



## UNA Advocacy on Neighbourhood Development

The University Neighbourhoods Association (UNA) provides services to and represents the 15,000 residents of UBC's residential neighbourhoods. In 2021 the UNA's elected Board of Directors formed a [Land Use Advisory Committee](#) to inform the Board's engagement with UBC in the Campus Vision 2050 planning process. The Committee has hosted a resident town hall; surveyed resident views on development and living in UBC neighbourhoods; and posed detailed questions about neighbourhood expansion to UBC's office of Campus and Community Planning (CCP). The UNA has drawn on its extensive engagement with residents in calling for UBC to prioritize sustainable, climate-responsible, affordable development at densities consistent with the current land-use plan.

How can you get involved?

- Share your ideas on neighbourhood development with the UNA, to assist our advocacy on your behalf: [a portal for comments and suggestions]
- Let the UBC Board of Governors know what you think of UBC's land-use planning proposals: [board.correspondence@ubc.ca](mailto:board.correspondence@ubc.ca)
- Let your MLA, David Eby, know what you think of UBC's land-use planning proposals: [david.eby.mla@leg.bc.ca](mailto:david.eby.mla@leg.bc.ca)
- Let UBC know what you think of their land-use planning proposals: <https://campusvision2050.ubc.ca/get-involved>

## Climate Action

UBC acknowledged in 2019 that we're facing a [climate emergency](#), and that the University must act decisively to cut carbon emissions and embrace climate resilience. UBC's [Climate Action Plan](#) sets ambitious goals for reducing the University's carbon footprint, with a focus on energy, construction, waste, and travel to and from campus. The Climate Action Plan highlights UBC's innovative use of mass-timber construction, development of a campus District Energy System, and support for a Skytrain extension to campus.

It's a bold and decisive plan, but it excludes UBC's residential neighbourhoods, where the majority of new construction will occur over the next thirty years. Rather than extending the University's climate leadership to neighbourhood development, the Campus Vision planning process has largely neglected the climate emergency and the need to plan for a low-carbon, climate resilient future.



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**The UNA's position:** UBC should pause the Campus Vision planning process until it can complete a comprehensive Climate Action Study and Plan that includes the University Neighbourhoods.

### **Affordability**

Students, faculty, staff, and area workers face a severe shortage of affordable housing near the University. Rents at UBC are among the highest in the Vancouver metro area, and rental vacancy rates are near zero. The [average purchase price for a basic apartment is close to \\$1.1 million](#), out of reach for most employees of the University. This is the highest anywhere in the Lower Mainland, and 32% higher than the average in Vancouver, the next most pricey municipality.

As of 2018, [49% of condominium units at UBC were not owner-occupied](#), the highest rate in Canada. This suggests that UBC condos have become a magnet for investment buyers, driving up housing prices for those seeking to purchase homes to live here. Residents suggest that many units sit vacant, though we can't know the full extent of the problem until UBC releases relevant data. It's important to note that Vancouver's ["Empty Homes Tax"](#) does not apply to UBC and the UEL, making area condos more attractive to speculators.

**The UNA's position:** UBC should prioritize the development of rental housing (at least 50%) in its neighbourhoods, as well as affordable purchase options for UBC affiliates. The University should actively discourage speculative investment, which drives up housing costs for all and feeds the region's affordability crisis.

### **Ecology and Green Space**

The Point Grey Peninsula, on the traditional, ancestral territory of the Musqueam people, is a rich, but fragile ecosystem, where forests meet the sea, eagles and owls nest precariously in some of the region's tallest trees, and threatened streams make their way around and through the dense development of the campus and residential neighbourhoods. The Campus Vision [Terms of Reference](#), with little consultation and no consideration of ecological or environmental impacts, call for a 50% increase in density for remaining neighbourhood development.

Future development should take account of the carrying capacity of the land and should prioritize a diverse "green infrastructure" within the neighbourhoods, including an abundance of trees on streets and pedestrian corridors, small and large parks, and ecologically nourishing connections with the surrounding forests and waterways.

**The UNA's position:** UBC should determine the ecological carrying capacity of its land before planning future development. The Campus Vision planning process should

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include detailed environmental impact studies for a range of development scenarios. The Campus Vision Terms of Reference should be revised to remove premature and arbitrary increases in density.

### **Affordable, Sustainable, Livable Density**

The University has advanced a plan to sharply increase housing density on its remaining land by building [up to thirty new towers](#), many over thirty stories tall, in developments at Stadium Road, Acadia Park, and on the edge of the Wesbrook neighbourhood. [Concrete and steel towers involve considerably more “embodied carbon”](#) than other housing forms, and directly contradict the University’s [Climate Action](#) goals. The proposed tower heights would preclude the use of [mass-timber construction](#), which tops out at around eighteen stories.

Many cities around the world have managed to achieve high densities in compact horizontal developments, with buildings averaging six to eight stories. Stacked townhouses, rowhouses, and carefully designed and sited apartment buildings can be dense, but also compatible with other goals, including frequent interaction of neighbours, “eyes on the street,” community-mindedness, the safety of children, and deterring property crime. Creatively landscaped roofs, courtyards, and public green spaces can contribute to community-building, water management, sustainable landscaping, and the green aesthetic valued by residents.

**The UNA’s position:** The University should draw on its faculty’s renowned expertise in urban planning, ecology, landscape architecture, and mass-timber engineering to design compact, green, human-scaled communities. These wood-based neighbourhoods should comprise a mix of low- and mid-rise apartment buildings, stacked townhomes, and mass-timber high-rises no higher than twenty stories.

### **Community Engagement Survey**

The UNA’s [Community Engagement Survey](#) drew a remarkable 876 responses, with residents expressing their appreciation of existing neighbourhoods and trepidation about the intensity and character of future development. Respondents emphasized the following priorities, for both existing and future neighbourhoods: trees, green space, and community-oriented space; low-rise construction and density without towers; the need for more retail, services, childcare, and schools, proportionate to the growing population; the need for more affordable housing with priority for those who work and study at UBC; emphasis on rental housing over market leasehold developments; and the importance of sustainability and sensitivity to local ecologies in current and future development.