

When the Community is the Classroom

An engaged semester for SFU students contributing to visions for False Creek South's future

Mieke Boecker, PIBC Student Member

In the fall of 2024, SFU's Master of Resource Management (Planning) students partnered with False Creek South Neighbourhood Association (FCSNA) for a community-centred course in the theory, practice, and methods of what's driving and what's hindering effective community planning today. Taught by Dr. Meg Holden, the course, *Sustainable Community and Regional Planning*, offered a view into the legacy, relevance, and critical moment currently faced in Vancouver's False Creek South (FCS) neighbourhood for the future of community planning. Students contributed by researching four areas of planning that complement FCSNA's interests and planning principles.

FCS was established as an experimental, socially-mixed neighbourhood on reclaimed industrial lands in the 1970s, and has since become well-known for its affordability and liveability. The liveable character of the neighbourhood resulted from the intentional establishment of equal portions of co-op housing, strata condominiums, and non-profit rental housing (one third each) and providing a range of unit sizes to meet the needs of a diverse demographic, including families, seniors, and singles.

The dilemma which the FCS community faces is that most of the leases for the buildings in FCS are due to expire over the next 10 to 20 years, with some already having expired without guarantee for lease renewal. This has generated a lot of anxiety around housing security in the community.

*RePlan was established as a committee of FCSNA in 2010 to negotiate lease renewals as well as enter into dialogue about land use and community planning decisions to preserve and enhance the FCS community during redevelopment. To date, the issue of lease renewals has not been resolved, putting collaboration between *RePlan and the City on hold. Despite this, *RePlan continues to explore options for independent, community-based planning projects.

We were lucky to have Robyn Chan, Project Manager of *RePlan, as our community contact throughout the semester to guide the direction of the four projects. Robyn both works and lives in FCS with her family, and her insights on the community's values and aspirations were invaluable.

The Student Projects

To complement the community planning work being carried out by *RePlan, students contributed to four areas of research:

- Inclusive, engaged, and self-determined governance in FCS
- Development of more-than-human nature
- Redesign that reflects culture, diversity, and community
- Blue-green, climate smart resilience

The projects were developed and refined from October to December and a final ideas mixer was held in January to present and discuss each group's findings.

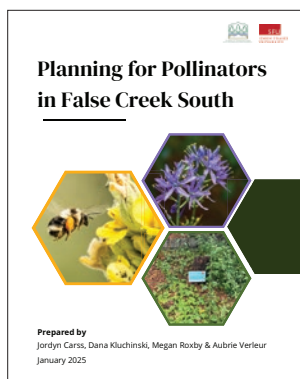
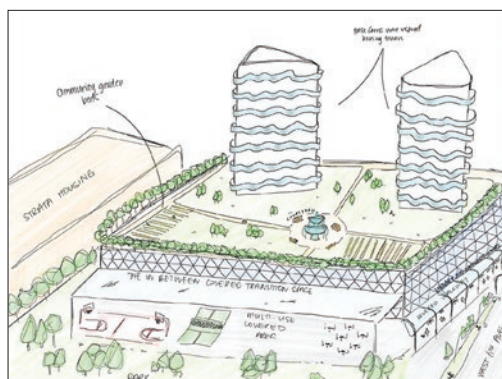
RISE2050, by Nadia Drissi El-Bouzaidi, Saaib Choudhry, and Jiaqi Zhang, investigated how sea-level rise could be factored into planning in FCS. The group conducted a systematic case study review of coastal adaptation plans from Canada, the U.S., Singapore, and the Netherlands. Care was taken to also consider Indigenous worldviews, values, and approaches by reviewing the three Host Nations' climate action plans.

Adaptive trigger-based planning stood out as a worthy approach to look into. This approach has been in use in Santa Cruz, California, and involves identifying thresholds or tipping points that trigger a dramatic increase in vulnerability. Continuous monitoring of identified triggers allows for a more coordinated response. For example, monitoring the distance between a cliff's edge and a walking path, beach width, and sea cave thickness provides a mechanism by which planners and community members can make more informed decisions about the state of the surrounding environment and potential community impacts.

Another way in which we need to plan for our communities is by thinking carefully about how to balance planning for density with maintaining community character. *Re-Imagining Community Living*, by Christina Gemino, Alli Di Giovanni, Sophie Heller-Marx, and Sara Yip, provided a design vision for 600 Moberly Road, an existing parcel of City-owned land in FCS. The vision proposes developing a public

"I was so impressed by the thoughtfulness and work that each group put into their reports and presentations. Each was grounded in what they had heard from community members, incorporated wisdom from the Host Nations on whose land we live, and were both practical and imaginative. We were presented with an incredible suite of opportunities, and so many new ideas to say "yes" to, and incorporate into our collective visioning. As a community organizer, it was so meaningful to see how each group engaged with the community and created space for residents to see themselves in the future of their neighbourhood. That is no easy task, and I'm grateful to everyone for seeing the value in taking the time and effort to engage with residents, and for gifting our community with new possibilities."

– Robyn Chan, *RePlan Project Manager



1 Reimagining Community Living:
The library and the public and private greenspace and plazas and the podium resident towers

2 Planning for Pollinators in False Creek South Cover

3 FCS Field Trip October 2024



library building with affordable housing units up top in addition to a plaza and community greenspace, which will benefit not just FCS residents but also surrounding neighbourhoods.

Vivid “imagine it” narratives and visual depictions of the proposed design helped bring the vision to life. Graham McGarva, a long-term resident of FCS and architect by profession, praised them as “the best architectural renderings that I’ve seen in years”, owing to their playful and intentionally imprecise design which creates room for a community to see itself reflected in the design and is malleable enough for it to continue to be shaped by the community it is proposed to.

Following the technically and visually adept work of the Moberly Drive vision, *Rooted in Place* ventured into the more abstract realm of the planning process. Jordan Wilson, Piper French, Roz Shepherd, and I sought to identify how *RePlan can continue to mobilize support in the community planning process for FCS. This was done by first identifying the main interest groups that would need to be taken into consideration (FCS community,

Host Nations, Vancouver public, and the City of Vancouver) and researched engagement approaches relevant to each group.

To build social capital within the FCS community, also known as bonding, a photovoice initiative was recommended, as this could simultaneously serve as a way to collect data on community planning values. The engagement approach that was recommended for bridging social ties with the Host Nations on whose land FCS resides, was to plan a community feast, fostering grounded human connection through the sharing of food. The most feasible option for engaging with the Vancouver public was identified as setting up a booth on the sea wall to engage with passersby and inform them about how they can get involved in the community planning process. As engagement with the City of Vancouver is currently on pause, the recommendation for engagement centered around *RePlan continuing to advocate for values-based planning that demonstrates benefits for both the FCS community and the City of Vancouver as a whole, considering that FCS is on public land.

Planning for Pollinators, by Jordyn Carss, Dana Kluchinski, Aubrie Verleur, and Megan Roxby, took a deep dive into the world of more-than-human planning, which advocates for the creation, restoration, and enhancement of natural areas not just for human benefit, but also that of non-human species. The relational approach it fosters between humans and the natural environment means that it also offers opportunities for collaboration and relationship building with local First Nations, whose world-views are grounded in this kinship relationality.

Pollinator habitat planning is already underway in FCS, with several volunteer groups working to create a pollinator corridor across the neighbourhood. The report provided *RePlan with a comprehensive overview of the City of Vancouver’s greenspace and biodiversity commitments, a compendium of pollinator habitat best management practices, and a list of funding opportunities, in the hope that this will equip them with a strong argument for the inclusion of pollinator habitat in the redevelopment of the FCS community, one that the City of Vancouver won’t be able to ignore.

At the end of the day, the four projects not only shed light on the technical question they sought to answer (“how does this approach help *RePlan make a stronger case for its planning principles in the redevelopment of FCS?”) but they generally addressed the question of what constitutes community resilience. The answer seems to lie in the acknowledgement and celebration of diversity, whether that be the diversity of unit sizes or amenity spaces, interest groups invited to the planning table, environmental indicators to guide adaptation planning, or non-human species being factored into planning decisions. Robyn Chan (*RePlan Project Manager) summed this sentiment up nicely at the end of the ideas mixer in saying that the projects reminded her that “the door is open to almost anything”.

Mieke is a second year Master of Resource Management (Planning) student at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include nature-based solutions, urban forest management, and equity planning.