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Wednesday 13 November 2013

Dear Members of the Board of Great Northern Way Campus Trust:

Re: Water features and revised structure plan for the Great Northern Way Campus of Emily Carr University

The goals of the False Creek Watershed Society (FCWS), incorporated as a non-profit in 2005, are:

- To advance the education of the public about the rich natural and human history of Vancouver's False Creek watershed and to increase understanding of our common environmental problems.
- To help the members of our community (and be a good example to the general community) to implement positive environmental change.

The FCWS works closely with groups on creek-related projects in the False Creek watershed, including the St. George Blueway group, which has been working for a number of years to daylight Mount Pleasant's creeks and reconnect to a biodiverse ecosystem [1].

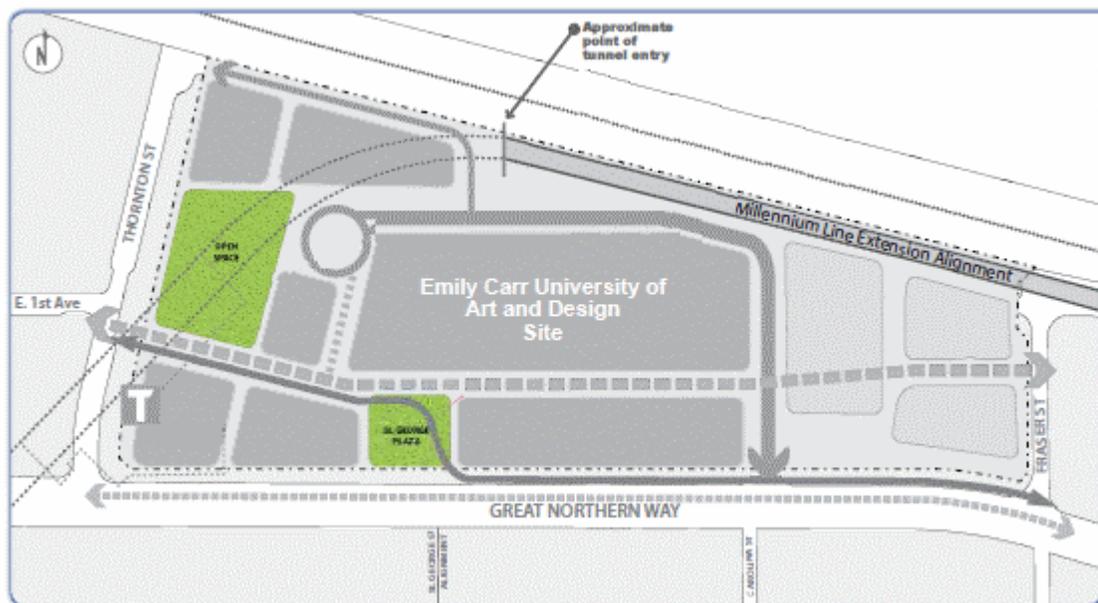
The FCWS actively involves itself in City of Vancouver planning processes related to its goals. Its Board members, staff, and associates, for example, participated in the City's processes for the Mount Pleasant Community Plan [2] and Eastern Core Strategy [3], and attended the public open house on Wednesday, 23 October, about the revised structure plan for the future redevelopment of the Great Northern Way Campus Lands [4], with City of Vancouver involvement as described in an April 2013 Development and Building Policy Report [5].

## 1. Water features in the revised structure plan for the Great Northern Way Campus

FCWS would like to thank the GNW Campus Trust for making reference to St. George Creek on its display boards at its October 2013 open house and online [4]. In the "PARKS + OPEN SPACE" part of the "Guiding principles" display board from the open house:

5. Commemorate the historical terminus of St George Creek on site as an element of the St George Rainway through Mount Pleasant [6].

The plan is for the commemoration to be at St. George Plaza, shown on the display board titled “Revised open spaces and public transit” [7]. The plaza is to be one of two main open spaces on the campus (see map below).



Proposed open spaces (St. George Plaza, Central Open Space) in current design.

**2. Historic water features in the Great Northern Way Campus area**

The Great Northern Way Campus is an interesting site from a natural history viewpoint. Part of the campus was in False Creek, St. George Creek flowed through the eastern end of the campus area, and Brewery Creek flowed a little to the west of the campus (it used to enter False Creek just west of Thornton Street).

Some of these historic water features have been acknowledged by the City. Brewery Creek, which used to flow to the west of the campus, is acknowledged by way of a series of markers, architectural elements, and a small garden along its path. There is also a proposal to mark the mouth of Brewery Creek with restored wetland in the Lost Creek Fen Project [8].

St. George Creek, which used to flow across the campus, was recognized in a proposal by architect Bryn Davidson to daylight St. George Creek. Davidson’s proposal was a finalist [9] in the Vancouver City Planning Commission’s 2005 “21 Places for the 21st Century” ideas competition [10]. Below is part of a map and accompanying text from Davidson’s submission:

The St. George Creek project is located along the path of St. George Street ... where it runs downhill from Kingsway to Great Northern Way. The sewer mains running under St. George Street serve a large segment of Mt. Pleasant and carry its water and waste downhill to the [False Creek] Flats (following underneath the Great Northern Way Campus).



Davidson's proposal has been embraced by the St. George Blueway group [1], who have been very active locally for years now. (An article about their work appeared on the front page of the *Vancouver Courier, Weekend Edition* on 1 November 2013 [11].)

The recognition of Brewery Creek and St. George Creek reflects a growing public sentiment to restore water features on the False Creek Flats, as seen in the many proposals in the re:CONNECT open ideas competition [12], organized by the City of Vancouver as part of its Eastern Core Strategy planning process [3]. (The Eastern Core Strategy is currently on hiatus, but is due to resume at some point.)

### 3. Potential for Great Northern Way Campus design and water features

FCWS understands that what was displayed at the open house is a structure plan, not an urban design plan, and is more about allocating rough parcels versus saying what's in the parcels. We see the possibility of the Great Northern Way Campus being a world class study in wetland integrated architecture, and also speaking to one of the guiding principles presented at the open house and to City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver environmental goals.

#### 3.1. Potential to include world-class wetland integrated architecture

There are a number of precedents in urban hydrology, in Vancouver and elsewhere, that might improve the structure plan:

- Water-centric public spaces: Various projects by German landscape architects Atelier Dreiseitl [13].
- Water features on the campuses of other local universities: According to an August 2012 edition of UBC Reports [14], UBC's Vancouver campus received a major upgrade last summer, including a new water feature on University Boulevard shown below, designed by the well-known Vancouver firm Philips Farevaag Smallenberg Landscape Architects [15]:



A new water feature on University Boulevard. *Philips Farevaag Smallemberg Landscape Architects Photograph*

- Urban whole-block parks with constructed wetland, public space and functional water elements, e.g., Tanner Springs Park, Portland, Oregon [16].
- Creek-integrated new development, e.g., City Creek Center, Salt Lake City, Utah [17].
- Wetland (stilted) architecture, e.g., Edithvale Seaford Wetlands Discovery Centre, Melbourne, Australia [18].
- Constructed wetland estuary habitat, e.g., at Adam Joseph Lewis Center, Oberlin College, Ohio [19].
- Stormwater management techniques including green infrastructure such as bioswales [20] and permeable roadway design, e.g., in Southeast False Creek and John Hendry Park, Vancouver, and Willamette River Park in Portland, Oregon.
- Boardwalk pedestrian and cycling corridor in an estuary, e.g., Rotary Marshes at the estuary of Brandt's Creek, at the north end of Waterfront Park, Kelowna, featuring a network of boardwalks and interpretive markers.
- Reed-bed constructed wetland wastewater treatment, e.g., the National Botanic Garden of Wales [21].
- "Living Machine" wastewater treatment facility [22], e.g., at Oberlin College, Ohio [23], which purifies non-potable wastewater for reuse in toilets and the landscape.

In each case, these precedents might suggest ways to influence the structure plans such that it opens up opportunities for water-centric design of both the connective public spaces and the building lots on the Great Northern Way campus.

### 3.2. Potential to create an enhanced sense of place

In the "PARKS + OPEN SPACE" part of the "Guiding principles" display board [6], we would draw your attention to the following statement:

3. Create a unique sense of place in the surrounding public real elements that support opportunities for social engagement and public art

As mentioned previously, part of the campus was in False Creek, St. George Creek flowed across the eastern edge of the campus area, and Brewery Creek flowed a little to the west of the campus (it used to enter False Creek just west of Thornton Street).

(a) Opportunity to recognize the historical edge of False Creek.

With regard to recognizing the southern edge of False Creek, the current proposal is for a bike route to skirt the slopes of Great Northern Way and Thornton Street — see [7]. The bottom of this slope represented the edge of False Creek in several maps of old waterbodies in Vancouver. That stretch of bike route would be an opportunity to commemorate the edge of False Creek with signage, etc.

(b) Opportunity for enhanced recognition of St. George Creek.

FCWS sees an opportunity to create a terminus for the St. George Creek and railway — as well as Brewery Creek and China Creek (which flowed into the eastern end of False Creek) — which is not only commemorative but also functional.

(c) Opportunity for enhanced visual/thematic elements to the campus.

Water features could add visually attractive, thematically interesting elements to the design of the campus.

(d) Opportunity to recognize the old in contrast to the new.

Water features would provide be an interesting juxtaposition of the new (e.g., the university's Center for Digital Media) and the old-as-new, i.e., the revised interest in old waterbodies, as seen in the City of Vancouver's Greenest City 2020 Action Plan [24], Metro Vancouver's Ecological Health Action Plan [25], and the recent European Union Water Framework Directive [26].

#### 4. Summary and Concluding Remarks

We appreciate the acknowledgement of the natural history of waterbodies in the Great Northern Way Campus area in the proposal to commemorate the historical terminus of St George Creek in the proposed St. George Plaza. We understand that the design of the campus remains relatively fluid, and hope that the Board of the GNW Trust will be receptive to the potential we see for incorporating further water features into the campus design, including the following suggestions:

- To create a terminus for the St. George Creek and railway — as well as Brewery Creek and China Creek — which is not only commemorative but also functional.
- For water elements to reprise their historic role on the site as part of the defining structure and identity for the new campus and precinct.
- For water elements to inform the structure plan, design guidelines, and final design of public spaces, architecture and landscape of the campus.
- To create a structure plan which allows for visual and functional continuity between various water elements.
- To create a structure plan which allows for pedestrian and multi-modal corridors to function as “Rainways” integrating mobility needs and functional surface-water infrastructure.

Board members, staff, and associates of FCWS would be happy to meet with the GNW Trust and City of Vancouver planning staff to follow up on the contents of this letter that interest them.

Sincerely,

The Board of False Creek Watershed Society

Board Members: Michael Barkusky (Treasurer), Greta Borick-Cunningham (Chair), Bryn Davidson,  
Dan Fass, Jason Morden  
Staff: Celia Brauer  
Associates: Shahira Sakiyama, Rita Wong

Cc: Elena Tikovt (Manager of Planning and Development for GNW Trust)  
Matt Shillito (General Manager of Planning and Development Services, City of Vancouver)  
Peter Judd (General Manager of Engineering Services, City of Vancouver)

## Notes

- [1] Website of the St. George Blueway group: <http://mtpleasantwatershed.wordpress.com>.
- [2] Website of the Mount Pleasant Community Plan: <http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/mount-pleasant-community-plan.aspx>.
- [3] Website of the Eastern Core Strategy planning process: <http://former.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/currentplanning/fcflats>. See also Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts study (<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/viaducts-study.aspx>).
- [4] Website of the Great Northern Way structure planning program: <https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/great-northern-way.aspx>
- [5] Shillito, Matt, with Peter Judd (2013). Great Northern Way Campus Revised Structure Plan: Planning Program. City of Vancouver Development and Building Policy Report. Report Date: 5 April 2013. <http://former.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20130424/documents/ptec7.pdf>. Discussed as part of agenda item with same name at meeting of the Standing Committee of Planning, Transportation & Environment on 24 April 2013. Meeting agenda: <http://former.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20130424/ptec20130424ag.htm>
- [6] The “Guiding principles” display board from the 23 October 2013 open house: <https://vancouver.ca/docs/planning/guiding-principles-board.pdf>
- [7] The “Revised open spaces and public transit” display board from the October 2013 open house, shows a map of the proposed campus redesign: <https://vancouver.ca/docs/planning/revised-open-spaces-public-transit-boards.pdf>.
- [8] Lost Creek Fen Project (mouth of Brewery Creek). <http://bcwfbogblog.com/2012/03/17/the-lost-fen>
- [9] Entry #73 in [10] - St. George Street: <http://alternativefutures.vancouverplanning.ca/art/73a.gif> and <http://alternativefutures.vancouverplanning.ca/art/73b.gif>
- [10] The Vancouver City Planning Commission’s 2005 “21 Places for the 21st Century” ideas competition finalists: <http://alternativefutures.vancouverplanning.ca/pages/21places-finalists.htm>
- [11] Rossi, Cheryl (2013). East side group aims to recreate lost stream with rainwater runoff: Mount Pleasant students join in efforts. *Vancouver Courier, Weekend Edition*. Vol. 104, No. 88, Friday 1 November 2013, pp. 1, 4. [www.vancourier.com/news/east-side-group-aims-to-recreate-lost-stream-with-rainwater-runoff-1.681412](http://www.vancourier.com/news/east-side-group-aims-to-recreate-lost-stream-with-rainwater-runoff-1.681412)
- [12] The re:CONNECT open ideas competition: <http://former.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/reconnect>.
- [13] German landscape architects Atelier Dreiseitl: [www.dreiseitl.com/index.php?id=15&lang=en](http://www.dreiseitl.com/index.php?id=15&lang=en) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atelier\\_Dreiseitl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atelier_Dreiseitl)
- [14] Waugh, Basil (2012). Extreme Makeover, Campus Edition. *UBC Reports*, Vol. 58, No. 9, 23 August 2012. [www.publicaffairs.ubc.ca/2012/08/23/extreme-makeover-campus-edition](http://www.publicaffairs.ubc.ca/2012/08/23/extreme-makeover-campus-edition)
- [15] Vancouver landscape architects Philips Farevaag Smallemberg Landscape Architects: [www.pfs.bc.ca](http://www.pfs.bc.ca)
- [16] Tanner Springs Park, Portland, Oregon. [www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/finder/index.cfm?&propertyid=1273&action=ViewPark&subareas=6](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/finder/index.cfm?&propertyid=1273&action=ViewPark&subareas=6)
- [17] City Creek Center, Salt Lake City, Utah. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City\\_Creek\\_Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Creek_Center) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City\\_Creek\\_%28Utah%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Creek_%28Utah%29)
- [18] Edithvale Seaford Wetlands Discovery Centre, Melbourne, Australia. [www.melbournewater.com.au/getinvolved/education/programs/eswdc/Pages/Edithvale-Seaford-Wetland-Discovery-Centre.aspx](http://www.melbournewater.com.au/getinvolved/education/programs/eswdc/Pages/Edithvale-Seaford-Wetland-Discovery-Centre.aspx)
- [19] Adam Joseph Lewis Center, Oberlin College, Ohio. [www.greenenergyohio.org/ost/page.cfm?pageId=1089](http://www.greenenergyohio.org/ost/page.cfm?pageId=1089)
- [20] Bioswale (Wikipedia entry): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bioswale>

- [21] National Botanic Garden of Wales. [www.gardenofwales.org.uk/?page\\_id=11163](http://www.gardenofwales.org.uk/?page_id=11163)
- [22] “Living Machine” wastewater treatment facility: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living\\_machines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_machines)
- [23] “Living Machine” wastewater treatment facility at Oberlin College, Ohio:  
[www.oberlin.edu/newserv/stories/living\\_machine\\_release.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/newserv/stories/living_machine_release.html)
- [24] City of Vancouver’s Greenest City 2020 Action Plan: <http://vancouver.ca/green-vancouver/greenest-city-2020-action-plan.aspx>
- [25] Metro Vancouver’s Ecological Health Action Plan:  
[www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/ecologicalhealth/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/ecologicalhealth/Pages/default.aspx)
- [26] European Union Water Framework Directive: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework>