

Concord Pacific Place

Vancouver, British Columbia

Project Type:
Mixed-Use/Multi-Use

Case No:
C032017

Year:
2002



Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

SUMMARY

Concord Pacific Place is a 204-acre (82.5-hectare) mixed-use, master-planned waterfront redevelopment project stretching some two miles (three kilometers) along the north shore of False Creek in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia. Now, about ten years into an expected 20-year-long construction period, the project features three waterfront parks, a community center, two child-care centers, a marina, 3,800 residential units, and 60,000 square feet (5,574 square meters) of neighborhood retail.

FEATURES

- Waterfront redevelopment
- Affordable housing
- Modern housing design
- Public parks, open space, and bicycle trails
- Marina

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SPECIAL FEATURES

- Waterfront redevelopment
- Affordable housing
- Modern housing design
- Public parks, open space, and bicycle trails
- Marina

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND SITE

Concord Pacific Place is an ambitious, mixed-use master-planned waterfront redevelopment project located in the downtown core of Vancouver, British Columbia. The 204-acre (82.5-hectare) project, which stretches some two miles (three kilometers) along the north shore of False Creek, responds to several identified objectives of the city of Vancouver: the new community is woven into the fabric of the adjacent city grid; it provides public access to the waterfront along its entire length and maintains the view corridors through the project to the northern mountains; it is in many respects a self-sufficient community, with a range of neighborhood retail uses, services, and amenities; and it is a diverse community demographically, with a mix of housing including family-oriented housing, as well as a component of nonmarket (i.e., government- or nonprofit-subsidized) housing.

Upon completion, the 20-year project will house some 15,000 people in almost 9,200 dwellings. Seven “neighborhoods” are being developed, comprising a combination of townhouses, low- and mid-rise flats, and approximately 47 towers, ranging in height from 15 to 38 stories. At buildout, the project is expected to include two schools, four daycare centers, a community center, 50 acres (20 hectares) of public parks and open space, three marinas, and retail and office space.

Now about ten years into construction, Concord Pacific Place is, as its name suggests, a “place” in Vancouver. A continuous stone seawall with pedestrian and bicycle paths now lines most of the entire two-mile (three-kilometer) shoreline, and three major waterfront parks have been built. The community center, converted from an old railroad roundhouse, has been completed, as have two child-care centers. The first of three planned marinas is nearly completed, and approximately 60,000 square feet (5,575 square meters) of neighborhood retail space has been developed. Of the 9,200 planned dwelling units, approximately 3,800 have been constructed (including 436 non-market units). New market-rate housing developments are offered to the public on a preconstruction basis and are generally sold prior to commencement of construction.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Concord Pacific site was first developed in the 1880s as the terminus of the Canadian transcontinental railroad. Used for industrial purposes, the site was degraded and mostly abandoned by the 1960s. Beginning its planning efforts for False Creek in the late 1960s, the city of Vancouver in 1974 rezoned most of the land from heavy-industrial use to a comprehensive development district, allowing for multiple uses. With an eye toward later redevelopment, the provincial government acquired the Concord Pacific site in 1988 and cleared it for use as the location of Expo '86—the 1986 World Exposition.

In 1988, the city issued a publication titled “False Creek Policy Broadsheets,” which articulated its goal of bringing housing to the downtown core, spelling out the planning principles that have governed the development of Concord Pacific Place. The municipal government also made the critical decision to sell the property to a single developer rather than carve out multiple developer packages. In response to a 1988 request for proposals, Concord Pacific Group, Inc. (formerly Concord Pacific Development Corporation), was selected as the master developer for the site. The selection was made based partly on Concord Pacific’s proposed development plan, its proposed land acquisition cost, its experience as a large-scale developer, and its financial strength.

The agreement with the city provided for a CDN\$320 million land acquisition price (to be paid in several installments), and required the developer to pay for and construct all required infrastructure for the project, with the primary exception of Pacific Boulevard, the major thoroughfare through the site, which was built by the city. The developer is also required to pay for and construct all the agreed-upon amenities for the project, except for the two schools, which will be built by the local school district on land deeded by the developer. The city was clear in its approach, notes Matthew Meehan, Concord Pacific’s vice president for planning. Except for site remediation, “all the risks and uncertainties [of development] were to be shouldered by the developer,” he says.

Once selected, Concord Pacific spent the next two years formulating and negotiating an “official development plan” (ODP) for the False Creek North property. The city of Vancouver worked closely with the developer in this process, notes Larry Beasley, Vancouver’s director of current planning, in what amounted to a “cooperative planning approach” between the developer and the municipality. The effort, he adds, entailed hundreds of workshops with the public, as well as substantial, ongoing collaboration with city staff.

The resulting ODP, adopted by the city in 1990, is a detailed document that lays out proposed land uses, density, building heights, and development principles, all of which became the basis for area-specific rezonings. Seven organizing principles are articulated and detailed in the ODP, summarized as:

- integrate with the city;
- build on the setting;
- maintain the sense of a substantial water basin;
- use streets as an organizing device;

- create lively places that have a strong image;
- develop neighborhoods; and
- plan for all age groups, with a particular emphasis on children.

The ODP provided concept plans for street patterns and public walkways, proposed land uses, neighborhood development subareas, community facility sites, marina locations, view corridors to be preserved and axial focal points, and numerical targets for the distribution of family and nonmarket housing within each neighborhood.

In Vancouver, the development process for large-scale redevelopment starts with the ODP. The next step is the area-specific rezoning: in the case of Concord Pacific Place, the seven neighborhoods (including some 16 subareas). The third step is the development permit, which addresses the larger-scale, urban design issues of a proposed project, and the final step is the building permit for a specific structure.

PLANNING AND DESIGN

As the site plan for Concord Pacific makes clear, the project is designed to extend the city to the waterfront. The existing city street grid has been continued virtually to the water, intersected by a cross street grid that conforms generally to the contours of the shoreline. Because the site was developed in this manner, Concord Pacific Place accomplishes several goals: the site is clearly part of the city, rather than a separate or walled enclave; the public is symbolically encouraged to access the waterfront and the neighborhood in general; views of the waterfront are preserved; and the scale and grain of the city are maintained. Pacific Boulevard, the major cross street, is designed to meld the city grid with the waterfront edge. Running from one end of the long, linear site to the other, the boulevard has been developed with commercial spaces at street level and housing above.

Along the shore, behind the aforementioned seawall, a 35-foot-wide (10.6-meter-wide) band of pedestrian and bicycle paths has been constructed. There is a clear layering of space back from the water's edge, starting with a 15-foot-wide (4.5-meter-wide) brick-paved walkway, then a landscaped median, and a bicycle path, also 15 feet (4.5 meters) wide. In some cases, raised planters at the edge of the bicycle path denote and physically separate the private realm from the public one. From this line, an area of raised terraces, bounded by low railings and landscaping, provides a transition space to the housing—a kind of front stoop. In other areas, public parks directly adjoin the waterfront walkway, allowing for both active and passive recreation by the water's edge.

Throughout the project, low- and mid-rise construction provides a nearly continuous facade along the streets. This street wall, lined with a mix of retail uses and townhouses, lends an urban feel to the project, and further serves to delineate the public and private realms. By lining the rectilinear grid of the streets, the low- and mid-rise housing also creates an inner courtyard for the private use of residents. In some areas, where public streets do not penetrate, "mews" have been developed. These pedestrian "streets," which are open to the public, are also lined with low-rise housing, which allows for resident surveillance of these areas.

Most of Concord Pacific's housing, however, is located in mid- to high-rise towers. They are sited strategically to maintain the identified view corridors, as well as to maximize views for residents. In most cases, the towers are located at the intersections of streets, and are in some cases situated to provide the termination of an axial view.

At street level, the mass of the towers is not fully apparent, as they are set back from the property line. Thus, the foreground view at street level is of the scale and rhythm of the townhouses and retail functions, and the bulk of the towers becomes apparent only in the longer view. Discussing one's perception of density, Concord Pacific's Meehan notes, "It isn't the height; it's what happens on the first three floors." In line with this philosophy, the Concord Pacific development plan provides for ground-floor retail and commercial uses along Pacific Boulevard, Davie Street (which is the axial street leading to the primary waterfront marina), and Marinaside Crescent, adjacent to the pedestrian and bicycle paths.

Architecturally, the towers and townhouses at Concord Pacific Place are all strongly modernistic in design. Inspired by the industrial look of the adjacent historic Yaletown warehouse district, brick, steel, and concrete detailing is evident in many locations, particularly at the lower building levels. Above, the towers are dominated by a glass curtain wall design. Incorporating water and boating imagery, many of the towers have undulating glass facades and roof lines. The highly articulated tower forms are modulated by the forms of projecting balconies and rooms, and by the rhythmic window mullion patterns within the glass facades.

IMPLEMENTATION

Little from Expo '86 was retained on site, with the exception of the Roundhouse Community Centre building, the Plaza of Nations structure, and the B.C. Place Stadium, on the east end of the site. Early construction on the project involved site remediation and seawall construction. Both the False Creek Basin and the adjacent lands were contaminated from the long history of industrial uses in the area. Remedial work, which is being done on an area-by-area basis, has included redirecting sewer outfalls to treatment plants, soil decontamination, and the development of subsurface drainage systems to capture and treat potentially contaminated subsurface drainage. Construction of the seawall, which also has proceeded in phases, has included minor dredging and filling in order to regularize the contour of the shoreline.

Responsibility for the site's remediation remains with the province. Otherwise, notes Meehan, the value of the land would have been severely discounted by potential developers to account for the unknown costs and liability associated with remediation. Under an agreement reached with the province, Concord Pacific excavates the land, but where contamination is found, any additional cost to comply with special handling and disposal of contaminated materials is billed by the excavation contractor directly to the province.

Beyond sitework, most of the development to date has focused on residential construction, along with supporting amenities and neighborhood retail uses. To date, little of the office and the major nonresidential portions of the development plan has been constructed.

Typically, the development module for the project's market-rate housing has been an entire block, consisting of perimeter townhouses and two to four towers. Parking is provided in below-grade garages, and the low-rise roof often serves as a podium for a swimming pool and other amenities. In some cases, townhouse units offer direct, private stairway access to garage parking. The towers have relatively small floor plates, allowing for just four to eight units per floor in most cases, in order to maintain a slender building profile in accordance with view protection requirements. Virtually all units have exterior terraces. In addition to the ample community-wide amenities, many of the residential projects offer extensive health club facilities and concierge services, as well as meeting rooms, computer rooms, and other services. Mini theaters, with ten to 25 seats, can be booked for private gatherings and are becoming more common, as are overnight guest rooms, which also may be reserved. Fiber-optic cable has been laid throughout Concord Pacific Place, and high-speed computer connections are available to all residences.

Nonmarket housing at Concord Pacific is set at 20 percent of all dwelling units. Spread throughout the site, the nonmarket buildings are typically ten stories or fewer based on the city's preference in number of dwelling units per project. The nonmarket buildings, largely indistinguishable from the market-rate structures, are built by Concord Pacific and then turned over to the city to own and manage.

Quayside Marina, the first marina at Concord Pacific Place, was completed in 2002. Located at the foot of Davie Street, it has 115 slips, accommodating boats from 30 to 120 feet (nine to 36.5 meters) long. Amenities for boaters include security gate access, an on-site dockmaster, restrooms, showers, laundry facilities, a garbage and recycling center, and pump-out services. Off-street parking is available in a below-grade structure adjacent to the drop-off/loading zone. Ninety percent of the 115 berths were sold to boaters in a stratified condominium-like concept, approximately two years ago, prior to construction. The cost of a 50-foot (15.2-meter) slip, not including the monthly maintenance fee, was set at CDN\$169,900 (approximately US\$109,000). Most of the slips were sold to boaters unconnected to the Concord Pacific Place residences, notes Tracie McTavish, director of sales for Concord Pacific. As the community matures, however, many purchasers of the residences have increasingly shown an interest in buying a boat slip as well as a residence.

In addition to the private boat-launching facility, the Quayside Marina includes a 500-foot-long (152.4-meter-long) floating public pier, and a launch for nonmotorized craft. The Aquabus Ferry service, which plies False Creek, has added a stop at the marina. Two additional planned marinas, located at either end of Concord Pacific Place, are expected to add 120 slips to the project total.

Concord Pacific Place is designed to be a walkable community. All parts of the project are connected via the seawalk and the parks and mews that adjoin it. In addition, retail uses and restaurants are located on Pacific Boulevard and in adjacent Yaletown. Closer to home, neighborhood services, including a supermarket called Urban Fare, are provided in the center of Concord Pacific, near the marina. The supermarket is a 27,000-square-foot (8,230-square-meter) facility aimed at an upscale urban demographic. Tucked into the base of one of the residential blocks, Urban Fare is high tech in interior design, and includes a café and delicatessen.

MARKETING

Housing at Concord Pacific Place ranges in size from one to three bedrooms, and from 500 to more than 4,000 square feet (46.5 to 371 square meters) in area. About half of all sales to date have been for two-bedroom/two-bathroom and den/nook units. Prices range from about CDN\$140,000 (about US\$89,600) to CDN\$2.5 million (US\$1.6 million), with the two-bedroom units in the CDN\$192,000–699,000 (US\$123,000–447,000) range.

Initially, the market for Concord Pacific residences was skewed toward overseas and other investors as the concept of a presale was new to the Vancouver market. As the amenities have been built and the form of the community has become visible, demand has shifted to more local sources and purchases for primary residency have increased. The residences at Concord Pacific Place are presold, typically through "presentation centers." The community has reached a critical mass, notes McTavish, Concord Pacific's sales director, and for the last year has been selling out entire projects within a few months of the project launch. Given the long-term nature of the overall project, a continuing objective of the developer, according to McTavish, has been to provide quality accommodations at attractive prices, thereby accelerating buyer acceptance and, ultimately, shortening the development horizon.

Given the range of housing types and prices offered at Concord Pacific Place, a variety of buyers have been attracted to the project. Buyers are mostly Vancouverites, ranging from first-time buyers to families, empty nesters, and

move-down buyers. Some purchases are for investment, with some existing residents buying additional units for investment with each new building launch. The majority of purchases, however, are for owner occupancy.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

- The experience of Concord Pacific Place demonstrates that public and private development interests at the waterfront are not mutually exclusive. Through careful site planning and urban design, public access to the waterfront, and views to and from the waterfront, can be preserved while satisfying the market and security needs of private housing development.
- Through mixing of uses, compact layouts, and a measure of density, a truly urban, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood can be created, lessening the need for automobile ownership and use. Concord Pacific has been built to the minimum required parking ratios, and even at that level more parking has been created than is necessary, according to the project developer, given the project's pedestrian and transit orientation.
- The sense of urbanity and of comfortable density at Concord Pacific Place derives from the eye-level perceptions of the project's continuous low-rise street facades. Says Meehan of Concord Pacific, "What's guiding your vision is the lowest three floors." At the same time, the unbounded space at the water's edge may be an especially appropriate location for high-rise development. "If there's any place that density won't feel so dense," he continues, "it's by the water."
- Building intensively is what allows the developer to provide public amenities in a waterfront setting. "The way you get the parks [and other amenities] is to go up," Meehan concludes.

PROJECT DATA			
LAND USE INFORMATION			
Use	Acres/Hectares		
Site area	204/82.5		
Land area	166/67.1		
Water	38/15.3		
GROSS BUILDING AREA			
Use	Gross Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)		
Office	1,615,000/150,033		
Retail	877,000/81,473		
Residential	9,750,000/905,775		
Hotel	350,000/32,515		
Total	12,592,000/1,169,797		
LEASABLE AREA			
	Existing	Planned	
Retail gross leasable area (square feet/square meters)	60,155/5,588	60,155/5,588	
Residential units	3,799*	9,197	
(*3,363 market rate + 436 nonmarket)			
Floor/area ratio: 2.86 (based on 101 acres/40.8 hectares [net land area of streets and public open space]).			
LAND USE PLAN			
Use	Acres/Hectares	Percentage of Site	
Buildings	91/36.8	44.6	
Streets/surface parking	14.48/5.8	7.1	
Landscaping/open space	60.52/24.5	29.7	
Other (Water)	38/15.3	18.6	
Total	204/82.5	100.0	
MARINAS			
Facility Slips	Existing/Planned		
Marina #1	115/115		
Marina #2	0/60		
Marina #3	0/60		
Total	115/235		
RESIDENTIAL INFORMATION			
Unit Type	Floor Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)	Market-Rate Number Sold/Leased	Range of Initial Sales/Rental Prices (CDN)
1 Bedroom	527-649/49-60	229	\$139,800-182,900
1+Den/nook	668-999/64-93	1,025	\$149,800-270,000
2/2 + Den/nook	840-1,708/78-159	1,680	\$192,000-699,000
3 Bedroom or larger	1,195-4,038/110-375	459	\$283,000-2,500,000
Total		3,393	
RETAIL INFORMATION			
Tenant Classification	Number of Stores	Total GLA (Square Feet/Square Meters)	
General merchandise	6	9,905/920	
Food service	5	35,147/3,246	
Personal services	7	7,372/685	
Financial	2	7,731/718	
Total		60,155/5,588	

DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION (CDN)

Site acquisition cost: \$320 million
Site improvement costs: \$100 million
Construction and soft costs: \$2.58 million
Total development cost at completion (if different): \$3 billion

DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Site purchased: 1988
Planning started: 1988
Construction started: 1992
Project completed: 2008

DIRECTIONS

From Vancouver International Airport: Take Grant McConachie Way directly from the terminal and over the Arthur Laing Bridge. Proceed northbound on Granville Street over the Granville Street Bridge. Take the Pacific Street eastbound off-ramp. Proceed eastbound and turn right at Homer Street.

Driving time: 20 minutes in nonpeak traffic.

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This Development Case Study is intended as a resource for subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the project's development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI—the Urban Land Institute.

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Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

The tall, slender towers of Concord Pacific Place are carefully sited to preserve view corridors to the waterfront from the city, and to maintain views of the mountains to the north. The project's towers are typically connected by low-rise structures that encircle the block and define the private open space within.



David Lam park, which adjoins the waterfront and the seawalk, is one of three major parks at Concord Pacific Place. Altogether, dedicated open space amounts to 42 acres (17 hectares) of the project's 166 land acres (67 hectares).



Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

The seawalk along the 1.8-mile (three-kilometer) length of Concord Pacific Place has defined zones for strolling and bicycling. Public art, required by the Official Development Plan, enlivens the scene.



Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

Neighborhood-serving retail uses line the major streets of the project, topped by townhouses and residential towers.



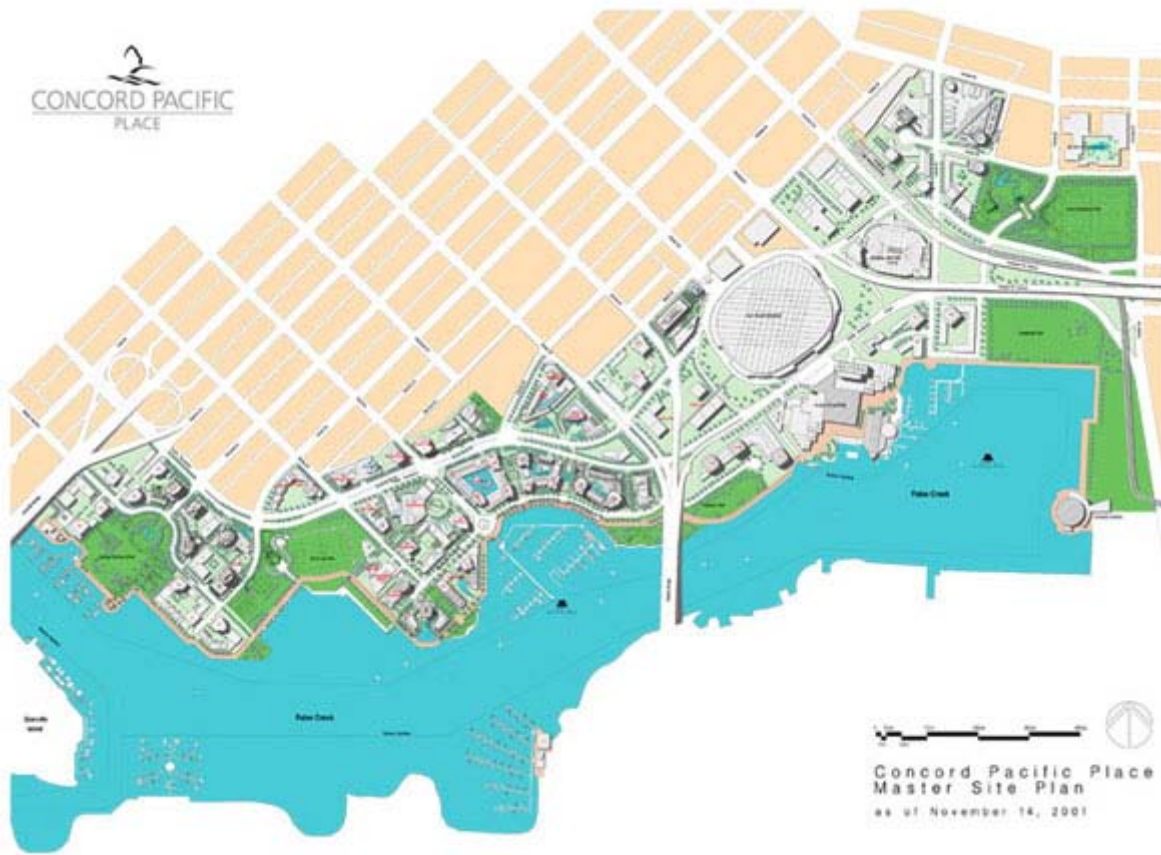
Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

Urban Fare, a 27,000-square-foot (2,508-square-meter) supermarket in the center of Concord Pacific Place, includes a cafe and delicatessen within the architecturally notable design.



Courtesy of Concord Pacific Group Inc.

Development along Pacific Boulevard, which cuts through the site, maintains the urban pattern of retail at the street level, and low- to mid-rise structures above. Residential towers are typically set back from the property line.



Concord Pacific Place
Master Site Plan
as of November 14, 2001

Site plan.