

City of Vancouver  
2007 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

*August, 2007*

*Environmental Scan*  
*DRAFT*



## ***PURPOSE***

This Environmental Scan reports on the changes in Vancouver and surroundings since the city's Strategic Plan was originally developed in 1997 and last updated in 2000. It is intended to help facilitate discussions about Vancouver's vision of its future and the important issues the city needs to address in the next several years in order to realize that vision. The City of Vancouver is at a critical crossroad as it plans for the next chapters of its future. We are now the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state of Washington. What kind of city do we want to be? What does it mean to be the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state? What is our role in the larger community – the county, the region, the state, and the nation? How do we envision our future? Is the Vision created ten years ago still valid? Should it be changed? These are the kinds of questions we will explore with our community as we prepare for the next 5-10 years. Discussions among city leaders and stakeholders will identify actions the city can consider to address the challenges we face and provide ways to measure progress toward achieving our renewed Vision. The issues and actions identified as most important and the related city actions will be used to update the City's Vision, Strategic Commitments and Key Indicators, which form the foundation of Vancouver's Strategic Plan.

## ***APPROACH***

This document was compiled by city staff based on information and data from existing studies and reports. These include the City of Vancouver's Comprehensive Plan and Plan Monitoring Report, data developed as a part of the current Clark County Comprehensive Plan update, city department business plans, annual reports, budget documents, prior State of the City addresses, census information, and other reference documents.

The Environmental Scan focuses on changes in both the external environment (community, regional, national and international) as well as internal changes to the city organization and services provided by the city.

## ***CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT***

### **National and International Changes**

Numerous books and articles have been written and documentaries and movies produced about the myriad of factors that have transformed our country and our world in the last decade. This section is by no means intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive but rather to illustrate the many ways that national and international events and trends have impacted our own local community and created challenges to the city in providing vital public services to Vancouver.

To mention just a few:

***Increased violence in our world.*** Violence ranging from the tragic events of September 11, 2001 to other acts of terrorism, the war in Iraq, violence related to drug and gang activity, to random acts of violence against our children in our schools, have forever changed our perceptions of safety and security and placed much higher expectations on all levels of

government to be effective and responsive in the wake of major events and, where possible, proactive in preventing or controlling them.

**Major events of nature.** Events such as the 2004 tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and other major storms, global climate changes, and new strains of virulent diseases such as SARS and concerns about a major flu pandemic have increased awareness about the delicate balance between nature and humankind. On a local level, the potential threat of another eruption by Mt. St. Helens or an earthquake is ever present. What is government’s role and responsibility in protecting and preparing our citizens for such natural disasters? What is the city’s role and responsibility to protect our environment and natural resources for future generations?

**Exponential advances in technology and communication** The impact of technology has profoundly changed how we interact as a society and how we conduct business. Devices that allow instant messaging, e-mail, cell phones that do everything but wash the dishes, text messaging, blogs, and instant video on the web, are just a few examples of technologies that have revolutionized communications. These changes have impacted local government in many ways including raising citizen expectations and opportunities for on-line transactions, 24/7 service delivery and real-time civic engagement.

**Globalization of the world’s economy.** Changes in how and where business and industry occurs have had a significant impact on our local economy and have forced new and creative strategies in economic development for our community.

**Changing demographics in our communities.** From the aging of our society as “Boomers” hit retirement age to the growing number of non-English speaking residents, demographic changes require increased attention to diversity issues such as sensitivity to cultural differences and language barriers, as well as new strategies for the delivery of government services.

All of these changes, and many others not mentioned here, create both opportunities and challenges to the City of Vancouver to reevaluate the programs and services we provide, our responsibility to both current and future citizens, and our role in shaping the future of our community.

## **Changes in Population and Demographics in Vancouver**

Ten years ago, in 1997, Vancouver completed the largest annexation (land area and population) in the history of Washington state – growing from 65,360 to 132,000 people and from 17,079 acres to 28,337 acres overnight. Since then, growth has been steady and is expected to continue. In all, Vancouver is expected to grow by 15% over the next 14 years, but “growth” could be higher if there is another major annexation.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>
2000	143,560
2007	160,800 per OFM
2014	172,000
2020	183,000

At the same time, we have seen and can expect to continue to see changes in the characteristics of city residents. Over the next decade, the baby boom population will reach retirement age and the percentage of Vancouver residents over 65 years of age is expected to increase from 11% today to 16% of the total population in 2020. At the same time, the percentage of school age children is projected to decline from its current 16% to 14% in 2020, a decrease of approximately 3,600 students.

Our population is also becoming more diverse – with increasing ethnic and racial minority populations. The fastest growing group is the Hispanic population, which increased from 6% of the population in 2000 to 8% today. In addition, the continuing growth of non-English speaking citizens requires increasing attention to diversity issues such as sensitivity to cultural differences and language barriers.

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2020</b>
White	85%	83%	82%	80%
Black	2.5%	2%	2%	2%
Asian	4.5%	5%	6%	7%
Hispanic	6%	8%	11%	12%
Russian/Ukrainian	4%	4%	5%	5%

## **Changes in Land Use Patterns**

It's no secret that Vancouver has experienced a building boom in recent years. Most of this growth has been as infill or redevelopment of underutilized land and buildings. As a result, there are fewer vacant lots and farm fields in the city. New, larger buildings are replacing existing small structures on underutilized parcels.

<b>Developed land category</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>
Residential	7371 acres	8387 acres
Commercial	1083 acres	1568 acres
Industrial	Not available	1951 acres
Total City Acreage	29,500 acres	31,200 acres

One of the results of this infill and redevelopment is that the residential density in the City of Vancouver is increasing:

<b>Housing Units/Acre</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2006</b>
Single-family detached	5.3	6.7 per BLR
Multi-family (including town homes)	16.4	17.3

The cost of housing is also rising at a faster pace than incomes. As a result, more households find it difficult to find affordable housing. The federal government considers that no household should pay more than 35% of its income for housing in order to be able to afford other necessities like health care, transportation, food, etc. In 2000, 34% of renters and 19% of homeowners paid more than 35% of their income for housing. Today 45% of renters and 21% of homeowners do.

## **Changes in the Economy**

Over the past decade, the economy of Vancouver and the region has changed from one based on manufacturing to one based more on services, retail trade, transportation and utilities. One sector of manufacturing industries has grown – that related to technology and communications. The state and Columbia River Economic Development Council expect this trend to continue.

One result of this change is that the per capita real income has not changed substantially. Jobs in the services and retail trade industries do not pay as well on average as those in manufacturing. The per capita real income in Vancouver has not changed since 2000 if adjusted for inflation. In nominal dollars, per capita income in Vancouver was \$29,083. In 2006, it was \$32,578, a 12% change. At the same time, inflation over this period of time equaled 12.1%, eliminating real income gains over this period of time. The percentage of residents below the poverty level increased from 12.2% in 2000 to 16.9% in 2006.

According to the Washington Employment Security Department, the number of jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Vancouver grew from 69,500 in 2000 to 74,000 in 2005,. More than 90% of these jobs came from small and medium sized firms , not the expansion of existing large businesses. This steady job growth has helped to ensure that the city continues to meet its goal of one job per household. In 2005, the ratio was 1.1 jobs per household. Yet an estimated 60,000 Clark County and Vancouver residents still commute to Oregon every day for work.

## **Changes in the Environment**

Vancouver has been defined by the Columbia River for its entire history. The Columbia has provided and continues to provide transportation, water for irrigation and recreation, crops, and food. Other major water bodies in the city include Burnt Bridge Creek and Vancouver Lake. In additions to changes on the river, a century of human activity has greatly altered the lake, the creek and their watersheds. None of these water bodies currently meet federal or state water quality standards. While progress in achieving water quality improvements has been slow, some conditions are improving. Today, restoration efforts by the City of Vancouver are returning the central portion of the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway to its natural wetlands environment, providing wildlife habitat, improving flood control and enhancing water quality. To promote public stewardship, eight miles of pedestrian trail now follows Burnt Bridge Creek's path as it winds through neighborhoods, forested riparian areas, open meadows and past wetlands, water quality treatment ponds and enhanced upland and riparian habitats.

Air quality in the Vancouver area is generally good. The greatest number of days per year that standards were exceeded over the past decade was only three; and in 2006, there were none. Although Vancouver is a designated "Tree City USA," the percentage of the land area that is covered by tree canopy has declined steadily over time. In 2000, 24% of the city was covered by

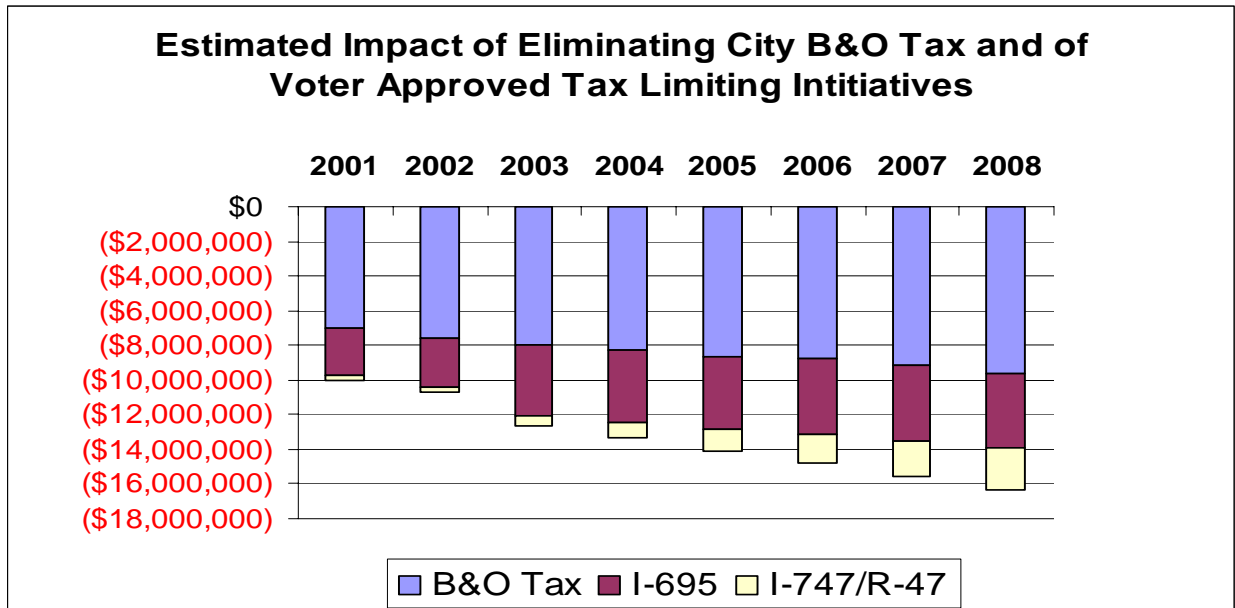
tree canopy; today only 19.7% is. Trees help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, reducing pollution. They shade buildings and streets, reducing the need for air conditioning in summer; and they hold the soil, reducing erosion and sedimentation in streams. The City has recently adopted a goal of 28% tree canopy.

## ***CHANGES IN CITY ORGANIZATION***

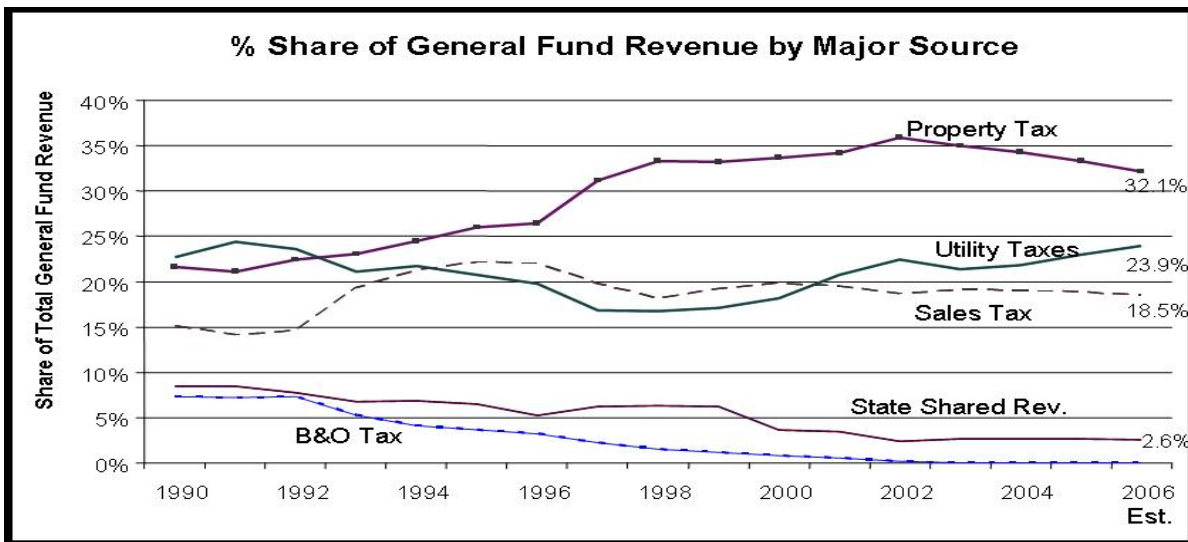
### **Changes in City Finances**

Since the last Strategic Plan update, the full impact of various tax limitation initiatives passed by Washington voters has become apparent in Vancouver. Costs are growing at a faster rate than revenues and the Vancouver City Council has struggled with finding new sources of revenue. As a result, City Council has been forced to make choices among city services. Those funded primarily by the General Fund have been most affected. For example, from 2003 through 2006, close to \$8 million was cut from General Fund programs, including the elimination of the Community Services Department; major reductions in recreation programs, \$4.5 million in cuts in administration and other discretionary programs, and elimination of more than 25 positions.

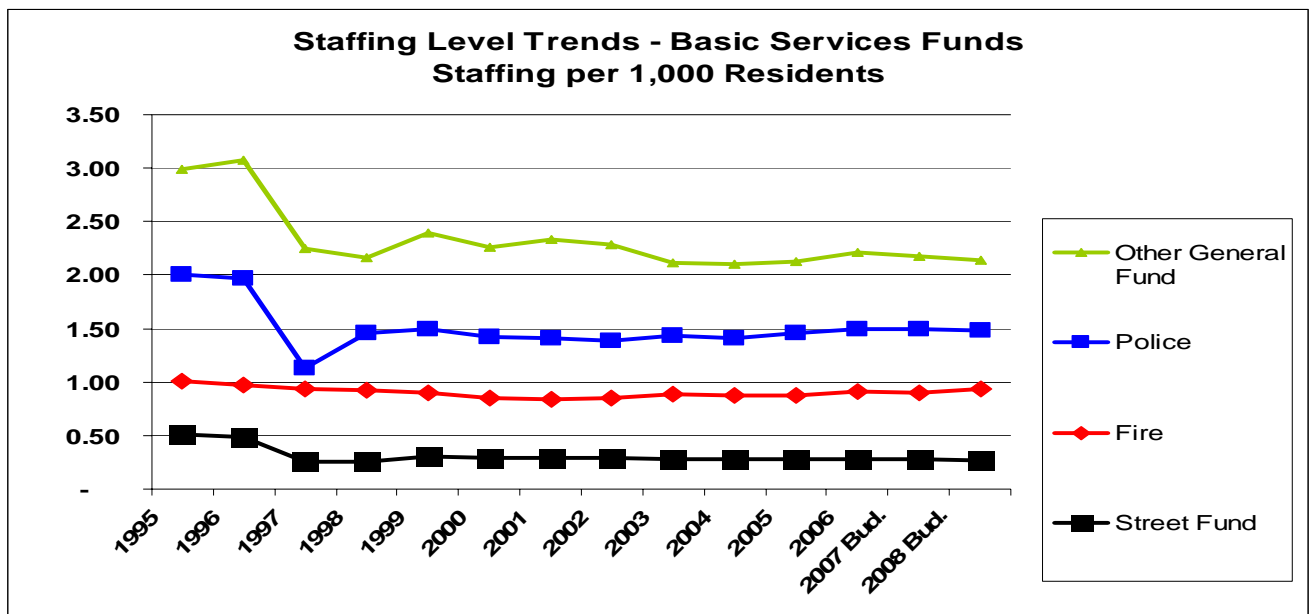
The following chart shows the cumulative effect of Initiatives 695 (reduction of motor vehicle tax) and 747/R-47 (property tax limitation), as well as the City’s phase out of the Business & Occupational (B&O) Tax

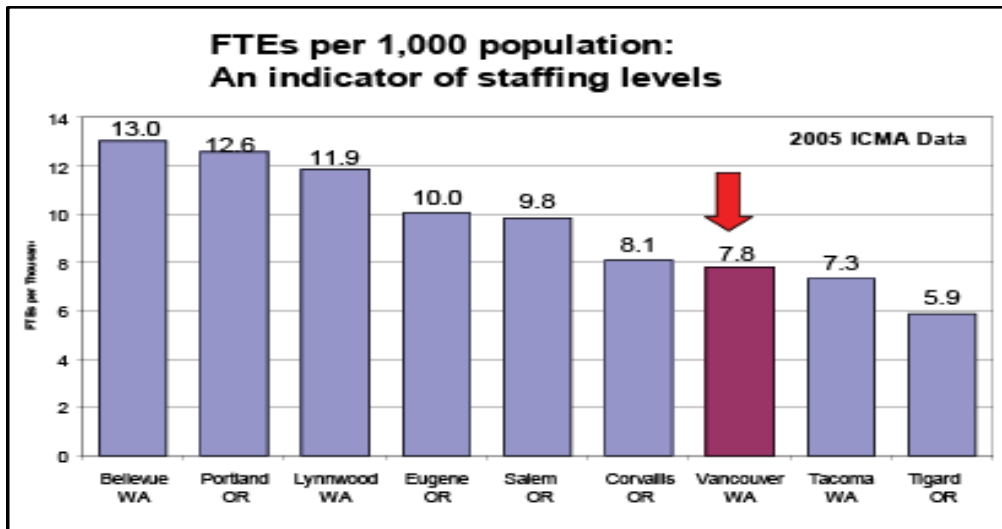


As a result of these changes in the tax structure, there has been a shift over time of the tax base for City services, with an increasing burden to tax payers on the property tax and utility taxes, as illustrated in the chart below.



With revenues not keeping pace with cost increases, due both to population growth as well as cost of living increases, there has been a slow but steady erosion of Vancouver's ability to provide basic city services. One indicator of service levels is staffing levels per 1,000 residents. As the chart below illustrates, the City experienced a significant decrease in staffing ratios immediately following the large Cascade Park annexation in 1997. Even with the phase out of the B&O tax, this annexation was expected to increase the City's tax base sufficiently to provide urban level services to the newly annexed areas. The subsequent, and unanticipated, voter approved tax limitations described above, however, have challenged the City's ability to return to previous service levels, as measured by staff ratios.





As demonstrated in the chart to the left, the staffing levels in the City of Vancouver are substantially below those of peer cities in Washington and Oregon.

In spite of these fiscal challenges, however, the city has worked hard to provide quality urban services by implementing a variety of cost-reduction strategies, coupled with significant efficiency measures. Investments in technology, for example, have allowed us to streamline operations and, in many areas, maintain service levels without adding additional staff. Business planning has been implemented in departments to ensure that they are providing the services that are most important to our citizens in the most cost effective manner. The city has specific identified performance measures for many city services. Vancouver also compares itself annually with peer cities throughout the country. If customer satisfaction is an indicator of our success in balancing resources with community needs, it would appear the city's efforts are working. Since 2000, the city has conducted a biannual community survey to gauge our citizen's level of satisfaction with city services. In general, satisfaction levels for basic city services (police, fire, water, parks, etc.) have been high. In the 2006 community survey 65% of the respondents said that Vancouver provides good value services to the residents.

## Changes in City Services

Due to many of the changes described above, in particular population growth, demographic changes and changes in Vancouver's finances, many changes to the composition of city services and to service levels have occurred over the past decade.

## Public Safety

One of the highest priority service areas for the city is public safety, which includes both the Police Department and Fire Department (which provides both fire and emergency medical response). Due to financial challenges in the past decade, staffing ratios per 1,000 residents in both departments are lower in 2007 than they were in 1996 (pre-Cascade Park annexation), as illustrated in the chart above. This has required changes in service delivery strategies to maintain adequate levels of public safety services to our community. Both departments have developed business plans to prioritize services, evaluate service delivery approaches, identify efficiencies and establish performance goals for their areas.

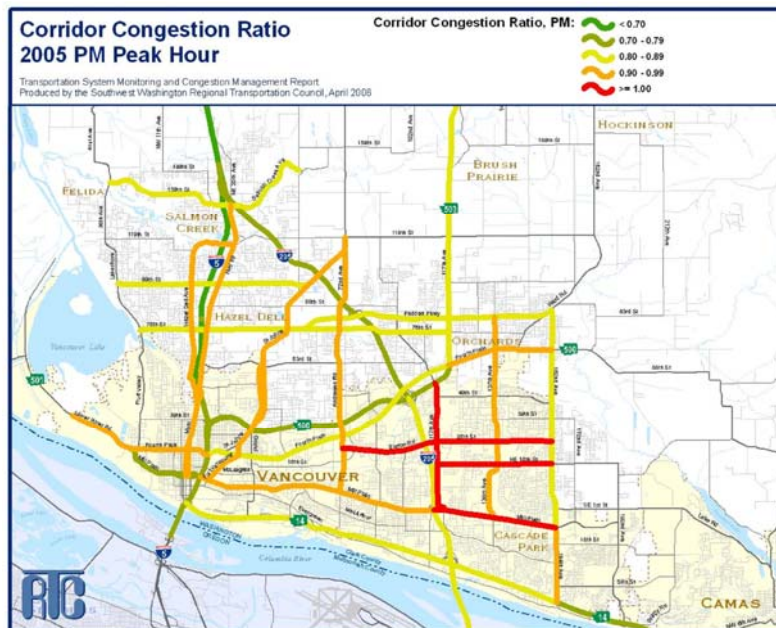
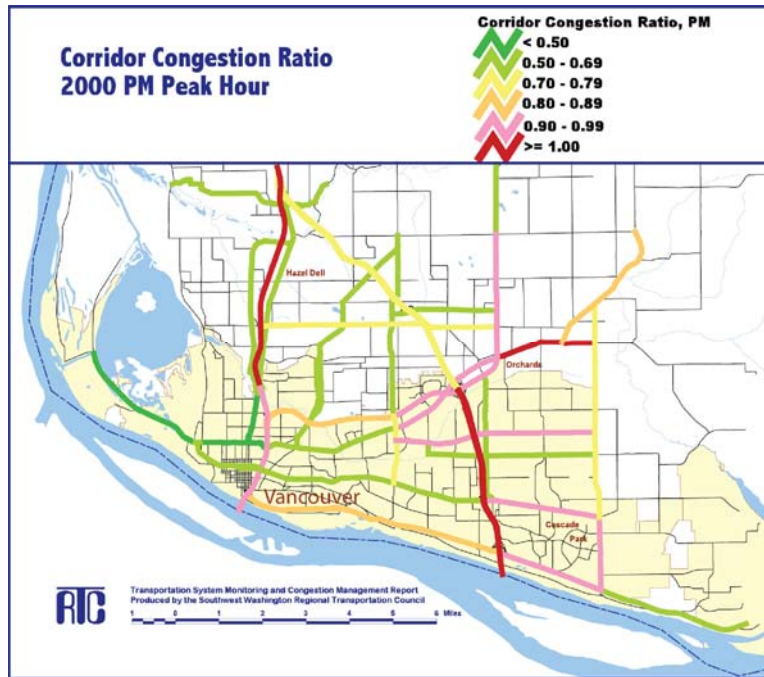
Police Department: The police department has continued to build a strong force that is flexible and highly responsive. They essentially meet all established response goals and exceed them in a

number of areas. Violent crime is steady with a slight decrease, and property crime is decreasing. The department has added non-commissioned technicians to assist with lower priority calls, expanded traffic and specialty responses as well as adjusted patrol areas and the force structure. In 2001, the department went from a three to two precincts to reduce facility costs and maximize the efficient deployment of patrol officers. Since the 2000 update of the city's Strategic Plan, the city has also moved Police Administration to a separate facility, leased a facility for investigations, completed construction of a new East precinct, and is currently building a new evidence facility, consistent with the growth in both responsibility and area they have assumed. According to our biannual community survey, citizens are very satisfied with the police department and officers. They feel generally as safe as they did six years ago, and do not see crime as a major issue facing the community.

Fire Department: Over 80% of Vancouver Fire Department's calls are for medical response. For the past four years, the department has been adding smaller medical response units to its fleet, locating them in strategic locations throughout the city. These units are much more economical than large engines to respond to medical calls. As a result of this effort, despite growing call volumes, the city response rate has stayed the same; and both the urban and rural responses have significantly improved. However, the department does not yet meet established response goals *in any category*. The fire department also decreased the overall demand for their calls by agreements with care facilities and by ending response to non-injury accidents. To maintain response times, the city has added one new fire station to the north and is adding one to the eastern area of the city, consistent with the department's business plan.

## Transportation

One of Vancouver's most pressing issues today is transportation. Despite significant capital investment in our streets and roadways, traffic congestion is consistently identified by our citizens as the issue of greatest concern; and levels of service continue to decline. The following maps show the levels of congestion as they appeared in 2000 and how they have increased in 2005.



The Transportation Department and Operation Center are responsible for a variety of services in the transportation area, including the maintenance of existing roads, sidewalks and trails, expansion of the transportation system through capital investment, and maintenance of existing and installation of new street lights and traffic control devices.

Success in the transportation area is measured in a number of ways, but three notable areas are:

- 1) Over 66% of all funds used in current projects are “non-city” money. We rely heavily on grants and other sources of funding to complete projects. In 2006, multi-year grants were approved in the amount of \$86,920,000. This represented a 68% success rate applying for high value grants that could be used for key projects.
- 2) We have used a portion of dedicated funding to maintain our road surfaces at a steady level; 65% of the roads and street surfaces are rated “satisfactory or above.” Although this is not the preferred level of satisfaction, the city has managed to keep the rating from slipping lower despite dramatically increased costs of material and labor. The city currently has a total of 1,714 lane miles and it costs an average of \$2,293 per lane mile to maintain our existing system.
- 3) The city is working to decrease the number of collisions at our top 10 accident intersections. Although the results are promising, the changes have not been as significant as we had hoped.

Funding for priority transportation projects is a particular challenge due to the significant costs associated with transportation capital. Our existing transportation capital funding is essentially depleted, and the city is actively searching for new sources of multi-year funding to maintain levels of service and to invest in our transportation infrastructure to decrease congestion, improve mobility and take advantage of economic development opportunities for our community. In 2006, the city implemented a business surcharge to generate revenue for a very limited number of high priority projects. The city is also working with the local business community and State legislature to explore other local options for transportation funding.

## **Parks & Recreation**

Vancouver is fortunate to have many parks and open spaces located throughout the community. Currently, 74% of our residents live within a quarter of a mile of a park, and 99% live within a half a mile. As redevelopment and infill occurs, it is difficult and expensive to acquire land for parks in neighborhoods that are already developed. However, the increased density will increase the need for parks and other public open space as private open space (yards and gardens) decreases. Meeting this need is a challenge the city faces, and finding sufficient dollars to maintain existing parks and green spaces is a continuous issue.

Our major indicators of success for Parks & Recreation are citizen satisfaction with services; parks acquisition and development standards; and recreation cost recovery. Citizen satisfaction has increased about 5% in the last two years, despite very limited funding. The city is very close to our land acquisition goals, and is making progress on development level of the parks. Recent efforts to contain maintenance costs and reduce the use of non-natural chemicals are showing some progress, and cost recovery for recreation programs is constantly improving. Major capital

programs include completion of Firstenburg Community Center, serving the east side of the city, and major renovation of Marshall Community Center to improve our service on the west side.

## **Community Services**

City services that have been most adversely impacted by the General Fund budget challenges of the last decade have been those in the community services area. Since the last Strategic Plan update in 2000, the Office of Neighborhoods program has been reduced from 4.0 to 1.5 FTEs and neighborhood grants have been decreased; the Heritage and Cultural programs and Youth Council were eliminated; the Retired Citizens Volunteer Corps (RSVP) and Foster Grandparents Program, previously sponsored by the City of Vancouver, were spun off to other agencies; and funding for various human service programs in the community has been significantly reduced. In the 2003/2004 biannual budget, the Community Services Department was eliminated and the remaining programs were assumed by other City departments.

## **City Facilities**

Another consequence of the City's efforts to balance constrained resources with increased demand for direct services has been underinvestment in City facilities. Many of the City's buildings, including fire and police stations and park facilities, are old and in dire need of repair or replacement. In addition, due to limited capital dollars, the city has tended to address its increasing space needs by incremental leasing of office space. This has resulted in the city government operating out of multiple locations, which is inefficient, costly and confusing to our customers.

Despite these challenges, the city has been slowly chipping away at its needs; and some progress has been made. A new fire station was opened in 2006 and another is under construction in 2007. A new police precinct building and the Firstenburg Community Center were opened on the east side of the city in 2006. The Marshall Community Center on the west side of the city is currently undergoing extensive renovations and is scheduled to reopen in the fall of 2007.

However, pressing needs still exist. Consolidation of core government functions into a centralized downtown service center and renovation or replacement of several fire and police stations remain a funding challenge the city faces.

## **Public Works**

Vancouver provides water and sewer service to residents within the urban growth area, as well as inside the city. Our citizens' top non-public safety concern is for clean, plentiful water, and growth increases water demand and sewage generation. The city's two wastewater treatment facilities and extensive collection system are designed and managed to handle the expected increase in volumes beyond 2020. Due to diligent management and increased maintenance, the city's water infrastructure is in good condition. At the same time, Vancouver's revitalization in the west and strong expansion in the east are expected to boost water demands by 60% over the next 20 years. The city's 2006 Water System Comprehensive Plan is designed to meet these future needs and enhance system reliability and security. The plan, developed in cooperation with the State Departments of Ecology and Health, outlines actions to ensure a continued supply of clean water. Improvements are already being put into place, including new transmission lines to move water quickly to growing areas. The city's water rights and existing capacities are

sufficient to handle all water demands that are expected through 2020. The city’s 66 mgd average annual water rights greatly exceeds the 2020 average demand of 44 mgd and also provides sufficient annual volume to allow higher peak day fluctuations. Going forward, the city will continue to promote the efficient use of water resources and evaluate supply and capacity in light of future demand.

<b>Service</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>Existing 2007 Capacity</b>
Average daily sewer use	22 mgd	20 mgd	25 mgd	28 mgd	37 mgd
Average daily water demand	26 mgd	32 mgd	38 mgd	44 mgd	70 mgd
Peak day water demand	53 mgd	59 mgd	65 mgd	73 mgd	88 mgd
Water rights, annual average	66mgd	66 mgd	66 mgd	66 mgd	66 mgd

## ***CONCLUSION***

As described in the Environmental Scan above, there are many factors at play that will influence the future of our community and organization. External forces – acts of nature, changes in demographics, technological advances, globalization of the economy, just to name a few – are largely outside of our control. Yet how we choose to respond to them, as a community and as a government agency, will be important to preserving and improving the livability of Vancouver. On a more local level, many of the issues and trends that Vancouver faces – impacts of population growth, traffic congestion, infrastructure needs, constrained financial resources, urbanization, environmental concerns, will be greatly impacted by decisions made by the City of Vancouver. The update of the city’s Strategic Plan presents an opportunity to shape the future of Vancouver by providing the framework to realize our potential as a community.