



Project Green Bloc

Executive Summary



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Project Green Bloc is about engaging neighbours in community-based workshops and projects designed to lower collective ecological footprints.

Run in the Riley Park neighbourhood of Vancouver from 2013-2015, Project Green Bloc was a neighbourhood's response to the Greenest City Action Plan's goal to lower the City's collective ecological footprint by 33% by 2020. Supported by national not-for-profit Evergreen, residents of the Project Green Bloc neighbourhood successfully reduced their collective ecological footprint by 12%, and were part of the first coordinated ecological footprint measurement in the City of Vancouver.

Research from several disciplines demonstrates the need for this type of project. The Vancouver Foundation's Connections and Engagement report on social isolation, as well as subsequent policy initiatives from the City of Vancouver's Engaged City Task Force, show that individuals are more likely to engage in city building activities and collective action when they are connected to their neighbours. Dr. Jennie Moore's research on the ecological footprint establishes simple, achievable ways in which individuals can change their behaviour to lower their ecological footprints to one-planet living. These two principles are the basis for Project Green Bloc.

In the City of Vancouver, there are multiple mechanisms for creating community projects – including the Vancouver Foundation's Neighbourhood Small Grants and Neighbourhood Matching Funds – but there are limited resources for neighbourhood leaders who are keen to lead longer-term, environmentally-based projects. Project Green Bloc sought to address that gap between demonstrated neighbourhood interest and capacity, and a lack of available resources.

Project components of Project Green Bloc included intensive ecological footprint surveys, held over a 14- or 28-day period, at the beginning and end of the project cycle. The survey was developed by Dr. Jennie Moore for the purposes of Project Green Bloc. Residents also engaged in a series of introductory dialogues and skills-building workshops designed to set the stage and teach ecological footprint reduction methods. Several physical placemaking projects were created, including pollinator-friendly planters, a community bulletin board and a street mural at the intersection of 23rd Ave and Columbia St. Finally, twenty households have had ongoing discussions on street greening and traffic calming strategies that can be presented to the City of Vancouver.

A project like this was not without its challenges. Neighbours had to balance their commitment to the two-year pilot with competing interests from family and other commitments. Navigating the City of Vancouver's bureaucracy and permitting process made seemingly simple neighbourhood projects much more complicated. Additionally, a consistent funding source was difficult to secure.

Project Green Bloc demonstrated its value as a unique approach for building community within a framework of the ecological footprint and climate change issues. The ecological survey developed for the project is, as far as we know, the only survey of its kind, and deserves to be expanded and tested in neighbourhoods throughout Metro Vancouver.

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Recommendations

Based on key learnings, the following recommendations have been made:

Transportation

- Systematic road-pricing for all of the Lower Mainland; and/or
- Requesting that ICBC offer pay-as-you-drive insurance option, with significant savings or those who drive fewer kilometers
- Launch an education campaign that makes the true cost of parking transparent

Community Initiatives – Permitting Issues

- Create a mentorship model within the City for community-driven initiatives

Land Use

- Create an open process by which neighbourhoods can collaboratively design and recommend traffic calming and street greening measures in their area
- Permits be issued allowing road and laneway spaces to be converted to agricultural or park uses, including operation by an agricultural business

Community Engagement

- Create a training series and network that provides neighbours and interested individuals with the tools to lead community projects
- Create opportunities for local businesses and Business Improvement Associations to participate
- Concrete placemaking activities with low barriers to participation, particularly targeted at families and children, be an essential part of community programming

City of Vancouver

- The City of Vancouver should pioneer the use of Dr. Moore's ecological footprinting model, and invest significantly in digital tools and communications to challenge residents across Vancouver to do Project Green Bloc's household ecological footprint survey
- The City of Vancouver should invest resources in efforts to work with renters and residents of multi-dwelling buildings to test elements of Project Green Bloc in lower income areas
- That the City of Vancouver work with the federal government, under its renewed commitment to infrastructure building, to build capacity of cities across Canada to work with neighbourhoods committed to community building, greening and traffic calming, building on models developed in Project Green Bloc