

## Project title

Building neighbourhood social resilience for climate-related extreme events and emergency management

## Greenest City goal(s) supported

- Climate Leadership - Climate Adaptation Strategy goals
- Lighter Footprint

*Also supports: Emergency Management, Healthy City Strategy, & Engaged City Task Force*

## Project context, scope, and value to City

Context: Resilience is defined as the ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, or accommodate a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions. When referring to a social system, the term adaptive capacity is often used. The determinants of high capacity include, among others, kinship networks and strong local connections.

In 2012, a survey by the Vancouver Foundation found that 74% of Vancouverites know the first names of at least two of their immediate neighbours, however challenges remain. More than one-quarter believe they don't have anything to offer to civic life. Almost half see non-English speakers as not trying hard enough to participate in the community. Those aged 24 to 34 and people living in suites in houses reported higher rates of loneliness.<sup>1</sup>

Social resilience is about knowing and socializing with your neighbours, and having someone (or being someone) close by to call on in an extreme event – whether from an earthquake, flood, heat wave, or other major incident, or from a more localized crisis such as an illness or disability.

During past emergency situations, the most important sources of help before, during, and after the event were reported to be friends, family, and neighbours. A major survey of those directly affected by Superstorm Sandy in New York showed that about a third reached out to friends, family and neighbours for assistance in the aftermath of the storm, rising to 47% for people in extremely affected areas.<sup>2</sup> In an extreme event, municipal resources will be stretched– the strength of the community's adaptive capacity will reduce the draw on these resources and help residents “weather the storm.” Superstorm Sandy and the flooding in Calgary last summer are examples of the extreme weather events forecasted to occur more frequently in Vancouver due to

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<sup>1</sup> Vancouver Foundation (2012). Connections and Engagement.

<sup>2</sup> <http://100resilientcities.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/entry/resilience-begins-at-home>

## GREENEST CITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM - 2014 PROJECT

climate change. Improving our neighbourhood social resiliency will help us be better prepared.

Research Project Scope: The Scholar will research existing resources and best practices in neighbourhood social resiliency. The research will involve lessons learned from local initiatives and other jurisdictions.

To complement this research, the Scholar will support City staff to plan, recruit, execute, and assess a pilot in multi-unit residential buildings – with the goal to support neighbour interaction, linking to emergency preparedness and resilience building. The pilot will likely be a building-wide event conducted in collaboration with community partners.

How this research will help Vancouver become the Greenest City: Vancouver's Climate Adaptation Strategy is a priority action in both the Greenest City Plan and the Corporate Strategic Business Plan. Vancouver's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy proposes "no regret" actions – those that benefit the community regardless of the extent of climate change we eventually experience. Building neighbourhood social resilience is an example of this "no regret" approach. Whether or not Vancouver experiences the extent of climate change impacts that are forecasted, research indicates that people who are better connected to others are more likely to live longer, feel safer, recover from illnesses quicker and suffer less from conditions such as heart disease, depression, and even the common cold.<sup>3</sup>

The research undertaken by the Scholar will contribute to a larger City project to develop a neighbourhood resiliency toolkit. It will also be used to inform the development of enhanced public education strategies for the Emergency Management Office, diversifying the existing disaster preparedness education program to address weather related events. The Scholar's findings may also support the work of the Mayor's Engaged City Task Force.

### **Deliverables**

- A final report consisting of:
  - A summary of neighbourhood social resilience approaches from other jurisdictions
  - A summary inventory of existing key initiatives in Vancouver that contribute to building neighbourhood social resilience (e.g. Block Party program, Neighbourhood Small Grants, Emergency Preparedness workshops, Sharing Economy)
  - Key lessons from the pilot project
  - Recommendations to improve/enhance the work of Emergency Management in public education around disaster preparedness

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<sup>3</sup> Putnam, R. (2001) Bowling Alone. NY: Touchstone

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- A final presentation to the Sustainability Group, Emergency Management Office, Corporate Communications' Public Engagement Team, and/or other related departments/staff

### **Mentor department**

Sustainability Group

### **Candidate skill set/background**

- Excellent research and writing skills.
- Demonstrated interest in Climate Adaptation Planning/Emergency Preparedness is an asset.
- Demonstrated interest in community-building is an asset.
- Experience conducting stakeholder and/or public engagement is an asset.