



Society Promoting Environmental Conservation

Healthy Cities Are Our Future



2007 Annual Report



Message from the President

It has been a challenging year for SPEC. 2006 -2007 was a promising year for the organization and the Board spent a great deal of energy in early 2007 making plans and setting priorities that included increased activity in many areas. We saw many opportunities including the potential for a realistic and value driven “on line” carbon credit purchase system, expansion of the transportation campaign and



an increased focus on the SPEC building as a Sustainability Centre. SPEC continues to do exactly the kind of education and campaigning that needs to be done on a daily basis in our community.

Regrettably, we were unable to find the kind of sustainable funding that was necessary to fund our plans and our lack of a substantial individual donor base meant we had little flexibility to deal with unsuccessful grant applications. This led to a challenging situation that required the full efforts and commitment of the staff and the Board. They all hung in and gave an enormous amount of time, energy and money to ensure that SPEC continued to be relevant and active.

Despite these setbacks there are a number of milestones and key accomplishments for this past year that need to be acknowledged and celebrated.

First and foremost, SPEC continued to lead on the Port Mann/Highway 1 file. It is no exaggeration to say that without SPEC, and in particular Dave Fields and Eric Doherty, the campaign against this folly would not have been nearly as effective – or even existent. Time after time they took the lead in shedding light on the Province’s misguided plan, succeeding in keeping the issue alive in the media and building a robust coalition of diverse interests. Today, new community groups are springing up in opposition to the Port Mann twinning and carrying on the fight at the neighbourhood level - precisely the goal we set for ourselves when we took this on.

Second, our Food Safety and Security committee has been very active leading the discussion in Vancouver on important food issues. Thanks to Joanna, Karen, Tara and Carole for their leadership on this.

Third, we have managed to finish our second Audited Financial Statement and change our year- end - no small feat given the challenges we faced.

Finally, we have recruited an exciting slate of new Directors for SPEC. Renewal is in the air. I am stepping down as President but will stay involved on the Board. I cannot express how rewarding and challenging these two years have been. I want to thank the Board for their constant support and encouragement and especially thank the three staff of SPEC for their dedication. Ilse who is the constant presence in the office, and Dave and Karen who I have already mentioned, along with the almost daily contribution of our stellar Board member and volunteer Jess Metter, who is here day in and day out making sure all the daily tasks are completed.

The need for SPEC has never been greater. A community oriented, practical, education and campaign oriented environmental group, SPEC has been around for almost 40 years and my prediction is that it will be around for 40 more, still fighting for the environment and for communities. We should celebrate that prospect.

A Message from the Desk of the Executive Director

SPEC is the only Vancouver non-profit focused on urban sustainability: on people and how their lives in cities can be made better. Our vision statement, "Healthy Cities are our Future", informs all of our programming, making us unique among the many groups working to protect the environment.

All of our current projects were chosen because of their importance in curbing, or coping with, climate change. We looked at the various ways people contribute to climate change and found that the big three are: transportation choices, food choices and energy consumption. Then we examined each of these areas to see what contribution SPEC could make, from an urban viewpoint, to changing government policy and encouraging public action.

Our transportation campaign focused immediately on "Better Transit, Not Freeways" and the plan to expand Hwy 1 and twin the Port Mann Bridge. Just like freeway proposals in Vancouver in the early '70's, this project threatens to choke communities with yet more traffic for which there is neither road capacity, nor parking. It also encourages the continuation of a car-dependent, urban sprawl that is bad for human health, air quality, the environment and our future food security, as the sprawl continues to eat up agricultural lands.

The campaign led with a solution: instead of more highway space, we should build queue-jumper lanes on the existing Port Mann to help the buses cross it,



and invest in three strategic transit upgrades that would help commuters use transit instead of cars. Our solution is cheaper, better and faster than highway development and, with continued investment in upgrading transit, would last much, much longer.

That fight obviously continues, and we're still optimistic that the Liberals will back down from their stubborn insistence that the expansion plan will go ahead.

Our Food Security project has two aspects: protecting Lower Mainland farmlands as well as encouraging urban agriculture. We believe that preparing people for the twin impacts of climate change and peak oil means alerting them to the fact that most agriculture is highly fossil-fuel dependent and that prices of food will rise steeply with rising oil prices.

Teaching the skills to grow food in urban centres, while working at the ALR and provincial levels to save existing farms, we hope to raise the profile of this issue considerably. At the same time, we encourage organic growing, the planting of non-commercial varieties (to protect biodiversity in the food supply) and the saving and sharing of seed (to ensure diversity in the sources of food supply in the face of emerging corporate control of food through seed patents).

We currently operate two demonstration gardens; we're working on a new project with schools and daycares to integrate food education into their curriculum, and we've made submissions to two ongoing applications for withdrawal of farmlands from the ALR.

Finally, SPEC is uniquely placed to assist with public education on renewable energy, as we operate a City-owned building in which we've installed three major pieces of solar technology for demonstration purposes. We work to educate the public, builders, architects and property managers (as well as students) about the benefits of incorporating solar technology and energy-savings measures. We conduct public tours and outreach events, providing a hands-on experience to anyone interested in what the technology can do.

Funding for our work is derived in large part from members like you, and we thank you for adding your voice to SPEC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Wristen', written in a cursive style.

Karen G. Wristen
Executive Director

A Heartfelt Thanks...

...to all of our 2007 volunteers. Without the hours of work that you did, we could never have pulled off the successes of this year!

Andrew Eisenberg	Douglas Gook	Mark Grimsrod
Andrew Kittel	Gabriel Pelletier	Mike Peel
Andrew Feltham	Georiga Graduate	Mitra Mansour
Andrew Monaghan	Hugo Li	Nancy Austin
Angela Berge	Isobel Kiborn	Nathan Heketh
Anja Wittling	Jacob Christian Ginj	Neil Hammond
Ann Foster	Jacqueline Bell	Paig
Ann Michelle Costa	Jason Poulser	Patrick Connolly - Boutin
Antoine Pastre	Jennifer Lewis	Peggy Lam
Ariel Yeh	Jennifer Bobroff	Chang
Baharani McGregor	Jennifer Chubb	Phoebe Ho
Barbara Zamora	Jim Wilson	Rafferty Baker
Benjamin Damm	Jodi Peters	Rick Pollay
Bill Hopwood	Jodi Muzylowski	Rie Onodera
Birchina Caldwell	Johanna Bruncke	Ron Thom
Blane Grant	Josh Tomlinson	Ronald Pon
Bob MacGregor	Julia Say	Saba Zebetian
Bonnie Frenton	Julie Desilets	Sabine Schoppel
Byron Koss	Karen Magnuson-Ford	Saori Ito
Cecile Helten	Kathleen Fawley	Sean Tynan
Cheryl Low	Kathryn Colby	Sean Mullen
Chris Bodnar	Kevin Luximon	Shannon Enns
Chris Curtis	Krystal Wiseman	Sherri Maunsell
Conrald Schmidt	Kym Bogan	Stephanie Eder
Daisy McColl	Laura Princic	Taliesin Whayland
Daniel Nofz	Laura Anderson	Tess Kitchener
Daniel Scheel	Leon Tonis	Toby Timm
Dark Armstrong	Lindsay O'Donnell	Vickie Knowles
David McKee	Marina Jozipovic	Zachary Bunting
Deming Smith	Mark Hann	

2007 Campaign Update

Better Transit, Not Freeways

2007 was a breakthrough year for the better transit, not freeways campaign. The public called for action on climate change and the Premier responded with promises and photo ops. The twinning of the Port Mann Bridge and expansion of Highway 1, part of the Gateway Project, is recognized by all as the biggest contradiction to the Premier's green plan, by increasing regional emissions above a business-as-usual-scenario. More and more experts have been joining their voices with concerned citizens and environmental groups, with over 260 experts signing a petition and speaking out in the media. In the fall the Official Opposition came out against freeway expansion, calling for a transit first solution to our transportation problems in the Lower Mainland.

As 2007 drew to a close, the climate change imperative overtook the outdated and heavily flawed Gateway Project. Citizens, frustrated by car congestion and inadequate transit service, support a transit first approach by a large margin. The Premier and the Highways Minister, unwilling to reconcile road building with climate change action, say they are going ahead anyway and have promised 20 buses to go with the Port Mann project. Nobody is fooled - citizens, pundits, experts and the environmental community have called it for what it is- a greenwash. Even the province's own studies back this up - their traffic projections

show that transit done with freeway expansion does not reduce the amount of car traffic.



*Stop Gateway Rally Sep 2007 at
Westin Bayshore Hotel*

This year SPEC also launched a new transportation project called Transit Lab with a free pancake breakfast served to transit users at the bustling Broadway Station. The project is intended to "better the better way" by explaining what makes a successful transit system and gives examples from around the world. Transit Lab is also a solutions playground where transit users can collaborate and offer suggestions on how to improve Metro Vancouver's transit system. We have been active on the front lines and behind the scenes. Producing incisive reports, educating the public, forging new partnerships and translating it all into action. In 2008 we will pressure the province to reconcile their freeway expansion plans with their green plans and build more support for expanded and frequent transit for our region.

In 2007 SPEC launched the Action Centre collecting 2300 signatures and 310 letters combined with 6000 signatures from events.



There were 36 outreach events, including: the Barenaked Ladies concert, Stop Cooking the Planet breakfast for transit users, hosting of David Suzuki's Vancouver stop on his cross Canada tour, a presence at the EPIC green consumer fair, at universities and colleges around the region and at Farmer's Markets community festivals and forums. February saw the release of Cooking the Books, the Taken for a Ride report showing more Gateway dirty tricks.

In May we released provincial poll results showing that 73% of people favour transit investment over freeway expansion to fight climate change. SPEC made submissions on greenhouse gas emissions to the Environmental Assessment Office on the South Fraser Perimeter Road (a part of the Gateway Project) in May and August and launched an advertising campaign in partnership with a Langley small business in 2 parts. Over 430 articles, letters and editorials have appeared this year in

the local, provincial, national and international press. The campaign was well represented in radio and television as well. The province's messaging is still being carried but the glaring inconsistencies between climate change and road building and the dire need for more transit is being discussed openly, even in papers where editorial boards support Gateway.

Food Safety and Security

SPEC's Food Safety and Security (FSS) committee is involved with projects that enhance food safety and security in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. More specifically, the goal is to:

- develop policy that reflects the implications for food security that arise from climate change, loss of biodiversity, and monoculture;
- educate and encourage citizens to produce their own food, to shop for locally grown food and to be aware of their 'food miles' consumed;
- work where appropriate to support other groups in areas of food safety, such as genetically modified organisms, aquaculture, agricultural feed safety, water and soil pollution;
- conduct public education and outreach to reduce the use of toxics in landscape and horticulture; and
- raise public awareness of, and participate in, efforts to protect the Agricultural Land Reserve.

SPEC's FSS committee is actively involved with three projects including:

- Developing demonstration urban agriculture sites that provide ideas and inspiration for growing food in garden plots or in small containers;
- Working with undergraduate students from UBC to develop resource packages that provide information on developing and maintaining community gardens; and
- Distributing brochures and information regarding Product Care and Safe Disposal of Pesticides (part of REAP – Real Alternatives to Pesticides)

The FSS is involved with demonstration gardens through our building's rooftop veggie production and a community garden site. Our crew consists of a variety of dedicated volunteers who have a keen interest in food, gardening, biodiversity, sustainable systems and more. In the process of developing our two demonstration sites we are learning what will and will not work under two different types of growing conditions - a rooftop and a garden plot. Our goal is to share what we have learned about urban agriculture as a way of helping or inspiring others to join in the task of local and household food production. Our mission is also to incorporate research into our growing practices. For example, we have been evaluating 3 different types of non-synthetic fertilizers to see which one works best for

growing plants and obtaining highest yields.

On the rooftop of SPEC's building we set out to learn how to utilize roof space to grow food and develop production methods that could be used by people living in apartments and with limited backyard space. A variety of vegetable, herb and flower seeds were sown in April and planted into a variety of containers in June 2007. Plants were watered as needed and maintained throughout the summer. The FSS Committee undertook a research project to compare organic fertilizers in order to compare the growth and yields of lettuce, tomatoes and peppers grown using three different organic fertilizers. The three fertilizers used were manure, alfalfa meal and flax seed meal.



Manure verses Alfalfa meal...



SPEC volunteer Jennifer Lewis

Energy

SPEC continues to showcase solar technology and energy conservation measures that are practical and, for the most part, affordable for the average citizen. In 2007, we conducted numerous tours of the facility for builders, architects, students and members of the general public. We also took the programme out to the community, at the EPIC trade show and as a participant in the MacMillan Space Centre's first ever "Sustainability Week" in March. At the Space Centre, we demonstrated our solar cookers and conducted a workshop with children and their parents in which the kids built their own solar cooker.

Back at the SPEC Sustainability Centre, our photovoltaic panels, installed in June, 2005 by Vancouver

Renewable Energy Cooperative (VREC), continue to perform at peak capacity. They have been a very valuable demonstration asset, as public interest in the generation of renewable energy has reached record levels in our experience. Although photovoltaic's are not presently cost-effective, new technology for producing the panels promises substantial price reductions, and we track these developments with interest.

We still have the 27-year-old solar hot water system to recommend to those disappointed with the cost-effectiveness of photovoltaics, however. Solar hot water has reduced our building's gas bill by 40%. It is an ideal technology for homeowners looking to make a small investment in sustainability: a solar hot water system can pay back its cost in energy savings within as little as 5 years.

Our third demonstration piece is a solar space heater, installed last year on our south wall. This simple device ducts air from outside, through a panel that collects the sun's heat. The whole device operates on a solar-powered fan, so it operates only when the sun is bright enough to add some heat to the air. The installation is still in progress but when completed, it will add warm air to our notoriously cold basement.

Our plans to continue to upgrade the Sustainability Centre include replacing some inefficient lighting fixtures and adding more solar hot water equipment to improve space

heating throughout the building. Tours of the facility are available by appointment, and school groups are welcomed. Interested in learning

about renewable energy options? Call for an appointment to explore this special space!

Outreach Activities

In 2007 SPEC attended numerous outreach events, including our introduction of David Suzuki on his cross-country climate change tour, our solar workshop at MacMillan Space Centre, Commercial Car Free Festival, Burnaby Discovery Day, Farmers Markets, Fingerling Festival, Vancouver Chinatown festival, the Barenaked Ladies, the Fray concert and many, many other outreach events....

BATTERY RECYCLING

SPEC continues to provide a community battery recycling depot as it has for years. Battery retailers are required to accept rechargeable batteries for recycling but there is no such requirement for other batteries. This creates huge amounts of toxic waste for landfills. The absence of a municipal battery recycling program in Vancouver or provincial legislation requiring recycling has left a huge void. SPEC is able fill a small part of that for residential battery users. We

collect and recycle hundreds of kilograms of batteries each year, charging only our real costs for the service. We recycle with Nu-Life Industries with whom we have a long standing relationship. The Waste Committee of the Board is now working on finding new funding so that we can expand the educational and outreach component of the program and hopefully develop satellite depots in retail facilities which will allow SPEC to spread the messages to conserve and reduce as well as to recycle.

Thanks to Our Funders!

SPEC would like to gratefully acknowledge the following funders who supported us in 2007:

- Tides Canada
- Endswell Foundation
- Somos el Barco
- Bullitt Foundation
- VanCity Envirofund
- Mountain Equipment Co-op
- City of Vancouver

Meeting Space at the SPEC Building

Board Room

The Board room is meant for smaller meetings. It measures 11ft by 16ft and comfortably seats 10 around a large table. Chairs are provided as are cups/plates, access to our washroom facilities, and our coffee maker, kettle, teapots, microwave etc. Also available for a small charge and upon request, are a TV/VCR/DVD, slide projector, and overhead projector. The Board Room is \$50 full day and \$30 half day or evening



SPEC's Board Room

Meeting Room

The meeting room is approximately 22ft by 30ft and is suitable for bigger meetings or for various smaller exercise groups like yoga/ qigong groups. The room can seat 60-70 people theatre-style, and 50 in

meeting-style. Tables and chairs are provided as are cups/plates, access to our washroom facilities, and our coffee maker, kettle, teapots, microwave etc. Also available for a small charge and upon request are a TV/VCR/DVD, slide projector, and overhead projector.

The Meeting Room is \$75 for a full day and \$50 for half a day or evening.

The Meeting Room and Board Room are available 7 days a week and are often free during weekdays on short notice.



SPEC's Meeting Room

To determine availability and to book a room call 604-736-7732 or email admin@spec.bc.ca

SPEC Board of Directors—2007

Dan Rogers, President
Carole Christopher, Vice President
Joanna Robinson, Vice President
Larry Fast, Treasurer
Tara Moreau, Secretary
Sara Blenkhorn
Yaming Chen

Ndonodji Djerambete
Eric Doherty
Paul Hundal
John Irwin
Jess Metter
Gerry Thorne

A fond farewell...

SPEC would like to acknowledge and thank Yaming Chen for his enthusiastic contributions to SPEC's outreach programs over his 3 years on the Board, and we wish him well.



In memory of Isobel Kiborn

SPEC volunteer Isobel Kiborn passed away on Feb 26, 2008 after a brief illness.

Isobel first started as a volunteer for SPEC in the 1970's assisting with the oil spill clean up at Crescent Beach which contaminated 42,000 feet of the beach area. Isobel became a local legend after presenting Premier W.A.C. Bennett with a bird that died due to the oil spill with the words "Smile at the birdie, Mr. Bennett".

In 1973 Isobel was elected as SPEC's Treasurer-Membership Chairman.

Isobel rejoined SPEC in 2007 as a volunteer and undertook to organize the SPEC video library. We will remember also her attention to the life of SPEC—the watering of plants, the sharing of a pot of tea. . . .

Karen Wristen and Ilse Sarady attended Isobel's beautiful memorial on March 22nd at the Unitarian Church. Isobel's good humor and wonderful smile will be greatly missed and remembered always.



SPEC volunteer Isobel Kiborn