



**Advancing Viable Community Benefits in Vancouver's Development Policy:
Strategic Lessons for Stakeholders and Practitioners**

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the implementation of Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Policy to provide actionable recommendations that balance developer feasibility with the delivery of meaningful, equitable outcomes for communities. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining in-depth interviews with developers (6), non-profits (7), and third-party monitors (3); economic multiplier modelling of 2023 project data; and case studies of two major developments: the New St. Paul's Hospital and the Ashley Mar Co-op.

Key Findings

- *Stakeholder Perspectives:* Perspectives are divided. Developers acknowledge the policy's intent but emphasize ambiguity, administrative burdens, and financial risks, advocating for a voluntary, incentive-based model. Social Enterprises support the policy's goals but criticize its weak implementation, citing tokenistic targets (10%) and structural barriers to accessing contracts. They demand higher ambition and earlier engagement. Third-Party Monitors confirm the 10% targets are feasible but act as essential facilitators, highlighting challenges like supply chain rigidity and subcontractor turnover.
- *Procurement Realities:* A stark divide exists. Services (cleaning, catering) are highly viable for local and social procurement. Construction materials (e.g. steel) are not, due to global supply chains and a limited certified supplier base. The narrow definition of "local" (City Core and Vancouver proper) is a major constraint.
- *Economic Impact:* Multiplier analysis proves the policy generates significant economic benefits in Vancouver. In 2023-24, the New St. Paul's Hospital generated an estimated \$73.99 million in local economic impact through employment and procurement. The Ashley Mar Co-op generated \$122.37 million, demonstrating how community-focused projects can catalyze greater local economic circulation.

Core Recommendations

- Eliminate ambiguity in policy language on phasing and reporting requirements to reduce developer risk.
- Expand the definition of "local" to Metro Vancouver and raise targets for services where market capacity allows.
- Retain independent monitors but mitigate conflicts of interest and improve data validation.
- Require the appointment of dedicated CBA coordinators within the development team and formal community engagement before project approval.
- Unbundle large contracts and create transparent project calendars to allow social enterprises to compete.
- Couple CBA obligations with developer incentives like density bonusing to build buy-in without diluting equity goals.

Vancouver's CBA Policy is a critical tool for inclusive development but must evolve from a symbolic gesture into a practical instrument. By adopting these reforms, the policy can provide the clarity developers need, and the ambition communities deserve, fulfilling its potential as a model for equitable urban growth.

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Advancing Viable Community Benefits in Vancouver's Development Policy: Strategic Lessons for Stakeholders and Practitioners

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, major cities across Canada have faced intensifying pressures to reconcile rapid urban growth with deepening social and economic inequality. Municipal governments—tasked with managing both development and equity goals—have increasingly turned to policy tools such as Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) to ensure that large-scale real estate and infrastructure projects yield public value (Wolf-Powers, 2010; De Barbieri, 2017). These agreements aim to secure tangible, localized benefits from private development, including employment opportunities, social procurement, community amenities, and inclusive economic outcomes (Gross, LeRoy, & Janis-Aparicio, 2005).

This research investigates the implementation and impacts of Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Policy, adopted in 2018, with a particular focus on local hiring and social procurement outcomes. CBAs are negotiated commitments among governments, developers, and community organizations that seek to embed equity-oriented provisions—such as local employment, contracting with equity-seeking businesses, and provision of affordable housing—into the development process (Salkin & Lavine, 2008). They are increasingly recognized in both academic and policy literatures as instruments for addressing the distributive inequalities of urban development (Fainstein, 2010; Angotti, 2008).

Municipalities such as Vancouver have generally adopted pro-growth planning approaches, streamlining approval processes and enabling rezoning and densification to attract investment and expand housing supply (Peck & Tickell, 2002). While this growth orientation facilitates construction and economic activity, it creates pressures for municipalities to secure public benefits without disincentivizing development. CBAs have emerged as a pragmatic strategy to balance these objectives—leveraging private investment to deliver social value without resorting to new taxation or regulatory challenges (Hackworth, 2007; Silver, 2021).

Vancouver's CBA Policy mandates that large developments over 45,000 square metres meet specific thresholds for inclusive hiring and procurement. Social procurement is defined as the intentional purchasing of goods and services from enterprises that generate demonstrable social value—such as non-profits, cooperatives, or equity-denied-owned businesses (City of Vancouver, 2018). The policy also mandates that at least 10% of new jobs created through eligible projects must be filled by members of equity-denied groups, including Indigenous Peoples, racialized individuals, immigrants and refugees, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ persons, and people with disabilities. These objectives are aligned with the City's broader Equity Framework and Healthy City Strategy, reinforcing Vancouver's commitment to social sustainability and inclusive economic growth (City of Vancouver, 2022; City of Vancouver, 2015).

Three core performance targets define the policy: (1) 10% of new employment opportunities must be filled by individuals from local equity-denied communities; (2) 10% of procurement spending must be directed to businesses based in Vancouver or Metro Vancouver; and (3) 10% of procurement must go to certified social value or equity-denied-owned enterprises. A single contract may contribute to multiple targets if it qualifies under more than one category. These requirements apply across the entire lifecycle of development—from rezoning and permitting through construction and post-occupancy—ensuring that equity considerations remain embedded throughout the process (City of Vancouver, 2018).

The central aim of this report is to assess how Vancouver's CBA policy can be refined to support both community outcomes and project feasibility. Rather than treating equity and growth as conflicting objectives, the report explores ways to align developer incentives with social impact goals through policy design, institutional support, and targeted investment in local supplier and workforce development. This pragmatic orientation reflects a broader academic and practitioner consensus that CBAs must be operationalized in ways that are both enforceable and adaptable (De Barbieri, 2017; Fainstein, 2010).

Despite its ambitions, the effectiveness of Vancouver's CBA Policy remains under-evaluated. This research addresses that gap by drawing on a mixed-methods data collection, incorporating stakeholder interviews, procurement and employment data, and economic multiplier modelling to examine how CBAs in Vancouver are influencing local economic circulation and community well-being, and to identify opportunities for reform. The methodology is designed to allow for both quantitative benchmarking and qualitative

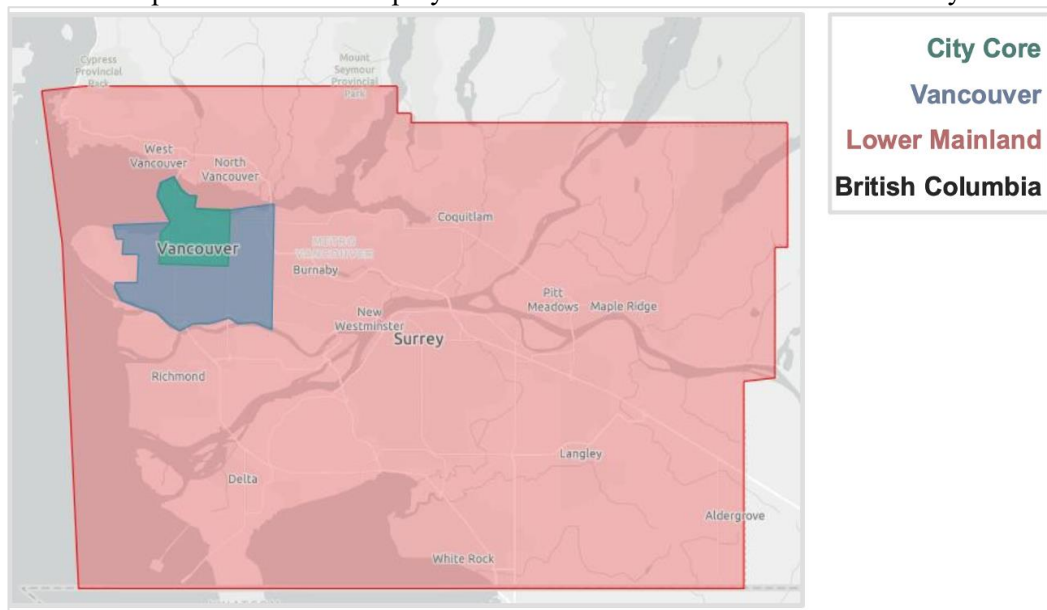
contextualization of findings. The study will establish a baseline of employment and procurement practices focusing on two major developments subject to CBA monitoring: (1) New St. Paul's Hospital (119,807 m²), reporting since 2021; and (2) Ashley Mar Co-op redevelopment (48,458 m²), reporting since 2022. Findings from these sites will be mapped against Vancouver's policy frameworks to evaluate the extent to which they are advancing municipal goals related to equity, social sustainability, and climate action.

The first step involves a thorough review of the City of Vancouver's CBA Policy to establish a clear understanding of its requirements for local and equity-denied employment, local procurement, and social value procurement. For each project, disaggregated data is available on: *Workforce demographics*, with particular attention to equity-denied populations; *Local versus non-local employment patterns*, to assess the geographic sourcing of labour; *Types and scale of procurement spending*, including supplier origin and ownership structure.

Equity-seeking groups are defined as self-identified communities that have historically faced unequal access to opportunities such as employment and education. These groups encompass Indigenous Peoples, racialized and visible minorities, immigrants and refugees, women and gender-diverse individuals, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, persons with mental or physical health challenges, persons with disabilities, and those experiencing multiple barriers to employment.

Localized employment and procurement are defined based on a geographic hierarchy beginning with the City Core, then expanding to the City of Vancouver, the Lower Mainland, and finally the province of British Columbia. Developers are expected to pursue "best efforts" to source locally in that order, visually depicted in Figure 1 below (City of Vancouver, 2025).

Figure 1. Localized procurement and employment as defined in Vancouver's CBA Policy



For CBA-compliant projects, compliance data is tracked through regular monthly and annual reporting to the City, with documentation of challenges encountered and any requests for additional data. In this study, 2023 data will be used since the 2024 data is yet forthcoming. The data has been collected using the City of Vancouver's existing CBA reporting templates and the developer submission processes already in use under the CBA Policy. This approach ensures alignment with existing reporting protocols.

In addition to administrative data on employment and procurement from selected development projects, this study incorporates qualitative evidence through a set of semi-structured stakeholder interviews, which help to contextualize implementation dynamics. These are organized around three domains of inquiry, including interviews with (a) *Developers* who are currently engaged and not engaged in projects subject to Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy, focusing on perceived cost implications, administrative challenges and the clarity of implementation mechanisms. Participants will be identified in coordination with City of Vancouver staff and selected based on their role in active and non-active CBA projects.

Further, we will also solicit perspectives from **(b) Non-Profit and Community representatives**. This component of the research involves semi-structured interviews with community-based organizations and social enterprises that have engaged directly¹ with the City of Vancouver’s CBA Policy. Participants will be selected based on demonstrated involvement in one or more of the following domains: (i) successful award and execution of CBA-related procurement contracts; (ii) submission of bids for procurement opportunities that were ultimately unsuccessful; (iii) facilitation of employee placement or hiring on CBA-designated project sites; and (iv) participation in the design, oversight, or ongoing refinement of the policy through formal mechanisms such as Project Specific Working Groups or municipal advisory bodies.

Furthermore, to evaluate the structural capacity of Vancouver’s procurement ecosystem and the feasibility of meeting the procurement-related thresholds set out in the City’s CBA Policy, this research will include targeted interviews with the, **(c) Third-party monitoring agencies** assigned to two major CBA-compliant development projects: the Ashley Mar redevelopment and the New St. Paul’s Hospital project. These monitors are tasked with advising developers, tracking compliance with CBA provisions, and reporting performance metrics to the City of Vancouver. As such, they are uniquely situated to provide detailed insights into the operational and market dynamics that influence CBA implementation at the project level. By triangulating data from official records, public sources, and stakeholder interviews, the research will generate a robust, multi-dimensional view of employment and procurement in CBA development projects. The interview data analysis process is detailed in Section 2A of the Annex.

Additionally, to evaluate the economic impacts of the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Policy, identifying appropriate economic multipliers that reflect the ripple effects generated by local and socially oriented enterprises is essential. Such multipliers are particularly effective in capturing the broader economic contributions of these entities, including indirect and induced effects. Existing research has yielded relatively consistent findings on the multiplier effects of local and social value businesses. For example, a 2023 Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) study showed how small, independent retailers strengthen local economies, finding that on average, consumer spending at small firms produces six times more local recirculation than at multinationals. Supporting this, a 2013 CUPE-BC and Civic Economics report, *Independent BC*, comparing 12 B.C. businesses with 130 external firms, found local retailers reinvest 45% of revenue locally, versus 17% for non-local chains; restaurants retained 65% versus 30% for chains. These data produced a three-round multiplier of 1.74 from the 45% reinvestment rate. Similarly, Patel and Martin (2011), in a study for the Maine Center for Economic Policy, found every \$100 spent at a locally owned business generated an additional \$58 locally. They projected that a modest 10% shift toward local enterprises in Portland, Maine, would add \$127 million in economic activity and create 784 jobs, with an implied multiplier of 2.11. Social value businesses—enterprises investing in community well-being, workforce diversity, and public policy goals—deliver comparable benefits, though their impacts are harder to capture with standard metrics such as GDP or employment. The World Economic Forum’s 2024 report stresses that spillovers, distributional effects, and positive externalities are often omitted from evaluations, while the lack of standardized impact accounting continues to limit robust assessment.

In the present study, the economic impact of the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Policy is captured using three multiplier formulas detailed in Section 1A of the Annex, each estimating the contribution of a specific mechanism: employment, local procurement, and social procurement, applying economic multipliers to assess how money circulates and generates additional value in the local economy because of the policy. The magnitude of impact depends on the extent to which employment and revenue are additional—i.e., would not have occurred without the policy.

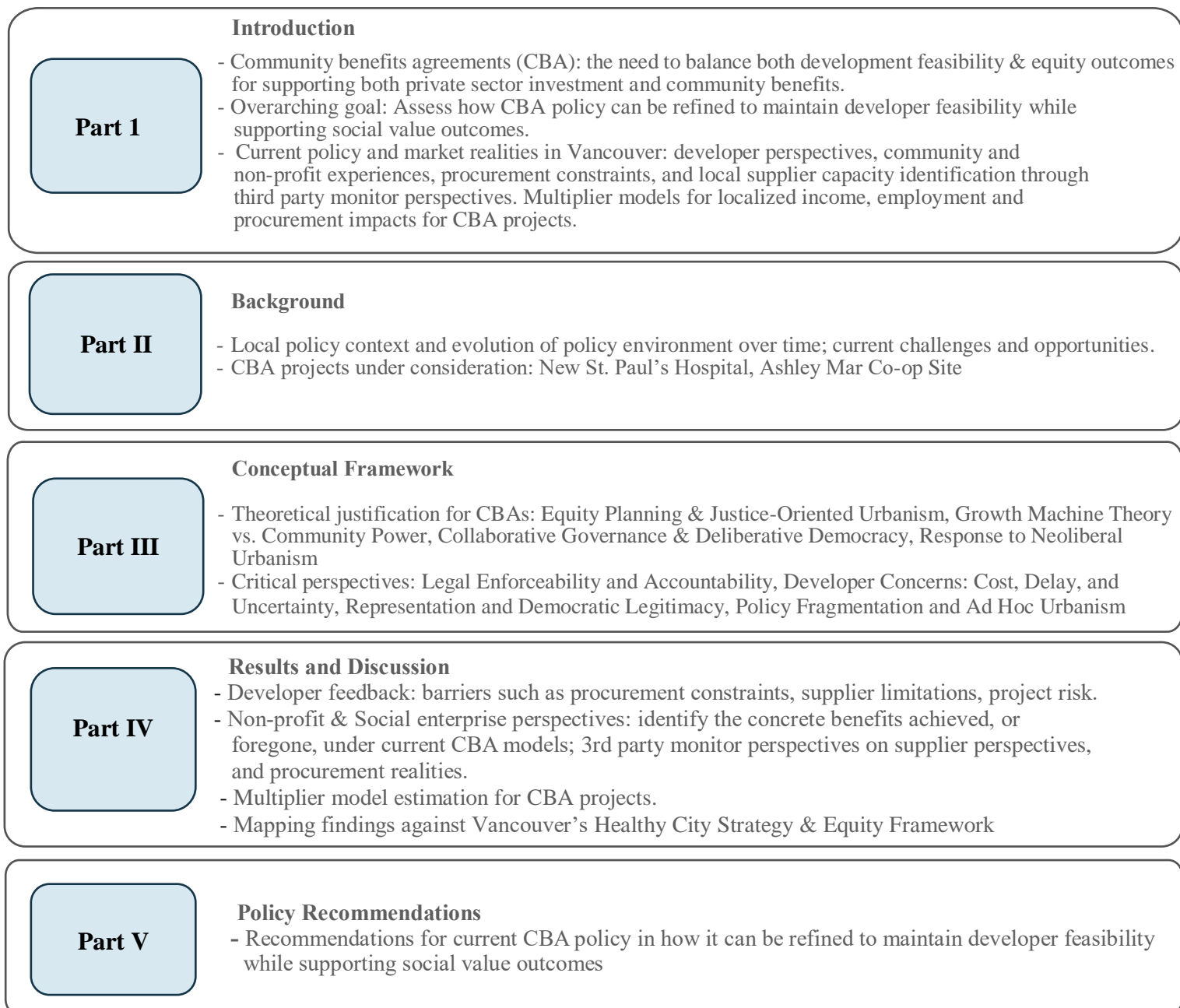
Ultimately, the study provides a critical foundation for refining Vancouver’s CBA model. It identifies key leverage points where policy, implementation, and industry practice can be better aligned, and offers practical recommendations to stakeholders seeking to scale equitable development. By grounding theoretical

¹Candidate organizations will be identified through contact lists maintained by City of Vancouver staff, documentation submitted through official CBA monitoring reports, and consultation with networks of local social enterprises.

commitments to inclusion in the realities of development economics and governance, the report aims to inform policy refinements that are both ambitious and achievable.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Section 2 analyzes Vancouver's CBA policy framework, highlighting its integration of equity, reconciliation, and local economic development goals, and situates it within broader provincial and national policy contexts. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the rationale for CBAs, including both supportive and critical perspectives. Section 4 synthesizes developer and stakeholder insights on policy design, procurement barriers, and market constraints. Section 5 explores options for refining CBA mechanisms in practice, including procurement adjustments, supplier development strategies, and policy flexibility. Section 6 concludes with recommendations for policymakers, planners, and community coalitions seeking to align development incentives with inclusive, equitable outcomes. Figure 2 below details the outline of the 5 sections of this report.

Figure 2. Structure of the 5 substantive sections



2. BACKGROUND

The City of Vancouver introduced its CBA policy in 2018, positioning it as a vehicle for inclusive economic development, local hiring, and social procurement—particularly on projects involving City-owned land or receiving significant public investment. The policy reflects a broader municipal shift toward aligning growth-oriented planning practices with redistributive objectives, as articulated in the City’s Equity Framework (2022), Healthy City Strategy (2015), and reconciliation commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

The CBA policy is structured around three core performance thresholds: first, 10% of all new employment generated through eligible development projects must be filled by individuals from equity-denied groups; second, 10% of procurement spending must be directed toward businesses based in Vancouver or the Metro Vancouver region; and third, an additional 10% must be allocated to certified social value suppliers or businesses owned by members of equity-denied communities. These provisions are mandatory for developments over 45,000 square metres and must be operationalized from the rezoning phase onward. Developers are required to submit a CBA implementation plan prior to permit issuance, appoint a third-party monitor, and establish a Project Specific Working Group to oversee delivery across the full project lifecycle—from rezoning through post-occupancy.

The City defines equity-denied communities to include Indigenous Peoples, racialized individuals, immigrants and refugees, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ persons, people with disabilities, and youth—populations that have historically faced systemic barriers to economic participation and access to development benefits. Vancouver’s application of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) further informs CBA design, ensuring that intersecting social identities and structural disadvantages are accounted for in hiring and procurement processes. Social procurement forms a central pillar of the policy. Developers are encouraged to contract with non-profits, co-operatives, Indigenous businesses, and certified social enterprises to fulfill procurement requirements. The rationale for this approach is supported by emerging evidence that localized and socially inclusive supply chains produce broader economic and social returns. For example, research by LOCO BC (2019) demonstrates that 64% of revenue spent on local businesses remains within the provincial economy, reinforcing arguments for localized, equity-based procurement as a strategy for community wealth-building.

In parallel, the policy emphasizes inclusive employment within sectors that have historically been marked by occupational segregation and limited access for equity-denied groups. The construction industry in British Columbia—where the CBA policy is most frequently applied—employs approximately 234,700 workers but remains underrepresented in terms of gender and racial equity. Women account for only 14% of the workforce, Indigenous Peoples 6%, and youth 12%, highlighting persistent labor market barriers (Community Savings Credit Union, 2021). The CBA’s inclusive hiring targets are therefore intended not only as redistributive mechanisms but also as structural interventions in workforce development.

At the provincial level, the Government of British Columbia has implemented a complementary CBA framework through BC Infrastructure Benefits (BCIB), a Crown corporation established in 2018. BCIB administers CBA provisions on designated public infrastructure projects, serving as the employer of record and overseeing training, recruitment, and workplace support for local and equity-seeking workers. This model reinforces the strategic use of CBAs to address labor shortages while advancing employment equity.

Vancouver’s policy also incorporates reconciliation commitments through the inclusion of Indigenous participation targets. CBAs are framed as instruments for economic self-determination and Indigenous rights recognition, with targeted procurement and hiring pathways supporting Indigenous businesses and workers. These provisions reflect the City’s alignment with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), translating high-level reconciliation principles into enforceable development practices.

Although less developed in policy terms, environmental and climate justice dimensions are increasingly salient to Vancouver’s CBA framework. The City’s Climate Emergency Action Plan (2020) calls for equity-centered implementation of green policies, and CBAs offer a potential platform for integrating sustainability goals—such as energy efficiency and green job creation—into the development process. Transit-oriented

developments and low-carbon construction are key areas where CBAs may be used to couple climate action with social inclusion.

The policy architecture is further shaped by insights from urban regime theory and growth machine critiques. These perspectives recognize that, in the absence of formal redistributive mechanisms, growth coalitions often dominate development decision-making. CBAs provide one pathway for local communities to influence those decisions by embedding enforceable conditions into the development approval process. This represents a shift from reactive consultation toward proactive, negotiated equity measures.

Finally, Vancouver's CBAs contribute to broader strategies of Community Wealth Building, a policy orientation that emphasizes local economic retention, democratic ownership, and long-term community stewardship of resources. By linking major capital investments to local labor markets and enterprise ecosystems, CBAs operationalize CWB principles in a way that is concrete, measurable, and tied to development timelines.

In summary, Vancouver's CBA policy represents an effort to translate equity planning theory and municipal policy objectives into operational tools for inclusive development. While not without implementation challenges, explored further in the following sections, the policy provides a practical framework for embedding social and economic equity into the city's land use and investment strategies. The remainder of this study examines how Vancouver's CBA policy is implemented in practice, focusing on employment and procurement outcomes across two major development projects, while also drawing on stakeholder insights to identify opportunities for strengthening the policy.

2.1 CBA Projects in Vancouver

This section outlines the characteristics of the development projects selected for analysis, including both those covered by the City of Vancouver's Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) Policy. It provides background on each project's scope, timeline, and context, establishing the foundation for subsequent comparative analysis of employment and procurement practices.

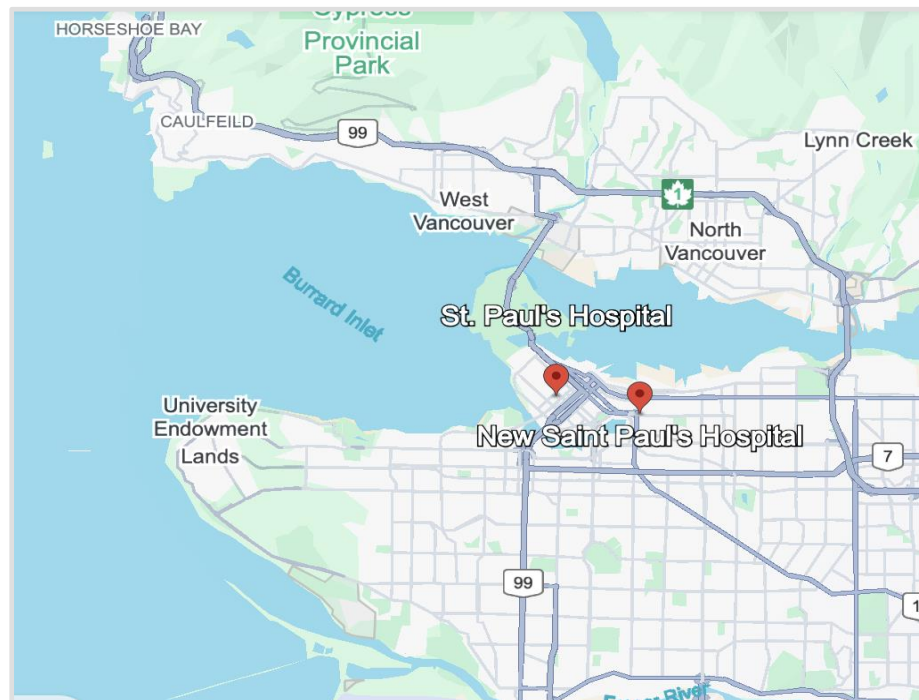
2.1.1. New St. Paul's Hospital

The New St. Paul's Hospital and Health Campus (NSPH) project is the first development project in Vancouver to be subject to the City's Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) Policy, enacted in 2018. The NSPH is a \$2.17 billion redevelopment project located at 1002 Station Street in Vancouver's False Creek Flats. Led by Providence Health Care and designed and constructed by PCL Constructors Westcoast Inc., and encompasses an 18.4-acre site, featuring an 11-storey, 548-bed acute care hospital. The project began in 2021 and the construction phase of the project is projected to be completed in summer 2026, with the hospital expected to open in 2027. Geared at helping the most vulnerable people in Vancouver, the site will also be home to several leading provincial programs and referral centers including programs for heart and lung care, renal disorders, eating disorders, specialty surgeries and transplants. The project is also expected to create 8,523 direct jobs and an additional 5,383 indirect jobs, in industries such as construction material manufacturing and food services.

The site for the NSPH project is located along Station Street, between National Avenue and Prior Street and behind Pacific Central Station, depicted in Figure 3 below. The Station Street site is close to the Downtown Eastside, a neighbourhood with both acute health needs and strong community economic development organizations, making it highly relevant to the CBA policy's equity goals. The 18.4-acre Station Street site in the heart of Vancouver was identified as the ideal location and was one of the largest undeveloped sites in Vancouver, with enough space to accommodate the new buildings on the health campus while still possessing enough area for future expansions as health care needs evolve.

The Downtown Eastside, with some of the highest poverty rates in Canada, also has some of the most innovative social enterprises, social value suppliers, and training and employment organizations in the country. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring this development enriches and empowers the communities where it takes place.

Figure 3. Location of New St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver



As of February 2024, the NSPH project has met or exceeded two out of three targets: 12% of new hires were local and equity-denied individuals, and 17% of procurement spending was local. The social procurement target, however, fell slightly short at 9%, due largely to supply limitations in certified vendors that could meet the hospital's technical and scale-related procurement needs. However, the independent third-party monitor for the New St. Paul's Hospital project, Buy Social Canada, demonstrated that the development has made sustained "best efforts" to achieve all CBA goals. A total of 1,175 new hires have been reported to date, of whom 43% identify as equity-denied and 12% live in the most local area codes of Vancouver. Numerous social enterprises and equity-denied businesses have contributed to the project. These partnerships have resulted in substantial social impacts beyond the formal procurement percentages, such as supportive employment, workforce development, and waste diversion.

The implementation process has included onboarding and training for dozens of subcontractors, regular engagement with community organizations, and participation in Project Specific Working Groups (PSWG) hosted by the City of Vancouver. These meetings have supported coordination, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving across all parties. Buy Social Canada, the third-party monitor, has played a critical role in facilitating employment connections, guiding procurement practices, and ensuring compliance with CBA reporting protocols.

Several challenges have emerged during implementation. Turnover among CBA champions within subcontractor teams has caused delays in reporting. Privacy concerns have affected participation in voluntary demographic surveys, and the availability of certified social value suppliers for high-value materials remains limited. Furthermore, while on-site workers contribute economically to local businesses (e.g., restaurants and cafes), this informal local spend is not captured in official reporting metrics.

Looking forward, the project is moving into a phase of construction where smaller-scale spending opportunities—for services like painting, moving, and installation—may offer new pathways to engage local and social enterprises. More importantly, Providence Health Care is preparing to extend CBA principles into the hospital's operational phase, by working with Buy Social Canada and other partners to build long-term infrastructure for social and local procurement, and inclusive employment. While construction-related opportunities are beginning to diminish, the operational phase presents new possibilities for meaningful, lasting

community benefits. Overall, NSPH's role as the City's first CBA-triggered project is setting an important precedent for future developments under Vancouver's evolving community benefit framework.

2.1.2. Ashley Mar Co-op Site

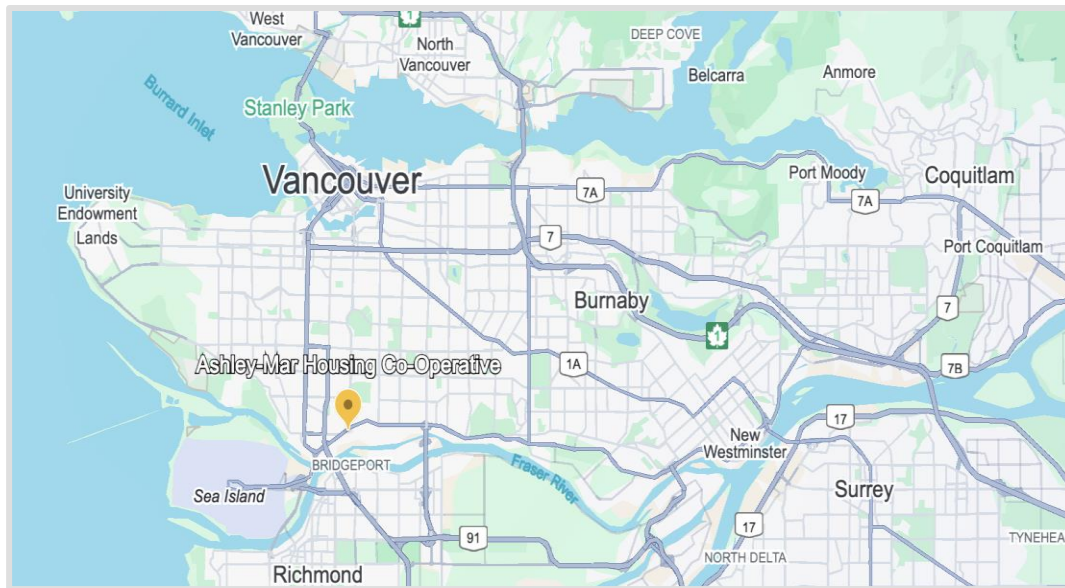
Ashley Mar is a mixed-use development situated at the intersection of Marine Drive and Cambie Street, see Figure 4 below for location. The community will consist of a 125-unit co-op building and two towers offering a combined 524 market rental homes. Situated in the Marpole neighborhood at the southernmost point of the Cambie Corridor, Ashley Mar offers access to many local amenities and transit options. Upon completion, residents will enjoy a walkable neighborhood with a variety of nearby amenities, including a grocery store, restaurants, shops, a movie theatre, and easy access to the Canada Line SkyTrain, connecting the site to downtown Vancouver and Richmond. This residential development will increase market rate housing supply and will improve local housing affordability by providing a one-for-one replacement of the existing 51 co-op housing units on site, while creating another 74 residential co-op units. Additionally, 11 units are designed to be accessible for those with mobility issues. This project is nearing the end of its construction and moving into operations phase currently.

The Ashley Mar Project is one of the first cohort of projects in the City to implement the CBA and has demonstrated substantial progress in its first three years, contributing significantly to fostering local economic development, social equity and environmental sustainability. Through committed efforts to meet the CBA targets, the project has not only advanced the construction of this mixed-use development but also supported the broader vision of an inclusive and thriving construction industry within Vancouver.

The Ashley Mar project has successfully achieved its CBA targets, notably in the creation of local jobs, hiring through social value employment agencies, and supporting small and minority-owned businesses. Inclusive hiring reached 16% for new entry-level workers from the City Core and equity-denied groups, and an additional 46% from equity-denied groups outside the City Core, reflecting significant workforce diversification. On the procurement side, social procurement accounted for 26% of spend, while local procurement achieved 2% within the City Core and 96% across Vancouver more broadly, highlighting both the opportunities and constraints of narrow versus regional definitions of "local." Taken together, these results show clear progress toward CBA goals while underscoring the importance of regionally grounded procurement strategies in sustaining long-term community benefits.

However, this year has not been without challenges that are unique to this project, and the stakeholders involved. Ensuring regular attendance at PSWG meetings, timely submission of monthly reports, collection of total workforce numbers, and adapting hiring practices have required adaptive strategies and persistent efforts on collaboration. Addressing these challenges has provided valuable insights and learning opportunities, reinforcing the importance of flexibility and continued adaptation of the CBA policy. Looking ahead, the stakeholders involved will continue to enhance the effectiveness of CBA initiatives, leveraging relationship development and collaboration. In conclusion, the Ashley Mar project has laid a robust foundation for future CBA projects, and long-term benefits in Vancouver's construction industry.

Figure 4. Location of Ashley-Mar Development in Vancouver



3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are policy instruments that seek to ensure that large-scale public and private development projects produce equitable, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes for local communities. These agreements typically involve negotiated commitments among governments, developers, and community organizations to embed social and economic equity provisions, such as local hiring, procurement from equity-denied businesses, affordable housing, and other community investments, into the development process.

In recent years, CBAs have emerged as a critical tool in addressing the distributive inequalities of urban development and have become central to debates on inclusive growth and just cities. The use of Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) as mechanisms for advancing urban justice and planning equity has given rise to a substantial body of theoretical and empirical scholarship. Although frequently endorsed to embed redistributive objectives within market-driven development, CBAs also prompt critical scrutiny concerning their legal enforceability, representational legitimacy, and integration within broader policy frameworks. The conceptual framework below synthesizes the literature around three principal strands: normative arguments in favor of CBAs as equity-oriented planning tools; critical perspectives on the limitations and risks associated with their implementation; and a more integrative view that addresses the inherent tensions between inclusive governance, institutional design, and prevailing economic conditions.

3.1. Theoretical Foundations in Support of Community Benefits Agreements

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) have gained traction in recent years as tools for aligning private development with public interest, especially in contexts of urban inequality, rapid gentrification, and infrastructural investment. Scholars advocating for CBAs draw on several interrelated theoretical traditions that foreground principles of justice, redistribution, and participatory governance in urban development. These include equity planning, growth machine critique, collaborative governance theory, and responses to neoliberal urbanism. Together, they provide a robust conceptual foundation for understanding both the normative goals and practical appeal of CBAs.

The first and perhaps most influential framework supporting CBAs stems from equity planning and justice-oriented urbanism. Rooted in the work of Krumholz (1982) and later advanced by Fainstein (2010), this body of theory holds that urban planning must do more than regulate land use or facilitate growth, it must

actively address structural inequalities. Equity planning frames the planner's role as one that should prioritize redistributive outcomes for historically marginalized communities, particularly in settings where market-driven development contributes to spatial and social stratification. Fainstein's conception of "The Just City" argues that urban interventions should be assessed by their ability to deliver equity, democracy, and diversity, placing the needs of the least advantaged at the center of planning decisions. In this context, CBAs emerge as tangible mechanisms for redistributing the benefits of urban growth, such as jobs, housing, and amenities, to those communities who have historically borne the costs of development while receiving few of its benefits.

CBAs also challenge the dominant explanatory model in urban political economy, namely Logan and Molotch's (1987) growth machine theory. According to this theory, cities are shaped by alliances of land-based elites, developers, property owners, and politicians, who prioritize economic gain and land value maximization. In contrast, CBAs represent an emergent form of counter-power, wherein community organizations, labour groups, and civil society actors intervene in the development process to secure negotiated benefits. Rather than functioning solely within formal planning institutions, CBAs operate as extra-institutional tools that allow community stakeholders to extract social value from private investment. In doing so, they reposition local actors not as passive recipients of development outcomes, but as agents of accountability and redistribution.

Closely tied to this reorientation of agency is the theoretical tradition of collaborative governance and deliberative democracy. As Ansell and Gash (2008) argue, collaborative governance involves the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in consensus-oriented decision-making processes. CBAs reflect this model by embedding civil society directly into the negotiation and design of development agreements. Unlike top-down planning exercises or tokenistic public consultations, CBAs enable structured dialogue and deliberation, often resulting in more contextually appropriate and broadly supported outcomes. The process of negotiating a CBA thus becomes a form of co-governance, fostering transparency, responsiveness, and procedural legitimacy.

Finally, CBAs are often interpreted as corrective responses to neoliberal urbanism. As Hackworth (2007) notes, contemporary urban governance is increasingly characterized by the erosion of public goods, privatization of infrastructure, and retrenchment of welfare supports. Within this framework, CBAs can be seen as attempts to reintroduce public purpose into market-driven urban development. While they do not negate the role of private investment, CBAs place enforceable community priorities on the table, pushing back against a planning regime dominated by deregulation, austerity, and fiscal constraint. As such, CBAs represent one of the few instruments capable of aligning private development with redistributive justice in cities shaped by neoliberal logics.

3.2 Critical Perspectives and Challenges in CBA Implementation

Despite their normative appeal, Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) have attracted substantial critique across legal, political, and urban planning literatures. While broadly supported as mechanisms for embedding redistributive outcomes into development, CBAs raise concerns in four principal areas: legal enforceability, democratic legitimacy, policy coherence, and developmental feasibility.

A central and recurring critique concerns legal enforceability and accountability. Because CBAs are often negotiated outside statutory planning frameworks, they may lack the binding authority of zoning regulations or formal development agreements. Scholars such as Marcello (2007) and Been (2010) have argued that CBAs frequently function as informal exactions, community concessions negotiated in exchange for project approval, that remain vulnerable to dilution or reversal. The absence of incorporation into legally binding instruments, such as zoning bylaws or covenant registration, leaves these agreements open to renegotiation, especially in contexts with limited administrative oversight or fluctuating political will. As Salkin and Lavine (2008) emphasize, institutional "lock-in" mechanisms are necessary to ensure long-term compliance, while realist policy evaluations (Flyvbjerg, 2001) suggest that without such safeguards, CBAs may fail to deliver sustained benefits.

Democratic legitimacy and representation form another major line of critique. Community groups involved in CBA negotiations may not adequately represent broader or more marginalized constituencies. As Wolf-Powers (2010) and Gross et al. (2005) note, asymmetries in negotiating power, where developers possess greater legal expertise, political access, and financial leverage, can result in agreements that reproduce rather than redress inequities. Moreover, the phenomenon of "participatory capture" may occur when well-resourced or

politically connected organizations dominate CBA processes, sidelining vulnerable groups or those with less organizational capacity. These dynamics raise critical questions about procedural fairness, inclusion, and transparency in the negotiation and implementation of CBAs.

Spatial and demographic inequities also emerge when CBAs are deployed in fragmented or discretionary ways. Case studies from the United States indicate that well-organized, gentrifying urban communities are more likely to secure favorable CBA terms, while lower-income or suburban areas with acute housing and infrastructure needs are often overlooked. Zuk and Chapple (2015) demonstrate that CBAs tend to cluster in high-visibility locations where political mobilization is strong, exacerbating geographic disparities in access to negotiated benefits. Gross et al. (2005) similarly argue that when developers face fragmented or under-resourced coalitions, resulting agreements are more likely to reflect existing power imbalances rather than advance redistributive goals.

Another significant concern involves the privatization of public responsibilities. Critics argue that CBAs, in the absence of coordinated policy frameworks, risk shifting essential public functions—such as affordable housing delivery, workforce development, or transit infrastructure—onto private actors. De Barbieri (2017) warns that this reliance on project-by-project negotiations produces “ad hoc urbanism,” undermining coherent planning and diluting public accountability. Similarly, Peterson (1995) contends that when municipalities treat CBAs as substitutes rather than complements to public investment, they weaken their long-term redistributive capacity and foster uneven jurisdictional outcomes.

Finally, concerns related to development feasibility, though less commonly addressed in academic literature, feature prominently in practitioner and industry perspectives. Developers emphasize the risks of cost inflation, approval delays, and regulatory uncertainty when CBAs are poorly integrated into planning processes. Without standardized negotiation guidelines, clear benefit valuation methods, or timelines for compliance, CBAs may be perceived as unpredictable “development taxes.” This perception can deter investment or lead developers to avoid jurisdictions with more stringent expectations.

In sum, CBAs occupy a complex space at the intersection of progressive urban theory and contested urban politics. They embody a potential pathway for democratizing development, yet also pose challenges to legal clarity, procedural equity, and policy coherence. Their success depends not only on the tangible outcomes they generate, but also on the structures of governance, representation, and institutional design within which they are embedded. A robust conceptual framework must therefore address both their transformative potential and their practical limitations, situating CBAs within the broader contestations over urban land, planning authority, and distributive justice.

3.3. Toward a Balanced Approach: Reconciling Equity Goals with Implementation Constraints

Despite the critiques outlined in the previous section, Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are often regarded in the literature as one of the few viable equity instruments available in neoliberal governance environments characterized by fiscal austerity, deregulation, and reduced public sector capacity. In such contexts, where traditional redistributive tools—such as public housing investment or universal infrastructure expansion—are constrained by limited fiscal or political capital, CBAs have emerged as pragmatic mechanisms for leveraging private development toward public ends. As Harvey (2008) observes, in cities where direct state intervention is curtailed, CBAs may function as one of the only means by which public value can be extracted from private capital. Rather than impeding economic growth, the literature suggests that CBAs can redefine their parameters to promote more inclusive and equitable outcomes. When supported by enforceable legal mechanisms, administrative infrastructure, and community capacity-building, CBAs have demonstrated the potential to yield measurable benefits, such as local employment opportunities, affordable housing units, and enhanced public amenities (Fainstein, 2010; Salkin & Lavine, 2008).

In this light, scholars increasingly advocate for a more balanced evaluation of CBAs—not as comprehensive solutions to urban inequality, nor as ineffectual compromises, but as conditional tools capable of advancing redistributive aims under certain institutional arrangements. The literature emphasizes that their success depends less on their normative goals and more on the specific governance structures in which they are situated. A growing body of research suggests that factors such as legal codification, procedural transparency, and inclusive community engagement significantly shape the efficacy and equity of CBAs in practice (Angotti, 2008; De Barbieri, 2017; Gross et al., 2005).

First, the literature underscores the importance of embedding CBAs within formal planning frameworks. CBAs that remain external to statutory zoning or permitting regimes are more susceptible to inconsistency, legal ambiguity, and non-enforcement. Scholars such as Marcello (2007) and De Barbieri (2017) argue that incorporating CBAs into binding instruments—such as zoning bylaws, official community plans, or development agreements—strengthens their legitimacy and enforceability. Legal integration, in this view, enhances policy alignment and minimizes the risk of dilution or reversal in politically sensitive or economically volatile contexts.

Second, evidence suggests that the establishment of clear eligibility thresholds and policy triggers can improve procedural consistency and reduce uncertainty. Research by Wolf-Powers (2010) highlights how threshold-based approaches—such as requiring CBAs for developments above a certain floor area, those involving public land, or those benefiting from public subsidies—can help institutionalize CBAs within municipal policy frameworks. Examples such as Toronto’s Open Door Program and Vancouver’s CBA Policy demonstrate how codified triggers can standardize expectations and increase predictability across projects (City of Toronto, 2020; City of Vancouver, 2018).

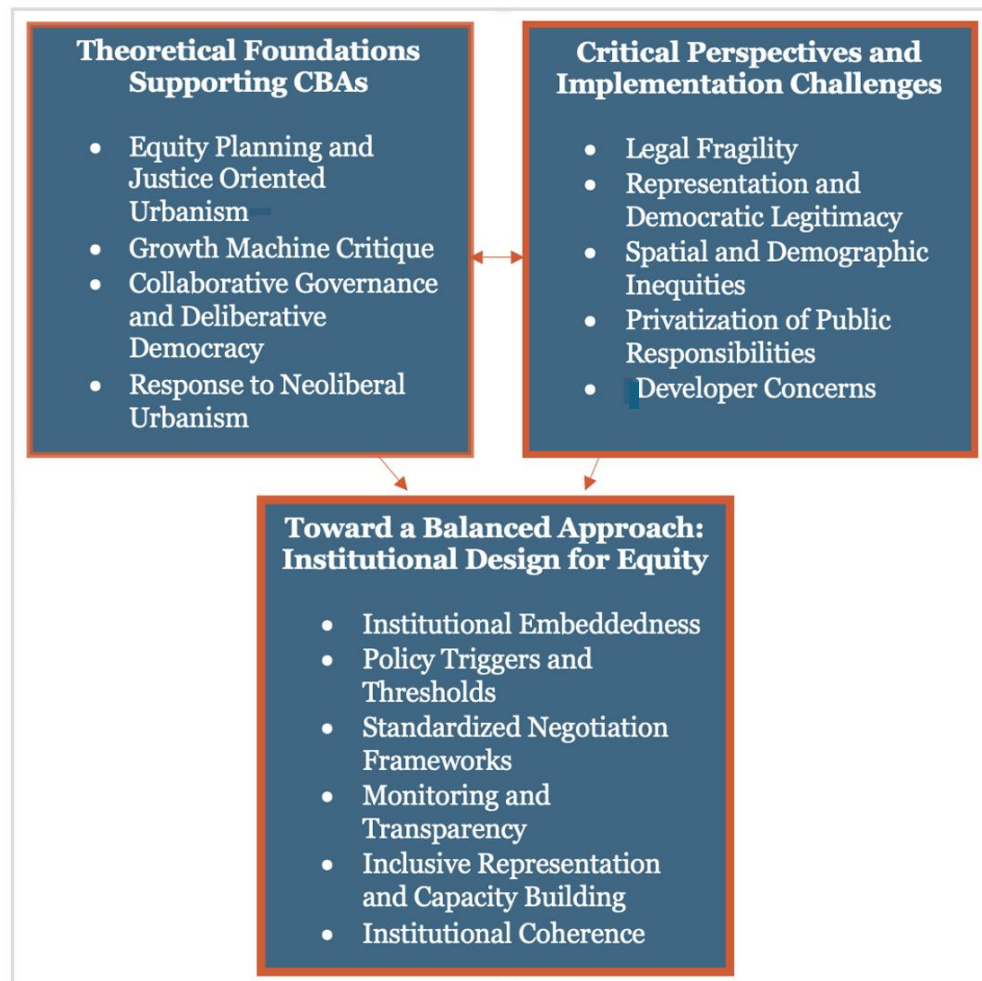
Third, the literature points to the benefits of standardized negotiation templates and protocols. By clearly delineating benefit categories, performance benchmarks, and implementation timelines, such tools can reduce ambiguity and transactional challenges. As Gross et al. (2005) and Marcello (2007) contend, standardization helps level the playing field between community coalitions and developers, reducing the influence of informal power dynamics and lowering negotiation costs.

Fourth, scholars emphasize the necessity of third-party monitoring and transparent data collection to uphold accountability. According to Salkin and Lavine (2008) and Wolf-Powers (2010), third-party oversight—typically provided by municipal agencies or neutral nonprofits—plays a critical role in ensuring compliance, tracking progress, and validating outcomes. Tools such as GIS-based platforms, public dashboards, and longitudinal data sets have been proposed to visualize the spatial distribution of CBA impacts and to inform evidence-based refinement (Zuk & Chapple, 2015).

Fifth, the literature highlights the need for inclusive governance structures and sustained community capacity building. Without support mechanisms—such as technical assistance, funding, and formal roles in negotiation processes—marginalized groups may be excluded or inadequately represented. Ansell and Gash (2008) and Wolf-Powers (2010) argue that collaborative governance requires intentional power-balancing strategies to ensure that equity-seeking communities can meaningfully participate in and shape development outcomes.

Finally, researchers consistently identify interdepartmental coordination as a key condition for effective CBA implementation. CBAs that are siloed from broader municipal planning, housing, procurement, or workforce development policies often suffer from fragmented delivery and missed opportunities for alignment. The literature suggests that institutional coherence across municipal functions is essential to achieving cross-sectoral goals and ensuring that CBAs inform upstream decisions around rezoning, capital planning, and service provision (Fainstein, 2010). Municipalities such as Vancouver, which have embedded CBA principles within broader strategic frameworks like the Equity Framework and Healthy City Strategy, provide illustrative models of such alignment (City of Vancouver, 2022). In sum, the literature supports the conclusion that CBAs remain one of the most promising instruments for embedding social equity in urban development processes shaped by neoliberal constraints. However, their long-term viability and transformative potential depend on how they are structured, institutionalized, and implemented. Addressing key design considerations, such as legal enforceability, transparent monitoring, equitable representation, and policy integration, is central to evolving CBAs from ad hoc policy tools into enduring mechanisms of urban justice. Figure 5 below summarizes the overarching conceptual framework guiding this report.

Figure 5. Conceptual framework guiding CBA assessment in the Vancouver context



4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from a mixed-methods analysis that combines qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews with quantitative results from community benefits multiplier models, and quantitative insights from multiplier models defined in section 4.2. The qualitative component draws on interviews with six developers, three third-party monitors, and seven representatives from the social enterprise and non-profit sector (including individual interviews and a focus group), providing a comprehensive view of how the City's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy is experienced across different actors in the development ecosystem. These interviews highlight areas of alignment, divergence, and unique recommendations among stakeholders, offering grounded perspectives on the practical and policy implications of CBAs. To complement these narratives, quantitative multiplier models are used to estimate the potential economic and social impacts of CBA implementation, providing an evidence-based measure of the policy's broader significance. Together, these qualitative and quantitative results offer a multi-dimensional understanding of the challenges and opportunities for reforming the CBA framework.

4.1.1. Developers' Perspectives on the CBA Policy

Developers expressed a complex mix of familiarity, skepticism, and in some cases, conditional support for the City's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy. Their knowledge of and connection to the policy varied widely depending on direct project involvement. For example, one developer currently facing inclusion in the CBA policy described facing fundamental uncertainty, particularly around whether one CBA would cover all five phases or if separate CBAs were required for each.

Non-CBA developers with less direct experience with the policy implementation learned of the policy primarily through industry associations like the Urban Development Institute (UDI) rather than firsthand practice, while others became familiar through previous exposure at other projects and discussions with peers.

Non-CBA developers underscored that this ambiguity was not a trivial administrative issue but a financial barrier, arguing that *the lack of clarity on the policy was making it harder to get financing because potential financiers were voicing concern over the uncertainty related to long-term risks*. Similarly, another non-CBA developer highlighted confusion which arose from shifting policy thresholds at one in-effect CBA project, describing how the goalposts changed when gross buildable area was used as a benchmark for policy implementation instead of floor space ratio.

By contrast, active CBA developers with more extensive operational engagement with the policy by virtue of having led projects to achieve compliance or even exceeding targets were more assured and positive about the policy goals and implementation, interpreting it as a best-efforts policy and underscored the local gains from successfully building networks with Indigenous communities, social enterprises, and trade unions. One active CBA developer emphasized tangible social impact through direct success stories, such as helping a single mother experiencing homelessness secure stable employment and housing. They also highlighted how CBA systems had alleviated the construction industry's labor shortages by quickly connecting trades with workers. For another active CBA developer, the benefits were more procedural, and reporting was deemed seamless, and the support of the third-party monitor was underscored as valuable in ensuring compliance.

On the other hand, non-CBA developers tended to frame any gains as aspirational rather than practical, acknowledging that the policy could potentially help people get into the sector, break down barriers, and keep benefits local. Overall describing it as a well-intentioned policy, developers praised the intent to give opportunities to marginalized groups and folks that need a hand up.

Despite these acknowledgments, challenges dominated both CBA and non-CBA developers' accounts. Across cases, developers described lack of clarity and consistency in requirements, with one developer emphasizing the unknowns around phases, costs, and post-occupancy obligations.

Developers also pointed to the administrative complexity and confusion arising between rezoning and social policy processes, highlighting financial and market risks, stressing that in a weak housing market, the added costs and delays from CBA obligations could make projects less viable. Non-CBA developers further warned that additional bureaucratic requirements deter investor interest, especially from pension funds and private equity groups, drawing a parallel to the decline of LEED certification when the numbers didn't make sense. Concerns about labor shortages were also consistent. One non-CBA developer noted that it was hard to find suitable people in equity-seeking groups, while another one recounted their North Vancouver experience where a temporary agency provided workers at expensive rates, who also lacked punctuality and performance, creating safety and productivity issues. Another active CBA developer acknowledged persistent issues of retention and trade capacity, where some trades were unable to accommodate unskilled or upskilled workers, despite their overall implementation success. Dismissing the CBA as an add-on cost, some non-CBA developers noted that much workforce diversification is naturally occurring already through existing labor markets.

“When I read it, it [CBA policy] doesn't seem to be written for us [developers]... The post-occupancy requirements, it's not clear what they mean.” – Non-CBA Developer

Several developers recommended that the City should facilitate incentives for developers that adjust with market cycles, underscoring that those could be removed by the City in an improved market in the future. This included incentivization via density bonusing, fee reductions, or deferrals, rather than penalties, to encourage developer participation without undermining project feasibility. Policy recommendations from non-CBA developers coalesced around making the policy less rigid and more incentive driven, where some developers

argued that CBAs should be voluntary or aspirational rather than mandatory, while another one took a stronger position to argue that the policy should be rescinded altogether.

Developers also advocated for direct consultation with trades and construction industry leaders, including superintendents and team leaders, to ensure implementation mechanisms align with industry realities. One active CBA developer added that clearer differentiation of roles was needed, with distinct requirements for owners versus general contractors and sub-trades, as well as separate frameworks for pre- and post-occupancy phases.

While non-CBA developers worried about unintended consequences for morale, safety, and limiting opportunity, by contrast, active CBA developers offered more optimistic conclusions, underscoring the necessity of alignment among developers, builders, and trades for CBA success. CBA developers also valued the visual statistics of community benefits and commended the general contractor's above and beyond efforts.

In their final reflections, most non-CBA developers expressed deep skepticism about the current framework, arguing that in times of housing crisis, nothing would be delivered if such requirements remain in place, while also cautioning against escalating costs, where one developer noted that the CBA policy could add up to 2.5 million CAD to their cost.

Taken together, developers' perspectives reveal a sector highly cautious about CBAs: while recognizing the policy's intent, they foreground costs, risks, and administrative challenges over social outcomes. The dominant narrative is one of pragmatism and risk aversion, with most developers calling for voluntary or incentive-based models, greater clarity, and streamlined processes. The contrasting accounts of active CBA and non-CBA projects demonstrate that CBAs can succeed under strong leadership and supportive monitoring, but for most developers, the policy in its current form is viewed as a threat to project viability rather than a tool for equitable development.

4.1.2 Perspectives of Social Enterprises and Non-Profits on the CBA Policy

Social enterprises and non-profits provided some of the strongest critiques of the CBA policy, reflecting both their deep involvement in co-creation and their lived experience of trying to access opportunities under it. Participants consistently expressed support for the principle of CBAs but emphasized a persistent gap between policy design and implementation.

Entry points into the policy varied across participants. One social enterprise representative, which first engaged with the policy in its early stages through the Exchange Inner City's Community Benefit Network Working Group, mentioned that they eventually stopped attending meetings, feeling there was not much benefit for their group. They observed that the 10% social procurement targets were too easy for developers to meet without driving real change. Another social enterprise representative who was deeply involved with the CBA policy from the outset, even having co-written elements of the policy, underscored that the policy focus should be on ensuring that the procurement frameworks allowed non-traditional contributions, such as recognizing commercial real estate spaces as a form of community benefit as opposed to its currently narrow perception of what services fell in the purview of local procurement.

Members of the focus group also recounted their role in policy co-creation, particularly through Exchange Inner City. Some had early contracts pre-dating the policy, while others reported creating new services specifically to fit CBA procurement niches. At the same time, several participants expressed frustration at the lack of clear access points for organizations that wanted to compete fairly for contracts. One participant summarized that there wasn't a clear process to accessing what types of jobs, services, or needs that could be used on the CBA project sites.

When it came to accessing contracts and services, social enterprises reported mixed experiences, where one social enterprise representative underscored that their firm did not apply for contracts because their services are primarily post-construction, noting that in their perspective, once the project site was occupied and operations began, there were no binding mechanisms that required the occupants to meet the CBA. However, this perspective points towards a common misconception about the policy among stakeholders, since the City does in fact have the authority to withhold permits if lack of compliance with the policy is ascertained.

Another social enterprise representative underscored how their firm's contribution came in the form of tenant capacity-building rather than direct contracts, underscoring the narrow fit between CBA procurement categories and the services offered by many community organizations.

Many social enterprises reported they didn't in fact get contracts, but rather they were taken on board by CBA developers as part of "term agreements," leading organizations to feel like they were charitable, or being fit into the work after the fact rather than being part of the contracting process. This included organizations which had staffed up to 200 workers at an active project and more than 30 at another, while another organization reported receiving cleaning contracts, including trailer maintenance at another active CBA project. Yet, despite these wins, many participants described systemic barriers. Larger contracts often went to pre-selected suppliers before permits were even issued, leaving social enterprises sidelined. Personal networks, rather than transparent processes, often determined access.

Experiences on actual CBA projects revealed a striking divide between success and disappointment. One past CBA project was consistently described as a best-case example, largely because the general contractor had hired a dedicated coordinator to manage CBA implementation. This produced transformative outcomes, with laborers from marginalized backgrounds progressing into trades apprenticeships and eventually achieving red seal certification. Conversely, another currently active CBA project was cited as an example of weak implementation: without a dedicated coordinator, price-driven decisions undermined equity goals. One focus group participant recalled how seven Indigenous hoist operators were dismissed after being undercut by another company. For most representatives, the broader outcome of the policy in meeting social procurement goals was underwhelming, and they underscored how the policy had not shown its effectiveness, and any benefits were minimal.

Discussions of barriers and gaps highlighted recurring structural problems. One participant pointed to the mismatch between the services their group could provide (post-construction) and the types of procurement opportunities typically offered under CBAs. They emphasized that contract scale was the largest obstacle, with social value consistently ranked below price in Request for Proposal evaluations. For example, one organization noted that they could not compete with large catering companies despite being aligned with the CBA's objectives. They recommended unbundling large contracts so that social enterprises could viably compete. Focus group participants echoed this, citing developers' adversarial attitudes.

*"Feels like they [i.e. developers] are forced to work with [social enterprises like] us, like charity."
- Social Enterprise Representative*

Several focus group participants also stated that the policy goals weren't ambitious enough. They pointed out that developers already hired diverse staff, meaning that 10% thresholds did not stretch practice. In general, targets were judged to be set far too low, with several participants arguing for 50% procurement benchmarks instead of 10%. More than one participant summarized the concern with box-checking, underscoring they could get jobs on active CBA sites just so the developer could check relevant boxes to meet targets. Another participant echoed that while labor-focused groups had benefitted, procurement impact was limited, underscoring how it was important to frame CBA benefits in economic, and not purely social terms in the current economic climate for the policy to remain intact and to be improved.

While focus group participants cited successful CBA projects from the past as proof of what could be achieved they considered ongoing projects as emblematic of tokenism. While non-profits and social enterprise representatives credited CBAs with raising the profile of the social enterprise sector, they warned that developers easily manipulate the policy, and the City has failed to hold them accountable.

"The best thing to do with the CBA is to make an argument that is economic first and social second." -Non-profit Representative

Many also criticized third-party monitors as conflicted, arguing that since the monitors are paid by developers, they are incentivized to show positive outcomes, not realities. Instead, participants strongly advocated for inside coordinators embedded in general contractors, accountable both to builders and to community groups. Participants also noted a lack of early engagement, with most opportunities locked up before social enterprises had a chance to bid.

The social enterprise/non-profit community's policy recommendations converged on the need for greater ambition, stronger accountability, and earlier, deeper community engagement. In addition to calling for raising targets and revising baselines, participants also underscored the need for longer-term planning for what services would be needed. One social enterprise representative recommended scaling obligations by project size (e.g., smaller developments hiring five workers, larger ones more), establishing a shared fund for third-party monitoring to reduce conflicts of interest, and creating a master calendar of upcoming projects so non-profits could prepare. They cautioned policymakers not to bow to developer lobbying, underscoring how the CBA policy hardly imposed a prohibitive cost, but rather provided value for both developers and the local social enterprise sector.

Focus group members recommended embedding integration coordinators within general contractors, shifting the DEI framing toward targeted support for people facing employment barriers, and requiring early commitments before bids and contracts are finalized. They urged a significant increase in targets, particularly for procurement, and stressed that CBAs must be presented not as charity but as mutually beneficial.

“It’s a win-win (policy) all around”- Non-profit Representative

Taken together, social enterprises and non-profits paint a picture of a policy that is well-conceived but weakly implemented. They acknowledge the potential for CBAs to transform lives and build inclusive economies but argue that current practices leave this potential largely untapped. Success depends on moving beyond tokenistic compliance and embedding structures—such as dedicated coordinators, unbundled contracts, and ambitious targets—that enable social enterprises to participate meaningfully. More than any other group, they stress that the policy must not be dismantled in the face of political pushback, but rather strengthened through co-creation, accountability, and a reframing that makes CBAs economically rational for all stakeholders.

4.1.3 Perspectives of Third-Party Monitors on the CBA Policy

The perspectives of third-party monitors highlight their central role as both compliance enforcers and relationship-builders, bridging the gap between the City's expectations, developer obligations, and the realities of subcontractors and suppliers. Both third-party monitors interviewed described their work as fundamentally about aggregating data from general contractors and sub-trades, checking it against City reporting requirements, and producing annual compliance reports. One third-party monitor clarified that the monitoring role is not about achieving precise monthly quotas but about guiding projects toward annual targets.

Beyond compliance, one third-party monitor reported engaging in active facilitation, emphasizing that they frequently connected sub-trades with suppliers, general contractors with employment agencies, and even personally passed on resumes received, underscoring the interpersonal dimension of the role. On the other hand, the other third-party monitor framed their function more structurally, explaining that they not only collect and aggregate reports but also offer proactive supports, including projecting spend, introducing suppliers, and providing training sessions to increase uptake.

Both sets of monitors underscored that their access to data is limited by the City's prescribed reporting tools, which capture information such as organization names, postal codes, dollar values spent, and, in some cases, wage data. Neither reported having access to developers' internal financial or procurement systems. While one third-party monitor mentioned that they occasionally cross-checked with equity-seeking social value surveys, the other noted that their own ability to assess impacts is bounded by what general contractors and sub-trades self-report. Misreporting and mistakes were common, requiring monitors to validate information using postal codes, websites, or follow-up questionnaires. As one interviewee pointed out, even definitions of “best efforts” are subjective.

On the integration of procurement targets, monitors generally agreed that CBA requirements were feasible but not without confusion, particularly for sub-contractors. One representative noted that many sub-contractors were not aware of the policy because CBA obligations were introduced late in the procurement process. With sufficient onboarding and simplified training, however, they found requirements could be communicated in easy-to-understand language that would remove most confusion. This third-party monitor reported providing

structured training for sub-contractors over the \$500,000 threshold and relied on a “concentric circle” model of defining local, in which City Core suppliers are prioritized, followed by broader Metro Vancouver, provincial, and national suppliers. Turnover among sub-contractors often requires repeated training, but both monitors agreed that with education, consistency improves.

According to third-party monitors, defining “local” remains a contested and nuanced issue. One interviewee described multiple concentric definitions ranging from the City Core to the national level but raised challenges that arise with multinational firms that maintain local offices. For instance, they cited the example of Hilti construction industry servicer, which has local headquarters, but is a large international business. Another third-party monitor addressed challenges related to defining “local” through postal code tracking, which they found to be a more precise measure, while also considering headquarters locations. Still, discrepancies among reporting remained, they admitted.

In terms of market feasibility, both monitors emphasized that services were generally easier to procure locally than materials, where rigid global supply chains limited options. One interviewee gave the example of interior finishes, noting that doors had to be sourced from U.S. suppliers like Oakmont and The Brick despite efforts to prioritize local. By contrast, some masonry services were procured locally with relative ease. The third-party monitor added that the policy itself had catalyzed new supplier growth, underscoring how businesses were moving towards obtaining certifications now that the policy had been in effect for several years. They cited the example of a cleaning supplier that scaled up to hazardous waste services, and a social enterprise that expanded from one sub-contractor to several. The scale of impact was further illustrated by the NSPH case, which achieved \$100M in social procurement, including \$2.1M from City Core suppliers. However, the interviewee noted proactive but limited Indigenous business involvement, reflecting broader challenges around equity-focused procurement.

On costs, risks, and incentives, both monitors reported minimal cost pressures directly attributable to CBAs, emphasizing that barriers were more about sub-contractors’ reliance on long-standing suppliers than price, and that that tariffs and global trade volatility had, paradoxically, increased the relative attractiveness of local suppliers. Risks were primarily tied to over-capacity trades facing reporting challenges, which created potential project delays.

The supplier ecosystem and barriers were described as evolving but uneven. Vancouver is broadly well-positioned to meet the 10% target, but barriers persist for small and equity-denied suppliers. One third-party monitor representative noted that there were probably more local and equity-denied suppliers in the region, but these organizations did not feel comfortable stating that due to strict certification requirements, preferring self-identification instead. The third-party monitors highlighted historical exclusions, gaps in insurance and certifications, and short compliance timelines as persistent constraints. Both monitors emphasized the importance of capacity-building support such as directories (e.g. City suppliers lists), social procurement roundtables, trade shows, toolkits, job fairs, and RFP language that signal opportunities for smaller suppliers. One representative also reported helping general contractors incorporate CBA language directly into bids to ensure compliance cascaded down the supply chain.

Accountability mechanisms were described as soft rather than punitive. Neither third-party monitor reported having formal enforcement authority, relying instead on best-efforts monitoring and validation techniques such as postal code checks and questionnaires. While they can identify inconsistencies or misclassifications, consequences for developers or subs are limited.

Finally, on policy alignment and lessons, both monitors assessed that the 10% target is realistic given Vancouver’s supplier base, though both recommended broadening the definition of “local” to Metro Vancouver given the limited industrial space in the City Core. They asserted that while the policy is broadly aligned with the City’s social value framework, the ecosystem was still “catching up,” and stronger market capacity assessments should precede major projects.

Both emphasized that relationship-building, early engagement, and simplifying reporting requirements are critical to long-term success, underscoring that the very existence of the CBA policy has stimulated measurable market growth among local and social enterprises.

Taken together, third-party monitors depict the CBA system as feasible, valuable, and evolving, though heavily reliant on education, facilitation, and relational trust. They position themselves less as auditors and more as translators and enablers, smoothing the frictions between policy ambition and market practice. Their accounts reinforce that while compliance is technically possible at current benchmarks, deeper challenges lie in supplier

capacity, certification barriers, and the late integration of CBA requirements into procurement processes. For monitors, the path forward involves raising ambition gradually, broadening the definition of local, and embedding early projections and training into project timelines, ensuring that CBAs drive meaningful market transformation rather than remain a box-ticking exercise.

4.1.4. Procurement Feasibility Within the CBA Framework

The analysis of sample spend data, combined with insights from interviews, focus group discussions, and the procurement specialist we interviewed, reveals a nuanced picture of the feasibility of meeting CBA procurement requirements locally. While the policy intent is widely supported, practical realities around supply chains, contract structures, and definitions of “local” constrain outcomes.

Non-profits and social enterprises consistently argued that the current 10% thresholds are too low, advocating for targets up to 50% in the procurement of local services. Importantly, interviews with developers and social enterprises indicated that the current definition of “local” for procurement purposes is too narrow, often limited to the City of Vancouver. Revising this definition to extend across the Metro Vancouver area would reflect the practical realities of supply chains and expand opportunities for local social enterprises, while still supporting the policy’s intent to generate tangible community benefits. This combined approach aligns with the growth machine critique (Logan & Molotch, 1987), recognizing that CBAs mediate between private profit motives and public interest, while ensuring that social impact remains both realistic and meaningful.

Local and social procurement has proven far more viable in the service sector than in construction materials. Services such as janitorial work, catering, labor hire, and security have been successfully fulfilled by several social enterprises that were consulted. These types of contracts align closely with the strengths of community-based organizations and have created pathways for direct employment and contract opportunities. By contrast, the procurement of construction materials such as glass, drywall, steel, doors, and HVAC equipment faces significant barriers. Developers often source these materials through long-standing national or international supplier contracts, leaving little flexibility to include smaller or newer suppliers. Third-party monitors highlighted that rigid supply chains for specialized materials mean local substitution is often impossible, even when it is desired. For example, interior doors for some CBA projects were sourced from U.S. suppliers despite explicit attempts to buy locally.

The procurement of structural materials illustrates the scale of these challenges. Large inputs such as concrete, reinforcing steel, and excavation account for tens of millions of dollars in spending across Metro Vancouver, but contribute little to none under narrower “City Core” or “Vancouver-only” definitions. For instance, approximately \$28.9 millions of concrete was procured within Metro Vancouver, compared with just \$1,000 within Vancouver proper. Similarly, about \$47.5 million worth of reinforcing steel was procured regionally, versus only \$3 million in the City Core. These figures confirm what developers described in interviews: high-value materials are rarely sourced within the boundaries of Vancouver alone. Monitors echoed this point, emphasizing that procurement chains for such structural materials are dominated by large suppliers and global networks, with little room for substitution. Smaller scopes such as waterproofing, cladding, windows, and roofing often showed no recorded local spend at all. Focus group participants added that these categories were often “locked up” by established suppliers before local and social value suppliers even had the chance to compete.

The Social Value Supplier (SVS) Directory, which is intended as a resource for developers and contractors, further illustrates the gap between intention and practice. The directory lists only a handful of certified suppliers for major categories—for example, just two suppliers for structural materials and nine for site works. This mismatch between the limited certified supplier base and the actual scale of construction spending demonstrates why many CBA-defined procurement targets are difficult to operationalize. Focus group participants also observed that even when smaller enterprises were listed in directories, they were often sidelined once large contracts had already been allocated to established suppliers.

A further challenge is the reliance of developers on long-standing supplier relationships, often involving multinational firms that may have local offices but operate within global frameworks. This reality restricts opportunities for social value suppliers to break into procurement chains. Even when social procurement targets

exist, much of the potential spend is effectively “locked in” through prior contracts, leaving limited space for new entrants.

Social enterprises and non-profits themselves identified recurring barriers to participation in CBA contracts. Large, bundled contracts often favored established suppliers and excluded smaller organizations, leading to frequent calls for contracts to be “unbundled” to open access points. The timing of opportunities was another barrier. Many contracts were allocated before social enterprises even had the chance to bid, undermining equitable participation. Participants also noted that access often depended on developer relationships and informal networks rather than transparent bidding processes, leaving many community groups at a disadvantage.

Examples of strong and weak implementation illustrate how these barriers play out in practice. The Parq Casino project was consistently described as a best-case example, largely because a dedicated coordinator embedded within the general contracting organization created structured pathways for social enterprises to participate. This resulted in measurable employment outcomes and career progression for equity-denied workers. By contrast, the St. Paul’s Hospital project was cited as an example of weak implementation. Here, price-driven decisions and the absence of early coordination significantly undermined opportunities for social and local procurement, reducing the policy’s intended impact.

Opportunities for local procurement also vary across project stages. During the pre-occupancy phase, procurement is dominated by construction trades and material inputs, where local sourcing is often constrained by rigid supply chains and pre-existing supplier contracts. Post-occupancy phases, however, present far greater opportunities for local and social enterprises, particularly in cleaning, maintenance, catering, and other operational services. Recognizing this evolving landscape is essential for effective policy design and for monitoring outcomes over the full lifecycle of a project.

Across interviews, focus groups, and procurement data, stakeholders consistently emphasized the ambiguity in the definition of “local.” The current emphasis on Vancouver proper excludes many feasible suppliers located in the broader Metro Vancouver region. Both developers and monitors argued that revising the definition to encompass the regional supply chain would better reflect the reality of construction procurement and open more meaningful opportunities for social and local enterprises.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data used in this analysis. The procurement specialist who provided the sample emphasized that the dataset represents a small, aggregated sample rather than a comprehensive account of all CBA projects. Key categories such as consulting, human resources, training programs, and other service scopes were not captured, meaning that the potential for local procurement may be understated.

4.2. Multiplier Estimation

In this section, the employment, local procurement and social procurement multipliers are computed for the New St. Paul’s Hospital and Ashley Mar Co-op project sites using the empirical model defined in Section 4.2. Using Eq 1, the employment multiplier is estimated to be CAD 3.81 million over the 2023-24 fiscal year for the St. Paul’s Hospital and CAD .06 million for the Ashley Mar site over this period, reflecting how differences in the nature of the development i.e. whether it is a hospital or a residential development, dictates respective localized employment gains from an initial investment. For this estimate, local employment is defined as that occurring within the City Core and the Vancouver region, where for the Ashley Mar site, 15 additional equity-denied hires were from the City Core and 6 additional equity-denied hires were from the Vancouver area, with a total of 21 new equity-denied hires incorporated in the estimation. For the New St. Paul’s Hospital site, 144 additional equity-denied hires were from the City Core and 67 additional equity-denied hires were from the Vancouver area, with a total of 211 new equity-denied hires incorporated in the estimation. These differences highlight how the size, labor intensity, and sectoral characteristics of projects influence localized employment impacts.

Using Eq 2, the local procurement multiplier was estimated to be CAD 52.22 M for the New St. Paul’s Hospital site and CAD 92.80 M for the Ashley Mar Co-op site, underscoring higher local procurement impact of the Ashley Mar Co-op site relative to St. Paul’s Hospital. Illustrating that social housing or co-op developments may channel procurement more directly to locally embedded businesses, amplifying regional economic circulation even with fewer total hires.

Further, using Eq 3, the social procurement multiplier was estimated to be CAD 17.96 M for the New St. Paul's Hospital site and CAD 29.51 M for the Ashley Mar Co-op site. The higher relative impact for the Ashley Mar site suggests that projects with stronger mandates for community benefit and social enterprise engagement can create amplified economic and social returns, fostering inclusive growth and reinvestment in marginalized populations. Table 1C in the Annex details the calculations underlying the numbers in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Employment, Local and Social Procurement Multipliers for the Ashley Mar and St Paul's Hospital sites 2023-24

| Project Site | Employment Multiplier (CAD M) | Local Procurement Multiplier (CAD M) | Social Procurement Multiplier (CAD M) | Total Equity-Seeking Hires (City Core & Vancouver) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| New St. Paul's Hospital | 3.81 | 52.22 | 17.96 | 211 |
| Ashley Mar Co-op | 0.06 | 92.8 | 29.51 | 21 |

Note: The local and social procurement for fiscal year 2023-2024 is calculated as cumulative expenditure for the year minus cumulative expenditure for the previous year

Together, these multipliers provide a robust, evidence-based evaluation of the economic contributions of CBA policies in Vancouver. The results reveal that while larger institutions like St. Paul's Hospital generate higher direct employment impacts, smaller or community-focused projects like Ashley Mar Co-op may produce proportionally larger local and social procurement effects, emphasizing the importance of targeted local sourcing and social enterprise engagement. From a policy perspective, these findings reinforce the strategic value of integrating CBA requirements into urban development and institutional construction projects to stimulate localized employment, enhance the resilience of local supply chains, and foster inclusive economic growth within the City Core and greater Vancouver region. They also suggest that multipliers vary according to the project type, highlighting the need for differentiated policy frameworks that account for sectoral and spatial differences in economic impact pathways.

4.3 Discussion and Synthesis

This cross-stakeholder analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy landscape by comparing perspectives from developers, social enterprises, non-profits, and third-party monitors. The analysis highlights areas of alignment, divergence, and unique contributions, offering insights to inform both policy refinement and implementation. By situating these findings within the broader theoretical traditions of equity planning, growth machine critique, collaborative governance, and responses to neoliberal urbanism, a more nuanced picture emerges of both the promise and the limitations of CBAs.

Across all stakeholder groups, knowledge of the CBA policy is uneven, and the role of intermediaries is widely recognized as critical. Developers often gain familiarity through direct project experience—such as Langara Gardens, St. Paul's Hospital, Parq Casino—or via industry associations. Yet many still find policy requirements unclear, with one developer even asking if a different CBA was needed for each of the project's five phases. Such uncertainty is not trivial: developers interpret knowledge gaps as financial risks that heighten project financing uncertainty. Non-profits and social enterprises, in contrast, are deeply embedded in the policy from its inception. Community leaders were involved in drafting and operationalizing the policy, viewing it as community-driven, but lamenting weak City implementation. Monitors, meanwhile, position themselves as translators and intermediaries who ensure reporting and compliance remain feasible. Their knowledge bridges gaps between City intent and developer practice, which stakeholders widely agreed is indispensable. The reliance on intermediaries underscores insights from collaborative governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which stresses the importance of third-party facilitation in bridging asymmetries of expertise and power.

All stakeholders acknowledge the potential benefits of the CBA policy, but their interpretations differ sharply. Developers describe CBAs as “laudable” and “well-intentioned,” and some highlight labour market gains, such as contractors who exceeded employment targets. Still, most developers regard benefits as abstract, disconnected from core business concerns, and at times more symbolic than material. Non-profits, by contrast, point to tangible outcomes when enforcement is strong—citing successful employment pathways through social enterprises, as in the Parq project—but often describe the policy as tokenistic when weakly implemented. Monitors highlight procedural rather than distributive benefits: process improvements, reporting consistency, and translation of City targets into actionable steps. These divergences reflect theoretical debates. Developers’ emphasis on symbolic intent resonates with critiques of CBAs as “development taxes” within neoliberal political economy (Harvey, 2008), while non-profits’ insistence on material redistribution aligns with equity planning’s justice orientation (Fainstein, 2010). Monitors’ focus on process reflects procedural justice traditions, which emphasize transparency and accountability as preconditions for legitimacy (Salkin & Lavine, 2008).

Stakeholders consistently noted challenges, though their emphasis varied. Developers highlighted costs, unclear requirements, financing uncertainty, reporting challenges, difficulties sourcing labour, and post-occupancy compliance. They warned that mandatory CBAs could deter investors and slow housing delivery, linking the policy directly to broader concerns about housing market viability. Such concerns reflect developmental feasibility critiques (Flyvbjerg, 2001), which stress that equity instruments must align with practical constraints or risk undermining their own goals. Non-profits, by contrast, emphasized exclusion from procurement, low benchmarks, weak developer buy-in, adversarial relations, and risks of developer-controlled monitoring. Participants’ observations of being seen as charities and adversarial feelings vis-à-vis the developers aligned with critiques of “participatory capture” (Wolf-Powers, 2010), whereby CBAs risk reproducing inequities if powerful stakeholders dominate negotiation and implementation. Monitors acknowledged administrative complexity and unclear responsibilities between owners, general contractors, and sub-trades, but were less concerned about costs. Across all groups, procurement and reporting systems were consistently identified as problematic: developers emphasized financial and operational risk, non-profits stressed inequities in access, and monitors focused on process efficiency.

Emotional orientations also diverged. Developers expressed frustration and caution, preoccupied with costs, clarity, and unintended consequences, though some acknowledged CBAs’ success when implemented effectively. Non-profits advocated for scaling up ambition and voiced concern over tokenism and rollback risks. Monitors remained largely neutral and technocratic, positioning themselves as enablers of compliance rather than advocates of stronger redistributive outcomes. These orientations reflect deeper theoretical divides: developers’ cautious pragmatism resonates with neoliberal risk logics (Harvey, 2008), non-profits’ advocacy embodies equity planning traditions (Fainstein, 2010), and monitors’ neutrality echoes procedural governance frameworks (Marcello, 2007).

Despite these divergences, convergence emerged around three key themes. First, all stakeholders emphasized the need for clarity and standardization, consistent with principles of procedural justice that stress transparency as a means of reducing power asymmetries (Fainstein, 2010; Wolf-Powers, 2010). Second, all highlighted the importance of early engagement, reflecting collaborative governance theory, which underscores co-governance from the outset to improve legitimacy and outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Third, all recognized CBAs’ potential to advance social and economic impact if designed and executed effectively, echoing critical urban theory’s framing of CBAs as a corrective response to neoliberal urbanism (Hackworth, 2007; Harvey, 2008).

At the same time, divergences reflected not just practical but also ideological orientations. Developers framed CBAs as costly and administratively burdensome, aligning with critiques of CBAs as investor deterrents. Non-profits argued that benchmarks were too low to be meaningful, reflecting an equity planning push for redistribution. Monitors viewed CBAs as feasible if structured through training, relationship-building, and reporting systems, aligning with governance frameworks emphasizing clarity and systemic integration. Similarly, benefits were framed as aspirational by developers, materially by non-profits, and procedurally by monitors—a clear illustration of growth machine critiques, which conceptualize CBAs as mediators between private profit motives and public benefit extraction (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

Each group also offered distinctive recommendations. Developers proposed voluntary or incentive-based approaches, including density bonusing, fee reductions, and tax credits, and in some cases argued for rescindment of requirements altogether. They identified post-occupancy obligations as particularly problematic

and stressed the need for industry consultation. Non-profits advocated higher thresholds, sometimes as high as 50%, early engagement before project approvals, embedding dedicated coordinators, reframing CBAs as economic development rather than charity, and safeguarding policies against rollback. Monitors focused on clarifying responsibilities between owners and contractors, phasing pre- and post-occupancy requirements, streamlining reporting, producing workforce projections earlier, and embedding monitoring within City processes.

Theoretically, these positions map onto distinct traditions. Developers' focus on feasibility, market confidence, and incentives reflects a pragmatic neoliberal orientation (Harvey, 2008). Non-profits' advocacy for redistribution, accountability, and participatory structures reflects equity planning traditions (Fainstein, 2010). Monitors' emphasis on clarity, role differentiation, and systemic integration resonates with procedural governance theory (Salkin & Lavine, 2008; Marcello, 2007). When synthesized, these perspectives underscore the necessity of balancing feasibility, ambition, and process efficiency in designing a CBA policy that is both impactful and politically durable.

4.4. Mapping Findings Against Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy & Equity Framework

The findings of this study resonate strongly with the City of Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy (2014–2025) and its companion Equity Framework (2021), both of which articulate commitments to creating an inclusive, just, and sustainable urban environment. By examining the role of community benefits agreements (CBAs) in shaping equitable access to amenities and opportunities, the research directly engages with the pillars of these two frameworks.

First, the Healthy City Strategy identifies key goals such as “Healthy Human Services,” “Making Ends Meet and Working Well,” and “Cultivating Connections.” Our findings indicate that CBAs, when embedded consistently into rezoning and development processes, can function as mechanisms to advance these goals by redistributing economic and social benefits to historically marginalized communities. For example, commitments to local hiring and procurement within CBAs align with the Strategy's call to address income inequality and promote meaningful work. Similarly, investments in community-serving infrastructure mirror the Strategy's emphasis on social connectedness and access to essential services.

Second, the Equity Framework emphasizes structural change, accountability, and the redistribution of power and resources. The evidence gathered in this study underscores that CBAs are most impactful when codified within the Official Development Plan (ODP) and Zoning and Development By-law, thereby reducing discretionary application and ensuring accountability across projects. Such institutionalization reflects the Equity Framework's principle of embedding equity into governance systems rather than relying on ad hoc or project-specific interventions. Importantly, findings also highlight the potential for CBAs to redress inequities produced by past planning decisions, particularly in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by exclusionary zoning or disinvestment.

Finally, the combined analysis suggests that CBAs can serve as a bridging tool between the Healthy City Strategy and the Equity Framework, operationalizing aspirational goals through enforceable mechanisms. By formalizing social and economic benefit requirements in major developments, the City can more effectively advance its commitments to health, well-being, and equity at the neighborhood scale.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: STRENGTHENING THE CBA FRAMEWORK

The findings from stakeholder interviews, combined with reflections from city staff and policy experts, point to a set of concrete directions for reforming the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) framework. The overarching challenge is balancing feasibility and clarity for developers with ambition, accountability, and accessibility for community stakeholders. The policy recommendations below integrate stakeholder insights with theoretical principles of equity planning, collaborative governance, and developmental feasibility.

a. *Strengthen Clarity and Standardization Through Policy Amendments*

Developers, non-profits, and monitors all flagged ambiguity in requirements, thresholds, and reporting as a critical barrier. Clearer rules on whether a single CBA applies across multiple project phases, how post-occupancy obligations are tracked, and what reporting templates must be used would reduce uncertainty and build confidence among developers. Theoretically, this links to principles of procedural justice and equity planning (Fainstein, 2010), where transparency reduces power asymmetries and ensures fairer outcomes. From a policy perspective, CBAs are already embedded as conditions of rezoning; however, their impact could be strengthened if the policy were automatically applied to all projects exceeding 45,000 m² in designated zoning areas and formally codified within the City's Official Development Plan and the Zoning and Development Bylaw, acknowledging any judicial constraints and contemporary developer community sentiments, influencing this.

b. *Rethink Monitoring Structures*

Third-party monitoring emerged as a contested issue. Developers questioned whether monitors are necessary, suggesting internal reporting or city-led coordination as alternatives. Non-profits, however, highlighted risks of conflicts of interest if developers monitor themselves, noting that independent oversight protects accountability. Policy reform should retain independent monitoring but build in capacity-building supports for social enterprises and local suppliers. This could include city-facilitated networking, training sessions, and procurement readiness programs, creating the connective tissue needed for implementation. Theoretically, this reflects legal and procedural integration (Salkin & Lavine, 2008), where enforceability and transparency require institutionalized oversight mechanisms.

c. *Scale Targets and Incentives for Greater Impact and Procurement Feasibility*

Findings related to procurement feasibility within CBA highlight several critical implications for policy reform. First, policymakers should conduct environmental scans to systematically assess which goods and services can realistically be sourced locally, ensuring that CBA targets are both ambitious and achievable. Second, the definition of "local" should be revised to encompass the Metro Vancouver region, not just Vancouver proper, to align with the structure of actual supply chains. Third, procurement expectations should be tailored to project phases, recognizing that different opportunities emerge in pre- and post-occupancy periods. Fourth, policies should differentiate across scopes, acknowledging that services and site works offer far greater potential for social and local procurement than structural materials. Finally, pathways for social value suppliers should be strengthened through unbundled contracts, early engagement, and transparent bidding processes. Together, these reforms would better align CBA policy ambition with market realities and ensure that community benefits are not only aspirational but achievable.

d. *Embed Early and Ongoing Engagement*

All stakeholder groups emphasized that late integration of CBAs undermines effectiveness. Non-profits highlighted success stories (e.g., embedded coordinators in the Parq project) where early engagement, built trust and accountability. Developers underscored the need to consult with trades and site managers early to ensure requirements align with operational realities. Policy should require dedicated coordinators early in the project lifecycle, with defined roles for developers, general contractors, and subcontractors. This aligns with collaborative governance theory, which stresses co-design and early co-governance to improve transparency and legitimacy.

e. *Increase Accessibility for Social Enterprises*

Social enterprises reported structural barriers to participation, including large, bundled contracts that privilege established suppliers and opaque procurement processes reliant on insider networks. Reforms should include contract "unbundling," transparent procurement timelines, and dedicated networking spaces where developers and local suppliers can connect. City staff could convene regular forums, especially given the pipeline of five projects in the coming year, to ensure opportunities are widely accessible. This

reflects equity planning principles (Krumholz & Forester, 1990), ensuring marginalized groups can access and benefit from urban development opportunities.

f. *Protect Accountability and Political Resilience*

Stakeholders emphasized the risk that CBAs could be weakened if political priorities shift or if developers lobby against enforcement. Policy reform should build accountability mechanisms—such as shared monitoring funds, independent oversight bodies, and dual reporting to both developers and community stakeholders—to safeguard against rollback. Theoretically, this ties to the corrective response to neoliberal urbanism (Harvey, 2008), where CBAs act as redistributive tools embedding public purpose into private development, requiring institutional resilience to remain effective.

g. *Recognize Practical Benefits and Build Buy-In*

Highlighting successful case studies (such as EllisDon’s Parq project) can demonstrate that CBAs are not only aspirational but achievable when supported by leadership and monitoring. By framing CBAs as mutually beneficial—strengthening workforce development, stabilizing local economies, and enhancing project legitimacy—policies can shift the narrative away from charity toward shared value. This reframing supports both collaborative governance and pragmatic neoliberal responses by aligning social goals with market logic.

h. *Balance Policy Form: By-law vs. Policy*

There is debate over whether CBAs should remain as policy or be enshrined as by-law. A by-law could enhance enforceability but raises risks of judicial challenge and legal entanglement. Conversely, keeping CBAs as policy preserves flexibility and efficiency in implementation. The current consensus among city staff leans toward retaining the policy form but strengthening implementation mechanisms to avoid a “toothless” outcome. From a collaborative governance perspective (Ansell & Gash, 2008), this flexibility allows iterative adjustment while sustaining legitimacy.

In sum, effective CBA reform requires a careful balance: policies must be clear, enforceable, and ambitious enough to deliver equity outcomes, yet flexible and incentive-driven to ensure developer participation. Embedding early engagement, strengthening monitoring, scaling targets, and building institutional resilience will help transform CBAs from a symbolic gesture into a practical and durable tool for equitable urban development.

6. CONCLUSION

This report demonstrates that CBAs represent both a challenge and an opportunity in contemporary urban governance. The policy sits at the intersection of private development interests, community benefit goals, and regulatory oversight, and its implementation requires careful negotiation between competing priorities.

Developers, while acknowledging the social intent of CBAs, consistently emphasized operational and financial challenges. Ambiguities in thresholds, reporting requirements, and post-occupancy responsibilities create uncertainty that can deter investment and complicate project delivery. Developers advocate for incentive-based mechanisms, clearer guidance, and flexibility in how CBAs are structured and enforced. However, successful examples such as the Parq Vancouver project illustrate that when implemented with strong leadership, dedicated coordinators, and alignment with industry realities, CBAs can deliver measurable outcomes.

Social enterprises and non-profits highlight the policy’s potential to create transformative social impact but point to persistent barriers in accessing opportunities. Structural challenges, including pre-selection of contractors, insufficient contract unbundling, and late-stage engagement, limit the effectiveness of CBAs. Stakeholders consistently recommended higher targets, earlier engagement, embedded integration coordinators, and tailored procurement mechanisms to ensure equitable participation. These findings underscore the need to

reframe CBAs not merely as compliance tools, but as strategic instruments for systemic change and economic inclusion.

Third-party monitors play a pivotal role in bridging policy and practice. Their focus on capacity-building, verification, and facilitation is essential to translating the policy's intent into measurable outcomes. They also highlight limitations in current reporting systems, contested definitions of "local" procurement, and the need for consistent training to ensure compliance across projects.

From a policy perspective, the study reveals that CBAs are most effective when they combine ambition with clarity, accountability, and practicality. Short-term improvements, such as clarifying reporting requirements, unbundling contracts, embedding coordinators, and scaling obligations to project size, can enhance implementation and mitigate challenges. Longer-term strategies may involve embedding CBAs into zoning or legal frameworks, ensuring resilience against market or political pressures, and maintaining alignment with broader social and economic development objectives.

In conclusion, CBAs represent a critical instrument to embed public purpose in private development. Their success relies on a balanced approach that recognizes the operational realities of developers, the social ambitions of community organizations, and the procedural expertise of monitors. When implemented thoughtfully, CBAs can foster inclusive urban development, equitable economic opportunities, and lasting community benefits, but without targeted reforms, they risk remaining symbolic rather than substantive tools for social change.

Annex

1.A. Multiplier Approach: Estimating the Economic Impact of the CBA Policy through Local and Social Procurement Multipliers

This section outlines the empirical strategy used to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Policy in more detail. An important tool for quantifying multiplier effects of local investments is the Local Multiplier 3 (LM3), developed by the New Economics Foundation in 2002. The LM3 method captures the initial spending by an organization, its subsequent local procurement, and the local re-spending by recipients of that income. This tool has been tested across ten communities and five sectors, including government procurement, agriculture, access to finance, and social welfare. In the UK, LM3 scores for two social value enterprises were 1.87 for a youth education program and 1.67 for a neighborhood regeneration initiative. This study adopts a multiplier-based approach to analyze the economic impacts of the CBA Policy, described in more depth in last year's sustainability scholar's report. The economic impacts are calculated using three formulas, each representing a specific policy dimension. The effect depends on the percentage of revenue or employment (α_i) attributable to the implementation of the CBA.

Eq (1) below calculates the economic impact of local employment by applying the induced income multiplier specific to British Columbia. This multiplier reflects the effect of wages paid to equity-deserving employees on the provincial economy.

$$\text{Salary Effect}_i = m_{i_{\text{employment}}} \times \alpha_i \times (\text{annual living wage} - \text{EI benefits}) \quad (1)$$

Where, n_i is the number of equity-deserving employees hired for project i , $m_{i_{\text{employment}}} = 1.254$ is the induced income multiplier (Statistics Canada, 2023), α is the proportion of employment considered additional due to the CBA, estimated to be 10% based on details provided by key informants. The salary is computed as the product of average hours worked per year and the Vancouver living wage. EI benefits represent what the individual would have received if unemployed. This calculation assumes that the employee would have otherwise been unemployed, so the net salary effect is derived by subtracting unemployment benefits from the wage. The relatively lower multiplier (1.254) compared to procurement reflects the different ways wages circulate in the economy.

Eq (2) below estimates the economic effect of local procurement by considering how spending with local businesses stimulates additional economic activity through supply chain and re-spending effects.

$$\text{Local Procurement Economic Effect}_i = m_{i_{\text{local}}} \times \sum_{h=1}^H \text{Local Procurement Spend}_{ih} \times \alpha_i \quad (2)$$

Where, H is the number of local companies engaged by project i , $m_{i_{\text{local}}} = 1.6$ is the local business multiplier, a figure that is computed as an average of local multipliers employed in analogous studies (Statistics Canada, 2024). $\text{Local Procurement Spend}_{ih}$ is the expenditure by project i in local business h , α_i is the share of procurement revenue that is additional due to CBA policy. Based on informed feedback from key informants, α_i is identified at 15%. The total economic impact from local procurement is obtained by summing over all local businesses contracted in the project. The multiplier of 1.6 reflects how each dollar spent locally continues to generate value in the regional economy.

Eq (3) evaluates the economic impact of social procurement—spending directed toward social value enterprises—using a higher multiplier that accounts for the broader social benefits these businesses provide to their communities.

$$\text{Social Procurement Economic Effect} = m_{i_{\text{social}}} \times \sum_{l=1}^L \text{Social Procurement Spend}_{il} \times \alpha_i \quad (3)$$

Where, L is the number of social value companies contracted by project i , $m_{i_{\text{social}}} = 1.7$ is the social enterprise multiplier, based on conservative estimates from similar research undertaken in the region (Statistics Canada, 2023), $\text{Social Procurement Spend}_{il}$ is the procurement value with social enterprises, α_i represents the proportion of revenue attributable to the CBA, estimated to be 25% based on information provided by key

informants. This model captures how spending with social enterprises not only recirculates economically but also amplifies community benefits through inclusive employment and reinvestment in marginalized populations. Together, these formulas offer an evidence-based method for evaluating the economic contributions of the CBA policy in Vancouver. They reflect distinct pathways—employment, local business development, and social value enterprise support—through which CBA requirements can generate sustained and measurable economic benefits.

1B. Interview data analysis

The analysis of qualitative interview data in this project will follow a thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of patterns and key insights across stakeholder perspectives. Interviews will be transcribed and systematically coded to extract recurring themes related to local hiring, procurement practices, barriers to implementation, and perceived impacts of the CBA Policy, relying on the NVivo software. Both inductive and deductive coding will be used: inductive to allow unexpected themes to emerge from the data, and deductive to test for alignment with predefined policy objectives such as equity, inclusion, and community benefit. Particular attention will be given to how interviewees describe successes and challenges in meeting CBA targets. This approach enables a rich understanding of how the policy operates in practice and informs recommendations for refinement. Triangulation with quantitative findings will enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis.

The interviews with developers will examine how developers perceive the financial and procedural implications of the policy, including administrative challenge, clarity of compliance requirements, and the degree to which CBA provisions influence project planning, supply chain logistics, and construction timelines. This component will generate insight into how compliance obligations are experienced by private-sector actors and whether CBA mandates are seen as feasible, cumbersome, or beneficial in practice.

The interviews with community organizations will explore how these actors interpret and experience the policy's employment and procurement mandates, with particular attention to the extent to which equity-denied populations, such as Indigenous Peoples, racialized groups, newcomers, and persons with disabilities, have benefitted from or faced obstacles in accessing CBA-related opportunities. Additional lines of inquiry will examine the organizational capacities required to compete for contracts, navigate municipal procurement systems, comply with reporting requirements, and sustain participation in long-duration development processes. In doing so, this qualitative stream seeks to surface not only outcome data but also experiential and structural insights that are not readily captured through administrative reporting.

The interviews with third-party monitors focus on three interrelated dimensions. First, they will assess whether it is financially viable for developers to source goods and services locally, or whether price and scale advantages continue to favor national or international suppliers. Second, they will examine which categories of goods and services—such as construction materials, subcontracted labor, or professional services—are realistically procurable from within the City of Vancouver or the broader Lower Mainland region. Third, the interviews will investigate constraints that may inhibit local or equity-denied supplier participation, including issues related to cost competitiveness, procurement scale, certification requirements, or readiness to meet project timelines.

A further goal of interviews with all three categories of stakeholders is to ascertain products and services for which localized procurement is feasible for developers, keeping in view local supply chain realities, and cost dynamics.

This qualitative component will draw on interviews with six developers, three Third-Party Monitors, and seven representatives from the social enterprise and non-profit sector (including individual interviews and a focus group), providing a comprehensive view of how the City's Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy is experienced across different actors in the development ecosystem. In combination, these methods enable a multidimensional evaluation of the CBA Policy's effectiveness and provide a grounded empirical basis for assessing how and under what conditions community benefits can be delivered equitably and at scale.

Drawing on both administrative reporting and stakeholder insights, the analysis combines quantitative multiplier modelling with qualitative data collection to assess how the policy translates equity goals into measurable economic outcomes. Together, these data sources offer a multidimensional foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the CBA Policy and for identifying actionable strategies to strengthen its institutional design and delivery.

Table 1C. Employment, Local and Social Procurement Multipliers for the Ashley Mar and St Paul's Table with Calculations

| | Employment Multiplier | Local Procurement Multiplier | Social Procurement Multiplier |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| St Paul's Hospital | $1.254 \times 1.10 \times 211 \times \$13,090^2 = \$3.81\text{M}$ | $1.6 \times 1.15 \times \$28.39\text{M} = \52.22M | $1.7 \times 1.25 \times 8.45 \text{ M} = \17.96 M |
| Ashley Mar | $1.254 \times 1.10 \times 21 \times \$13,090 = \$0.06\text{M}$ | $1.6 \times 1.15 \times \$50.48\text{M} = \92.80M | $1.7 \times 1.25 \times \$13.89\text{M} = \29.51M |

²The living wage for Metro Vancouver in 2025 is \$27.50 per hour. Assuming a standard 35-hour workweek and 52 weeks per year: $\$27.50 \times 35 \text{ hours/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks/year} = \$49,230$ per year. For claims beginning on or after December 29, 2024, the maximum weekly EI benefit rate is \$695. Over 52 weeks: $\$695 \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$36,140$ per year. Difference: Living Wage – EI Benefits. To find the difference between the annual living wage and the maximum EI benefits: $\$49,230$ (living wage) – $\$36,140$ (EI benefits) = $\$13,090$.

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