

**Subject:** Open Letter to Mayor and Council on Vancouver Views

**From:** Stephen Bohus

**Date:** Fri, 28 Jan 2011 12:36:49 -0800

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January 28, 2011

Mayor Gregor Robertson and City Councillors, City of Vancouver, 453 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver

Dear Mayor Robertson and Councillors:

Re: February 1, 2011 Regular Council: Implementation of Vancouver Views and Opportunities for Higher Buildings Downtown

I am writing to urge you to reject the staff report and policy referenced above, to instruct staff to rectify serious problems in the report and consultation process (which I outline in this letter), and to start a new phase of meaningful public consultation.

Last week Council heard from about 40 public delegations on the topic of higher buildings. I would like to encourage Council to be very open to the issues and concerns they raised, and also at the same time to objectively and carefully scrutinize the statements and work produced by the Planning Department.

Kindly consider that the work produced by staff may not be of a high enough standard to be adopted 'as is'. Not a single unbiased or accurate 3D computer rendering was used in the staff panels for the 3 public consultation sessions in October of 2010. Planning staff refused to release the computer model to the public and hence none of the images presented by staff are independently verifiable.

The staff report, presentations, and public consultations are so fundamentally flawed that I believe a Council approval of the staff report and proposed policy on February 1st, 2011, would fail to serve the public interest. I believe the entire view study process should be started from the beginning, with meaningful cooperation with citizens groups and members of the public, and with the involvement of independent consultants agreeable to the public.

For Council's reference, I hereby provide a summary intermixed with images to explain several of my key concerns with the current state of Vancouver Views. I would also like to personally thank the 3 councillors who attended the CityHallWatch Citizens forum on January 11th to take part in the discussions; I've provided links to video presentations for other members of council.

Thank you for giving residents an opportunity to voice our concerns.

Sincerely,  
Stephen Bohus, BLA

Links to Jan 11th Citizens forum on Views, presentations on YouTube: <http://wp.me/P18o1P-4n>

Summary:

Though the staff report does not explicitly state it, the capacity/view/heights study actually tries to achieve two goals.

The first goal is to remove the Queen Elizabeth Park view control over much of the downtown. In this case the sites affected would revert to control by existing height bylaws (maximum "discretionary" height) or the control of other view corridors (where applicable).

The second goal would be to substantially increase heights on many of the identified sites over and above the maximum allowable under existing height controls without the QE view control. This would almost give developers a blank cheque to do whatever they wish on the identified sites, without the kind of painstaking review that was involved with the Shangri-La (when this development encroached upon public views).

There are a total of 8 identified sites for towers, including one in the West End (not 7 as indicated by staff). Summary of identified towers:

- 1) 425' tower (Southeast of Granville Loops)
- 2) 425' tower (Southwest of Granville Loops)
- 3) 48 storey tower (Burrard Gateway / or 53 storeys @ 550 feet)
- 4) 36 storey tower (Burrard Gateway lower tower on Hornby)
- 5) 375' tower (Davie Tower North at Burrard, community gardens, approx 41 storeys, clearly identified Jan 17, 2011)
- 6) 550' Alberni Street (west of Burrard)
- 7) 550' tower (Melville)
- 8) 700' tower (on W.Georgia, west of Burrard; there is a 19 storey tower on the site, so either a redevelopment of this site is being considered, or there's a possibility that this 700' tower is a precedent 'height' to include for a tower nearby such as the empty lot at 1151 W.Georgia between Thurlow and Bute)

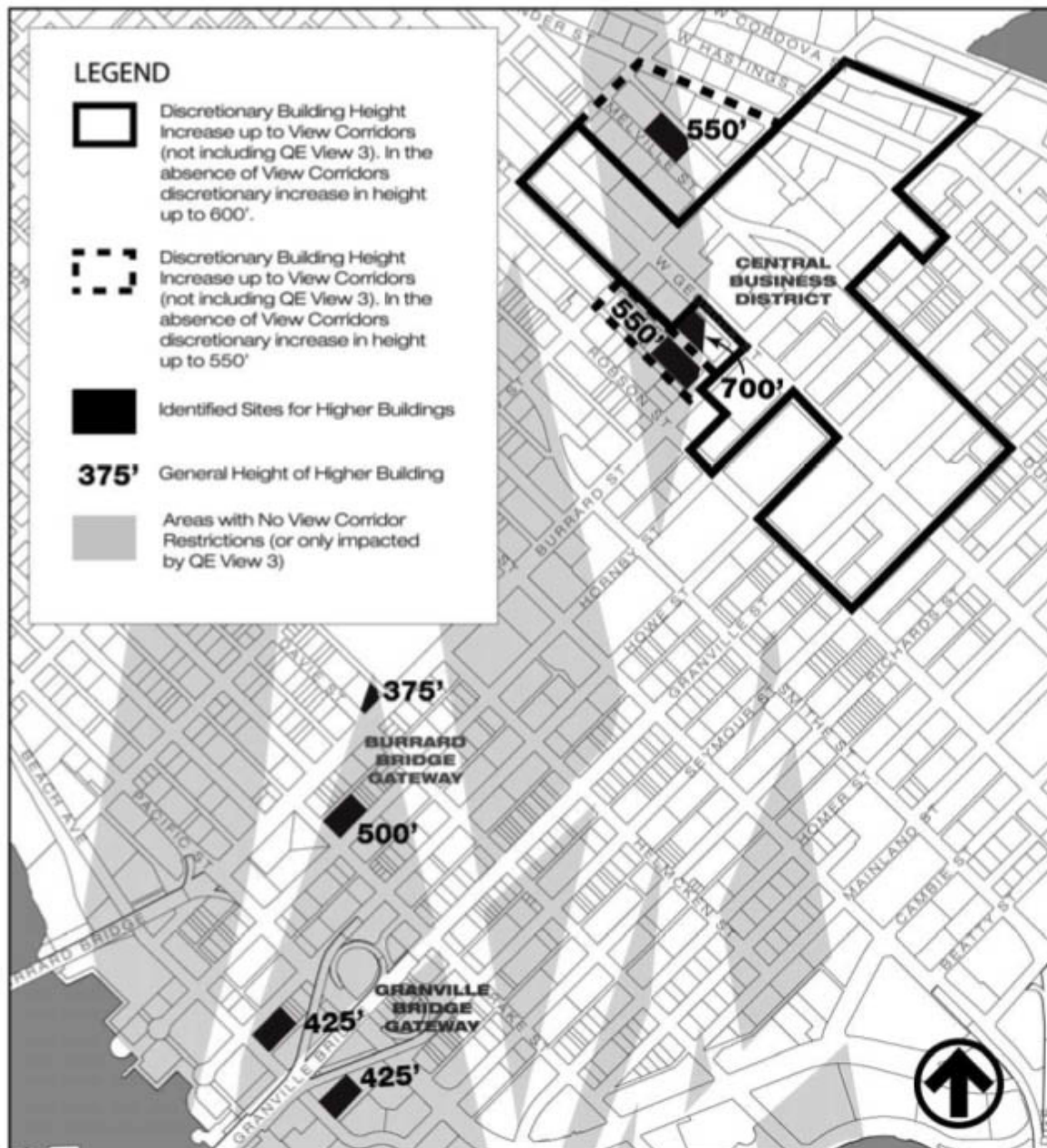


Figure 1: General Policy for Higher Buildings Map

In the timeline of the views study, the first really meaningful communication between planning staff and the public occurred in the very final round of public consultations in late October 2010. Each of these were held downtown.

The panels presented to the public in October 2010 can be found here:

<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/capacitystudy/pdf/oct10displayboards.pdf>

As I have illustrated on previous occasions, the second sentence of Panel 1 is highly misleading: “These buildings would be visible in the skyline but WOULD NOT IMPACT PROTECTED PUBLIC VIEWS of the mountains.” This is because these buildings would impact protected public views from Queen Elizabeth Park, which the study excludes. Furthermore, the public are not adequately told that there are only 20 discreet locations around the city that count as protected public views; any public view outside of this short list is 'fair game' for developers to encroach upon. Many public views of the mountains will indeed be affected by the proposed developments.

## View Cone List

### Council Approved View Cones

Following is a list of Council Approved View Cones. Clicking on the link will take you to detailed information about the specific view cone, including a photograph of the protected area. On each photograph, the extents of the view cone and the protected area are defined by a yellow line. This line provides an visual approximation of the height limit for the view cone, but an the exact building height can only be determined by calculations.

### False Creek View Cones

view number	view name	view point location	view subject
<a href="#"><u>A</u></a>	Alder Terrace	Viewing platform below Lamey's Mill Road	Mount Seymour
<a href="#"><u>B1</u></a>	Charleson Seawall	Charleson Seawall below Charleson Park	Lions
<a href="#"><u>B2</u></a>	Charleson Seawall	Charleson Seawall below Charleson Park	Crown/Grouse
<a href="#"><u>C1</u></a>	Laurel Landbridge	North end of the Laurel Landbridge	Lions
<a href="#"><u>C2</u></a>	Laurel Landbridge	North end of the Laurel Landbridge	Crown/Grouse
<a href="#"><u>D</u></a>	Heather Bay	Water's edge at Leg-in-Boot Square	Lions
<a href="#"><u>E1</u></a>	Cambie Bridge	Cambie Bridge mid-point, just north of the 6th Avenue on-ramp	Crown/Grouse
<a href="#"><u>E2.1</u></a>	Cambie Bridge	Cambie Bridge at the stairs above the South shore of False Creek	Mount Seymour
<a href="#"><u>10</u></a>	Granville Island	Graville Island north of the Art's club Theatre	Hollyburn Ridge

<a href="#"><u>12.1.1</u></a>	Granville Bridge
<a href="#"><u>12.1.2</u></a>	Granville Bridge
<a href="#"><u>12.1.3</u></a>	Granville Bridge
<a href="#"><u>12.2</u></a>	Granville Bridge

### Outlying Area View Cones

view number	view name
<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>	Queen Elizabeth Park
<a href="#"><u>9.1</u></a>	Cambie Street
<a href="#"><u>9.2</u></a>	Cambie Street
<a href="#"><u>20</u></a>	Granville Street
<a href="#"><u>21</u></a>	Commercial Drive
<a href="#"><u>22</u></a>	Main Street
<a href="#"><u>27</u></a>	Trout Lake

The panoramic computer simulation view of from Queen Elizabeth Park is an impossible view on Panel 1, as foreground topography and vegetation is turned off.



Panel 3 shows out of date photos of several of the protected views. The Charleson Park view is from 2009, and it appears that there has been some encroachment on the bottom of the viewcone. The view from Cambie between 10th&11th is clearly old with the stadium construction. The Queen Elizabeth Park view does not correspond to the location defined in the city's online VanMap GIS for that viewcone, and it is not the best view from QE Park (which is the platform with the public art sculptures). Furthermore,



other protected views have been left out of the comparison.



The view 'E1' from the Cambie Bridge would have been an excellent comparison to see the impact of recent changes in the city. Below is the 'current' photo from the city's web page (11am on January 27th). Also attached are two real world photos taken on January 26th for a comparison. The zoomed in version of the photo clearly shows that there has been significant intrusion lately into this protected public view. None of this was communicated to the public. All existing protected views should have been reviewed to verify compliance with the protected view corridor policy.

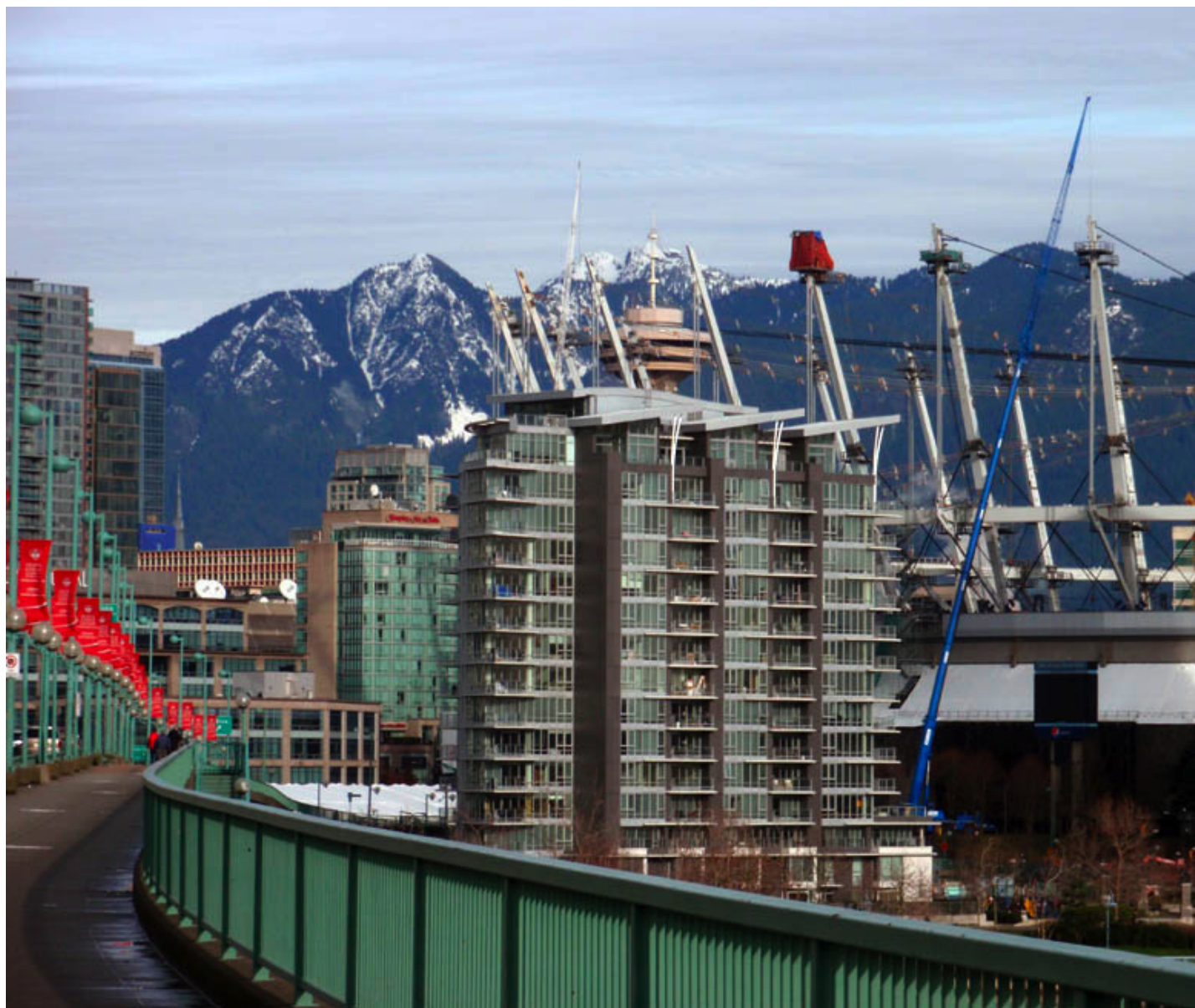
**View Cone E1: Cambie Bridge to Crown/Grouse [Find it in VanMap](#)**



above: City of Vancouver web page, January 28, 2011 below: photos: January 26, 2011







Furthermore, as of 11am on January 28th, the View Point elevation is still listed as 21.83 m (163 feet). One of these numbers is obviously wrong. In reality, 21.83 metres is approximately 71.6 feet, while 163 feet is approximately 49.7m. The errors in the conversions were pointed out on January 20th during my presentation (second speaker), and the errors still have not been addressed for this view and for many of the other officially protected public views (list at end). This is a key oversight, as the city's web page contains what are supposed to be official descriptions of the protected views.

Description of View Cone E1, City of Vancouver web page, January 28, 2011:

### Views Information

- **View Point:** Cambie Bridge 1/3 point (just north of the merge point at the 6th Ave. on-ramp)
- **View Field:** Crown/Grouse
- **History:** Approved by City Council on December 12, 1989

### Reference Data

- **View Point:** Cambie Bridge 1/3 point
- **View Point elevation:** 21.83 m (163 feet)
- **Reference Point:** Harbour Centre tower roof level
- **Reference Point elevation:** 122.41 m (493 feet)
- **Distance to reference point from view point:** 1648.96 m (5410 feet)

There are shortcomings in some of the proposed new view corridors. These proposed view corridors do not contribute much to view protection. In fact, they appear to be “reverse-engineered” to fit existing height controls in Chinatown and DTES.

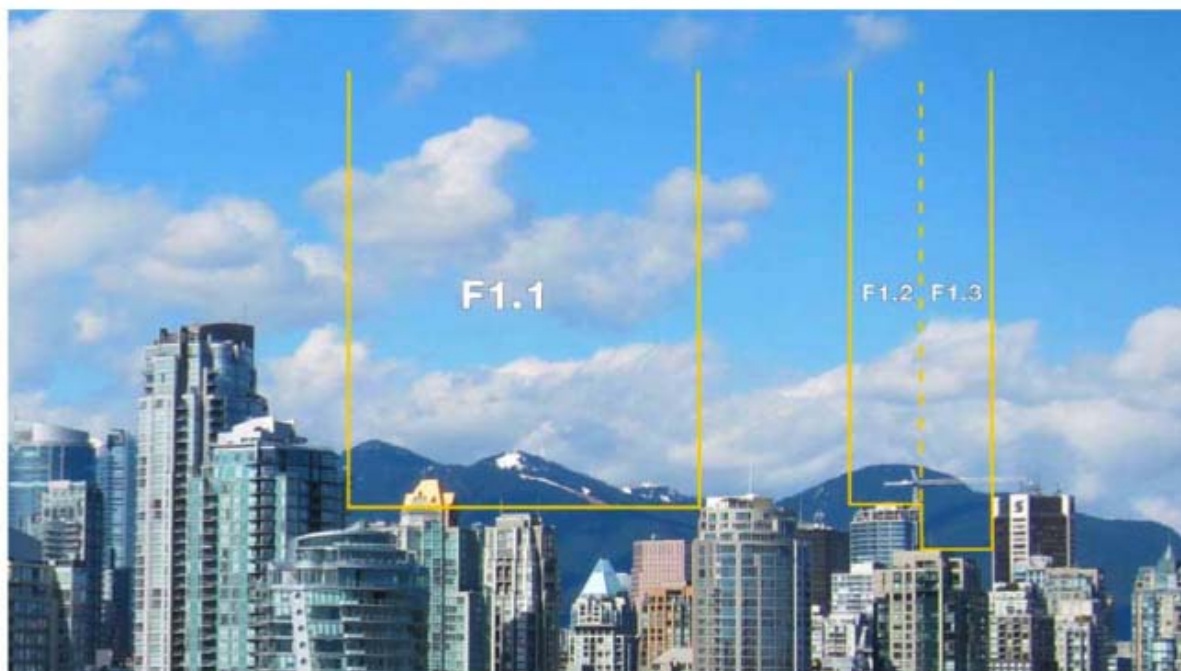
The one small sliver of a view introduced over the downtown from Choklit Park is described incorrectly. The written description of the view states it is from the centre of the 'Upper Plaza' of the park at Spruce and 7th. Photographs in the field suggest that a photo taken from another location (from the Lower Plaza) was used to illustrate view F1. There are considerable legal implications here due to the incorrect description.



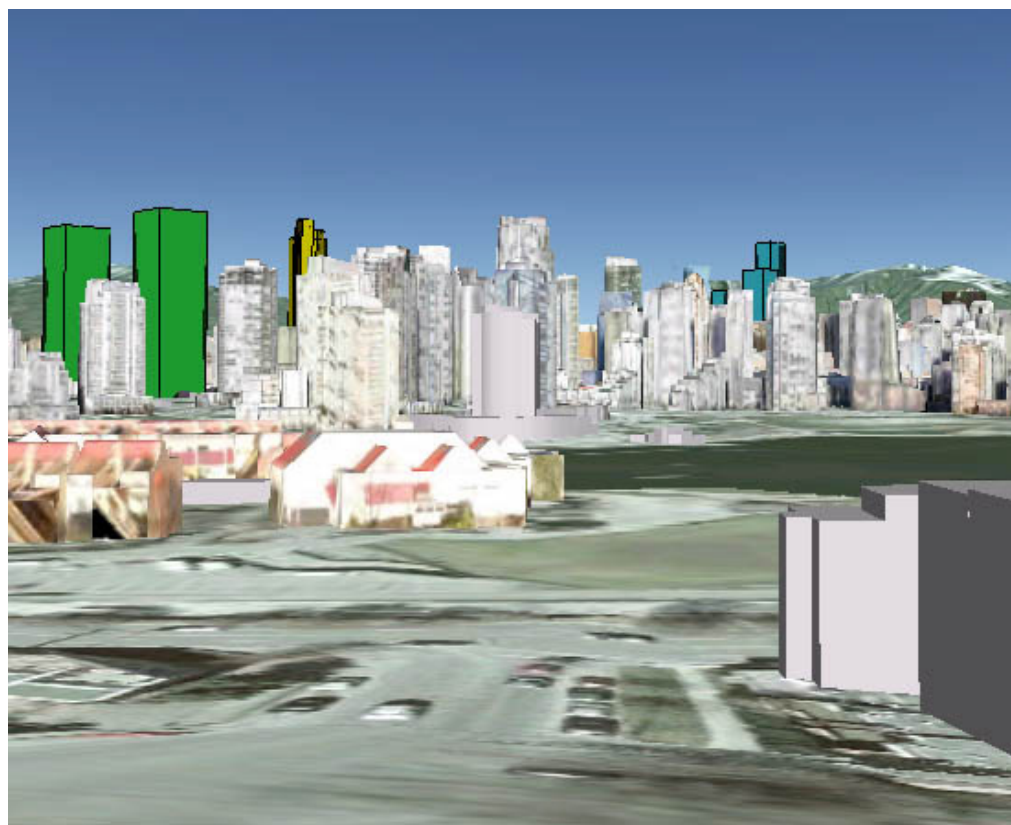
Above: Photo from the Centre of the Upper Plaza of Choklit Park (Right hand side of views F1.2 and F1.3 partially obscured by branches (there are branches in front of the Scotia Tower) Below: photo from staff report.



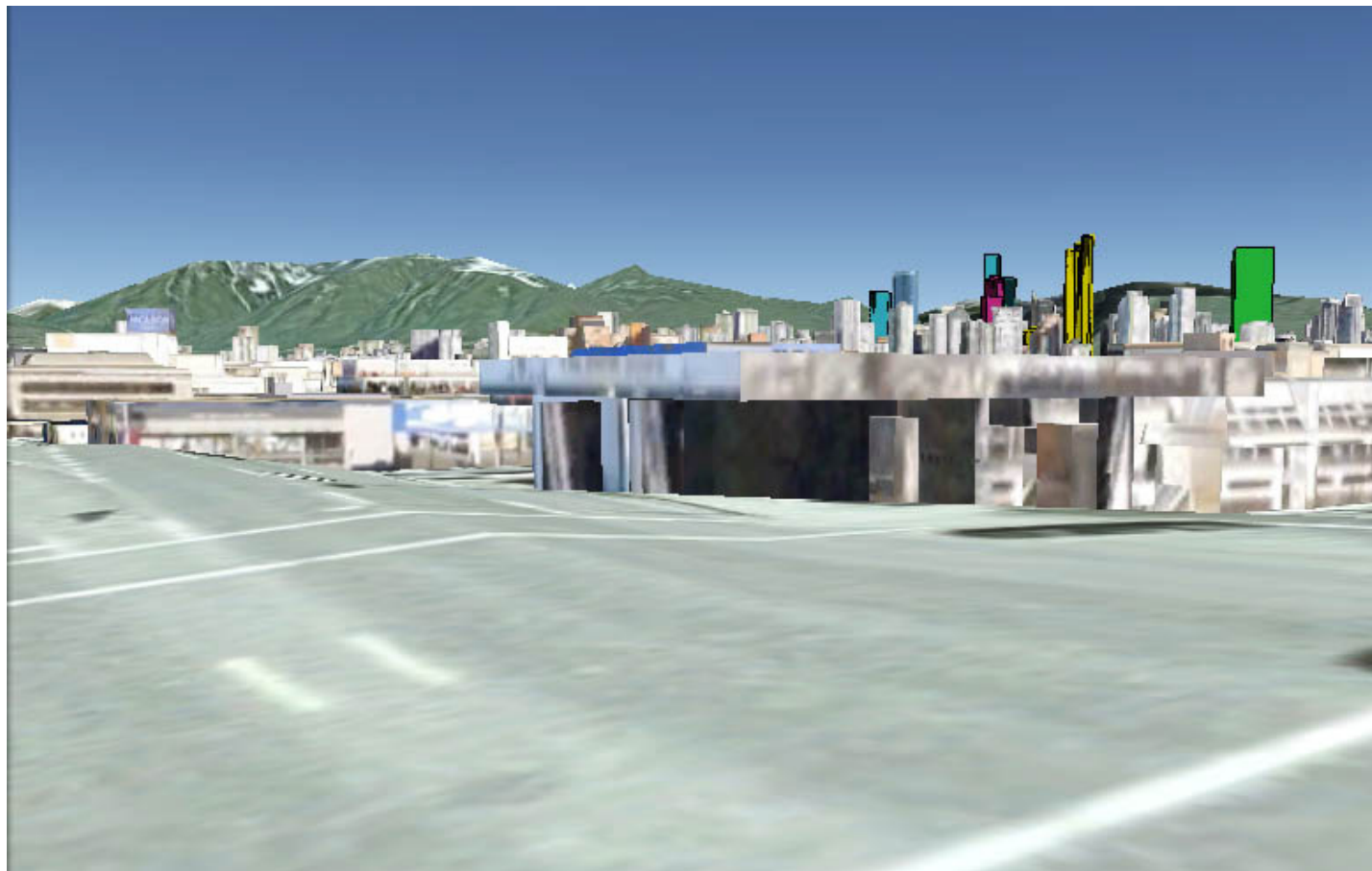
**View F1: CHOKLIT PARK to Grouse & Mount Fromme**



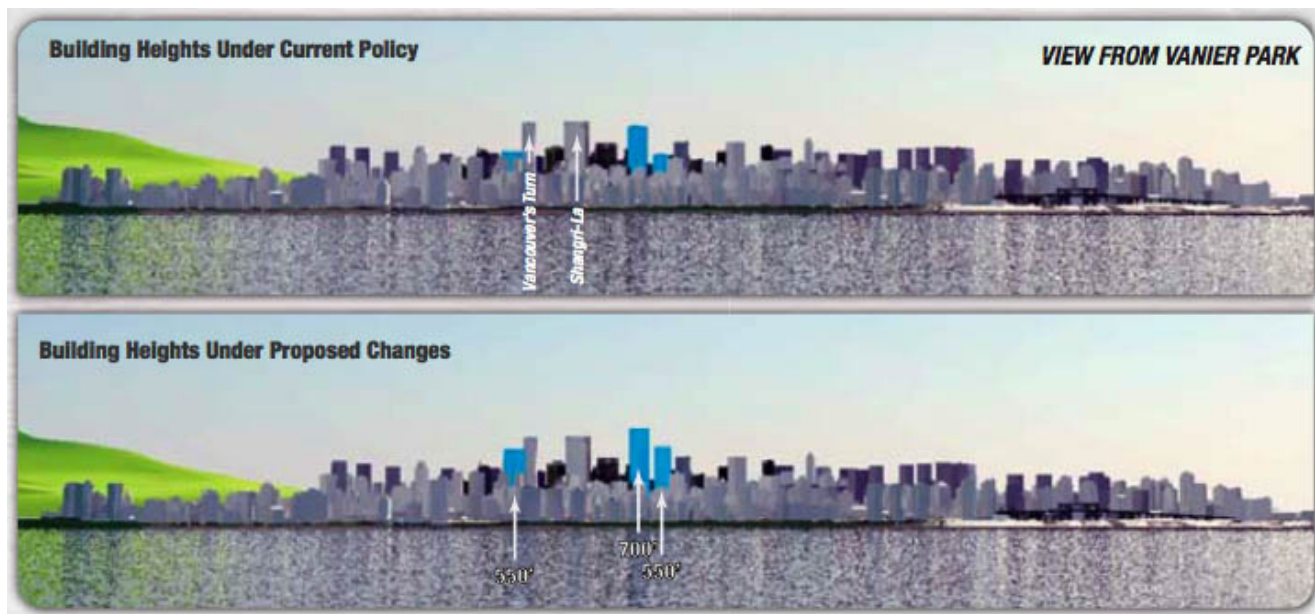
In the neighbourhood around this viewpoint, there are significant PUBLIC VIEWS of the mountains that will indeed be affected by many of the proposed developments. Such is a view from 7th and Oak (Google Earth simulation, same colour scheme as used in staff report, photo calibrations are near end of this summary).



View from Burrard south of 5th (Google Earth simulation, colour scheme similar to Staff Report except Davie Tower is magenta)

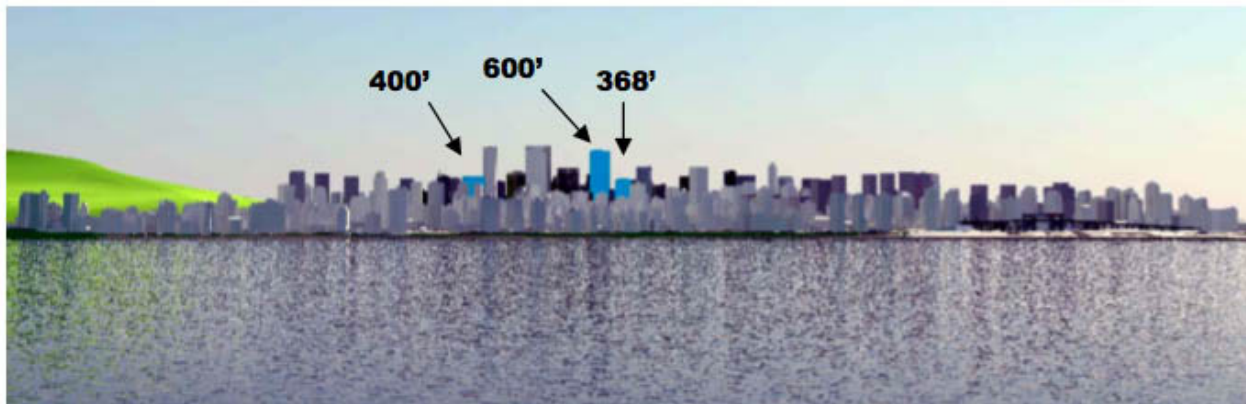


On Panel 4 (October 2010 public consultation), there are two images with the label 'VIEW FROM VANIER PARK'. Then in the staff report released to the public on December 10th, 2010, two images are labelled to be from 'Spanish Banks'.

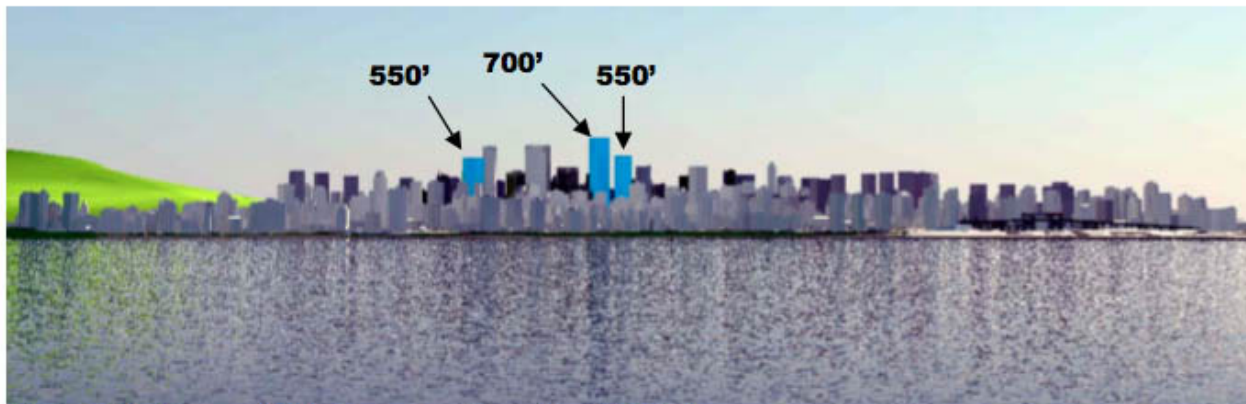


Above: Panel from October 2010 Public Consultation (Vanier Park) Below: Staff report, released Dec 10th, 2010 (Spanish Banks)



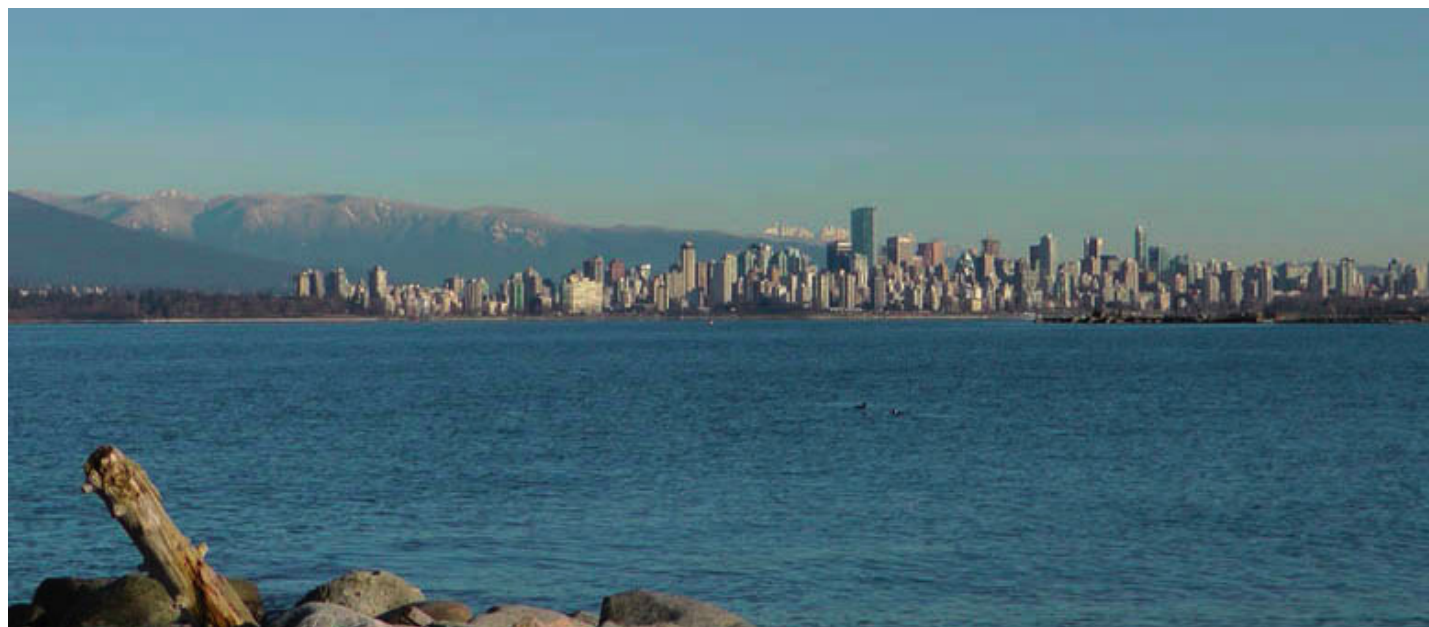


**Figure 2.1: Existing Policy Heights from Spanish Banks**



**Figure 2.2: Proposed CBD Expansion from Spanish Banks**

These images appear to be rendered from the same point, and not from two different parks. Furthermore if the views are indeed from Spanish Banks then the public are still misled. There is also the issue of the mountains in the view to consider; the images suggest that the mountains END over part of the West End towards the left side of the rendering. The image presented by staff erroneously shows no mountains above the Central Business District, and planning staff claimed on December 16th that the mountains are part of the computer model.



As demonstrated at the Citizen's forum on Jan11th, there are INDEED MOUNTAINS that are visible behind part of the CBD. Staff have failed to make any subsequent corrections, and persisted in using this



incorrect rendering on January 17th (staff communication session in response to forum).

Staff have used other misleading images in both the public presentation panels and the final staff report. Panel 5 (Oct 2010 Public Consultation) and Page 10 of the final staff report use green coloured buildings in the renderings of the Granville loops proposal. Whatever their reason for choosing that colour, we know that green blends in with the mountains and could lead people to underestimate the real visual impacts of the proposed buildings (illustrated in Citizen's Forum with an alternate colour). Thus, a more sincere effort would choose a color other than green.



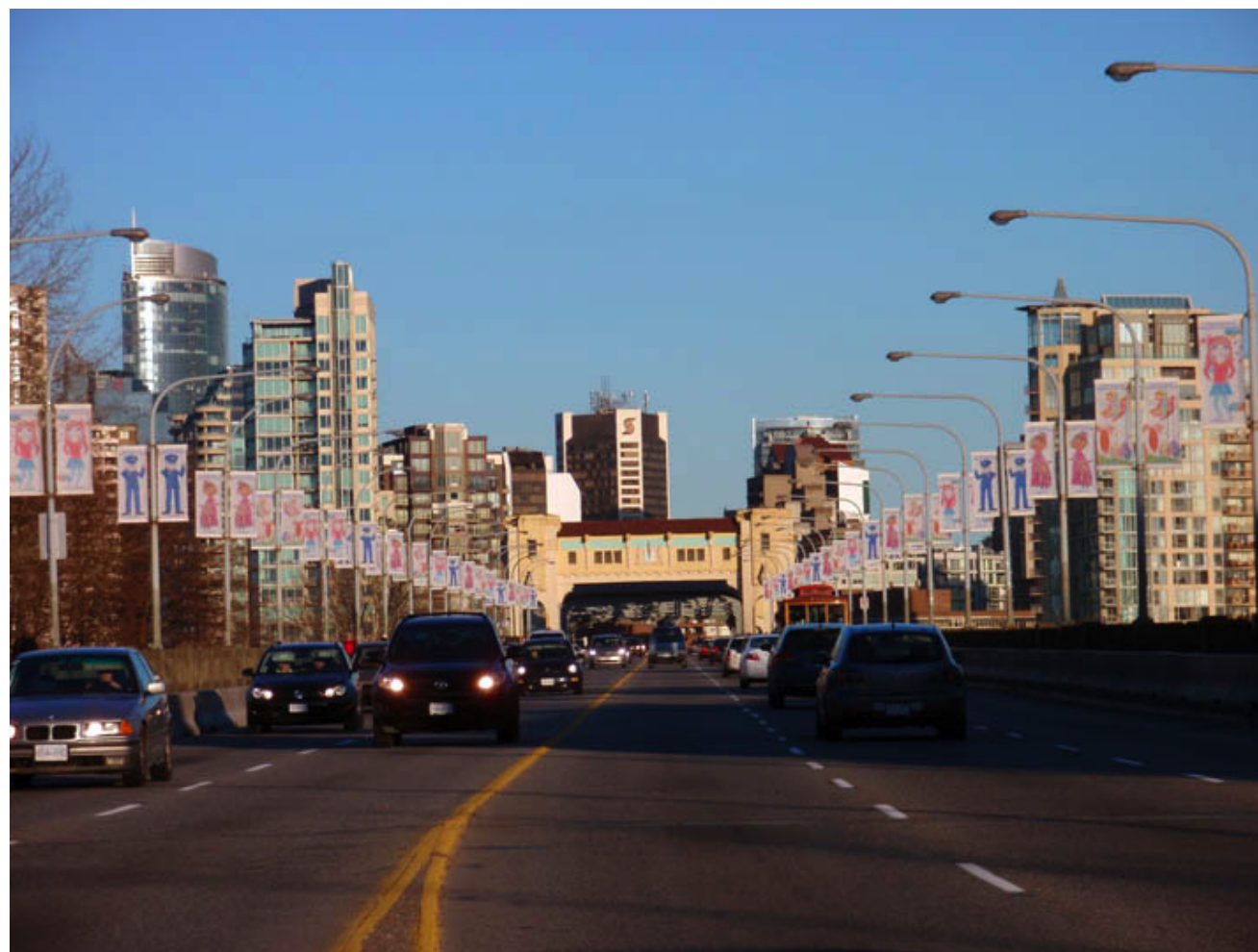
Colouring by Staff (Granville Loops) above, recoloured towers below:

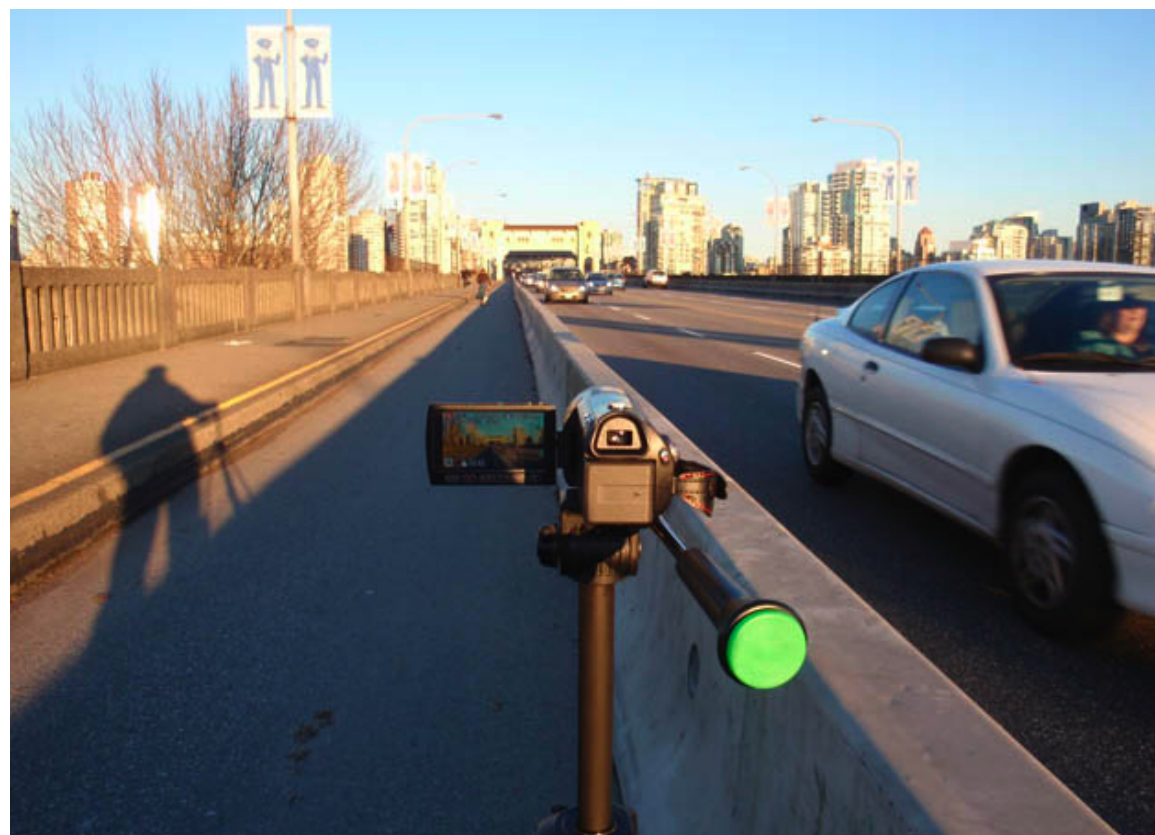


Page 9 of the staff report and the final Panel 6 (public consultation) show a misleading view from Burrard Bridge from a height that would never be seen by an observer. This view appears to be a helicopter point of view, and was discussed in detail at the Citizen's Forum on Jan11th (additional photos from the field, around car level).



Above: rendering used by staff, higher than car level (helicopter / floating view) Below: photos from several points along and before the Burrard Bridge



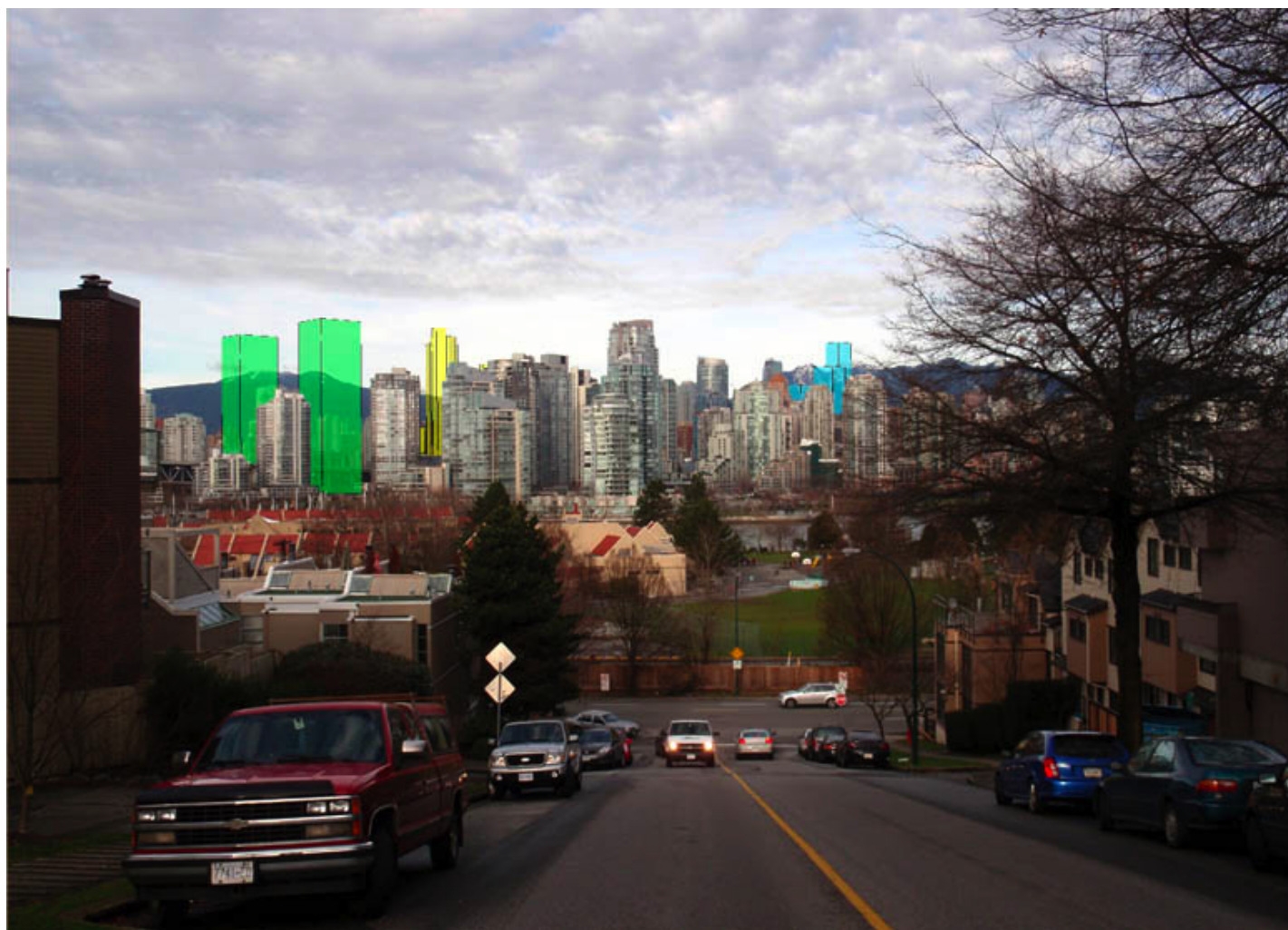


All in all, not a single neutral or accurate 3D computer rendering was used in the staff panels for the 3 public consultation sessions in October of 2010. Furthermore, planning staff refused to release the computer model to the public and hence none of the images presented by staff are independently verifiable. There was no information given about the graphics rendering options, material properties, camera location and direction, field of view (zoom/wide angle settings), time of day and light settings. The only way to do any computer modelling for the public was to start from scratch and build all of the proposals based very limited information released on the sites and heights. Google Earth was of help



here as it allows the incorporation of custom built models into 3D. Planning staff could have and should have released geopositioned models of all of the proposals for public scrutiny. Members of the public were forced to volunteer their own time and expertise for this task. The main point is that the City has virtually failed to provide any support to facilitate an independent review of its policies and recommendations on "Vancouver Views." This is a serious matter.

The introduction of high towers into parts of the city away from the CBD has a significant impact on public views. The 'dome policy' and the existing view corridors have shaped Vancouver's skyline over the last few decades. A change in policy will have a significant impact on many public views. There is also a danger that very high buildings such as the proposed Burrard Gateway towers and the Granville Loops towers will be used as precedents in the future to justify much taller buildings away from the CBD.



Oak and 7th, photo match & simulation (wireframe match below)

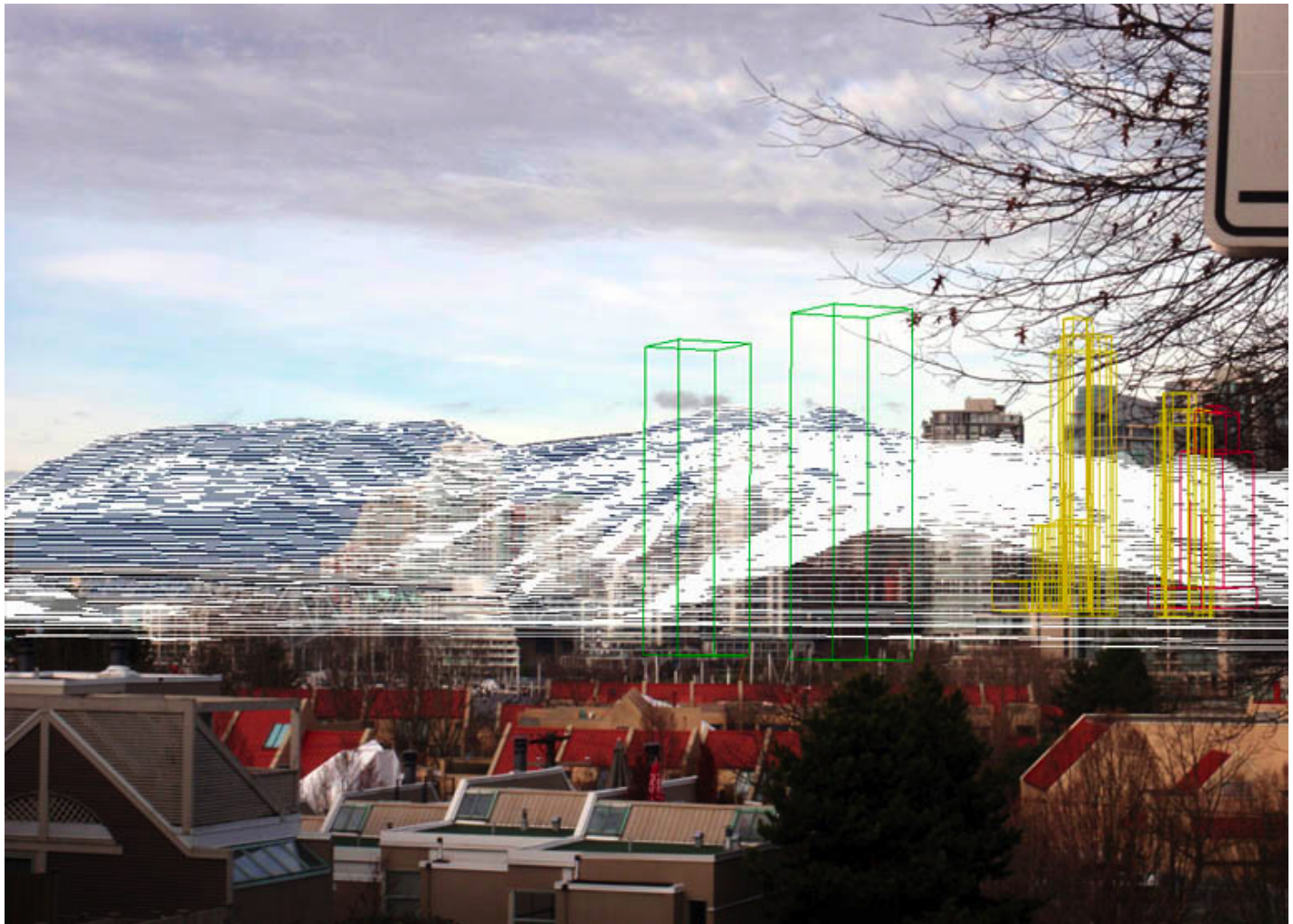






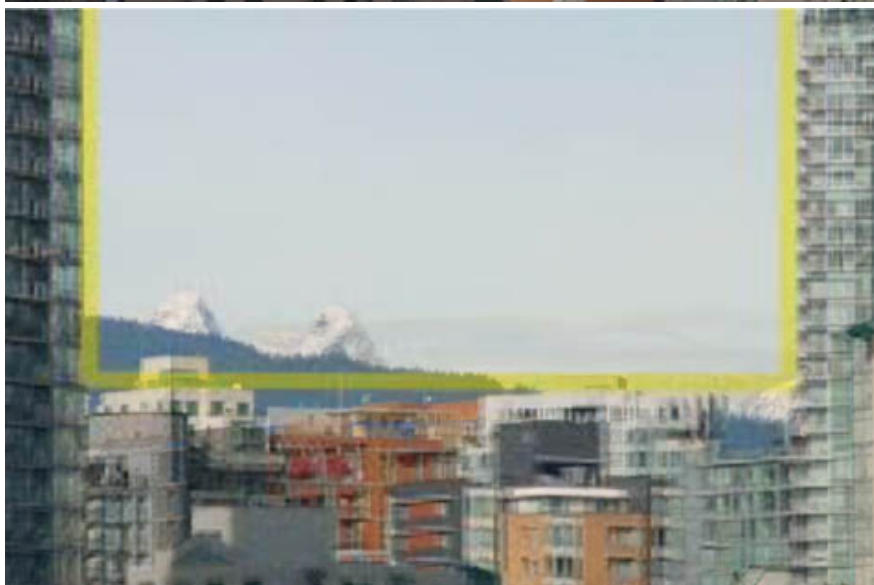
Oak and 7th East side, photo match & simulation (wireframe match below)





The example held up by staff as an example of view corridors in the Staff Presentation on December 16th also illustrates problems with the current implementation of the view corridor policy (page 5&6 of staff presentation). View Corridor B1 from Charleson Seawall to the Lions has the intrusion of a mechanical structure on a building into the view cone. The view corridor policy would be more effective by specifying a maximum height above sea level for each site (or parts of a site where any part of a building is permitted to reach but not exceed this ceiling). Absolute building heights are also problematic because of differences in grade on a building site; it's difficult to determine which point should be used to measure building height. As already noted, a full review of the effectiveness of all viewcones with current photographs is highly recommended.

Photos: December 2010 photo and view cone (first image shows recent December 2010 photo, right image is an overlay of the recent photo with staff presentation image from 2009)



Noted Metric / Imperial conversion errors (see <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/views/listing.htm> for each view cone description; please double check all figures)

View 10: 3.84m is NOT 104 feet, 30.06m is NOT 190'

View 12.1.1: 450' is NOT 109.31m

View 12.1.2: 450' is NOT is NOT 109.31m

View 12.1.3: 450' is NOT 109.31m, 41.05m is NOT 226'

View 12.2: 126.68m is NOT 507', 41.64m is NOT 228'

View 20: 102.6m is NOT 428'

View 21: 98.64m is NOT 415 feet , 45.30m is NOT 240 feet

View 22: 56.5m is NOT 277 feet, 32.2m is NOT 197 feet

View 27: 54.44 is NOT 270 feet, 30.06m is NOT 190 feet

View 3.1: 78.52m is NOT 349 feet

View 3.2.1: 145.88m is NOT 570 feet

View 3.2.2: 170.27m is NOT 650 feet

View 9.1: 26.68m is NOT 507 feet , 34.63m is NOT 20 feet

View 9.2.1: 161.73m is NOT 622 feet

View 9.2.2: 126.68m is NOT 507 feet

View A: 107.78 is NOT 445 feet

View B1: 82.18m is NOT 361 feet

View B2: 137.96m is NOT 544 feet

View C1: 82.18m is NOT 361 feet, 17.26m is NOT 148 feet

View C2.1: 168.13m is NOT 643 feet

View C2.2: 137.96m is NOT 544 feet

View D1: 106.87m is NOT 442 feet, 5.05m is NOT 108 feet

View E1: 122.41m is NOT 493 feet, 21.83m is NOT 163 feet

View E2.1: 81.87 is NOT 360 feet, 21.83m is NOT 163 feet