion investigates mixed-use developments, some of which have developed around existing malls, as is the case in the Coquitlam City Centre area, and their ability to gain prestige and become focal points within the suburban landscape (Filion, 2001). The role of mixed-use developments as part of a sustainability strategy is expanded upon by Grant, who states that mixed-use developments can also make a positive contribution to urban design, economic vitality, and environmental quality (Grant, 2002).

Understanding the role of these principles guides this research, which examines Coquitlam policies in relation to the podium-tower typology. Of particular importance is the evidence of new urbanism, density, and transit-oriented development within planning policy documents. It is also important to gain an understanding of the relationship between the city and the developers and how well their ambitions were fused to create the vision that is today becoming Coquitlam City Centre. In Coquitlam, some neighbourhoods

prescribing the podium-tower typology adhere to policies of transit-oriented development while others are trying to create walkable mixed-use neighbourhoods. The application of the podium-tower typology with commercial space or townhouses at the ground level is being used in some locations where it may not be the most applicable building typology. Understanding the influencing planning principles helps to illuminate the rational for encouraging this form of development while gaining insight into the experiences of other communities.

## 2.3. Planning Theory and Practice

The intent of this project is to understand the migration of the podium-tower typology, part of which is rooted in the practice of planning and the effectiveness of planners to implement planning theories. In the early 1990s, Vancouver and Coquitlam each had planning policies and guidelines encouraging high density, mixed-use development. The form and character of development resulting from these policies was very different for Vancouver than it was for Coquitlam. Over time however, the podium-tower typology associated with Vancouverism began to emerge in Coquitlam. To better understand the gradual transformation of the built-form in Coquitlam City Centre, the type of planning systems used by Vancouver and Coquitlam will be examined to determine how these systems could affect the implementation of community plans. The effectiveness with which planners implement urban design principles is in part a result of the differences between a discretionary and regulatory planning (Punter, 2007).

### 2.3.1. Planning Systems: Regulatory versus Discretionary

An important component related to the emergence and migration of the podium-tower typology is the planning framework used by Vancouver and Coquitlam. Vancouver uses a discretionary planning model while Coquitlam, which is typical of most North American cities, uses a regulatory model (Punter, 2007). Punter describes the regulatory system as the provision of well-defined development rights that "create a high level of certainty for all parties" involved in the development process. By contrast, the discretionary system is more pragmatic, provides flexibility, and deals with development on more of a case by case approach (Punter 2007:167). Punter further notes that the "distinctions between regulatory and discretionary have become blurred, particularly with the invention of design review as an additional control process overlaid on the regulatory permitting process" (Punter 2007:168). New urbanism and its focus on urban design has resulted in planners reclaiming control over urban design/physical form, which had previously been abdicated to architects and landscape architects (Neuman, 2005:139). Designers, sponsored by developers and endorsed by public officials, are also promoting new urbanism (Garde, 2004:167), but with an increase in prescriptive urban design policy and regulation, architects and designers feel threatened by a loss of autonomy (Punter, 1987). New urbanist design schemes are appearing in new suburban developments, urban infill projects, and urban transit-oriented developments (Garde, 2004:154), and the complexity of implementing these plans is a challenge for planners.

As planning departments try to implement prescriptive urban design policies their success is dependent on the completion of a complex process that requires participation and agreement from a diverse group including the public, politicians, developers, and

planners. The difference between regulatory and discretionary planning systems becomes more noticeable and relevant through the implementation process.

### 2.3.2. Plan Implementation

The implementation of a plan presents a challenge to planners, and many implementation studies focus on analyzing planning documents while ignoring the outcomes (Loh, 2011). MacDonald, a researcher who analysed Vancouver Planning documents to determine what design control approaches have been used, followed through by conducting field observations to see what types of buildings had been built in response to those guidelines (MacDonald, 2005). MacDonald's approach is important for my research, which emphasizes determining how development in Coquitlam City Centre was guided by planning documents. In Vancouver, the public sector proactively lead and shaped development rather than merely reacting to market-led proposals (MacDonald, 2005:14) This was supported by a discretionary regulatory framework and a robust participatory and engaged planning process that involved politicians, the public, and developers in incremental design decision making. This process was well suited to achieving the vision outlined by the plan (Punter, 2003). This led to the development of the podium-tower typology that was "fundamentally different from the building types upon which the urban design theory being referenced was based" (MacDonald, 2005:14).

The discretionary approach to planning allows more flexibility, is more adept at responding to new challenges, and better suited to achieving common goals between stakeholders. A shared experience for planners in both Vancouver and Coquitlam is the pressure felt by external stakeholders when trying to implement plans. As Neuman states, "planners want to avoid confrontation, developers want to get projects through the regulatory hurdles in minimum time, and residents prefer things as they know them"

(Neuman 2005:134). Each of these stakeholders add a dimension of potential conflict and complexity to the planning process. This complexity can result in elements of the plan getting dropped along the way, and the implementation of a community plan that is altered or not meeting its original goals (Loh, 2011). Vancouver developed a new process to facilitate and manage the implementation and development of plans while also gaining public support. The literature on planning theory and practice "still lacks an understanding of where problems are going to arise in the development and implementation of plans" (Loh, 2011:35).

The development industry in Canada has considerable influence in municipal politics (Buzzelli & Harris, 2006:907), and therefore the podium-tower typology "found in Vancouver must be economic, or else developers would not be building them" (MacDonald, 2005:38). In Coquitlam, the development of podium-tower condominiums began in earnest in 2006, 16 years after policies permitting this urban typology were introduced. If the podium-tower typology was economically feasible and popular with developers in Vancouver, it is possible that the goals of Coquitlam's City Centre plan conflicted with each other, resulting in the plan not being implemented. Conflicting goals and objectives in urban plans are a key reason for creating difficulties in plan implementation (Loh, 2011:37).

Neuman states that "planning has always served private interests" but that planning practitioners must also "be prepared to justify the need for planning in the face of alternatives i.e. citizens, developers, politicians who may have differing opinions and perspectives" (Neuman 2005:131&133). In Vancouver, through a discretionary planning system involving collaboration with industry, politicians, and the public, planners were able to create an innovative new housing typology that could be built "within the context of

large-scale corporate development practice" (MacDonald, 2005:37). In addition "principles that focus more on neighbourhood design aspects are more frequently implemented, while principles that have regional focus are least implemented" (Garde, 2004:158). Understanding the role of Coquitlam within the region in conjunction with regional planning policies is an important part of this project.

## 2.4. Competitive Suburbs

As Metro Vancouver suburbs compete for population and employment growth, the Coquitlam City Centre area is attracting high density residential development along with commercial and office development. This commercial and office growth is not accidental as the zoning that allows developers to construct the podium-tower condo buildings also gives incentives for developers to build commercial and office space, which was premised on the anticipated construction of the Evergreen Line. These policies and current developments enhance the ability of Coquitlam to maintain urban competitiveness, which is based on its ability to maintain continued growth and create value. Hill & Brennan's study of American suburbs reveals that they are becoming more competitive and are able to compete with central cities for employment growth (2007). Condominium development in the form of a tall skinny tower with commercial uses in the podium reflects an urban typology. This, in conjunction with the creation of office employment and the potential for convenient rapid transit access, start to resemble the ideas of Richard Florida.

### 2.4.1. Creative Class

Florida advises city officials to heavily invest in creating a high quality urban environment rich in cultural amenities and conducive to diversity in a local social life in an

effort to create or stimulate job growth in the new economy (Florida, 2002). The creative class is made up of a knowledge based workforce that desire a creative community, allowing people to establish a creative identity through choice of work and accessibility to a wide range of lifestyle amenities (Florida, 2002). Access to lifestyle amenities is a message that is present in the current marketing language used to sell condos in Coquitlam, which includes this recent example: "high-rise communit(ies) delivering livability, community and security on an intimate scale… in one of the Lower Mainland's most vibrant metropolitan centres… just minutes from all the amenities" (Cressey 2011). Within the context of the creative class ideology, cities are required to create these kinds of environments for fear of becoming uncompetitive (Florida, 2002).

The result of this is a "notion that cities must become trendy, happening places in order to compete in the twenty-first-century economy" (Malanga, 2004:1), and the solicitation of the creative class is strongly linked with the economic and political life of the city (Peck, 2007). The underlying message regarding creative class and creative city policies is that "solutions to complex urban problems are no longer sought through rigorous analysis and critical thinking, but through the application of trendy best practices": (Cormier, 2010).

### 2.4.2. Policy Migration

In an effort to understand the migration of the podium-tower typology, it is relevant to understand issues of urban competitiveness in relation to how and why policies are transferred from place to place as explored by McCann (2004). McCann focuses on the influence of "best places to live" rankings and their effect on urban policy. With Vancouver having ranked as the "best place to live" for several years it is possible that policies associated with its success may be transferred or copied by other cities hoping to share

in some of its success. The podium-tower typology, being at the core of Vancouver's successful inner-city development, makes this housing typology and its associated policies a candidate for exportation, as has been witnessed in San Francisco and, as is the focus of this research, in Coquitlam. This sentiment is supported by Sandercock (as cited in Lorinc, 2006) who states, "there are no recipes for building better cities, but we can learn a lot from inspiring stories" (Lorinc, 2006:290).

### 2.4.3. Regional Policies & Market Trends

An important component in understanding the migration of the podium-tower typology from urban to suburban locations is the role of market trends and their influence over regional and municipal planning policies. In 1975, The Livable Region Strategic Plan identified four regional town centres that were to become complete mixed-use communities where residents could work, shop, and play. Each of the four town centre areas, which included Coquitlam Town Centre (officially designated in 1980), Metrotown in Burnaby, New Westminster's Downtown, and Surrey City Centre were to have a mix of office and retail of approximately one million square feet. Subsequent regional plans including the Regional Growth Strategy (Metro, 2011) continue to advocate for strong employment growth in the regional centres.

Contrary to regional planning policies, suburban office development has not occurred in the regional town centres, but has instead been located in business parks (McMillan, 2004). In the 1970s and 1980s, cities like Vancouver and Toronto had such strong office growth in the Central Business District that that municipal governments encouraged decentralization (Mathew, 1992). In the 1980s, office functions began to decentralize as head offices relocated in suburban office parks (Garreau, 1991; Coffey, 1994). By 2000, office parks accounted for over 13 million square feet of office space,

more than three times the office space found in the eight regional town centres (McMillian, 2004:7).

Regional office trends need to be acknowledged to determine if regional policies advocating for mixed-use office and residential development, in conjunction with market trends to develop office space in low density office parks, has played a role in the timing and phasing of development including the form and character of development in Coquitlam City Centre area.

# Chapter 3.

# Research Design

This research investigates how and why the podium-tower housing typology has become a popular development model in Coquitlam City Centre. To answer this question, a range of data collection methods were utilized and three analytical perspectives were applied to the data. Research data was collected through the following methods: 1) an extensive review of academic literatures relevant to podium-tower development, planning policies and principles, and regional development trends; 2) a review of regional and municipal policy documents, bylaws, council reports, and planning documents; and 3) semi-structured interviews with city staff with information and experience with podium-tower development in Coquitlam.

To assist in data analysis, three analytical perspectives were applied to the data and sorted into three time-periods. The analytical perspectives are based on observations of podium-tower development in Vancouver and Coquitlam, which suggest that the Vancouver model of podium-tower development is being replicated in Coquitlam, and assist in separating overlapping events and processes in order to create a clear and accurate understanding for how and why this replication is occurring. The analytical perspectives are as follows:

- Identifying the emergence and migration of podium-tower policy and development;
- Understanding the difference and evolution of podium-tower design between Vancouver and Coquitlam; and
- Determining how podium-tower policy evolved over time in Coquitlam

The historical context, processes and events surrounding podium-tower development in Vancouver and Coquitlam spans over four decades. To organize and manage the data over this time frame, the following chronology was established based on the emergence of the podium-tower in policy and development in the city and region:

- 1960 to 1990 – Regional policies influence on the podium-tower typology
- 1990 to 2004 – Emergence of the podium-tower in Vancouver and Coquitlam
- 2004 to 2012 – Emergence of a Vancouver style of podium-tower in Coquitlam

Each analytical perspective is applied to each of the time periods for the purpose of identifying the emergence of the podium-tower concept in planning policies, the evolution of policy and architectural design, and to compare changing policies with changes in architectural design to identify causal relationships that can be categorized chronologically.

Academic scholarship provided a framework for understanding planning principles of mixed-use, transit-oriented development, and new urbanism, as related to high density high-rise development. Literature on suburban competition, regional planning, and suburban development provides context for analyzing Coquitlam within its regional framework. Research on Vancouver provided a context for understanding the emergence of the podium-tower and its origins as related to Vancouver's discretionary planning system, and a global context given the unique development opportunities through international investment and its location on the Pacific Rim.

Regional and municipal planning policy documents, planning reports, and council minutes were an essential source of data as they helped establish a timeframe for the emergence and migration of the podium-tower policies in Vancouver and Coquitlam, as well as providing the planning rationale promoting this typology. The review of regional

planning policy began with documents from the 1960s to present, and municipal planning documents were reviewed from the 1970s to present. Reviewing policies over this time frame allowed for the comparison of policies between Vancouver and Coquitlam, while also revealing how policies changed over time. Using this time frame also allowed for a comparison of development trends in Coquitlam over time with the evolution of podium-tower policies to understand the relationship between planning policy and development trends.

Urban design was a specific focus in the review of municipal planning documents, particularly since podium-tower development in Vancouver and Coquitlam was architecturally distinct. The urban design guidelines within municipal policy documents were compared with podium-tower development in Vancouver and Coquitlam to identify similarities and differences and understand how the design of podium-tower design has evolved and been influenced by planning policy and architectural design trends. The purpose of the design policy review and analysis was to identify design trends originating in Vancouver, and their subsequent emergence in Coquitlam podium-tower development, to determine how architectural design migrated from Vancouver to Coquitlam.

Interviews with key informants provided context and insight into the emergence and development of podium-towers beyond what could be gathered from municipal planning policy documents and planning reports. The interviewees were Coquitlam city staff and included the land development manager, the manager of development services, and the senior planner of community planning. Each of these interviewees provided a different perspective of podium-tower development in Coquitlam which include: 1) policy planning; 2) development planning; and 3) urban land development. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on gaining unique insights into the relationship between

planning policy, policy implementation, and market aspects of podium-tower development as related to the popularity and migration of the podium-tower typology.

While the architectural design of podium-tower development is an important aspect of this research, architects and developers were not interviewed. The interviews with city staff also provided the perspective of developers and architects regarding the popularity of the Vancouver style of podium-tower development in Coquitlam, as staff work closely with developers and architects in the implementation and development of policy, which was sufficient for the purposes of this research. Also, the focus on architectural design is primarily to support the hypothesis that variations in podium-tower design exist and that over time the typology has become homogenous. Analysing architectural design was for the purpose of identifying design trends in podium-tower development and the migration of those trends to Coquitlam, with a focus on how these trends related to policy and its implementation. The identification of changes and trends in podium-tower design were observable through the built environment and did not require interviews.

The collected data was analyzed according to the key themes and time periods noted above. A timeline was created to track the emergence and evolution of podium-tower design in both Vancouver and Coquitlam, and the evolution of podium-tower policies in Coquitlam. A synthesis of this data in combination with interview data provided a detailed understanding of the history, events, and processes that have culminated in the podium-tower becoming a popular development model in Coquitlam.

# Chapter 4.

# Vancouver and the Emergence of the Podium-Tower Typology

The podium-tower typology emerged in Vancouver as part of a visionary plan to intensify residential capacity while seeking to avoid the mistakes of post second world war "urban renewal" housing projects. Plans focused on creating livable communities that would have a population of diverse age and income, with access to public parks, open spaces, commercial retail, and a range of housing choices. The successful implementation of these plans were in part due to Vancouver's powerful discretionary and participatory planning process, which delegated authority from council to the planning department in order to make day-to-day planning decisions (Grant, 2009:365). The result was a transformation of Vancouver's downtown waterfronts, characterized by the point-tower on a podium, which is now commonly referred to as "Vancouverism".

The term "Vancouverism," which emerged in the mid-2000s, describes the planning model in which the podium-tower was one key component. Vancouverism achieves high residential densities in livable urban communities defined by "tall widely separated slender towers interspersed with low-rise buildings, public spaces, small parks and pedestrian friendly streetscapes and facades to minimize the impact of a high-density population" (Mitham, 2012; Chamberlain, 2005). The mechanics of Vancouverism are based on the principles of livability, successfully applied through a discretionary and cooperative planning process, resulting in a new building typology of the point-tower set upon a townhouse base surrounded by parks, vibrant streetscapes, and waterfront access.

This chapter examines how the podium-tower typology emerged and became a popular development model in Vancouver by investigating the regional and historic context of the city's planning policies and unique development opportunities in relation to Expo '86, waterfront mega projects, international investment, and a shift in demographics. It is important to understand the context within which the podium-tower first emerged in Vancouver as it was intended to address planning issues specific to a local context. Many cities without this local context are now copying Vancouver's urban design policies for podium-tower developments, and they risk creating a locally inappropriate response (Grant, 2009a:368).

## 4.1. Policy and Planning

### 4.1.1. Planning Policy

Regional and municipal planning policies have provided a framework for Vancouver's downtown revitalization and the emergence of the podium-tower typology. The influence of regional policies began in the late 1960s through collaboration between the City of Vancouver, which maintained its own municipal autonomy, and the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) (2009a, Grant:359). Regional planning focused on livability, which was emphasized in *The Livable Region 1976/1986,* and provided a growth management strategy that defined residential growth targets, promoted balanced population and employment growth, and created five regional centres, with Vancouver at its core (GVRD, 1975). The overarching goals of the plan encouraged a reduction in urban sprawl through compact development and a transit-oriented transportation system, providing for the protection of open space (GVRD, 1975). Vancouver's regional role was to encourage the residential intensification of the downtown core and discourage office

uses considered to be more suitable in a suburban location in order to balance its population to employment ratio. These policies were reflected in Vancouver's 1975 Downtown Official Plan (Vancouver, 1975:3).

In the early 1970s, planners "reformed planning processes and objectives" that resulted in a "planning culture of innovation, community engagement, and consensus building" (Grant, 2009a:362). This is present in The Downtown Official Development Plan (DODP) which encouraged mixed-use development, and "flexibility and creativity in the preparation of development proposals" (Vancouver, 1975:3). While the plan did not provide design guidelines, it did require development to meet the "highest standards of design and amenity for the benefit of all users of the Downtown" (Vancouver, 1975:3).

The 1991 Central Area Plan (CAP), which was an update to the 1975 Official Development Plan, didn't advocate for any particular building typology, but instead identified issues related to high density, mixed-use development to be resolved during plan implementation. The plan advocated for a high density neighbourhood with an age diverse population supported by a broad range of housing types, and highlighted the issue of achieving a range of housing choices in a high density neighbourhood. The plan focused on creating a neighbourhood with a diverse range of housing and identified issues that needed to be resolved in the implementation of the plan without providing a solution.

In the early 1990s, the City of Vancouver created several plans that contributed to the development of the podium-tower typology. The 1990 Official Development Plans for False Creek North and Coal Harbour areas were the first to advocate for architectural design features reflective of the podium-tower typology. These policies required point towers, not slabs, and for streets to be lined with pedestrian oriented uses at grade with

taller structures rising above. Design guidelines were later created to help regulate the form and character of development in these neighbourhoods.

During the early 1990s, design guidelines began to progressively prescribe the podium-tower typology in response to city council becoming more comfortable with the typology (Beasley, 2007, cited in Sherrell, 2007:15). These guidelines began with the Downtown South Guidelines in 1991 and continued with area specific CD-1 neighbourhood guidelines. In 1993, the CD-1 Guidelines for the Roundhouse area introduced massing controls that encouraged towers to be integrated with the low-rise buildings at their base. The height of low rise buildings ranged from two to eight storeys and commercial and residential units at the base were required to have ground-oriented access (Vancouver, 1993). Towers were required to be narrow and were not permitted to protrude into defined view corridors. These guidelines were not overly prescriptive and provided a wide range of interpretation, however the requirement for development to enhance the streetscape by creating a strong street-wall and for towers to be set upon a low rise base was very clear.

Regional and municipal planning policies provided a framework for the residential intensification of Vancouver's downtown core, but do not provide a complete explanation for how the podium-tower typology emerged. Policies advocated for residential intensification, housing diversity, and pedestrian active street-frontages and over time began to define a podium-tower building typology. Policies identified issues and set goals, to be resolved through plan implementation. These issues and goals were defined by the planning principles of livability.

### 4.1.2. Planning Principles

Vancouver's residential intensification of the downtown core focused on planning principles ranging from sustainability, smart growth, and density, to mixed-use and new urbanism. Residential intensification was intended to counteract suburban sprawl, while also promoting sustainability through the preservation of agricultural land. The effect of increasing the downtown population and encouraging mixed-use development would reduce auto-oriented traffic and provide opportunities for people to live and work within the downtown core. While these principles played a role in transforming Vancouver's downtown, the key element behind the success of these principles was the goal of maintaining livability. Livability was associated with "low key, low density" neighbourhoods, and maintaining those qualities in a high density urban environment (Vancouver, 1991:23). The organizing principles for livability were defined by Vancouver's "living first" strategy, which was based on a "comprehensive integrated strategy: pushing for housing intensity; insisting on housing diversity; structuring of coherent, identifiable, and supportive neighbourhoods; and fostering suitably domestic urban design and architecture" (Beasley, 2000). Housing objectives included the creation of new neighbourhoods that could provide a diverse range of housing, while livability objectives focused on making these dense communities attractive places to live. The challenge was to create a high density community while overcoming the perceived negative aspects of high residential densities.

Topics related to density cover a wide range of concepts including form and character of buildings, sustainable development, urban sprawl, crowding, compact city, social issues and values, and the role of planners and local governments to provide principles governing density (Churchman, 1999:390). Vancouver in the early 1960s was

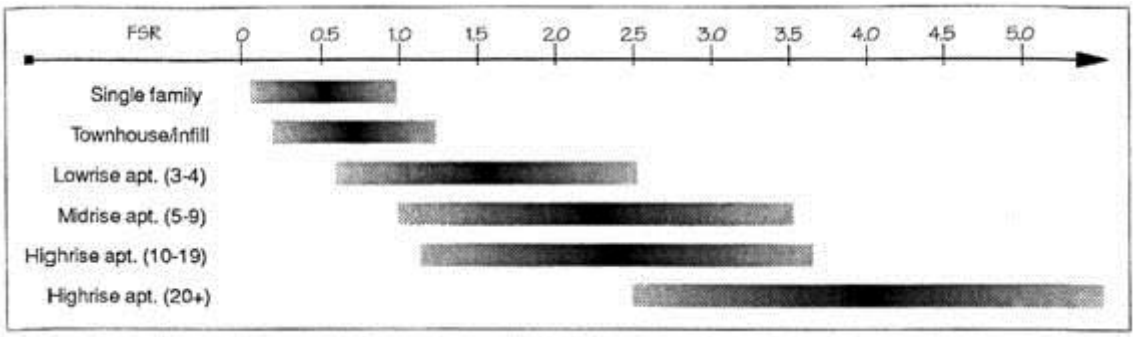
considered “low density and lacking urban character” and in order to densify it had to grapple with a myriad of density related issues (Grant, 2009a:358). A chief concern regarding high urban densities is that they reduce the quality of life for urban residents (Churchman, 1999:392). After Expo ’86, Beasley stated that the redevelopment of the Expo lands provided an opportunity to envision the implementation of a multi-modal, high density residential neighbourhood that could resolve issues related to high density through good urban design (Grant, 2009a:358). The importance of the human landscape is a critical element for ensuring livability, and many cities focus on the larger scale of buildings in the context of the overall cityscape and neglect the human scale to the detriment of a vibrant pedestrian realm (Gehl, 2010). Vancouver planners have avoided this by identifying public streets “as the primary scene of public life” for creating an “alive downtown” and “a walkable city” (City of Vancouver, 1991:26). This was to be accomplished by paying attention to the arrangement of buildings and public spaces at the human scale (City of Vancouver, 1990a).

Plans also focused on other public realm qualities such as creating neighbourhoods with a sense of place, livability, eyes on the street, and an active and strongly defined street edge (City of Vancouver, 1991a:2). Many of these principles are based in urban design theory that is focused on traditional urbanism, and contribute to the enhancement of the public realm (MacDonald, 2005:13). Vancouver city planners made the same discovery as the New Urbanists by relying on the traditional relationships between the street, the sidewalk, and the building/street-wall to solve many of the problems in making high densities work in Vancouver. (Beasley, 2000). With a mix of uses throughout the urban core, and buildings that address the street to create an

attractive pedestrian realm, Vancouver has become a noted example of high-rise new urbanism (Grant, 2009a).

Vancouver planners also strived to create a high density residential neighbourhood that could provide a diverse range of housing types for a diverse range of people of different ages and incomes, including families with children (City of Vancouver, 1991). A concern related to creating a diverse range of housing types was the notion that policies advocating for high residential densities would result in high-rise construction rather than a range of building forms as shown in Figure 2 (Vancouver, 1991:23; Lozano, 2007).

**Figure 2. Density and Building Type Relationship (Vancouver, 1991)**




Source: City of Vancouver, 1991, p. 24

The result of Vancouver's policies and design guidelines was "three new building types: (1) point towers rising from two- to three-storey townhouse bases; (2) point towers rising from six- to eight-storey apartment blocks containing ground-floor cityhomes; and (3) four- to 12-storey apartment blocks containing ground-floor cityhomes" (MacDonald, 2005:26). The emergence of these new building types was the result of a highly discretionary regulatory framework and an innovative cooperative planning process that involved the public, developers, and politicians in achieving livability objectives (Punter, 2003).

### 4.1.3. Planning Process

Vancouver's discretionary and cooperative planning process provided the means to proactively lead and shape development rather than simply responding to proposals from the development industry (MacDonald, 2005:14). The discretionary planning system is common in Britain and Ireland and is noted for its flexibility and lack of certainty (Punter, 2007). Based on case law and pragmatism, the discretionary model reflects the idea that all future circumstances related to a planning application cannot be predicted in advance (Booth, 1996:5). Within this model professional planners are given considerable discretion when reviewing development applications, allowing for the consideration of a full range of planning matters and not just those defined by regulation (Punter, 2007:168). By contrast the regulatory system, which is common in most of Western Europe and North America, provides clear development rights and a "high level of certainty for all parties" (Booth, 1996; Punter, 2007:167). In Vancouver, the discretionary planning model is based on the delegation of authority to the Director of Planning to make day-to-day development related decisions (Punter, 2003:14). This has resulted in more authority being given to planning staff as well as an increase in the number of development planners with architectural experience in an effort to increase the expertise in the planning department (Punter, 2003:296). A planning department with expertise in architectural and urban design related issues is better able to effectively implement plans and policies in a timely manner.

The expertise within Vancouver's planning department is reflected in the implementation of a new development review process and regulatory framework in anticipation of large waterfront redevelopment projects in order to manage the massive change they envisioned and to gain public support (MacDonald, 2005:20). This resulted

in a five-stage development process involving politicians, developers and the public, beginning with large-scale, conceptual issues followed by specific design details in later stages, while also allowing for input and consensus at each stage of the process (Punter, 2003). Planning processes began with city planning staff and developers working together to create guiding principles in the form of policy broadsheets, while concurrently consulting the public through a series of workshops and providing council with opportunities to review. Upon council approval of the policy broadsheets, the planning staff and developers design a development framework plan, which is refined through a series of public workshops and council hearings (City of Vancouver, 1990a). Upon approval of the development plan, city planning staff and the developer's architects create a set of detailed design guidelines while consulting with stakeholders in the immediate neighbourhood and seeking feedback from city council. When the guidelines have been approved by council, the developer applies for rezoning in accordance with the development plan and design guidelines, and the application receives a formal review by staff and the Urban Design Panel (an independent council-appointed group of design experts) and proceeds to a public hearing before city council. Once the rezoning is approved, implementation occurs through normal permit processing (Punter, 2003). In the case of the development of Concord Pacific Place, planning staff worked jointly with the developer to design the detailed aspects of the site plan including street layout, park dedications, view corridors, building configurations, and tower placement and height (MacDonald, 2005:20).

The cooperative approach to planning allowed planners to work collaboratively with developers, architects, and designers while receiving input from the public and feedback from city council. This collaborative process resulted in partnerships, which helped to make the planning process a success (Punter, 2003:196). Beasley states that

in consultation with public it was not about telling the public that density was good for them, but to show them that intensification can provide opportunities to improve the community (Grant, 2009a:364). Through powers of discretionary decision making and collaborative partnerships, the city of Vancouver was able to gain support of the public and developers through efforts to find solutions that work locally along with a commitment to mutual learning (Grant:, 2009a:368). This collaborative process resulted in the development of neighbourhoods that were shaped by the input from a wide range of stakeholders. The podium-tower typology forms just one part of a neighbourhood, yet its design is a response to an array of neighbourhood goals and objectives achieved through a collaborative planning process.

## 4.2. Expo ‘86

As other communities try to replicate Vancouver’s successful downtown revitalization, in part through the replication of the podium-tower typology, it is important to understand that Vancouver was provided with opportunities that most cities will never experience. Many of the factors that made Vancouver’s downtown revitalization a success were provided by the Expo ’86 mega event. Key opportunities provided by Expo ‘86 were: 1) the provision of a large waterfront site with redevelopment potential, 2) established linkages with Asia, resulting in international investment that funded development, and 3) provincial and federal investments to civic infrastructure that increased Vancouver’s urban appeal. The redevelopment opportunity brought planners, architects and developers together in a collaborative planning process. This process resulted in a master planned community featuring the podium-tower typology that transformed False Creek North. This dramatic transformation was made possible by the site being developed by a single large

development company backed by Asian investment with the financial ability to implement the plan. Development of the site by a single developer provided architectural continuity and helped to establish a unified vision of the podium-tower typology. Also, the large scale of the development established the podium-tower typology en masse and entrenched the podium-tower typology upon Vancouver's landscape. The events surrounding Expo '86 and the opportunities that they provided to Vancouver did not happen by chance. The Expo '86 event was part of the Provincial government's rationale to increase economic ties with Asia and present Vancouver as Canada's gateway to the Pacific Rim.

### 4.2.1. Expo '86 Rationale

In 1980, the BC provincial government announced a decision to host a world fair in 1986 on the historically industrial waterfront lands surrounding False Creek. The provincial government's economic rationale was to position the city as Canada's gateway to the Pacific. The event provided an opportunity for the provincial government to pursue stronger economic ties with Asia, increase public popularity through investments in public infrastructure, and provide a trigger for the redevelopment of the North Shore of False Creek (Olds, 2001:101,105,187). Expo '86 has been credited with reviving the city's economy and for its ability to market the city on a global scale (Punter, 2003:192).

### 4.2.2. Asian Investment

Part of this economic revival can be attributed to the provincial government's 1988 sale of the Expo site to Li Ka-shing, Hong Kong's wealthiest property tycoon. The purchase has been described as a "dramatic expression of globalization of Vancouver's economy and of Asian inroads into the city's commercial and residential property markets" (Punter, 2003:193). In an effort to diversify an economy that was highly dependent on

natural resources, the sale of the site represented a “reconceptualization of Vancouver into a Pacific Rim/global/world-class city” for the purpose of increasing the flow of global capital in the context of increased Asian immigration (Olds, 2001:91-2). Selling the site to Li Ka-shing, “Hong Kong’s most famous tycoon” resulted in the “largest, most high-profile property development project in Vancouver’s history” and provided a signal of economic prosperity for Asian investments (Olds, 2001:96). The sale of the site to Li Ka-shing coincided with Asian uncertainty regarding Hong Kong’s future in advance of the 1997 transfer of sovereignty, which resulted in Asian investment and migration to Vancouver (Bogdanowicz, 2006:23).

During this time period, Vancouver was also growing rapidly, in part due to “increased immigration flows from Asia”, which saw the city return to an average annual population growth of 2 percent per annum (Olds, 2001: Punter, 2003). High immigration levels supported the international marketing and sale of condos to foreign investors, which were marketed in Hong Kong, and provided a “’landing strip for foreign capital,” whereby purchasers perceived the condos as investment opportunities and vacation properties (Olds, 2001:98). A collaborative planning process allowed the developer’s strong ties to Asia to be reflected in the podium-tower buildings, which suited the tastes of Asian buyers who “knew and liked small apartments in small-plate high rises” (Boddy, 2004). This resulted in a steady demand for housing and allowed the city to impose design controls upon developers who readily complied in order to expedite the development process during a hot housing market (Punter, 2003:380). These events helped to establish policies that helped entrench the podium-tower typology in both planning policy and as a marketable commodity.

### 4.2.3. Planning Opportunity

The 1980 announcement to host the Expo ‘86 event was accompanied by plans for 10,000 residential units and 70,000 square metres of offices that were intended to occupy the site after the fair was complete (Punter, 2003:187). The large redevelopment site provided an opportunity for the city to implement planning policies and goals aimed at intensifying the downtown residential population through the creation of a new master planned neighbourhood. The Expo ‘86 site provided the city with an opportunity to pursue goals of increasing the downtown residential population and to create a “liveable” downtown core. This was further supported by a declining office market, which provided a rationale for restructuring the downtown core as a residential neighbourhood (Olds, 2001:91; Grant, 2009a:362).

The timing of the redevelopment was fortunate given that the city’s political history had cultivated and fostered a planning regime with considerable influence over the form and character of development. Vancouver’s city council, which had a history of encouraging innovative planning, resulted in a discretionary and cooperative planning regime that provided planners with the ability to be innovative (Grant, 2009a). Living First policies, which advocated high quality urban design principles, were adopted to guide development of the dismantled Expo ’86 fairgrounds (Beasley, 2000). New planning and design processes were implemented in order to create a high-quality residential neighbourhood on False Creek’s north shore (Punter, 2003:186).

### 4.2.4. Provincial and Federal Investment

The experience and international attention gained by hosting the world fair provided Vancouver with resources and redevelopment opportunities that would be the envy of other cities (Grant, 2009a). The federal and provincial government funded major

infrastructure improvements including BC Place, the regions first rapid transit system (the Sky Train), as well as cycling and pedestrian trails (Harcourt et al., 2007; Grant, 2009a). These infrastructure improvements enhanced Vancouver's metropolitan stature, thereby increasing its urban appeal and attractiveness to international investors. In the years following Expo '86, international investment, tourism, and immigration increased due to global exposure (Harcourt et al., 2007; Grant, 2009a: 367). The success surrounding the redevelopment of False Creek North has led to international attention and has resulted in the term "Vancouverism,"' which characterizes the urban characteristics of False Creek and the underlying planning processes.

## 4.3. Vancouverism

Two definitions that describe Vancouverism are as follows: 1) a planning model that achieves high residential densities in livable urban communities defined by "tall widely separated slender towers interspersed with low-rise buildings, public spaces, natural light, open views, small parks and lively pedestrian friendly streetscapes and facades that minimize the impact of a high-density population" (Mitham, 2012; DeWolf, 2012; Chamberlain, 2005); and 2) by the principles of livability, successfully applied through a discretionary and cooperative planning process, which resulted in a new building typology of the point-tower set upon a townhouse base surrounded by parks, vibrant streetscapes, and waterfront access.

The term "Vancouverism" became popular during the mid-2000s, following the successful redevelopment and revitalization of Vancouver's downtown waterfronts. These successes were reflected in the media, and attracted the attention of other cities wanting to replicate that success. *The Economist* Intelligence Unit annual survey voted

Vancouver the world's most livable city for five straight years from 2005 to 2011 (Reuters, 2011), and in 2005 an article in the *New York Times* discussed a redevelopment project in San Francisco that was based on a planning model called "Vancouverism" (Chamberlain, 2005). San Francisco adopted the podium-tower typology as part of the 2005 Rincon Hill Plan aimed at redeveloping and revitalizing underutilized lands. Vancouver's success also led to the replication and export of the podium-tower typology by the city's own architects, planners and developers, who led projects in the United States and Dubai (Boddy, 2004). In Dubai, the effort to duplicate Vancouver went so far as to replicate the False Creek waterfront along with gargantuan point towers on a podium.

As other communities adopt Vancouverism they gloss over the unique set of opportunities that converged making Vancouver's waterfront redevelopment successful, and instead focus efforts on recreating the key architectural feature, the podium-tower. The podium-tower typology originated through a collaborative planning process and was the result of a political and planning regime that fostered high-quality urban development (Blore and Sutherland, 1999:49). This "interventionist, [and] prescriptive approach to planning and urban design" developed over two decades through political support and a lineage of empowered and innovative planning directors (Boddy, 2004:15). Other municipalities trying to replicate the success of Vancouverism find it more feasible to adopt the building typology associated with its success rather than transform the political and planning culture that exists within Vancouver city hall. This replication is fueled by the international attention and critical acclaim the city has received. Through Vancouverism, the podium-tower typology has become a symbol of urbanity and densification and is now synonymous with the term Vancouverism (DeWolf, 2012; Villagomez, 2011).

As defined by Gordon Price, Vancouverism has become “the name somewhat vaguely applied to the tower-and-podium style that evolved out of the megaproject developments that so spectacularly changed the City of Vancouver in the 1990s” (Price, 2013). The replication of the podium-tower typology by other cities is an attempt to emulate Vancouver’s successful redevelopment and oversimplifies the broader definition of the term. This oversimplification has resulted in an oversimplified planning model that focuses on the podium-tower typology.

### 4.3.1. The Podium-Tower Typology

The podium and point-tower has become a marketable commodity. This typology rose to popularity through a convergence of unique circumstances that elevated it into the limelight and branded it as the crucial element behind the success of Vancouver’s downtown transformation from an industrial city into a world class global city. This success has been reflected by developers, who initially were reluctant to build podium-tower developments, but now apply pressure to construct the typology in all Vancouver neighbourhoods, even when planners are trying to encourage other development forms (Punter, 2003:238; Boddy, 2004:18; Villagomez, 2011). The success of the podium-tower typology has resulted in its proliferation and migration across the Metro region, and as planners try to densify new and old neighbourhoods alike, developers have come to associate density with the podium-tower typology. As podium-tower development is occurring in suburban communities, Vancouver planners are struggling to encourage developers to consider other development forms.

Across Metro Vancouver, the podium-tower typology has become associated with densification, which presents a challenge for planners who would advocate for a range of housing forms that provide a range of densities best suited to the location. The popularity

of the podium-tower typology with developers has made it easy for some municipalities to encourage high-density residential development through the proposal of podium-tower policies, while also making it difficult to encourage developers to construct any other building form in areas slated for densification. Vancouver's former head planner Brent Toderian states that the "development industry, and even the marketplace, has come to expect that densification will mean towers with views" (Villagomez, 2011), and an example is the city's proposal of mid-rise building forms along the Cambie corridor, which received little interest from developers as "the podium-point tower tends to get all the attention" (Villagomez, 2011). Counter to the belief that the podium-tower typology is the only successful building form are the mid-rise buildings that make up the Olympic Village development along False Creek's southeastern shoreline (Toderian, 2012). As Vancouver attempts to encourage developers to accept mid-rise building forms outside of the downtown core, the development of high-rise podium-tower projects in suburban municipalities is on the rise.

The Metro municipalities of Richmond, North Vancouver, Surrey, and Coquitlam all have neighbourhoods that are increasing residential densities through the development of podium-point towers, which Gordon Price describes as subscribing to a Vancouver style of urbanism (Price, 2013). The podium-tower typology is a proven development form with developers and the spread of this building form across the region reveals developer confidence in the typology. Many municipalities are encouraging the podium-tower typology, which may be part of a neighbourhood plan based on planning principles, or it may be the only way for cities to encourage development by being forced to conform to a building typology that developers are willing to construct. This form of development has been described as an industrially produced form of housing that succeeds only in its clever

and adept marketing ability, and in Canada planners and politicians often succumb to market pressures (Kataoka, 2009:45; Grant, 2009b). In this context, the podium-tower typology can be defined as an industrial commodity being promoted by the development community.

As podium-tower development migrates across the region, there is a trend for the density and height of developments to increase. Price makes the observation that in Coquitlam the podium-tower high-rises "are often taller and more imposing than what might be found downtown [in Vancouver]" (Price 2013). Experiences in other Canadian suburbs confirm that this is more than a regional trend, as there has been a tendency for developers to push for higher densities for condo projects (Grant, 2009b). In this context, the podium-tower which was previously a symbol of Vancouverism, based on the broadest definition of the term, has now become a symbol of an industrial commodity.

## 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the podium-tower typology has been utilized by Vancouver as a means for increasing residential densities and enhancing the public realm through unique waterfront redevelopment opportunities. Vancouver's discretionary planning system and large scale redevelopment opportunities allowed for the transformation of a post-industrial waterfront area into a high-density residential neighbourhood with plenty of public amenities. With the rise of Vancouverism, the podium-tower has been adopted by planners and developers as a popular development model. The podium-tower has become so popular that Vancouver planners struggle to encourage developers to consider other building forms, and as it makes its way to the suburbs the densities are becoming even higher than in Vancouver. The next section

looks at the regional influences and evolution of policy that contributed to the emergence of the podium-tower typology in Coquitlam. Vancouver's history and experience with podium-tower development provide the necessary background and context to begin identifying the key elements behind the migration of the podium-tower typology from inner-city Vancouver to the bedroom community of Coquitlam.

# Chapter 5.

# Coquitlam and the Town Centre Plan: 1970 - 1990

## 5.1. Overview of Coquitlam

From 1970 to 1990, Coquitlam aggressively pursued a Regional Town Centre (RTC) designation as a means of creating the incentive for new development opportunities in a large undeveloped area of the city, known today as the City Centre[2]. This pursuit of the RTC designation pitted Coquitlam against its municipal neighbours of Port Coquitlam and Port Moody, and resulted in the adoption of plans that helped Coquitlam secure a RTC designation in 1980. These plans started to loosely define the architectural form and character of development in the late 1970s, which by 1990 had evolved into clearly articulated design policies defining the podium-tower typology. The podium-tower was envisioned to comprise sixty percent commercial retail-office space, based on predictions that office space would leave downtown Vancouver for the RTC-designated areas in the suburbs. This chapter explores the influence of the Regional Town Centre concept and the emergence of the podium-tower typology in Coquitlam, as well as outlines the context within which it emerged.

## 5.2. Pursuit of a Regional Town Centre: 1970 - 1980

Regional and municipal planning policies have provided a framework for the development of Coquitlam's RTC, which has witnessed the emergence of a Vancouver

[2] The Regional Town Centre was defined by the "Town Centre Plan" and was renamed the "City Centre Area Plan" in 2008. Any reference to RTC, Town Centre or City Centre is referring to the same area.

style podium-tower typology. The influence of regional policies began in the 1970s as Coquitlam started to adopt RTC policies as a strategy aimed at receiving the official RTC designation. The Town Centre concept originated in the 1966 Official Regional Plan and stated that urban growth was to "take the form of a series of compact Regional Towns, each with its own business and civic centre and each related to industrial areas, complementing a Regional business, social, and financial Core in downtown Vancouver" (LMRPB 1966,3). The philosophy behind the RTC concept was to encourage sustainable development through compact, complete communities that would be interconnected by rapid transit and with less reliance on the automobile. However, Coquitlam's pursuit of the RTC designation was for the development opportunities that would come with the RTC designation.

In 1973, Coquitlam introduced an "Advance Plan" that identified a new "Town Centre Area" neighbourhood (Coquitlam, 1973). The plan did not provide many details other than providing land use designations that identified a site for a shopping mall, medium density apartments, limited high density apartments, and future schools and park space. The Town Centre Plan was proposed in an undeveloped area of Coquitlam that was strategically positioned between Port Moody and Port Coquitlam in order to compete for the RTC designation. For this reason, the GVRD criticized Coquitlam in a 1975 Regional Town Centre policy report for attempting to build a RTC from scratch (Pereira, 2011:63), as both Port Moody and Port Coquitlam had historic town centres with civic amenities in closer proximity to the proposed RTC than did Coquitlam. Regardless, Coquitlam continued to pursue the RTC designation through the creation of land use policies that laid the framework for future development that would eventually be the focal point for podium-tower development.

In the GVRD's 1975 Livable Region Strategy, four suitable RTC locations were identified which included Burnaby, New Westminster, Surrey, and the Northeast Sector (GVRD, 1975:19-20). The Northeast sector was made up of Coquitlam, Port Moody, and Port Coquitlam, which proved to be a major obstacle in the identification of the Town Centre in the Northeast sector due to political infighting between these municipalities over the RTC location (GVRD, 1975:20). Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam were each planning their own Regional Town Centre even though only one Regional Town Centre could be located in the Northeast sector (GVRD 1975:36), while Coquitlam's historic town centre was located in the Maillardville neighbourhood in close proximity to the Fraser River and the historic Fraser Mill site.

In 1976, Coquitlam revised the 1973 Town Centre Plan to reflect regional policies from the 1975 Livable Region Strategy by including policies to increase population and employment, and proposed a mix of civic and cultural uses required of a Town Centre (Coquitlam, 1978). The plan increased the land area for proposed commercial and high density apartment buildings, and designated new locations for civic functions. Coquitlam's Town Centre Plan strived to convince the GVRD that the city was committed to creating the essential services to support the office sector, along with a residential population that could support commercial retail and office. These goals were further clarified and expanded upon in the 1979 Town Centre Guidelines, along with preliminary concepts to establish civic amenities in the area.

The 1979 Town Centre Design Guidelines provided detailed direction for the implementation of Town Centre plans, but did not advocate for specific building typologies. The focus was on private development since by this time the City had already created a preliminary concept for the road network, public mass transit, and civic buildings including

a Fire Hall, Court House, and a municipal administrative centre (Coquitlam, 1979). A regional shopping centre was also under construction and was cited as a key achievement of the 1973/1976 Town Centre Plans, marking the beginning of the regional town centre (Coquitlam, 1979). The guidelines of this era were vague and idealistic and provided a conceptual vision but not one that created a clear vision of how the neighbourhood would look and feel from an architectural or urban design perspective.

The guidelines consisted of a set of principles and potential issues intended to guide the bulk form, height, shape, site design, texture, colour, and construction technique, and did not propose a podium-tower typology. The guidelines were intended to be used by the "urban designer to find an appropriate solution to the set of circumstances prevalent at the time of a development proposal" (Coquitlam, 1979:50). These vague guidelines are similar to Vancouver planning policies from the same era, which are more philosophical and ideological than prescriptive and assume that solutions to planning issues will be found during the implementation of the plan whereby the plans and policies serve as a theoretical framework guiding planners in the direction of positive outcomes.

The few prescriptive guidelines that are provided recommend locating "taller structures at a centralized location" with a height between 10 and 20 storeys (based on an average Floor Space Ratio (FSR) of 2.0) (Coquitlam, 1979:18). The guidelines also encourage smaller, pedestrian friendly blocks as a way to break up the pre-existing large parcels, and cite the uniqueness of the tall slender buildings in Vancouver's West End as an innovative solution to high density zoning on small lots (Coquitlam, 1979:40). In Coquitlam, where the planning model was based on a regulatory system that strictly governed what developers could and could not do, these general guidelines provided little direction for the development of high-rise buildings.

If the Town Centre Design Guidelines (1979) did not clearly articulate the form and character of development, they did clearly reiterate the message to commercial and residential developers that the city was open for business. The guidelines state that: 1) city council had "adopted a positive and aggressive attitude toward all [development] projects" and had "expressed their interest in escalating the promotion and implementation of town centre development" (Coquitlam, 1979:7); and 2) "leaders in the development industry indicate there is only one Guideline appropriate in [the Town Centre Area]: Speed!" (Coquitlam, 1979:59). The guidelines also note that "private and public investment is a means toward an end, and not an end unto itself", since it is "the community that is the ultimate client, not the investor" (Coquitlam, 1979:9). These contradictory messages highlight the complexity of planning amongst an array of competing interests. Planners had to strive to maintain planning principles while also having to address political interests that are focused on encouraging development.

Coquitlam's efforts to secure a RTC designation were realized in 1980 (LMRPB, 1980; GVRD, 1980). The RTC designation provided an opportunity for massive residential and commercial growth, and Coquitlam took advantage of a large undeveloped area of the city on which to focus that development. Through planning policies and guidelines the city had committed to developing a RTC from scratch, and over the next 20 years, would make major public investments through the creation of parks and new civic facilities for the purpose of attracting private investment to the city. In the pursuit of a RTC, a policy framework was created for the purpose of attracting development, but with a vague and nondescript vision for the neighbourhood. The guidelines did not prescribe any particular typology or architectural design, but did set in place the height and density of residential towers that remained largely unchanged for over 20 years, until the arrival of the

Vancouver style podium-tower. The main goal of attracting a RTC designation was to create development opportunities for the city, and while planners drafted plans to create growth opportunities, they also continued to develop plans to create a more sustainable community through high density, mixed-use development.

## 5.3. Emergence of the Podium-tower Concept: 1980 - 1990

By 1990, Coquitlam had developed a clearly articulated vision of the RTC that was to be characterized by a mixed-use podium-tower typology. The podium-tower design came about as a means to provide both residential and commercial use in the same building, which would make development denser and more concentrated. The adoption of mixed-use commercial/residential zoning in the core area was a departure from previous plans in the 1970s and early 1980s, which had identified the RTC core as being predominantly commercial. Design guidelines started to loosely define the podium-tower typology in 1988, and by 1990 had rapidly evolved into a fully developed concept that is still used in Coquitlam today. The addition of residential units to the top of a commercial podium was identified as a way of creating a more “urban” neighbourhood (Coquitlam, 1988). The policy documents do not define urban, but it is associated with the mix of high density residential in close proximity to commercial shops. Planners were also already aware of low market demand for commercial office space in Coquitlam and the residential component provided an incentive for developers to develop commercial floor space in the RTC.

Podium-tower policies emerged in two stages, with the first stage in 1988 and the second stage in 1990. The first podium-tower design elements appeared in the 1988 Official Community Plan (OCP), and proposed mixed-use buildings in a high density area

defined as the core. While these policies did not explicitly define a podium-tower typology they were implied through design principles advocating for a strongly defined street-wall, ground level retail uses, and residential located above. The ground plane was required to have a continuous street-wall with shops adjacent to the street, reflecting a traditional shop front character made up of shop entrances and windows rather than a blank wall (Coquitlam, 1988:10). The continuous street-wall is a common design element associated with the podium as it is intended to frame the street and create a separation from the residential above. The inclusion of residential was introduced to stimulate development and enhance the "urban quality" (Coquitlam, 1988:10).

In 1988, planners were trying to find a mechanism to encourage commercial development in the RTC and the residential component of the mixed-use concept was the lure that would encourage developers to construct commercial space. The plan increased densities from a permitted maximum of 2.0 to 2.5 FSR, and allowed 40 percent of the density to be residential units with the remaining 60 percent being commercial-office floor space (Coquitlam, 1988:10). As noted in the 1988 OCP, Coquitlam planners discuss the difficulty of attracting office development to the suburbs given the speculation that over-development of downtown office buildings had kept vacancy rates up and therefore stalled the trend of office suburbanization as seen in other North American centres (Coquitlam, 1988:15). Even as the planners were continuing to adopt the RTC concept into plans, there was doubt about their successful implementation. It was felt that this trend would not change soon as there was still ample office development opportunity, "particularly with the addition of the "Expo" site on False Creek," and the lack of a rapid transit line was also seen as a critical element limiting office growth (Coquitlam, 1988:15). Shortly after the

adoption of the 1988 OCP, the city tried to stimulate commercial development by reducing the commercial-residential FSR from a 60/40 split to a 50/50 ratio.

The 1990 Coquitlam Town Centre Urban Design Guidelines expanded upon the 1988 OCP and provided more detailed and illustrative examples that defined the podium-tower typology much as it exists today. A key element of the guidelines was the introduction of generic design principles for high-rise tower development in the Town Centre. The high-rise tower guidelines clearly defined the podium- point tower concept. The guidelines defined a street facing podium with a continuous street-wall and a point tower located above and set back from the street. The towers were to be point blocks and not slabs with a maximum floor plate size of (576m$^2$~6400ft$^2$) to ensure that the tower was slender and narrow to minimize shadow impacts and allow sunlight into the street corridor (Coquitlam, 1990:23,59). The podium was now defined by a street-wall with a minimum height of 2 storeys and including awnings for weather protection (Coquitlam, 1990:23). The plan also focused commercial development along a defined, accessible pedestrian corridor, as a means of creating a critical mass of commercial development that could attract other developers to the area (Coquitlam, 1990:22).

The 1990 Coquitlam Town Centre Urban Design Guidelines illustrate how quickly architectural and urban design ideas can migrate throughout the region. The 1990 guidelines advocated for the same style of podium-tower development that also emerged in the 1993 Vancouver policies for the False Creek North and Coal Harbour areas. These policies shared architectural design features such as point towers, not slabs, and for streets to be lined with pedestrian oriented uses at grade with taller structures rising above.

The 1990 design guidelines were created by Hotson Bakker Architects, who were based in Vancouver and have had a long history with projects dating back to the late 1970s. They have been described as being at the forefront for an urban design movement that has transformed the city in a "well-mannered form of urbanism, with increasing acceptance of such things as the street as the prime venue of public life and the importance of appropriate built form to frame and support it" (Berelowitz, 2005:157). Norman Hotson and Joost Bakker, at the forefront of Vancouver architecture and urban design, would have been aware of urban design trends in 1990 such as the podium-point tower concept. In this manner, Vancouver-based consulting firms were able to export urban design policies to surrounding suburbs such as Coquitlam.

## 5.4. Conclusion

Throughout the 1980s, Coquitlam developed plans and policies that would guide the development of a RTC based on regional policies as well as the city's own vision for the area. It was through these policies that the podium-tower typology began to emerge in Coquitlam. This was achieved in part with the assistance of Vancouver architects who were hired to provide urban design guidelines that would define the form and character of mixed-use development in Coquitlam's RTC. The result was guidelines that defined a podium-tower typology in advance of its emergence in Vancouver, which did not occur until 1993. Coquitlam's adoption of podium-tower policies preceded "Vancouverism" and the popularization of the podium-tower model, and was facilitated by planners and architects based on the merits of planning principles and a knowledge of urban design trends. In Coquitlam, podium-tower policies were being used to fulfill a commercial retail-office component of the RTC concept. The residential part of the podium-tower was to

provide the incentive to developers to construct the buildings. The podium-tower was poised to take advantage of office suburbanization trends, which had been occurring in other parts of North America. However, in the 1980s planners were already doubtful that demand for office space in the suburbs of Metro Vancouver would increase anytime soon, and began reducing the commercial-residential floor space ratio. These reductions to commercial floor space became a trend that would continue for two decades.

# Chapter 6.

# Implementing the Town Centre Plan: 1990 to 2004

In 1990, the city of Coquitlam had a fully developed vision for the RTC characterized by a mixed-use podium-tower typology that allowed for a mix of employment and residential in one building as well as pedestrian oriented streets and an active public realm. However, development remained slow as the market for suburban office space, which was anticipated in the 1970s and 1980s, did not materialize. Rather than development being concentrated in the RTCs, office development went to office parks developed on the urban fringe. As a result, Coquitlam struggled to encourage podium-tower development in the City Centre, and the pro-development council, led by Mayor Lou Sekora (1983-1997) and Mayor Jon Kingsbury (1998-2005), supported efforts to amend the commercial-residential FSR to bring it into alignment with the market, in order to attract and encourage development. Coquitlam's high suburban parking standards, which required a large number of concealed parking spaces, impeded development in part due to Coquitlam's high water table. The high water table, combined with high parking standards and requirements to conceal parking made it challenging for developers to conceal all parking underground. As a result, parking was provided in the form of above-ground parkades. This diminished the podium's ability to activate the streetscape through street fronting commercial businesses, as the podium resembled a parking garage rather than a commercial building.

During this time period, the city had four podium-tower projects proceed to varying stages of completion. These projects incorporated the 1990 podium-tower design guidelines and resulted in four projects, each with their own architectural distinction. The

developments did not share the same conformity of design as did the post-2004 projects, and provide an example of how the guidelines can be interpreted differently. Without a "tried and true" development model for the podium-tower typology, developers, with the help of architects, were experimenting with the design of the podium-tower concept. The style of podium-tower development occurring in Coquitlam was also not unique. Architects designing podium-tower projects in Coquitlam were influenced by podium-tower design trends occurring in Vancouver, and similarities in podium-tower design can be seen between the two cities. Two of Coquitlam's pre-2004 developments provide examples of how podium-tower architecture migrated around the region.

## 6.1. Commercial-Residential Floor Space Ratio

In 1990, Coquitlam's commercial-residential FSR was 50 percent commercial and residential with the intent of establishing a strong employment base accentuated by a dense residential population. However, implementing the plan proved difficult as developers were immediately reluctant to meet the city's requirements for commercial floor space, and responded by deferring the majority of commercial development to the later stages of development. In fact, the first reduction to the commercial-residential FSR occurred in 1989, in response to a development application received in advance of the 1990 Urban Design Guidelines being completed. In 1988, the Vancouver developer Molnar Group proposed a mixed-use podium-tower development that had a commercial-residential ratio of 40/60, contrary to the required ratio of 60/40 (Coquitlam, 1989). The Molnar Group, a well-established condominium developer in the lower mainland and originally founded in 1969 (Molnar, 2013), was proposing a multiphase development that included a mix of condominiums, commercial retail, and a hotel. City planners negotiated

with Molnar to reach a compromised commercial-residential ratio of 50/50, with the 50/50 commercial-residential FSR being achieved when the project was fully built-out (Coquitlam, 1988). The developer also originally proposed to provide 634 parking stalls, which was 256 stalls less than the city's requirement of 890 stalls (Coquitlam, 1988). The project never progressed beyond the first phase of development, with the commercial component never being completed, and became the first example that represented the challenges of implementing City Centre polices.

A second mixed-use podium-tower project called Henderson Centre was proposed in 1991, by Hong Kong developer Henderson Development, and proposed a commercial retail mall with a condominium tower located above. This project was Henderson Development's third project in the Vancouver region, along with two other projects: Paris Square (181 Keefer Place), and International Village (88 West Pender), both located in downtown Vancouver. The International Village and Henderson Centre are similar in design and were constructed around the same time, with the Vancouver project being completed sooner. Henderson had originally hired Bing Thom, the Vancouver architect who later became known for designing podium-towers in Vancouver, to design the Coquitlam mixed-use project. However, the Toronto based Kirkor Architects supplied the final building design drawings for both the Coquitlam and Vancouver projects, accounting for the similarity in design. During the development application process, the commercial-residential FSR was reduced from 50/50 commercial-residential ratio to a ratio of 35/65 percent commercial-residential (Coquitlam, 1991). This reduction to the commercial-residential FSR was preceded by an analytical review conducted by city planners with the help of market consultants, as it was clear that developers were struggling to provide the commercial component of mixed-use development, making it difficult for the city to

implement the City Centre Plan. Before reducing the commercial-residential FSR, Coquitlam planners explored a range of options that would provide flexibility for developers trying to construct mixed-use development. These options included: 1) maintaining the status quo; 2) allowing the market complete flexibility to choose the appropriate ratio; 3) providing density bonuses for office use only sites; 4) using comprehensive development zoning that would allow for a flexible application of the commercial-residential ratio on a case-by-case basis; and 5) lowering the ratio for commercial development (Coquitlam, 1991).

Planners chose to lower the commercial-residential ratio to 35/65 based on the rationale that demand for residential development would be higher in the early stages of town centre development, with demand for commercial space coming later, particularly once a rapid transit link had been confirmed (Coquitlam, 1991:2). It is noted in a 1991 planning report that as market conditions change over time, developers may want to provide more than the 35 percent commercial minimum at which time the commercial ratio can be increased (Coquitlam, 1991).

The commercial-residential ratio was not amended again until 2004, and in the meantime development remained slow with only two more mixed-use development projects occurring between 1991 and 2004. These projects, which included the Kensington, built in 1996, and the Raphael Towers, completed in the 2005, were architecturally distinct from one another. The Kensington consisted of a four storey mixed-use commercial-residential podium with a tower located above, and was designed by Vancouver based Hewitt Tan Kwasnicky (HTK) Architects. The owner, F.Y Holdings, was originally reluctant to build a high-rise tower out of fear that the cost of providing a foundation for a tower on Coquitlam's particular soil structure would make the

development unfeasible. The owner was convinced by city planners to include a residential tower, and HTK architects, who today have designed podium-tower developments across the Metro Vancouver region, including partnerships with local podium-tower architect James Cheng, provided the final building design. Despite the city's efforts to encourage development of the residential tower, its construction, which was slated for the later phase of development, was never completed, and only the originally proposed four storey podium with commercial-retail at grade was developed (Coquitlam, 1993, 1994).

The other mixed-use project was the Raphael Towers. This development comprised a mid-rise office building (5 storeys) and residential tower (11 storeys), with both towers having commercial at grade. The project, which was completed in 2004, was developed by Cape Construction and designed by Patrick Cotter Architects, both based out of Richmond. In the second phase of development, the original application was amended to permit an increase in the total number of residential units.

In 2004, the city amended policies that focused on land use and density, as these were two aspects of development within the control of the city (Coquitlam 2004b). The policy amendments reduced the commercial-residential ratio and reduced the overall land use area for mixed-use development within the RTC core area. The rationale supporting these amendments focused on triggering development, stating that while the "RTC ha[d] enjoyed considerable success" the "mixed-use component of the City Centre Concept Plan [was] the remaining area where significant development [was] expected to occur over the next twenty years" (Coquitlam, 2004b:3). Consultants also indicated that city's original commercial-residential ratios were ambitious and that requirements for commercial space needed to be reduced in exchange for more residential development (Coquitlam 2004b).

This was the same rationale provided in 1991 for reductions in the commercial-residential FSR. As a result, the commercial-residential FSR was further reduced from 35/65 to 28/72 commercial-residential. The rationale for the increase in residential FSR was that over the long run it would provide a customer base that would attract commercial retail development (Coquitlam, 2004b). It was also suggested that office development would be attracted by the increase in residential development, as office tenants prefer to locate near retail and residential land uses (Coquitlam, 2004b). The reduction to overall land area for mixed-use commercial-residential development provided more residential development on the periphery of the RTC area and created a tighter, more focused commercial core (2004b). These changes resulted in the RTC having less employment capacity than originally envisioned, and a higher concentration of residential development.

Coquitlam's plans for a RTC were becoming more aligned with Vancouver's 1990 False Creek North plans, which had a commercial-residential ratio of 21 percent commercial and 79 percent residential. False Creek North was intended to be predominantly residential in keeping with regional and City objectives (City of Vancouver, 1990a:5), while Coquitlam was trying to develop a strong employment base. The reductions in commercial floor space meant that it too would now more likely develop primarily as a residential neighbourhood, rather than the employment centre as originally envisioned.

## 6.2. Policy and Commercial Office Market Realities

The market reality in Coquitlam was that there was little demand for commercial office space, while at the same time there was a market for residential space. From 1990 to 2004, the lands surrounding the mixed-use portion of the RTC that were designated for

residential developed steadily with a range of medium to high density apartments. There was also a market for office space, located on the urban fringe and not in the RTCs (GVRD, 2001). Office space was located in office parks, which reduced the developers cost and risk as development was easier to facilitate on ready-made, large land parcels, compared to developing a tower in an urban centre (McMillan, 2004:40). Another reason for low office demand in RTCs was that fewer head offices were locating in the region, and Coquitlam's geographic location within the region was considered peripheral compared to other RTCs (GVRD, 2001).

In 2004, Coquitlam amended policies in the City Centre area to align policies for commercial office space with market demand. In a 2004 planning report, Coquitlam planners reaffirmed the advice of market consultants by stating that the intent of the amendments was to bring "regulations and policies up to date with current conditions" that would serve to "responsively guide future development" (Coquitlam 2004a:1). The changes were endorsed by the Urban Development Institute, as it appeared that they would speed up development and bring policies in line with market realities (Coquitlam, 2004a). The report rationalized a reduction in commercial floor space, stating that it would trigger an increase in mixed-use and residential development which in turn would help support retail development and foster a vibrant and active streetscape (Coquitlam, 2004b). The plan held on to planning principles that would support transit-oriented development such as high density residential and mixed-use in a concentrated area, and new urbanism concepts of a traditional shopping street and a vibrant public realm. However, the reduction to commercial floor space ratio was a trade-off that diminished the ability for the RTC to ever provide the employment base originally envisioned, in an attempt to salvage other parts of the vision such as an active and vibrant public realm that would occur

through increased residential development and ground oriented, street fronting retail. The City Centre plan and the vision for the RTC were evolving based on a new vision and rationale provided via commercial office market realities.

The development of all adjacent residential lands during this time period demonstrates that there was a market for residential development, and it can be assumed that the low demand for commercial space was the contributing factor to the slow pace of mixed-use development in Coquitlam's City Centre area. Developers faced with constructing commercial space on high priced mixed-use properties chose to build on the urban fringe. In an interview with Raul Allueva, Manager of Development Services for the City of Coquitlam, he stated that "unless you have a mechanism to force development into [RTCs], developers will find the optimal opportunities" (Allueva, Interview, 2013). Allueva suggests that planners need to ensure that the neighbourhood vision is achievable and can be implemented through policy. "The development community can tell you if a policy will work, without much effort" (Allueva, Interview, 2013). Allueva notes that it is important to have a good working relationship with developers in order to be able to work collaboratively when developing policy. In a regulatory planning system it is much harder to change policy once it has been adopted. In 1988, planners had introduced the mixed-use concept with an understanding that attaining commercial development in the RTC would be difficult and the residential component was to provide an incentive to secure commercial development. As a result, planners were required to reduce the commercial FSR in order to attract development, albeit slowly. The slow reduction of commercial FSR suggests that planners, with the support of city council, were committed to wait for a commercial retail and office market to materialize in the RTC.

Throughout the 1990s, Coquitlam planners struggled to implement the vision for the RTC despite market realities, which didn't go unnoticed by regional planners. In 2003, the GVRD had identified tools to help municipalities with RTC designations improve the market for office development. These tools included locating municipal facilities in the RTC, creating new zones that excluded residential from office/retail zones so as not to create a higher value for the land, providing municipal cost contributions through tax breaks, reducing pricing of municipal land sales, and reducing parking ratio requirements (2004b). Coquitlam had already relocated its historic town centre to the RTC and reduced parking ratios, but refused to sacrifice the vision of the City Centre as a mixed-use neighbourhood by separating office from residential.

To ensure that development continued in the City Centre, planners were required to further reduce the employment generating capacity, but were also determined to "retain the original mixed-use intent" (Coquitlam, 2004b:3). Lynn Guilbault, Senior Planner for the City of Coquitlam and present in 2004, suggests that the City was waiting out development trends in order to realize the vision of the RTC, even if it took longer than expected. Guilbault recognizes that plans evolve as the market evolves, but holds out hope for the eventual development of commercial office space. "How long it will take for employment centres to want to be in the heart of a city where there's population, rapid transit and all of the amenities, shopping, restaurants, recreational… office parks don't have that" (Guilbault, Interview, 2013). The compromise is reducing the commercial space in exchange for residential, which as Guilbault states is hoped to attract more commercial development in the long run "Getting the residential development, we are suddenly becoming more urban and hopefully more attractive for commercial" (Guilbault, Interview, 2013).

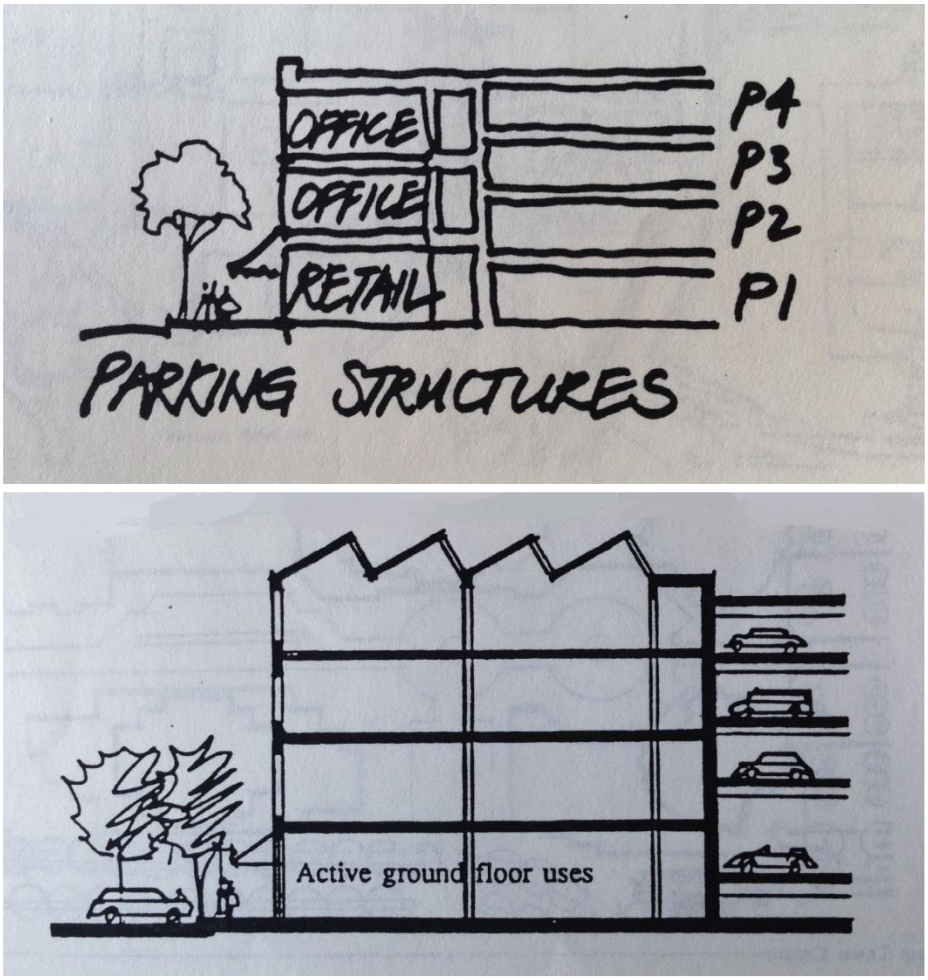
## 6.3. Suburban vs. Urban Parking Standards

The design of podium-tower development in Coquitlam during the 1990 to 2004 era was influenced by parking requirements that required more parking spaces than development in Vancouver. Coquitlam's parking standards for mixed-use development reflected suburban parking standards for commercial and residential development rather than an urban mixed-use model with development concentrated around a future rapid transit station, as envisioned by the City Centre plan. Parking regulations required developers to supply a large number of parking stalls for both commercial and residential development on one site, and this parking was also required to be concealed. These parking regulations would not have permitted a Vancouver style of podium-tower in Coquitlam.

Concealing parking is typically done by providing it underground, as done in Vancouver. However, due to Coquitlam's high water table, developers were limited in how many floors of underground parking they could provide. In order to meet the standards for parking spaces, they were required to provide parking above grade. The 1990 Urban Design Guidelines required above grade parking to be concealed behind street fronting commercial retail and office uses, as shown in Figure 3. However, due to the large number of parking spaces required by zoning regulations, developers were unable to conceal all of the parking in spite of the urban design guidelines. The Henderson Centre, which was completed in 1999, is an example of development that was unable to achieve the guidelines (Figure 4). In this case parking was provided underground for residents, while commercial parking was provided on the ground level and the two floors above, and as is shown in Figure 4, the street is void of commercial office or retail with a partially concealed parking structure fronting the street. The Raphael, which is shown in Figure 5, was under

construction in 2004 and provided commercial office space fronting the street, and also did not conceal the above grade parking on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors.

**Figure 3 1990 Urban Design Guidelines, Coquitlam**




Source: City of Coquitlam, 1990, p. 37 & 54.

**Figure 4 Henderson Centre: 1990 to 2004 Era – 1163 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam**

**Figure 5 The Raphael: 1990 to 2004 Era - 2973 Glen Drive, Coquitlam**

Planners did not have enough influence to encourage developers to completely conceal the parking, although attempts were made to screen the parking behind metal grates. Impacting the design was the number of parking stalls that developers were

required to provide, which was dictated by inflexible zoning regulations that can only varied by council approval. The design guidelines are flexible, because they have less regulatory authority. Therefore, the successful implementation of guidelines relies on the planner's ability to negotiate with developers. The ability of a planner to successfully negotiate and implement design guidelines is dependent on how much authority and power is given to planners. Power to implement design guidelines would come from a council supportive of urban design. However, in a pro-development environment, urban design criteria that hinder development are dismissed. Guilbault states that "As planners we create opportunities. However, when it comes to design, at least here in Coquitlam, [our influence] hasn't been that strong" (Guilbault Interview, 2013). In this regulatory environment planners are allowed some discretion in evaluating development proposals, so long as it does not deter development from occurring.

As a result, the opportunities to activate the streetscape with commercial retail and conceal parking behind second storey offices were missed. In the case of the Henderson, which had the parking structure fronting a large section of the street Guilbault stated "This was a huge mistake, it creates a huge gap, which is not urban" (Guilbault Interview, 2013). The Raphael, which had three storeys of above ground parking, provided the incentive to create better articulated design guidelines, illustrating how developers should conceal all parking while also ensuring that parking was not permitted to front the street above the second storey. Guilbault notes that these early developments served to identify the issues of implementing podium-tower policies and regulations, and provided a reference for future policy amendments. In these 1990 to 2004 podium-tower developments, planners were forced to compromise on urban design and were further hindered by the outdated parking regulations.

The combination of suburban parking regulations that were accommodating an auto-oriented community in combination with design guidelines seeking an urban form of development resulted in incompatible polices, and is suggestive of the transformation that the city was undergoing. As the city took a step towards an urban future, it still had a foot firmly planted in its suburban past. Coquitlam's parking standards originated from a regulatory planning model that applied the same parking standard to the RTC and were the same parking regulations that would apply to any other area of the city. From the 1950s onward, Coquitlam had developed as a suburban bedroom community and parking standards still reflect the auto-oriented nature of the city. While the RTC proposed a mixed-use, walkable neighbourhood connected by rapid transit, they had not yet been reflected in the parking standards, as the city did not have rapid transit and was still largely auto dependent.

As shown in Table 1, a comparison of 1993 parking standards reveals that Coquitlam's parking standards were noticeably higher than parking standards in Vancouver False Creek North. While residential parking requirements between the two cities were very similar, it is the commercial parking requirements that differ greatly. As a result, developers in Coquitlam were required to submit formal requests to reduce parking requirements which would be approved or declined by council on a case-by-case basis. Planners did not have the discretion to vary parking standards, and were dependent on council to make those decisions, which had an impact on design.

**Table 1 Comparison of Parking Standards: Vancouver and Coquitlam (1993)**

| Comparison of 1993 Parking Standards | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Vancouver | Coquitlam |
| Apartment | 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit* | 1.55 spaces per dwelling unit** |
| Commercial | 1 space for every 100m² | 1 space for every 40m² |
| Office | 1 space for every 93m² | 1 space for every 40m² |
| Restaurant | 1 space for every 50m² | 1 space for every 10m² |
| **Source: City of Vancouver, 1993; City of Coquitlam, 1993** | | |

* Based on parking requirements for 1993 CD-1 Roundhouse Neighbourhood which requires 1 space for each 200m² of gross floor area plus 0.9 spaces for each dwelling unit. Proposed residential gfa = 114,620m² (114,620m² / 200m² = 573 parking spaces). Proposed total units = 1,030 (1,030*0.9=927 parking spaces) ((573 parking spaces + 927 parking spaces)/1,030 dwelling units) = 1.5 parking spaces per unit

** Based on an average of parking space requirements that range from 0.9 parking spaces for a bachelor unit to 1.75 parking spaces per unit for a three bedroom unit. An additional 0.2 parking spaces per unit is added for visitor parking.

Developers were opposed to the high parking requirements due to the high cost of providing structured parking, which was further impacted by the high water table, and because it would help improve site planning and building design. In Metro Vancouver, the cost of structured parking on average ranges from $20,000[3] to $45,000 per stall, and can account for approximately 10 percent of total construction costs (Metro, 2012). In response, Coquitlam reduced parking requirements in 2004 by permitting 30 percent reductions in areas adjacent to rapid transit. To qualify for the reduction, developers were required to demonstrate a lesser need for parking as a result of higher transit usage, lower automobile ownership, and shared parking opportunities between commercial and residential uses (Coquitlam, 2004b:9). This reduction to parking requirements was still higher than parking standards in Vancouver. However, it represented a first step to bringing parking standards in line with the vision of the RTC as a community not completely reliant on the automobile. It also brought parking regulations a step closer to the expectations of developers, which were based on architects that were already familiar

3 Costs are based on 2012 dollar values.

with Vancouver's podium-tower design with lower commercial parking standards, and provided a step in permitting a more urban form of podium-tower development.

Another change intended to influence the design of Coquitlam's podium-towers was the creation of new design policies that required commercial space to be adjacent to the street. The street fronting commercial business would help to keep the streetscape more intimate, and characteristic of urban areas (Coquitlam, 1996). Still, despite these guidelines, many buildings have exposed above grade parking. Policies that advocate for the concealment of parking do not have the same regulatory authority as a regulatory zoning bylaw. However, from the 1980s onward the zoning regulations also required that all above ground parking be concealed. The implementation of guidelines depends on the how much power staff have been given to address a specific issue. Guidelines can be interpreted as either suggestions or strict rules depending on whether planners have the power to implement them. City council and staff can overlook design guidelines so long as the general intent of the policy is met. For issues of serious political significance, guidelines are typically much more strictly adhered. In the case of concealing parking, a broad and loose interpretation has been applied in terms of what qualifies as being concealed. In the early podium-tower developments, metal screening was deemed a sufficient means of concealing parking to meet both the regulatory and design guideline requirements, as was the case in the Raphael Towers. The failure to conceal parking had a large impact on design and the fact that it was a regulatory requirement meant little as it was given a broad and loose interpretation.

The 30 percent reduction to parking did not address the fact that parking standards for the City Centre area were out of sync with the vision of a transit-oriented community. However, the policy did provide a tool that allowed an "across the board" reduction in

parking, thereby making it easier for developers to meet the city's parking requirements. These changes also brought Coquitlam's podium-tower policies a step closer to allowing a Vancouver style of podium-tower, as it would now becoming possible for developers to achieve an urban style podium, defined by retail and office uses rather than parking structures. In addition to the 30 percent reduction in parking, this was achieved by redefining relevant design guidelines that could only encourage the concealment of parking to be used in conjunction with strict regulatory policies.

## 6.4. Migration of Podium-Tower Design

Podium-tower design elements have been migrating from Vancouver to Coquitlam since the early 1990s. In the same way that Vancouver architects drafted Coquitlam's 1990 urban design guidelines, so too did they design Coquitlam's first podium-tower developments. Vancouver architects, when given the opportunity to design podium-tower projects in the suburbs, were spreading podium-tower design elements across the region. In the 1990 to 2004 era, there were two podium-tower developments in Coquitlam that provide examples of how podium-tower design elements migrated between Vancouver and Coquitlam. While these developments are not reflective of the podium-tower design that characterized False Creek, they do provide an example of how architectural design was migrating between cities prior to Coquitlam's post-2004 boom in condominium development.

Two developments that share architectural design features are "Cambridge Gardens" (Figure 6) built in Vancouver in 1990 and the "The Fontenac" (Figure 7) built in Coquitlam in 1991. Both buildings were designed by Vancouver architects with Cambridge Gardens designed by James Cheng, and the Frontenac designed by David Thom. Thom

is an established Vancouver architect that has been director of IBI Group, an urban and architectural design firm, since 1979 (IBI Group, 2013). Cheng, another established Vancouver architect, studied under the famous Vancouver architect Arthur Erickson, and has been credited as a pioneer of the podium-tower typology (DeWolf, 2012).

**Figure 6 The Cambridge Gardens: 2668 Ash Street, Vancouver - Built 1990**

**Figure 7 The Frontenac: 1180 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam - Built 1991**

The key feature shared between the two developments is the porte cochere which protrudes out beyond the main entrance. Other similarities are the size of the windows on the tower and stucco material. Both buildings are set back from the street providing easy automobile access. This is in contrast to later podium-tower development which would bring the building face out to the street. The buildings also share pyramid like roof features. In Figure 6, the pyramid is set above the main foyer of the building while in Figure 7, the pyramid feature is set above the porte cochere. These examples illustrate how different architects were emulating the design trends of the early 1990s onto buildings in different cities.

Two more developments that provide an example of migrating podium-tower design are the International Village Mall (Figure 8) in Vancouver built in 1998, and Henderson Centre (Figure 9) in Coquitlam built in 1999. As noted previously, both developments were built by the Hong Kong developer Henderson Development, and were designed by Kirkor a Toronto architectural firm (Kalman & Ward, 2012). In this case the developer's influence is reflected in the function of the building as they both function

primarily as shopping malls with an attached residential tower. The architect used similar features for the exterior, however the Vancouver development appears to have utilized higher quality building materials. Both buildings prominently feature a rounded glass corner, and have similar street-wall features including the awning and shop entry ways. Major differences are the use of higher quality building materials used for the Vancouver development such as brick versus stucco for the siding. Both buildings also include residential towers located at the rear opposite corner of the mall entrances, as shown in Figures 8 and 9.

**Figure 8 International Village Mall: 88 West Pender, Vancouver – Built 1998**


**Figure 9 Henderson Centre: 1163 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam - Built in 1999**


## 6.5. Conclusion

The amendments during this time period brought Coquitlam City Centre closer in line with the Vancouver model of podium-tower development, which had not yet been popularized by the term “Vancouverism”. Coquitlam planners relied on consultants to

provide market studies that in both 1991 and 2004 indicated that the commercial market could not bear the amount of commercial floor space the city was requiring developers to build. Developers avoided constructing commercial floor space by deferring its construction to the later phases of development, which in some cases were never completed. New policies were introduced to allow a thirty percent reduction to parking standards, making it easier for developers to meet parking requirements. Design guidelines were also introduced to better hide the above ground parkade behind commercial retail and office businesses in an effort to improve the vibrancy of the streetscape.

Comparing Coquitlam and Vancouver podium-tower development from this time period reveals how architects and developers were facilitating the migration of architectural design trends across the region. During this era, podium-tower development in Coquitlam shared similarities in architectural design with development in Vancouver. The migration of these architectural styles preceded the rise in popularity of the podium-tower associated with Vancouverism and shows that the migration of architectural design trends in not a new process. The design examples covered in this section also shows that there are variations in podium-tower design, and that a standardized architectural design for podium-tower development did not yet exist in the 1990s and early 2000s.

# Chapter 7.

# Implementing the Town Centre Plan: 2004 to 2012

The 2004 to 2012 era marks a turning point for the city, in part due to the strong residential market in the City Centre area, and in the emergence of the Vancouver podium-tower model. In 2004, the city amended policies to encourage development so that the city could "capitaliz[e] on the strong current residential market" (Coquitlam, 2004b), and as it turned out, mixed-use podium-tower development remained steady through to 2013. The policy amendments included reductions to commercial floor space requirements, increased residential densities, and the introduction of new density bonus policies. The city was also trying to shake its image as a bedroom community by renaming the "Town Centre" to "City Centre" to coincide with efforts to become more urban. Coquitlam's city council, led by Mayor Maxine Wilson (2005-2008), and Mayor Richard Stewart (2008-present), also began to deal with more urban issues, such as homelessness and affordable housing, which had not been addressed in the past. The city still retained a pro-development stance as policy changes in this area were focused on encouraging mixed-use development by aligning policies with the market. However, the new density bonus policies were more sophisticated than previous policy revisions as they allowed the city to receive community amenities funded by new development, and they also helped subsidize the development of commercial office space. The boom in development was also accompanied by a shift in architectural design. Podium-tower development in the City Centre now reflected the Vancouver style of podium-tower, and while this was partly due to policy amendments that reduced parking requirements and improved design guidelines, they did not account for the entire shift in design. Some of the changes, such

as the use of glass as a dominant feature of the facade, are not prescribed by the design guidelines. These changes can be attributed to the rising popularity of the podium-tower typology in Vancouver, since it was proving to be a successful and increasingly dominant building typology among urban planners and developers throughout the region.

## 7.1. Policy Revisions

Post-2004, the city amended policies by reducing commercial floor space requirements and increasing residential densities. In 2008, new policies were introduced requiring developers to provide a minimum amount of commercial space up front, which was in response to developers continuing to defer the development of commercial space to later phases of construction. The concern with deferring commercial development to later development phases is that there is no commitment from the developer to ever construct that commercial space (Guilbault, Interview, 2013). Post-2004, a total of six development projects resulted in 14 high-rise residential towers and one mid-rise office building. Among these development proposals, three office buildings, ranging in height from 9 to 20 storeys, were deferred to later stages of development. In the 1990s, developers had deferred the development of commercial space, and then later sold those lots to new investors. The new owners then developed these lots without having to provide the commercial floor space required by the previous development agreement, but were still required to meet the current regulations. This was the market's way of avoiding the development of commercial floor space, an indication that the market for commercial floor space did not yet exist. Developers were willing to pay for land and then leave the commercial portion undeveloped rather than take the risk of constructing commercial space that could sit vacant. During this time period, it was Vancouver based developers

that came to Coquitlam with years of experience building throughout the Metro Vancouver region. The list of developers includes Bosa, Cressey, Onni, Intergulf, and Unimet, all of which had experience with mixed-use developments.

In 2008, the city responded by reducing commercial floor space to be congruent with the market, and also required developers to build a portion of the commercial floor space up front. The effect of this policy was to ensure that a minimum amount of commercial space was provided through each project and that developers were no longer permitted to defer commercial construction indefinitely.

In 2011, commercial floor space requirements were again reduced, while also increasing residential densities as a means of making commercial development more feasible. This change in commercial and residential densities, accompanied by a new, streamlined density bonus structure, aimed at providing a "potential major revenue source for specified community amenities" (Coquitlam, 2011:1). The city reduced commercial floor space requirements from 28 percent to 20 percent and increased residential densities from 2.0 to 5.0 FSR after consulting with current and prospective developers, and conducted technical analysis indicating that the commercial floor space requirements were "adversely affecting the economics of some City Centre developments and creating surplus employment-generating floor space for which there is no foreseeable demand" (Coquitlam, 2011:2). The city responded by introduced a new density structure that allowed the commercial-residential floor space ratio to range from 20/80 (commercial/residential) to 10/90 (commercial/residential). In both cases, the amount of commercial floor space is constant with only the residential floor space increasing. The increase in residential densities was permitted through density bonus policies that allowed developers to purchase extra density in exchange for financial contributions that would

provide community amenities. What the developer received was an increase in residential density and therefore profit, which provided the means to subsidize the development of the commercial space.

## 7.2. Subsidization of Commercial Office Space

Coquitlam amended policies to reduce commercial floor space requirements in 2004, 2008, and 2011, and still developers insisted that there was no market for commercial space in Coquitlam. Two developers with mixed-use projects in Coquitlam are Bosa Properties and Cressey, and both indicate that a market for office space in Coquitlam does not yet exist (Barer, 2011). Cressey, a lower mainland developer with 40 years of experience including podium-tower mixed-use developments in Vancouver, proposed a nine storey office component set above ground level commercial units, which has yet to break ground. Jason Turcotte, the Development Manager at Cressey, noted that they would not have provided office space had it not been a city requirement, stating that "Our market research indicated that we would need to lease the office floor space at a loss" as the "office market is simply not there in Coquitlam at lease rates which would make the project viable" (Barer, 2011:80).

The subsidization of office space is made feasible through the bonus density provisions that allow an increase in residential floor space, which helps to offset the cost of providing office space at below market rents (Barer, 2011). Turcotte states that "The only way to bring office space to the development is to have residents buying housing subsidizing that office space" (Barer, 2011:80). This is also supported by Hermann Nuessler, vice President of Development for Bosa Properties. Bosa Properties began constructing high-rise residential towers in the mid-1990s, and has experience building

commercial retail/office and residential developments in Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminster, Surrey, and North Vancouver. Nuessler stated that, in Coquitlam, development of “office space is financially carried by the residential component” (Barer, 2011:81). The density bonus provision allows for increased residential densities and becomes the tool the city uses to provide an incentive to developers to build office space in the City Centre.

The reduction in commercial densities and the density bonus provisions is a compromise between the policy vision for city Centre and the realities of the office market. Raul Allueva, Manager of Development Services for the City of Coquitlam, notes that it is not the city’s goal to discourage development, which is what would happen if developers were required to build unleasable commercial floor space (R. Allueva, Interview, 2013). Allueva states, “our goal in the long term is 30 percent to 40 percent [commercial floor space], but you can’t get there in one shot, so we get 15 percent in current development, but as Sky Train comes we will get office buildings, some of that may be 100 percent [office space] and in the balance of time we will shift our policies as demand [for office space] increases” (R. Allueva, Interview, 2013). This is supported by Nuessler, who believes that a market for office space will not exist until the Evergreen Line Sky Train is built (Barer, 2011:81). For two decades, market consultants have cautioned that commercial floor space policies were too ambitious and would likely not be realized until the arrival of rapid transit. In the meantime, Coquitlam planners have had to be flexible and pragmatic with the City Centre vision in hopes that a market for office space will come with the arrival of the Sky Train.

As the city waits for the arrival of the Sky Train to bring market demand for office space, the density bonus policies have been strategically used to attract development and

secure community amenity contributions from developers. Density bonus provisions were first introduced in 2008 that permitted increases in residential density in exchange for more commercial space. However, due to the low demand for commercial space the density bonus policies remained unpopular and were revised in 2011, allowing developers a bonus to residential FSR in exchange for community amenity contributions. The city calculates the community amenity contribution by charging developers a maximum of 50 percent of the "uplift" in land value as a result of the increase in residential density. The actual price the developer paid for the land was based on the original density, therefore the increase in density equates to an increase in land value and profit for the developer, as this difference in value would have been capitalized in the land value at the original point of sale.

The idea of leveraging density for community amenities was introduced in Vancouver during the development of False Creek and Coal Harbour in the 1990s (Moore, 2013). At that time, the city used a fixed value capture system with a fixed rate for each additional square foot of residential floor space, but over time it proved to be too inflexible (Punter, 2003). Today, Vancouver still uses the fixed rate, but also uses a less transparent case by case approach under certain criteria where the rate is negotiated (Punter, 2003).

In comparison to Vancouver, Coquitlam has only been using density bonus provisions for a few years, and has taken a slightly different approach to calculating the values of the community amenity contribution. The density bonus sought from the developer can range from a maximum density of 3.0 to 5.0 FSR, requiring a financial contribution to the city ranging from 75 percent to 25 percent of the uplift. This system allows the city and developer to make more money as the density increases, with the developer earning proportionally more. It is also through this mechanism that developers

can afford to provide the commercial space, while the city receives an increase in population and funding to support community amenities. In comparison, Vancouver takes 70 percent of the uplift in land value whereas in Coquitlam the average is 50 percent of the uplift (Moore, 2013:24). Allueva explains that the density bonus provisions are based on a partnership model that benefits both the city and the developer. "We need that money to pay for things [like] recreation centres, Sky Train stations, and [developers] see the money as going to invest in things that residents will like, which benefits [developers]. It's a partnership model" (Allueva, Interview, 2013).

The density bonus provisions were also used to give the city a competitive edge over neighbouring municipalities by allowing the developer to retain a larger portion of the land lift. Allueva stated that "we dropped that lift down to 25 percent if [developers] go to the [maximum density], because we want developers to come here. We don't want them to go to Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, or Burnaby. We are a company trying to draw customers so we want the best regulatory environment we can create" (Allueva, Interview, 2013).

The reduction of the commercial-residential FSR, increases to residential densities, and the introduction of density bonus provisions illustrates how planners were using the regulatory planning model to attract and encourage podium-tower development in the city, while also achieving some of the goals of the RTC. The city's RTC was now more residential than commercial, however, there is still hope that the commercial office market will appear once the development of the Evergreen Sky Train line is completed. The alignment of commercial-floor space with market demand allowed developers to import a style of podium-tower development that was being built around the region.

## 7.3. Evolution of Podium-tower Design: 2004 - 2012

Post-2004, podium-tower development in Coquitlam began to emulate the Vancouver style of podium-tower architecture that characterized the north shore of False Creek and the edge of Yale Town, even though guidelines for podium-tower design had remained fundamentally unchanged since 1990. Changes to urban design policies had occurred in the 1990s, however, these changes were too minor to account for the architectural shift in design that occurred post-2004. Instead, developers were beginning to favour the Vancouver model of podium-tower, which was gaining a successful reputation in association with Vancouver's waterfront redevelopments. It was the migration of the Vancouver podium-tower model that had the biggest impact on design. This migration was facilitated by the reduction to commercial floor space requirements. Also contributing to the Vancouver style of podium-tower design was the migration of design elements that were not regulated by policy or guidelines, in particular the floor to ceiling glass facades that have become a characterizing feature of Vancouver's podium-tower development along False Creek.

This section identifies the policies, guidelines, and architectural trends that resulted in the Vancouver style of podium-tower emerging in Coquitlam, and examines the evolution of podium-tower design in Coquitlam by comparing and contrasting pre- and post-2004 developments.

### 7.3.1. Influence of Policy on Design

Post-2004, policy changes that influenced the design of podium-tower development in Coquitlam were refinements to design guidelines to conceal all parking, reductions to parking requirements, and the addition of density bonus provisions. The

design guidelines that better illustrated how to conceal parking resulted in the podium becoming a more prominent feature on the streetscape, as it now contained retail uses that activated the streetscape, in contrast to previous designs which turned the podium into a parking garage. Reducing the number of parking spaces made it easier for developers to provide the necessary parking and achieve design guidelines to conceal parking located above ground. Density bonus provisions provided an incentive for developers to construct commercial office space by subsidizing the cost of commercial space through increases to residential densities. This resulted in increased building heights and the development of commercial office space. Building heights were now exceeding 40 storeys, in contrast to the 1990s when building heights were no higher than mid-20 storeys. These policies improved the design of podium-tower development by creating active streetscapes and higher densities, providing a more urban feel.

### 7.3.2. Migration of Architectural Design Trends

Coquitlam's podium-tower developments from the 1990s have shown that architectural similarities were shared with podium-tower development in Vancouver during that time period. However, each podium-tower project in the 1990s was architecturally distinct from the previous project. This indicates that a template for the podium-tower design had not yet been popularized, and developers and architects were experimenting with the design. What was different about the post-2004 developments was that the architectural style of podium-tower development had become homogenous between different developers and between Vancouver and Coquitlam. This architectural homogeneity and similarity with Vancouver podium-tower development suggests that developers, with the help of architects, had discovered a template for podium-tower development that could be replicated successfully across the region. These mixed-use

podium-tower projects were defined by buildings that consisted of large floor to ceiling windows, ground level townhomes raised from the sidewalk, and street fronting commercial retail and office uses that activated the sidewalk, creating a vibrant public realm. The architects that designed these buildings were also bringing their experience and familiarity with Vancouver architecture to Coquitlam.

As depicted in Figure 10, the tower facades in Vancouver are dominated by glass windows and narrow bands of painted concrete, and townhomes are raised from the street providing privacy and "eyes on the street". The examples in Figures 10 and 11 show two different types of podium; Figure 10 illustrates a townhouse podium and Figure 11 depicts a commercial podium. These design trends also emerged in Coquitlam, as seen in the examples of post 2004 development (Figures 12, 13, and 14).

**Figure 10 Podium-tower development along False Creek, Vancouver (2014)**

**Figure 11 Podium-tower with street-fronting commercial, Pacific Boulevard, Vancouver (2014)**


The similarities between Vancouver and Coquitlam podium-tower development can be seen in Figure 12. The Grand Central building was designed by Vancouver architectural firm Lawrence Doyle Young & Wright, who also designed podium-tower projects in Vancouver. The building has a two storey street-wall with articulated shop fronts giving it the appearance of a traditional shopping street. Above grade parking is concealed behind shop fronts on the ground floor, and second storey parking is concealed by paneling.

**Figure 12 Podium-tower with street-fronting commercial, The High Street, Coquitlam (2014)**

Design guidelines advocating for these design elements had been in place since the 1990s. It was now possible for developers to achieve the guidelines due to reduced parking standards and because guidelines to conceal parking were better articulated and increased efforts were being made to conceal parking. The articulated street-fronts shown in Figure 12 are very similar to those in Figure 11, and are an example of how architects and developers began copying the Vancouver style podium. In both images, the two storey street-wall defines the street with a sense of human scale, and the large sidewalks provide the opportunities for café or restaurant seating as a means to activate the public realm. The towers also share similarities in design as they are both point towers with a narrow base and large floor to ceiling windows.

The glass and concrete façades of the high-rise towers is a design feature that is not regulated by policies or guidelines in Vancouver or Coquitlam. The popularity of glass and concrete is a design trend that has originated in Vancouver and has been brought to Coquitlam by architects and developers. The buildings in Figure 13, which were designed by Vancouver based architects David Thom (left) and Lawrence Doyle Architects (right), provide an example of how architectural styles have changed over time. The older building on the left features stucco siding, smaller windows, and angle parking in front of the commercial store fronts. The building on the right features a higher street-wall, floor to ceiling glass in both the tower and commercial podium, and painted concrete rather than stucco. In Figure 14, the buildings are designed by Richmond based Patrick Cotter Architects (left) and Gustavson Wylie Architects and Lawrence Doyle Young & Wright Architects (right) and reflect the same comments noted above. Other design features shared with Vancouver developments are the increase in building heights, a uniform and continuous street-wall with street-fronting office and retail, and the concealment of all parking either below grade or located behind at-grade street-fronting retail shops. Between 1990 and 2012, building heights doubled from 20 storeys to 40 storeys, which was a trend that also occurred in Vancouver, albeit sooner. Other noticeable differences were the inclusion of new urbanism principles that provided “eyes on the street” through podium townhouses that were raised from the sidewalk, as seen in Figure 15. Figure 15 features developments designed by Toronto based Kirkor Architects (left), and Vancouver based Rafii Architects (right).

**Figure 13 Pre-2004 podium with angel parking (left); post-2004 retail podium with residential above (right)**


**Figure 14 Pre-2004 podium-tower (left); post-2004 retail podium, with office and retail above (right)**

**Figure 15 Pre-2004 townhomes at grade (left); post-2004 townhomes above grade (right)**

The figures above illustrate how some of the post-2004 design elements were the result of policy amendments, such as improved guidelines to conceal parking, and others were the result of architectural styles migrating around the region. Perry Staniscia, the Manager of Lands & Properties for the City of Coquitlam, stated that the same developers that were building podium-tower developments in Vancouver are now building in Coquitlam and "policies have evolved to allow that to happen" (Staniscia, Interview, 2013). The combination of policy changes and migrating architectural styles resulted in a Vancouver style of podium-tower development appearing in Coquitlam. The style, however, is a hybrid of Vancouver podium-tower elements, such as the floor to ceiling windows and articulated shop fronts, and Guilbault points out that the above grade parking up to the second storey is a modification to the podium-tower that is unique to Coquitlam (Guilbault, Interview, 2013). The increase in building heights was a result of the density bonus provisions that increased residential densities in exchange for the development of commercial office space.

The podium-tower typology has the ability achieve multiple goals for both planners and developers, which is why the typology is so popular. For the podium-tower typology to work in Coquitlam, it required amendments to existing policies in order to encourage development, and it required new policies to ensure that parking above grade was concealed by street fronting commercial retail. Allueva refers to the podium-tower as a building form that does many things well, "It creates street activity, a street-wall with commercial frontage, with the ability to create above grade parking" (Allueva, Interview, 2013). The podium-tower is a flexible typology that has proven to be adaptable to Coquitlam's geography, but also required policies to be flexible in order to facilitate its development.

## 7.4. Dominance of the Podium-Tower

Post-2004, Coquitlam developers accepted the podium-tower typology as a profitable building form and were incorporating urban planning principles such as pedestrian oriented and active streetscapes, in conjunction with street-oriented retail and high-density residential as seen in Vancouver. The False Creek style of podium-tower that became associated with the term "Vancouverism" provided the template for a development model that developers could replicate in Coquitlam. Allueva notes that the success of the podium-tower has created a development trend as "[developers] are business people, and they will take what is tried and true and replicate it 50 times" (Allueva, Interview, 2013). Allueva also notes that developers like the podium-tower because it is a product that they know they can sell, which helps eliminate risk.

However, if developers were given a choice to build something else, Staniscia states that developers probably wouldn't build anything different because the podium-

tower is what the market has come to expect (Staniscia, Interview, 2013). This is the same in Vancouver where Toderian states that “our development industry, and even the market place, has come to expect that densification will mean towers with views” (Campbell, 2013). Staniscia also notes that the “the podium-tower is very efficient to build; if you can build one storey you can build 10 [storeys]” and “high-rise construction is like a factory” (Staniscia, Interview, 2013). Developers like the podium-tower typology for the economies of scale, which is a result of the tower heights. Once the podium is built, the construction of the tower becomes a repetitive process as each floor is a replication of the previous floor. The higher developers build, the higher the return of investment as “views are a valuable commodity” and become extremely profitable once they exceed 20 storeys (Campbell, 2013). This leaves little incentive for mid-rise buildings which require the same material costs to build to 8 or 10 storeys, and from the perspective of developers, fails to capitalize on the most profitable units which are to be found on the higher floors.

## 7.5. Conclusion

The Vancouver style of podium-tower emerged in Coquitlam during the 2004 to 2012 era, as a result of aligning policies with the market and the rising popularity of the podium-tower associated with Vancouverism. The policy changes included increasing residential densities, lowering commercial floor space requirements, and introducing a density bonus policy that allowed developers to purchase additional density in exchange for providing the city with community amenities. These policy changes no longer allowed developers to defer the development of commercial space to later stages of development, and while the amount of commercial space developed was less than originally envisioned in City Centre plans, market consultants determined this to be in alignment with what the

market could bear. The density bonus policy provided an innovative means of extracting community amenities from developers through a clearly defined regulatory policy, unlike Vancouver where amenity contribution rates are not defined and are determined on a case-by-case basis. The increase in residential densities provided by density bonuses provided a means of subsidizing the construction and leasing of commercial space in the City Centre. City planners hope that demand for commercial office space will increase once the Evergreen Line is in operation, and will amend policies to capture that demand as it emerges.

In Coquitlam, the design of podium-tower development changed quite dramatically with the post-2004 podium-tower developments, and they began to reflect the character and style of podium-towers present along Vancouver's redeveloped waterfronts. The change in design was influenced by the market, since developers adopted the podium-tower typology as a result of its popularity in Vancouver. Coquitlam's design guidelines remained largely unchanged since their inception in the 1990s, and the amendments that did occur were not substantial enough to account for the shift in the design of podium-tower developments that occurred post-2004. The shift in design is due to developers adopting a podium-tower style that had already been proven successful in Vancouver, and exporting it to Coquitlam.

The effect of these changes on the City Centre are mostly positive since new podium-tower development is characterized by street fronting commercial businesses, and parking is now concealed below grade or behind commercial shops. The increased residential population also provides a market for local business and helps to increase the vibrancy of the emerging City Centre, while new density bonus policies allow the city to receive community amenities from developers. The downside is that the employment

generating capacity of the City Centre has been diminished by the reduction of commercial floor space requirements. However, as noted by Coquitlam planners, there is hope that demand for commercial floor space will increase with the completion of the Evergreen Line.

# Chapter 8.

# The Spread of Podium-Tower Policies

Podium-tower policies spread across Coquitlam in the mid-2000s during a time of rising housing prices and a condominium boom in the suburbs (Bula, 2011). The spread of policies occurred through city led neighbourhood planning processes aimed at revitalizing existing neighbourhoods, or through developer driven proposals intended to create entirely new neighbourhoods. Until the mid-2000s, podium-tower development had only been permitted in the City Centre Area (referred to pre-2008 as the Town Centre Area). However, in the mid-2000s, podium-tower policies began spreading to neighbourhoods lacking rapid transit, and introducing a building typology out of context with the existing neighbourhood character. The city's podium-tower policies for the City Centre area made it easy to transfer to other neighbourhoods, as policies and guidelines were already in place. However, as the podium-tower typology spread across the city, the appropriateness of the building form was secondary to capitalizing on development opportunities. It had taken the city two decades to develop podium-tower policies that were aligned with market expectations and demand, and now that those market ready policies were developed, they were rapidly spreading across the city.

Podium-tower policies spread to three Coquitlam neighbourhoods which were not adjacent to existing or future rapid transit: 1) Fraser Mills[4], an historic lumber yard and mill site adjacent to the Fraser River; 2) Maillardville, the city's historic town centre; and 3) Austin Heights, a 1970s suburban neighbourhood served by a commercial core. These

4 Fraser Mills refers to the name of the historic lumber mill previous located on this site. The city's neighbourhood plan is titled "Waterfront Village Neighbourhood Centre"

neighbourhoods do not have immediate access to rapid transit, which is often a key planning principle providing rationale for the location of high-density residential development. These three neighbourhoods illustrate the popularity of the podium-tower typology with developers, and the willingness of local politicians to support its development at the expense of preserving industrial lands and at the expense of the existing character of historic and established neighbourhoods.

## 8.1. Fraser Mills, Maillardville, and Austin Heights

### 8.1.1. Fraser Mills

In 2008, the developer led application to create a waterfront village on this historic industrial site was approved by Coquitlam city council. The plan proposed a "vibrant mixed-use waterfront community" consisting of 13 towers, with an average height of 30 storeys (Coquitlam 2008c:5). The site was purchased by the Beedie Group in 2004, a Burnaby based developer with a history of industrial development. More recently, Beedie began pursuing a mixed-use residential portfolio that now includes a large redevelopment project in Burnaby's Station Square, adjacent to Metrotown. The redevelopment proposal for the Fraser Mills site was not initially supported by city planners and politicians. The case was controversial as it proposed to introduce a new community into the heart of Coquitlam's industrial lands. However, city council was persuaded by the developer to approve the plan in principle, which effectively allowed Beedie to proceed with the plan (Coquitlam 2007). Only one councillor, Councillor Asmundson, opposed the motion to approve the developer's proposal (Coquitlam, 2006). Coquitlam council signaled to the developer that it was in favour of the development, while also retaining the authority to decline the proposal at a future date. The plan was approved in full in 2008.

Proposing a higher density form of housing on lower density lands is a common practice by developers as the appraised value of the land is based on the original lower density value of the property. This process allows the developer to gain an additional profit on the sale of each unit, as the land is essentially purchased at a discount. However, these proposals are also risky because there is no guarantee that the proposal to increase density will be approved by the city, and there is no guarantee that there will ultimately be a market for this development. However, the developer was confident that council would approve the plan. The confidence that council will approve of developer proposals to amend existing plans is an example of how the podium-tower is spreading to areas that previously would never have been considered for a high-density, high-rise form of housing. This confidence also reflects the developer-friendly approach of most city councillors. While the policies permit podium-tower development in this neighbourhood, development has not yet started, indicating that the housing market for condominiums may not be as strong as it was perceived to be in the mid-2000s.

### 8.1.2. Maillardville

Maillardville is the city's oldest historic neighbourhood and it was the supportive residential community to the historic Fraser Mills lumber mill. Maillardville was the town centre up until the mid-1990s, when the majority of civic functions were relocated to the City Centre Area in support of the RTC designation. What followed was a continued decline in the commercial core of the neighbourhood, which had begun in the decades previous. The city had countered with continuous efforts to revitalize the neighbourhood, without any success.

Efforts to revitalize Maillardville's commercial core attracted little attention from the development industry between 1985 and 2008 (Coquitlam, 2008a). Therefore, a market

consultant was hired to identify the factors that would explain why redevelopment was slow to occur (Coquitlam, 2008b). The market assessment was conducted by Paul Rollo and Associates and "determined that an increase in the density and scale of development was needed to attract new development to Maillardville's Neighbourhood Centre" (Coquitlam, 2008b:1). The existing densities in 2008 permitted low rise apartments, which based on the report was too low to attract developers to the neighbourhood. The aim was to attract developers in an effort to revitalize the neighbourhood, which also meant revitalizing the neighbourhood's commercial core. Polices were amended to increase the height and density of buildings to permit a podium-tower form of development, which was anticipated to also attract and sustain commercial development in the area (Coquitlam, 2008b). Regardless of these policy changes, developers have not been enticed to construct podium-tower development in this neighbourhood.

### 8.1.3. Austin Heights

In 2011, the Austin Heights Neighbourhood Plan (AHNP) proposed a high-density mixed-use podium-tower form of development as a means of revitalizing the neighbourhood (Coquitlam, 2010). The neighbourhood was perceived as being in decline by the local area merchants, who lobbied the city to undertake revitalization efforts for the area (Guilbault, Interview, 2013). Guilbault states, "merchants wanted an upgrade to façades and streetscapes, [and] that gets done through redevelopment" (Guilbault, Interview, 2013). The challenge was to maintain the vision and character of the neighbourhood when faced with political pressure to create a neighbourhood plan and also to encourage development. As Guilbault states, "one thing to reduce the challenge is to do a market study, [which] is limited, but gives you some parameters" (Guilbault,

Interview, 2013). Understanding the market trends and knowing what a neighbourhood plan can accomplish through policy are the parameters to which Guilbault is referring.

A primary focus of the plan was to revitalize the neighbourhood through redevelopment, and market analysts were asked to determine the minimum densities required to attract developers to the commercial core (City of Coquitlam, 2010). The market consultant determined that a minimum density of "3.4 to 3.6 times the lot area was required to trigger redevelopment", and the increased residential densities would also sustain and support commercial businesses (Coquitlam, 2010:3). Increasing densities was deemed to be the trigger that would attract developers to build in the neighbourhood.

The market consultants also conducted analysis to determine if other lower density forms of development would achieve efforts to revitalize the neighbourhood and concluded that "while the mid-rise form (up to 12 storeys in height) is being developed in Vancouver, it is not yet a form that works in the suburban context" (Coquitlam, 2010:3). The consultant's conclusion took into consideration the cost of land and construction in relation to the price point at which the condominiums would sell in Coquitlam versus Vancouver. In Coquitlam, a condo sells for less than a condo in Vancouver and is the underlying reason why mid-rise works in Vancouver and not in Coquitlam. In Vancouver, a developer can sell units in a mid-rise at a price high enough to earn a profit. In Coquitlam, a mid-rise condo would not have enough value to earn a profit for developers, meaning that the price they would have to sell it for to cover the cost of the land and construction would be higher than a buyer would be willing to pay for a condo in Coquitlam. As Staniscia states, "mid-rise [developments] spreads the cost of construction over half the number of units" (Staniscia, Interview, 2013), and noted in a previous section, high-rise construction results in economies of scale as building heights increase and units become more profitable near

the top. For these reasons, the podium-tower typology is popular with developers in the suburbs at the expense of other building typologies that might be better suited to older neighbourhoods that do not have nearby rapid transit. In Maillardville and Austin Heights, the podium-tower typology was chosen for its ability to provide commercial at grade and high density residential to support that commercial. Also, high density residential development was deemed to be the only economically viable building form, based on the advice of market analysts. For these reasons, podium-tower policies were introduced into already developed neighbourhoods in an effort to redevelop and revitalize the neighbourhood. What is at stake with these polices is the loss of the existing character of these neighbourhoods. Redevelopment means the demolition of existing buildings, which would displace the existing commercial tenants. Local merchants who wanted to see the area undergo a facelift could eventually find themselves forced to relocate, as retail rental rates would be higher in newly constructed buildings. In the case of Austin Heights, the plan received strong opposition from local residents, in particular Todd Purves, who states "Revitalization of the area is one thing; a total transformation to a high-density neighbourhood is completely another" (2011a, Warren). As a result, the city is planning to undertake more public consultation on the plan to address the community's concerns regarding high-rise development (2011b, Warren).

Commenting on the spread of the podium-tower typology, Allueva states that "it's not appropriate for all cases, and there needs to be more critical thinking. I like to call it the lazy planner paradigm, because it is totally overused" (Allueva, Interview, 2013). Comparable Vancouver neighbourhoods that resemble Austin Heights and Maillardville and are building 4 and 5 storey mixed-use developments are in areas located along Hastings Street and Broadway. For these types of development to work in Coquitlam,

Allueva states that plans cannot be based off of current property values, which means that land values would have to drop before other low- to mid-rise building typologies would be feasible (Allueva, Interview, 2013). This is not happening in Coquitlam because neighbourhood plans are trying to encourage development in the short term in order to achieve goals of revitalization.

Part of the rational for choosing the podium-tower typology is that the high-rise apartments are the only way to achieve high-densities. However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, the Arbutus Walk development in Vancouver is comprised of mid-rise buildings that accommodate about 1,000 residences in approximately three blocks (Campbell, 2013). In the case of Austin Heights and Maillardville, both Guilbault and Allueva suggest that the Parisian typology of 7 or 8 storeys should have been given more consideration. Patrick Condon, senior researcher at UBC's Design Centre for Sustainability, says "I think the city and developers feel it's easier to do one tower project than many incremental projects" (Campbell, 2013). Market analysts do not provide these insights because they consult with developers to determine the feasibility of building different building typologies. When developers are entrenched in replicating a podium-tower typology, it is repeated by market analysts, which is then incorporated in the Coquitlam neighbourhood plans. Breaking the cycle of podium-tower development would require political support and patience in order to wait for the economics of land pricing, construction costs, and condo market values to be in sync.

# Chapter 9.

# Conclusions

It has taken two decades of planning and policy revisions to accommodate the style of podium-tower development being constructed in Coquitlam today. Regional planning provided the foundation and rationale that allowed Coquitlam to begin pursuing a RTC designation, and resulted in the podium-tower typology being proposed as the commercial and residential cornerstone of a compact, high density, mixed-use neighbourhood. Coquitlam had intended the podium-tower to accommodate significant retail and office employment that would fulfill the complete and compact RTC concept. However, these policies had little influence over regional commercial market trends or the location of commercial development, which instead located to the fringes of suburban communities where land was cheaper to develop and provided businesses with cheaper rents. These events undermined a key component of Coquitlam City Centre, and podium-tower policies were slowly adjusted to align with the market for commercial development. Coquitlam's alignment of policies with the market has shown that the city is similar to other suburban cities in Canada, which often succumb to pressure from developers to amend restrictive policies and increase residential densities.

Coquitlam's ability to implement the City Centre plan as originally proposed was hindered by the region's commercial market trends and by suburban competition. Coquitlam, unlike Vancouver, does not have the option to say no to developers as they will seek out development opportunities in neighbouring municipalities with less restrictive development policies and regulations. Vancouver planners, with support of city council, have the discretionary power to say 'no' to developers. However, this power is largely

dependent on the high demand for development in Vancouver. This enabled Vancouver planners to persuade developers to adopt the podium-tower typology, but it was Vancouver's profitable housing market and exclusive waterfront location that encouraged them to build it. Had there been demand for commercial space in Coquitlam City Centre in the 1990s, things may have turned out differently. Instead Coquitlam's ability to implement its version of the podium-tower was undermined by competing suburban communities that were eager to attract commercial development away from the RTCs, and exposed the difficulty of implementing a regional plan in the face of inter-municipal competition.

Despite Coquitlam's failure to implement the City Centre plan as originally envisioned, the city has adopted innovative policies to capture benefits for the city by taking advantage of the strong demand for residential development. Through a regulatory approach, the city has adopted a density bonus policy that allows the city to sell density to the developer in exchange for community amenity contributions. The bonus density also helps developers subsidize the cost of constructing and leasing commercial office/retail space at below market rents. This development of commercial office/retail space is helping the city to achieve some of the original goals of job creation as set out in the RTC concept and the original City Centre plan.

The podium-tower typology is a popular development model in Coquitlam in part because developers have come to associate the podium-tower with densification. Developers like the podium-tower because they know it will sell. The popularity of this building typology is evident in the homogeneity of its design. Early podium-tower developments in Coquitlam and Vancouver have shown that different architectural styles existed prior to its popularization by "Vancouverism". With the popularization of the

podium-tower, developers adopted the model as seen around False Creek in part because it symbolizes the success of Vancouver's downtown revitalization, and it is a tried and true development model. The Vancouver style of podium-tower has now been exported to the suburbs, including Coquitlam. Today, the style of podium-tower that developers are building in Coquitlam is reflective of the False Creek podium-tower, characterized by glass and concrete towers and street oriented podiums.

The popularity of the podium-tower has provided benefits and challenges for Coquitlam. The boom in podium-tower development in the City Centre is slowly transforming the area into a vibrant and active neighbourhood through increased residential population and commercial business located along streets. Coquitlam planners hope that demand for office space will increase as a result of the Evergreen Line, which is scheduled to be completed by 2016. The podium-tower also raises questions of appropriateness, especially in potential new development where it has been proposed as a means of revitalizing older neighbourhoods and redeveloping post-industrial lands. As the podium-tower rides a wave of popularity, planners will have to look to the future to identify how the dominance of this typology may affect the city's ability to provide a diverse range of housing for people of varying incomes and needs. This typology, which was originally proposed in Vancouver as an innovative solution to increasing residential densities through a mix of low and high densities, has become a development model that is being widely replicated throughout the suburbs.

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