Here’s **Sam Sullivan**, the longest-serving member of City Council, on Homer Street, his habitat, the main street of his ‘hood. Some call it ‘Yaletown’ – but that’s a term reserved for foreigners who don’t know the difference.
Planners call the west side of Homer Street Downtown South – but, really, it doesn’t quite have a name. Down here you have to specify the street you’re on, the block you’re in and the closest cross street. (“I say Helmcken,” he notes. “It’s more exotic than Nelson.”)

Sam is in a zone of transition. A block or so to the west: a homeless shelter, a brothel and a drug market. To the east: ten of the city’s finest restaurants, million-dollar condos, Urban Fare and the seawall.

Sam, who wheels over to City Hall across the Cambie Bridge, measures accessibility by whether it’s possible to get to the waterfront without an impediment. “You have to get way up Cambie Street before that happens,” he says, which is not a bad measure of success.

Otherwise, everything he needs is close by – not the case in Collingwood Village, his last residence, where shopping was blocks away, up a hill, in a different neighbourhood.
Actually Sam, like most of his neighbours, is a newcomer to Homer Street. He moved into the newly completed Domus (middle right) just a few months ago, down the SkyTrain line from the suburbs.

Not that Collingwood Village, out at Joyce Station (above), was all Vancouver Specials, front lawns and garage doors. From his 19th floor window he could see Vancouver Island. Now his view is of the towers of False Creek and, in between, his workplace at City Hall.
He eats out a lot, each restaurant chosen as much for ambience as for food. For coffee, he prefers Triggiano’s down the street at Davie and Homer. With his PDA powered by the battery from his chair, his cell plugged into his ear, and his e-mail on tap, work is only interrupted to share conversation with friends (above) like Roger Chilton.
So why Downtown? It’s partly a commitment to his beliefs – and what he argues for in Council: the creation of livable, high-density neighbourhoods as a way to save the environment and build our cities. And then there’s the attraction of the new: a spacious condo that met all his criteria - wooden floors, an open plan, an organic grocery store nearby.
Though a founder of the **Tetra Society**, which recruits technically-skilled volunteers to create assistive devices for people with disabilities, Sam doesn’t surround himself with gadgets.

The ones he seems proudest of are often the simplest: a hook (above and right) attached to a rope that allows him to open the door to his building. Or a piece of curved metal (below right) that gives his front door the needed spring to close unassisted. In fact, the only exceptional piece of equipment in the entire condo is the hoist in the bathroom (below).
The downside: there’s noise at night, sometimes a lot – sirens, unmuffled motorcycles (“boorish, malicious”), late-night bar patrons whooping their way home. And of course, construction. The view out his window is being transformed as this part of the city builds out 15 years ahead of expectations.
He now finds himself going days without having to use his van, and sometimes being resentful that he has to make the transition from sidewalk to road. It’s a common syndrome of downtown dwellers: they end up being more neighbourhood oriented than the suburbanite and more parochial than a small-town dweller. But Sam Sullivan has never been accused of having a limited vision.
Sam’s neighbourhood changed this weekend in a small but meaningful way. Homer was once a one-way arterial designed to push cars through the city. Now it has been turned into a two-way residential street with a bike lane, along with parts of Cambie and Beatty Streets. Click here for more information.

It’s part of the Downtown Transportation Plan, and another small step towards a more livable city.
The architectural studio of Joe Wai has occupied a Yaletown loft at 1107 Homer for 25 years - way before the neighbourhood was trendy. But a quarter century of activity comes to an end in a few months when Joe vacates and the building is demolished for, of course, another condo.
I'm a member of the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board (SPAB). At our April meeting I shared with the board members my pedestrian experiences during my recent trip to Vancouver. (I am deaf and legally blind and use a white cane for mobility).

Vancouver is a very busy place with pedestrians walking every which way. People came from the side and tried to cross in front of me without paying attention and not noticing my white cane. My friend's fast verbal warning caught them just in time to avoid a couple of people, me included, from falling.

Other folks came straight toward me but they were busy with cell phones, pagers or reading information. At the last second they looked up and quickly jumped aside. These experiences seemed unique to Vancouver.
Vancouver has curb ramps at each street crossing. But they blend in with the sidewalk and are difficult to notice with a white cane since there are no detectable surface changes for the ramps. (Seattle puts a yellow square on its curb ramps as a detectable surface for wayfinding.)

The bus shelters I encountered are completely glass. One of the smaller sides have big pictures but the three remaining sides are solid glass with no warnings that I noticed. I nearly walked into one of the glass sides. It would be good if strips of colorful tape or paint were added.

Vancouver is the first city where I have seen buses with big, low, clear and orange-colored numbers / destinations on the front of the buses. This is wonderful to be able to see which bus number I'm getting on. Seattle's newer buses have the orange-colored numbers but Vancouver's beats Seattle's in size.
On May 16th at SFU Harbour Centre, a panel of three – Sun writer Bob Ransford, Co-Director of Planning Larry Beasley and Tyee editor David Beers – were brought together by the Vancouver City Planning Commission to discuss Berelowitz’s book on Vancouver, *Dream City*. Here’s an abridged version of Larry’s comments.

*Dream City* is the kind of book I’ve been hoping would be written: to bring context to other key writings about Vancouver, including Ann Breen and Dick Rigby’s book *Intown Living* (which includes Vancouver as the strongest case of their thesis) and Richard Register’s *Ecocities* (which pairs Vancouver and Curitiba, Brazil as the pace-setting eco-cities of the future) or Leonie Sandercock’s article in this month’s *Harvard Design Magazine* called “An Anatomy of Civic Ambition in Vancouver” (which does a perfect job of linking our urban design results to our regulatory system and the design culture that it has spawned).

[Click images above for further information or to order.]
I was also hoping it would be written: to bring a sense of personal investment and commentary to fill out the brilliant but rather academic treatise of John Punter’s book, *The Vancouver Achievement*. Lance has done all these things and more in *Dream City*.

First of all, this is a very insightful and intelligent book. It accurately fixes the basic elements of Vancouver’s natural and urban personality – the things at the base of our struggle against globalization; and it accurately tells the story of Vancouver’s frantic creation and recent transformation. Because I’ve lived through the recent transformation, I especially like the long view.

Secondly, it’s a book that surprises by what it includes and by what it does not include – the surprises really enhance one’s reading of it.

(1) I was surprised by the cogency of the link he draws between nature, our attitude about nature and the built form and cityscapes that have resulted …
But I was also surprised by the lack of deeper coverage of the unique west-coast domestic modernist architectural tradition that developed after the war because of that bias to nature – Ron Thom and the others – probably best illustrated by Arthur Erickson’s wood house for Gordon and Mary Smith (above left) and his concrete house for the Eppich’s (above right) – which are not really profiled in the book.

(2) I was surprised by and learned a lot about the strength of the early search for urbanity in the explosion of growth at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries.

But I was surprised by the lack of coverage of the absolutely unique interpretation of the New Urbanism at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries – a comfortable modernism but coherent fabric of civility and public priority that is acknowledged as a special contribution to the growing movement of the New Urbanism – confirmed by Andreas Duany only this last month when he said that Vancouver is the very best new manifestation of the New Urbanism he has ever seen (even if, like everywhere else, it’s not as good as the old urbanism of those wonderful ancient European cities).
(3) I was surprised by how well the history of zoning and its effects are pinpointed and by the rare moment in the book of “high polemicism” when the limits of that zoning are decried.

But I was also surprised that the most unique quality of our zoning – the strength and breadth of its discretion – is not fully evaluated or celebrated, or the ability of our zoning to morph as it needs to because of discretion. (I still don’t buy the principle that zoning is stymieing great development in Vancouver – that Lance picks up from other critics and presses again. Someone needs to do the real evaluation that gets to the truth about this.)
And, while this book does not focus on personalities, I’m surprised that more ink is not given to the true father of Vancouver’s absolutely unique discretionary zoning system that is now so admired in North America – Ray Spaxman (right). Not enough has been written about this brilliant man and his impact on our city through his development management systems as well as his extraordinary personal taste.

But these are marginal issues that are overwhelmed by the shear pleasure of reading this book. It is deliciously written, ideas are cleverly expressed, the character of our city and people are beautifully described – often touchingly described.

In the end, this is a very romantic book – starting with the emotional desire to write about Vancouver that Lance remembers from his first moments off the plane; proceeding through his wonderfully personal interpretations about the spiritual effects of landscape and climate on this place; and ending with his breathless description of the exhilaration of living in a “city on the ascendance.”
And, finally, I found Lance worrying about the same forces that worry me – that cause me anxiety even in the face of all we have accomplished. We cannot be complacent; we surely must realize that our challenges have just begun, in part because of our very success.

Lance and I both fear the contradiction of our suburbs and their pattern of development conceived from out-dated ideas and standards.

Lance and I both fear that we may not have the guts, as a community, to see through the often shockingly challenging ideas that are necessary to attack the social dysfunction in our city.
So a reader can connect to the analysis and the emotion and the anxiety and the joy of this book and learn something important about Vancouver.

And for that I say thank you, Lance, for writing this extraordinary testimonial.

[For a stimulating interview with Lance in *The Tyee*, click here.]
Great article about our wonderful natural resource, lanes in Vancouver. However, I wanted to point out that the country lane concept was not developed as part of the Showcase program, but was totally funded by Engineering Department streets capital funding as a demonstration project. The report reference can be found here.

**Sandra James** MCIP, City Planner and Greenways Planner

Thanks for an overdue examination of our city's lanes. I was expecting, however, more of your usual exploration of both sides of matters. Along with the statement that garage entrances on lanes make for "an exceptionally poor pedestrian experience," you did juxtapose photos illustrating better than a thousand words the benefits for sidewalks/boulevards in having the vehicular access not at the street, but from the lane.

However, there was no "other side" given for paved lanes, such as reduced dust and increased opportunity for pick-up basketball, hockey or other play. On the topic of more environmentally sustainable design treatments, we might also mention the added capital cost of these and consider whether the marginal cost is best spent carrying on or being applied to other measures with a higher pay-back, environmentally. Lisa should be credited, though, for presenting a significant part of the picture.

**Paul M. Pinsker**, P.Eng.
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