

Shifting Form, Shaping the Future



Detail of RE-THINKSURFACE. Image by Sturgess Architecture.

In terms of blue sky thinking, the recent *FormShift Vancouver* ideas competition took innovative housing solutions to new heights. The competition, co-hosted by the AIBC along with the City of Vancouver, set out to inspire brave, new visions for the city. Not only did it generate significant interest both far and wide, it tapped into a wellspring of creativity.

Taking place this past spring, the competition attracted 86 innovative submissions, some from as far away as New York, Paris and Rotterdam. It was open to any and all – from architects and designers to those who simply had creative inclinations. Any concept was possible.

Design competitions such as this are breeding grounds of innovation, and *FormShift Vancouver* could not have been more opportune. While the city is enjoying tremendous growth, it is well aware of the many challenges that accompany such growth. For context, participants were advised to read the *Vancouver EcoDensity Charter* in its entirety. Key aspects of the charter were reflected in the judging criteria, such as resource conservation, accessible public transit, livable neighborhoods and sustainable public spaces.

“The competition provided an opportunity to carry the newly emerging urban forms into the fabric of the city,” commented Walter Francl MAIBC, Chair and Professional Advisor for the competition.

Participants could opt for any or all of the three categories. The *Vancouver Primary* category, offering the highest award at \$6,000, called for designs that incorporated a rapid transit station in a mixed-use arterial site situated along a major city street. The winning submission came from Calgary’s Sturgess Architecture. *RE-THINKSURFACE* redefined the building as a system of productive surfaces. Walls, for instance, generated energy while roofs provided agricultural space.

“We wanted to explore a building model that would waste nothing, where every surface would be useful at many levels,” notes Jeremy Sturgess B.Arch. FRAIC R.C.A.

In the *Vancouver Secondary* category, a \$4,000 prize was allocated to a design targeted at a smaller residential site situated in an established neighborhood, with accessibility to public transit of utmost significance. Local firm Romses Architects took top honours. Scott Romses MAIBC, and architectural graduate Sing Mak completed a two-part series, *Harvest Green Project 01* and *Harvest Green Project 02*, that were submitted for the Primary and Secondary categories respectively.

In the latter, Romses’ team drew from the *Vancouver EcoDensity Charter*’s passages on laneway housing. Their concept proposed that Vancouver do more to generate the very food and energy it consumes. As such, the laneway areas would provide space for agriculture while prefabricated residential units, known as “ModPods,” would harvest rainwater and renewable solar and wind energy. In blurring the distinction between urban and rural, the *Harvest Green Projects* stood out from the crowd.

“Our submission explored the idea of projects being a form of energy infrastructure,” recalls Romses MAIBC. “We knew that the city was interested in the idea of laneway housing, so we saw our submission as a way to propel that forward.”

Perhaps the most openly creative submissions were found in the *Vancouver Wild Card* category, which awarded \$2,000. Free of any site-specific considerations, the criteria had but one requirement: push the envelope of sustainable design. True to its

name, the category included submissions of all sizes and shapes, ranging from the small and whimsical to the grand and monumental.

The winner, created by GO Design Collaborative, took an unprecedented approach that steered clear of tried-and-tested solutions altogether.

“Our first reaction was that we wanted to explore the non-housing-related aspects raised in the *EcoDensity Charter* as we felt that Vancouver could benefit by examining these issues in more depth,” states Pauline Thimm, who recently co-founded GO Design Collaborative with partner Jennifer Uegama. Instead, they chose to focus on scarcities in Vancouver’s industrial and agricultural production. The winning result, titled *DENcity : INTENcity*, examined the potential for a waterfront industrial site in Vancouver’s Marpole community. In preserving industrial lands for strictly single-use facilities, Thimm feels that real potential has been lost, and sees the opportunity to transform similar sites throughout the city into denser spaces.

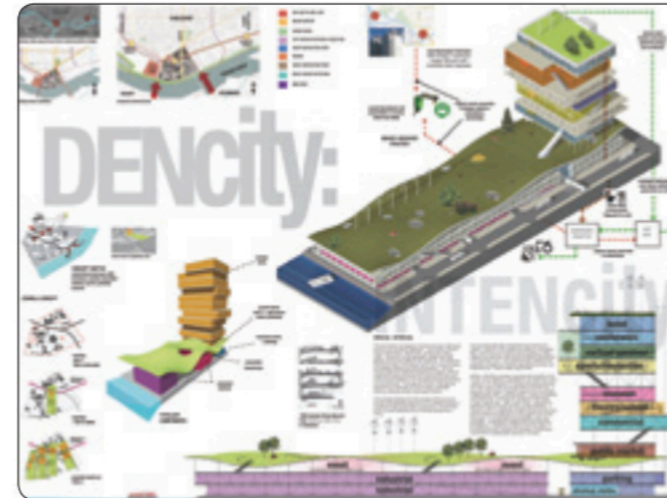
“We suggested densifying large-scale industrial, agricultural and community-based activities in a way that allows multiple uses to coexist,” she explains. “This can generate some opportunities in waste recycling and energy production. On a denser scale, these things become more ecologically and economically viable.”

In the end, perhaps the biggest *FormShift Vancouver* winner was the city itself. By bringing the architecture and design communities together in a big-picture, free thinking exercise, they helped to enliven the city’s urban dialogue.

“Vancouver has always been a laboratory for urban residential density,” observes Sturgess. “I believe *FormShift Vancouver* illustrates how the city can develop alternate forms of urban density, and how the triple bottom line approach (people, planet, profits) can offer a rich palette of housing models.”



Detail of Harvest Green Project 02. Image by Romses Architects.



DENCITY : INTENcity. Image by Go Design Collaborative

Winners:

Vancouver Primary:
RE-THINKSURFACE
Sturgess Architecture (Jeremy Sturgess) – Calgary

Vancouver Secondary:
Harvest Green Project - 02
Romses Architects (Scott Romses) – Vancouver

Vancouver Wildcard:
DENCITY : INTENcity
Go Design Collaborative (Pauline Thimm and Jennifer Uegama) – Vancouver (Vancouver Wildcard)

Vancouver Secondary:

Eco-Density Now! by Acme Architecture – Santa Barbara, California
CMO (Miller / Miller / Cavens) – Vancouver

Vancouver Wildcard:

Dreams of Vertical Topographies, by Public Architecture + Communication – Vancouver
Cultivating Wildness, by Idette de Boer & Magali Bailey – Vancouver
GBL Architects Inc. – Vancouver
rooftop green pixels, by Wang Yiming – Burnaby

Jury:

Chair (non-voting) and Professional Advisor:
Walter Francl MAIBC, Walter Francl Architecture Inc., Vancouver
• Ian Chodikoff, Architect / Editor-in-chief – *Canadian Architect*, Toronto
• Stan Douglas, Photo-based Artist, Vancouver
• Nancy Knight, Vice President Campus and Community Planning – University of British Columbia, Vancouver
• Brent Toderian, Director of Planning – City of Vancouver
Jury Facilitator: Gordon Price, Director – Simon Fraser University City Program, Vancouver

Honourable Mentions

Vancouver Primary:
Harvest Green Project - 01
by Romses Architects – Vancouver
Community Catalyst, by Sebastien Garon and Chris Foyd – Vancouver

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