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Joint Property Development Permits

Peter J. Reese Architect Ltd., Vancouver, BC

Issue

Vancouver's Victory Square, an inner-city area known for its unique heritage character, was suffering from economic decline and deteriorating building stock by the mid-1990s. The challenge was to find an economical means for rehabilitating existing stock while retaining the heritage character and providing lower income housing, in particular single room occupancy units (SROs). With rehabilitation on a building-by-building basis being prohibitively expensive, a suitable alternative was needed.

Plan

If a group of buildings is treated as the basic unit of development, economies of scale can be achieved. Seismic upgrading, elevator access and mechanical and plumbing services become feasible when applied on a large scale. Joint property development, a mechanism for developing separately owned properties together, has been used successfully for new construction in Vancouver.

In order to take a similar approach with Victory Square, the City required an analysis of issues and development of a regulatory model suitable for rehabilitation of existing buildings and infill development. Peter J. Reese Architect Ltd. received an ACT grant to conduct an in-depth analysis of legal and regulatory issues needing to be resolved, and to make recommendations regarding zoning bylaw and procedural changes.

Project team

Peter J. Reese Architect Ltd.
City of Vancouver Senior Area
Planner
Urban Development Institute
(Pacific Region)
Greater Vancouver Home Builder's
Association

The project team consulted with several City departments — Planning, Legal, Permits and Licences, and Housing and Properties — as well as with property owners and developers.



Cordova Building near Victory Square

Source: CMHC Vancouver

Results

A Joint Development Permit Study, released in January 2000, draws on issues faced in the Victory Square Concept Plan (VSCP). Its conclusions are also applicable in other historic areas around Vancouver such as Gastown, Chinatown and Yaletown.

The study's analysis of joint property development in Vancouver found that municipal staff, area developers and property owners were not generally aware

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that the City already had the power to permit joint upgrading of independently owned properties. Consequently, it was decided that a brochure was needed to communicate the goals for Victory Square.

A draft brochure was produced detailing economic and technical gains to be made through a Joint Development Permit project. Also highlighted were possible types of joint development projects, such as combining two buildings into one project, developing a row of buildings, permitting group projects with buildings extending across blocks and whole block redevelopment.

However, the draft brochure has not been published and is not on the City's critical path for the Victory Square area, says City of Vancouver Planner Nathan Edelson, for two reasons. First, the City developed an attractive Heritage Investment Program, which has been oversubscribed and is meeting the area's revitalization needs. Second, an agreement to relax parking requirements in the area — one of the incentives recommended in the draft brochure — has been agreed to in principle.

Edelson believes the project got the municipality thinking about innovative ways to save the buildings in Victory Square. He also hopes the findings of the study will be helpful in other areas of the city such as Chinatown.

"This is a very difficult project to do because it requires such a high level of trust between several different owners," he said. "It becomes very complicated with the legality and the engineering required, but we still think it's a good idea."



Joint development opportunities may be possible in Vancouver's Chinatown

Source: Tourism Vancouver

The City is looking for joint development opportunities and Edelson pointed to Chinatown — where family associations own a number of connected buildings — as a possibility. Ideally, the City would like to see a pilot project initiated and would walk the parties through the process.

"The main benefit of the study was that we know we can do (joint development) and we know it is legal," Edelson said. "The project was definitely worthwhile."

Related reports

Joint Development Permits: draft brochure

The draft brochure is available on the ACT website. See "ACT projects & solutions".

Contact

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