FEBRUARY
14TH & 15TH, 2013
REGENERATIVE
NEIGHBOURHOODS
SUMMIT
LIU INSTITUTE
FOR GLOBAL ISSUES, UBC
Note
This Summit report is one (imperfect) interpretation of the Regenerative Neighbourhoods Summit. It is based on extensive notes taken by a small group of scribes and is based on an interpretation and synthesis of emerging themes by David Waldron, RNP Manager and Devon Miller, RNP Assistant.

As such, others may have alternative interpretations and are welcome to contact David Waldron with comments, feedback and additions at dave@synapse-strategies.com
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UBC is exploring a new sustainability agenda – one that is attempting to shift the conversation from one of constraints and limits to one that asks: to what degree can all human activities improve human well-being and ecological integrity?

Just over a year and a half ago, UBC opened the Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability (CIRS), UBC’s flagship sustainability building and an ongoing endeavour to demonstrate regenerative sustainability at the building scale. The aim is to demonstrate that a building can achieve net positive performance in both environmental terms as represented by energy, water, structural and operational carbon, and in human well-being terms as represented by building inhabitants’ improvements in productivity, health and happiness.

UBC is now beginning to investigate ways to apply regenerative sustainability aspirations and key principles — including the lessons learned from CIRS — at the neighbourhood scale. The Regenerative Neighbourhoods Project (RNP) is an applied research project designed to explore the potential, and our capability, for creating neighbourhoods that improve both environmental conditions and human quality of life.

As part of the RNP, the Regenerative Neighbourhoods Summit was held at UBC’s Liu Institute for Global Issues on February 14th and 15th, 2013. The Summit provided an opportunity to further explore the ideas of regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale. Participants included researchers and practitioners from leading organizations in Cascadia and across North America (see appendix for a full list of attendees and their organizations) and included strong representation from UBC (researchers and operations managers). Some participants were deeply immersed in the ideas of regenerative sustainability and some were relatively new to the field.

The purpose of the Summit was to expand the dialogue regarding regenerative sustainability and to inform the on-going research agenda. The Summit provided an opportunity for leaders in the field to meet, discuss, and consider ways that regenerative sustainability can be applied at the neighbourhood scale. The intention was for participants to contribute to the RNP exploration mandate as well as to their own work and research interests.

Participants created a wonderful atmosphere of mutual appreciation and respect, where insights and perspectives flowed freely, leading to idea creation and relationship building. The shared inquiry began with seeding presentations, which led to stimulating and inspiring dialogue about the potential for regenerative sustainability, ways of thinking about it and how it may be practiced. A welcomed outcome of the Summit was an intention to meet again at future events, and participants and organizers look forward to continuing the conversation in the near future.
The Summit was designed as a participant-led, shared inquiry with thought leaders and practitioners. It began with participant introductions, initial questions and seeding presentations about the meaning and practice of regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale.

A series of breakout groups and report-back sessions followed. Summit conversations were rich and inspired, leading to a number of insights about regenerative sustainability in general, and at the neighbourhood scale in particular.

The overall question posed to the group to frame the invitation and begin the dialogue was:

**To what degree can human activity actually improve both human well-being and ecological integrity?**

### AGENDA

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<td>Sadhu Johnston – STAR Communities</td>
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<td><strong>1:00-1:20</strong> Seeding presentations and introduction to dialogue</td>
<td><strong>12:00-1:00</strong> Lunch &amp; presentation</td>
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<td>Bill Reed – Regenerative Development</td>
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<td><strong>2:35-5:00</strong> Small table &amp; plenary reporting</td>
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<td>Guiding Question: What is the potential for regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale and how might we measure both their qualitative and quantitative characteristics?</td>
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<td><strong>5:00-6:00</strong> Break, reception &amp; optional tour at CIRS</td>
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The discussions on Thursday were primed with Question #1 and two accompanying descriptions:

What is the potential for regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale and how might we measure both their qualitative and quantitative characteristics?

For example:
• How do we define “regenerative sustainability”?
• What do we mean by net positive in both environmental and human terms?
• What criteria would we use to determine and measure “regenerative-ness”?
• What scales up and what doesn’t from the building level?

TWO DESCRIPTIONS WERE ALSO PROVIDED:
Regenerative sustainability embraces such qualities as whole, integrated and closed loop systems; supports the potential for self-organization of living systems; encourages shared responsibility and ownership; and catalyzes the capability for ‘net positive’ outcomes in human well-being and ecological integrity.

Regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale means the creation of places with the capability to maximize their potential for ecological restoration and improvements to socio-cultural well-being through a continual process of self-organization.
SADHU JOHNSTON
Deputy City Manager, City of Vancouver

Sadhu presented on the STAR (Sustainability Tools for Assessing & Rating Communities) Community Rating System, focused on sustainable cities. The framework is tailored to each community since the path to sustainability is always unique to each place. Sadhu lauded the innovative work going on in cities and urged the group to consider how critical it is for cities to have tools to take the brainpower in the room and the field and implement it on the ground. Finally, he cautioned that the process for STAR took nearly 5 years and several million dollars to develop and that we should consider avoiding approaches that seek to “re-invent the wheel”.

BOB BERKEBILE
BNIM Architects

Bob reflected that he has more questions than answers about regenerative development. As part of his efforts to ignite a revolution to change the dialogue in the field of architecture and urban design, Bob presented the REGEN tool, a system for aiding understanding of the patterns of life on earth. REGEN is designed such that values change depending on the elements present in place and relationships are shown graphically to show the interrelatedness of various systems at work. In terms of regenerative sustainability approaches, Bob finds that place trumps everything else, and culture and worldview are far more critical than ecological crisis. He also noted that a violent disruption (such as a major storm event) can give residents access to new thinking and behavior. As he put it, “there is no force more powerful than a community that has discovered what they care about…our challenge is to decide what we care about.”
RAY COLE
Professor, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture

Ray’s presentation focused on moving beyond ‘green’ buildings and ‘net zero’ aspirations to engage in net positive design. He suggested that the key question is: what is the baseline that we are measuring positive against? Is it based on an ecosystem services approach? The site’s carrying capacity? The site’s pre-development condition? Over what time frame? Also, what is the scope of energy measured (embodied, operating, infrastructure, transportation)? Ray believes that the wrong question to be asking is what is the implication of ‘scaling up’ regenerative sustainability and that the right questions to be asking are “what is the new dialogue when set within this neighbourhood context?”, and, “what are the cross-scale implications?”

PAMELA MANG
Regenesis Group

Pamela described how a change of mindset is required to engage in regenerative sustainability. All too often in our society we separate human and natural systems and this “leaves two engines hurtling toward each other on the same track”. Development provides a force for re-uniting ecological and social regeneration – for co-evolution. Therefore design and development professionals have the potential for significant change leadership – but realizing that potential is another question. We have to keep building our reflexive capacity, need to identify genuine wealth (e.g., all the qualities of being for all beings in a particular place) and aspirations, and need to use storytelling to shift understanding and give meaning to those involved. Regenerative development works on elevating and coalescing aspirations, and revealing the essence of place to develop a shared sense of identity, vocation and purpose needed to inspire profound changes.

JASON MCLENNAN
International Living Future Institute

Jason introduced the Living Building Challenge 2.1 and the work that the International Living Future Institute (ILFI) has been doing around the world. Jason put forth the idea that the point of development is not the building itself but rather it is the change of stories that occur as a result of building. He also corrected a common misconception by saying that the theory of LBC is not to stop at net-zero impact, but that net-zero impact is in fact the starting point and net-positive is the goal. Jason, like Ray, suggested a reframing of the question of ‘scaling up’ by saying it is not one of ‘scaling up’, but it may be how can we use the scale of the neighbourhood to change how we think, behave, and push our goals forward?

BILL REED
Regenesis Group

Bill began his talk by describing some regenerative development practice premises: patterns are how we understand and hold complex relationships; stories convey patterns, and; stories or essence of place are how civilizations or communities understand and hold these patterns. He went on to describe four arenas of consideration for regenerative development: 1) vitality; 2) viability; 3) evolutionary capability of the place, and; 4) sourcing regeneration of the larger system. Bill suggested that buildings are potential acupuncture points for regeneration. He described the Brattleboro Co-op case study to illustrate this premise; a food co-op that went from wanting to build a LEED Platinum building to being a local food co-op and community hub that had a far lower carbon footprint and was a beacon in the community.
THURSDAY CONVERSATIONS

Starting with Question # 1 and stimulated by the presentations, participants explored the questions posed and quickly moved to a broader exploration of the meaning and practice of regenerative sustainability.

Emerging insights emphasized the importance of place, questioned the idea of focusing strictly on neighbourhood scale, and further explored the meanings, purposes and processes of regenerative sustainability as presented. Some groups explored some technical considerations around scale, net positivity and performance measurement but soon left this area to explore what was felt to be an important and challenging dimension: the ‘human’ side of regenerative sustainability.

The day closed with an open discussion of what main themes and intriguing ideas appeared to be emerging from the conversations of the day, followed by a reception as well as an interactive presentation and discussion with representatives from Arup and UBC.

Pierre Ouillet, UBC Vice President-Finance, Resources and Operations, gives his keynote presentation on “Why CFO’s need not fear sustainability”
The day began with reflections from Thursday. Participants reiterated the observation that, while the range of discussions was wide and interesting, there was a greater focus on the social side of regenerative sustainability. This was followed by questions regarding how to merge the building environment and social dimension together.

There was also a recognition that the concepts discussed should be made more concrete and more demonstration projects were needed. Lastly, there was the suggestion that the process of engaging in shared inquiry should, itself, be regenerative.
Recognizing the importance of ‘place’, four neighbourhood-types were described and formed the basis for four break-out groups to discuss the idea of applying a regenerative sustainability lens to these places.

The four neighbourhood types for exploration included:

(1) UBC Campus and Community;
(2) An Urban, High Density Neighbourhood;
(3) A Suburban Neighbourhood and
(4) A Rural, Ecologically-sensitive Development site.

The questions for each of these groups were:
What are the characteristics of this place?
What are the patterns present in the place?
What would it mean to place a regenerative lens on each of these places?

These diverse places and groups yielded diverse results.

**UBC Campus and Community**

UBC should focus on moving from characterizing students, faculty and staff as “occupants” to characterizing them as “inhabitants” in order to connect inhabitants with place. As well, there is a need to incorporate notions of regenerative sustainability into the DNA and infrastructure of UBC so that it leads the narrative throughout each project (infrastructure, building, landscape, etc.) on campus. As well, there was recognition of the need for an integrated view to campus planning and design. If the campus is thought of as an integrated entity (as opposed to a campus made up of isolated nodes), and if the goal of the campus is to be net positive (on energy, waste, materials, etc.) then each of the integrated nodal interventions needs to contribute to that goal.

**Urban, High Density Neighbourhood**

This group spent the first 5 minutes in silence picturing themselves in this place and what it may feel like. They asked questions such as “What are the existing connections?” “What is alive in this community right now?” “What is the purpose and essence of this place?” and “In the future, what will happen to this place?” There was tension regarding whether historic ecological systems should be restored or whether it was more important to look to the future and create new places and spaces. Main takeaways from the discussion included the need for a change of mindset, and the fact that you cannot impose anything on residents but rather should allow residents to explore the potential for their neighbourhood.

**Suburban Neighbourhood**

Following some role-playing that was designed to tease out why community members would/should care about regenerative sustainability when they have other priorities and responsibilities in their lives, the discussion shifted to ask “what key principles can regenerative sustainability bring to the neighbourhood?” A key finding was the importance of weaving stories into a common vision, as the sense of “I am not alone” creates trust and creates space to create the future. Finally, using the analogy of the digital age of music and the loss of camaraderie since the analog age, there was a sense that “we need to get the band together” and co-create a process to meaningfully engage with one another as community members.

**Rural, Ecologically-sensitive Development Site**

This discussion began with looking at the dominant patterns in the landscape (ecological, geological, social, etc.). Discussed was the notion that regeneration is a process of experiencing, and that you always must start by finding the dominant patterns of the land (the essence) and asking, “how could this place work?” Then it is important to create a common vision, or a story, through co-creating and engaging community members in a way of thinking that they would not do by themselves. A key consideration in regenerative sustainability is how to sustain regeneration in the community once the environment is built. A suggestion provided was through the avenue of effective community engagement and visioning/storying processes.
Early Friday afternoon, participants were invited to explore some of the barriers – and possible pathways forward – for applying regenerative sustainability aspirations and principles at the neighbourhood scale.

This conversation was primed by Question 2:

What are current obstacles and potential enabling strategies to support the creation of regenerative neighbourhoods?

For example:
What are the obstacles and enablers related to integrated neighbourhood infrastructure and building design, technologies, institutions, behaviours as well as economic, policy and other considerations?

To kick off this discussion was another series of ‘seeding presentations’.

JASON TWILL
Vulcan Inc.

Jason began his presentation with a quote from Oscar Wilde: “We know the price of everything and the value of nothing”. He then outlined The Economics of Change, a model for incorporating ecological and natural capital into financial assessment, leading to what he called an accurate description of the integrated value of a project. Part of The Economics of Change is the Integrated Investment Modeling tool, which evolves the traditional pro-forma analysis to monetize social and environment capital. This modeling tool is open source, familiar in structure, and is intended for use by owners, developers, lenders, appraisers and policy makers.

MARK HOLLAND & KEITH CULVER
New Monaco & UBC Okanagan

Mark described the New Monaco Neighbourhood Project in terms of its sustainability goals and features, and Keith described the experience of the New Monaco/UBC partnership; an innovative development project in a more ‘mainstream’ market. The project aims to be the healthiest community in Canada, with affordable housing, a goal of 50% below average water usage, and a strong local food strategy including urban agriculture and a farmer’s market. The project will include a land exchange with UBC so research can be completed on drought-tolerant plant species. Keith suggested partnerships such as these must engage in “flexible coupling” and that they require compromise to push ideas further.
**DAVID RAMSLIE**  
City of Vancouver

David began with an analogy, suggesting green buildings today are at the same level as personal computers were in the 80s; useful but only to a certain extent. Once these computers were connected via the Internet, usefulness, speed and efficiency of connecting with the network became more important. Similarly, today we have the ability to start connecting buildings, and the infrastructure and the networks are most important. While we know what the solutions are (district energy, etc.), what we don’t know is how to build the resilient infrastructure systems that allow the buildings to work together; we need a micro-utility model. David closed by saying that the exciting thing about regenerative neighbourhoods is that it is aspirational and captures imagination – and within that there is value.

**ROB BENNETT**  
Portland Sustainability Initiative

Rob’s presentation introduced Portland Sustainability Institute’s EcoDistricts framework including 6 principles for neighbourhoods: 1) Neighbourhoods are the building blocks of sustainable cities; 2) Diversity, vibrancy, resiliency, efficiency, and beauty are the currency of sustainable neighbourhoods; 3) Sustainable neighbourhoods must celebrate transparency, creativity, and inclusion; 4) Neighbourhood sustainability requires a new model – one that brings disparate sectors and community stakeholders together to plan, act and manage; 5) People can act on complex challenges; 6) Failure is expected and encouraged. The EcoDistrict performance areas are: Equitable Development, Health + Well being, Community Identity, Access + Mobility, Energy, Water, Habitat + Ecosystem Function, and Materials Management.

*This presentation was not given during the summit, but slides were provided.*

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**FRIDAY CONVERSATIONS**

Returning to the question posed regarding obstacles and enablers, the discussion that ensued identified barriers such as institutional inertia, intentional self-interest, timeline/project delivery expectations and the balance between ambitious goals and immediate practicalities. Enablers identified focused on key areas for engaging with neighbourhoods such as using the co-discovery process as a healing process, removing self-imposed constraints, and improving the clarity of value propositions.

As participants noted in their closing remarks, the two day session was filled with invigorating conversations, insights into regenerative sustainability approaches, and discussions regarding the reframing that is needed in the design of the built environment. There were good insights provided on the questions posed at the Summit, and not surprisingly, the conversations also stretched well beyond the boundaries set by the questions to provide rich insights about regenerative sustainability more generally. These insights are expressed in the Key Themes Emerging section.

A key result of the Summit was the recognition that the process of this agenda should be regenerative also, and that it is important for everyone involved to work together to move the mandate forward. Several future meetings were discussed, such as at the Living Future UnConference 2013 in May in Seattle, and the EcoDistricts 2013 conference, scheduled for Fall of 2013. Participants and organizers look forward to continuing the conversation!
KEY THEMES EMERGING

The flow of presentations, small and large group discussions and report back sessions yielded interesting insights and further questions, and through the two days, some key themes emerged.

CORE IDEAS OF REGENERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY

Core ideas of regenerative sustainability include restoring and enhancing local ecosystems, creating positive synergistic connections, and seeking to support and catalyze the mutually beneficial co-evolution of human and natural systems. Regenerative development seeks to develop the aspirations, capabilities and processes of place to create a system with vitality, viability and harmony (with the larger systems’ regeneration). Process considerations include recognizing the unique attributes and core essence of place, utilizing storytelling to ‘shift the story field,’ using holistic integrative measures that invite creative participation, and connecting around a shared vision and purpose. A final key attribute of regenerative sustainability is that it is not a one-time intervention. Instead, regenerative sustainability must build capability within the system so that the community continues to regenerate itself after the architects, designers, planners, and project managers are gone.

STORY OF PLACE

Participants suggested that place trumps everything else. Each place is unique, and a story of place needs to incorporate local historical, cultural, social, and natural systems considerations. From this story, it is possible to create a development that is appropriate to that particular place and that is in line with the goals and aspirations of the community. Furthermore, it was recognized that often we consider all of these systems as separate to human systems, and instead we must engage our whole system, mind, body and spirit.

REFRAMING TO FOCUS ON ‘POTENTIAL’

Participants pointed to the idea of ‘potential’ as a key idea in regenerative sustainability. It is important to articulate an attractive vision for the potential for a particular place without being too specific, as defining it too precisely could kill the momentum. Participants also spoke to the value and importance of narrative and re-framing the sustainability story from an invitation to sacrifice or limit harm to one of improvement, capability and potential.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AS ‘NICHE’

A key consideration was a re-consideration of scale. Rather than thinking of the neighbourhood as the preferred scale, we should think of it as an important scale, or niche, where we can integrate human and natural systems as well as technological (non-living) systems. Neighbourhoods were emphasized as being important, but the most important questions are: what is the new dialogue when set within a neighbourhood context, and what are the cross-scale implications for decision-making? We can view neighbourhoods as sub-systems within systems (e.g., a building is set within a neighbourhood context, which is set within a city context). A final consideration was the idea of reciprocal relationships. Values in action (e.g., the mindset) can shape the built form of neighbourhoods and the built form of neighbourhoods can, in turn, shape values, behaviours and mindsets. A key question going forward, therefore, could be: how can neighbourhoods be seen as a tool for behavior change?
WHOLE SYSTEMS, MANY DIMENSIONS

A re-occurring theme was the necessity to move away from disaggregated, reductionist thinking and to take a whole system view where human, biophysical (environmental) and technological systems are integrated and interdependent. A key question posed in this regard was “How do we hold the whole?” There were also questions regarding communication between disciplines: “We have been stuck in domains and we’ve never learned to share how the core patterns move across all domains – but this is beginning to happen and it’s exciting!”

HUMAN DIMENSION

Throughout the Summit there was a strong focus on process and the socio-cultural dimensions of development. Participants not only explored the importance of community engagement and empowerment but also the importance of engaging body, mind and spirit and developing the capacity, vitality, viability and harmony of human and non-human living systems. There was also much discussion regarding the ‘change of mind’ that needs to occur, so that it is not only the development that is regenerative but also the people involved. Questions posed within this theme included: How could this regenerative process relate to current municipal planning processes? What are some processes for effective and meaningful community engagement on these topics?

BIOPHYSICAL DIMENSION (LIVING)

Throughout the Summit, there was less emphasis placed on specific environmental flows and issues, as human and social considerations dominated most discussions. However, biophysical flows were nonetheless recognized as being important. There was some tension between the focus on regenerative physical systems and the focus on regenerative human communities. This was encapsulated by the position voiced by some that ‘the building alone can’t be regenerative’.

TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSION (NON-LIVING)

A different approach is needed for technological (e.g., energy and water systems) than for human and living systems and the inquiry set the context for more in-depth analysis of technology and biophysical stocks and flows. Participants noted that there is a technical world and there is a living world. We have a tendency to blend them, but we must learn to work with them in different ways and weave them together only when appropriate. The technical world is still important and a challenge is to see how it relates to living systems. Responding to the notion of ‘the building doesn’t matter’, some participants suggested that technical aspects of a project (e.g., buildings and infrastructure) are vital. They can be thought of as acupuncture points, contributing to the regeneration of the surrounding living systems.

NET POSITIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Performance assessment was discussed infrequently during the Summit, although one session yielded a set of proposed performance assessment categories such as: restores and enhances local ecosystems, creates positive synergistic connections, net positive on human and natural considerations, has high walkability, diversity of services, and food production. Others suggested that running projects through the lens of The Five Capitals (social, human, manufactured, natural, financial) would be a useful way of measuring net positive performance. A key consideration is that performance assessment should include both qualitative and quantitative categories, and should be holistic and address the range of human and environmental impacts.

ASSESSMENT AND THE ‘NEIGHBOURHOOD SCALE’

Following the challenge of quantitatively measuring or assessing net positive is, in part, the issue of scale. Participants identified a number of challenges in defining boundaries and emphasized the importance of the relationship between a neighbourhood and its surroundings and components (e.g., buildings). It is important to consider what is achievable at each scale, and what is considered to be regenerative at various scales. One suggestion is that a sub-system becomes net positive when it contributes positively outside its own boundaries (e.g., a building contributing positively...
in the environmental and human dimension to the neighbourhood). A key challenge with this idea is one of setting boundaries, as an exact boundary is hard to define and may be different depending on the system in question (e.g., ecosystem boundaries are often different than geographic/political boundaries, which may be different again infrastructure boundaries).

**POWERFUL EXAMPLES**

Some participants, while acknowledging the value of the evolving narrative at the Summit, wondered if the conversation was ‘stretching too far’ and if it was possible to embody the ideas in more tangible projects. Participants pointed to the importance of having pragmatic, tangible examples of this thinking that can be seen and felt. As one participant related, “we are faced my friends with the fierce urgency of now.” While it is clear there are barriers to this kind of approach (e.g., barriers inherent in a risk averse real estate industry that prevent innovation) there is a need to re-frame and develop good examples so that this approach can be shown to be viable.

**UBC LIVING LABORATORY**

UBC’s Campus as Living Lab was acknowledged as fertile ground for applying some of these ideas on campus. It was also acknowledged that this fertile ground needs to be balanced with powerful early examples. There was recognition and appreciation for what UBC is trying to do, as examples of regenerative processes emerge with projects such as CIRS. Said one participant, “the real impact of CIRS is not about the building but has to do with what is now happening at UBC generally, and elsewhere because of CIRS”. The Summit benefitted greatly through the participation of key UBC operations managers, who can support the sustainability initiatives that are underway at UBC.

**ENGAGED NETWORK**

Life moves up, not on. There is an opportunity for rethinking to occur, for new regenerative framings and stories to emerge, and to link with such framings at other scales. There was much interest from participants to have the conversations continue and relationships grow. The Summit initiated a diverse, unbranded network with distributed leadership. This network should continue to co-develop the themes of regenerative sustainability by working together, meeting at specific events (such as at SB13 in Vancouver, Living Future in Seattle, and EcoDistricts 2013 in Boston) and conversing through social media.

**WHAT’S THE STORY?**

Throughout the Summit, ‘story’ (story of place, storytelling, changing the story, etc.) played a prominent role. Story gives meaning, connects us with place and can create shared purpose. Storytelling that supports regenerative development focuses on activating potential and inspiring change. This led directly to the idea that participants in the Summit are, and can continue to be, agents of a new story about sustainability in line with the key themes emerging.

As John Robinson offered:

*Story’s the name of the game.\nAt stake is our chance to reframe.\nOur co-evolutions,\nIn search of solutions\nThat can make a regenerative claim.*
The RNP began in early 2012 with the intention to explore and catalyze the emergence of regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale. The project is guided, in part, by the question: to what degree can human activity actually improve both environmental conditions and human quality of life?

There are considerable opportunities to re-write the sustainability story and to think – and practice – well beyond the dominant ‘less harm’ sustainability narrative. So, what is the potential – for us, as fully engaged participants within our communities (citizens, designers, planners, researchers, investors, managers and officials) – to restore, and to support the regeneration of, human and non-human living systems? What could this look like in urban neighbourhoods of the future, where billions will live and trillions of dollars will be spent?

The Regenerative Neighbourhoods Summit was an important event in our on-going exploration. Thank you, to all who participated and contributed your time and insights. We hope your days at the Summit were inspiring and rewarding. Thank you also to Dr. Göran Carstedt, our Lead Facilitator, for his creative design of the Summit process and adept facilitation. His knowledge and experience of the subject matter – as well as of learning processes in general – was inspiring and invaluable.

Given our mission to explore and catalyze regenerative sustainability at the neighbourhood scale, we began the conversation by asking about basic meanings: What is regenerative sustainability? How can it be measured? What do we mean by ‘net positive’? What are some of the barriers and enablers? It was only natural – and expected – for such a creative group of people to ‘paint outside the lines’ set by these questions!

Big questions, powerful tangents and resonant themes were delightfully commonplace. There were some explorations into technical areas such as moving beyond green, defining net positive, defining system boundaries, ways of assessing biophysical dimensions, and strategies to achieve net positives. However, the dominant trajectory was a deeper exploration into the human dimensions of regenerative sustainability. What is the nature of a practice that would support the emergence of net positive outcomes in living systems? For example, how might we re-conceive non-living components – like buildings and infrastructure – for their catalytic potential to improve quality of life of all living systems? This is a powerful change from simply being objects designed to fulfill specialist functions like transporting power or wastewater or automobiles.
Many participants saw the Summit as the start of a much bigger conversation that should take place: a conversation to re-cast the sustainability story, particularly in its relationship to the built environment. What is the full potential to reconceive the relationships that connect living and non-living systems? Between people and buildings? Between human and other living systems? Between each other? In an increasingly fragmented world of institutions, interests and disciplines, often rationalized with words like ‘practical’ and ‘realistic’, how do we re-connect the disconnected?

Systems evolve. Communities evolve. Neighbourhoods evolve. What is our role in this evolution? We can play a part in the unfolding story: recognizing, honoring and building on the past; being relevant and active in the present; and catalyzing the full potential of the future. Since each place is unique, discovering and co-creating a new story of place is at the core of engaging with people, patterns and place. We are already discovering that engaging with the positive potential of people and place can be very practical as a transformative process.

The emergent themes outlined in this report create an intellectual space for further conversation and co-development of our collective thinking and practices. But this is hardly enough. Moving towards real and tangible demonstrations of this thinking with powerful examples has always been our aim.

All of the participants at the Summit – and many more – are pursuing this in their own way and we are all richer for it. Since diverse networks with distributed leadership are stronger, how can we facilitate the “genius of the ‘and’”1 as we pursue our individual/organizational and collective missions?

With respect to our Regenerative Neighbourhoods research project, we intend to continue along three main tracks:

- With research, we will continue to review the unfolding literature and practices, engage with other researchers and practitioners and analyze our findings associated with projects at UBC and beyond. A series of reports and publications will follow covering a range of themes. Can we reframe our understanding of regenerative sustainability? What is the role of the neighbourhood niche, in particular? How will we know if we are successfully catalyzing new understanding and practice?
- With application at UBC, we will continue to engage with UBC operations planners and managers in the Campus as Living Laboratory. We are co-creating with them a new storyline about sustainability at UBC, through a range of approaches including new plans, design guidelines, and construction practices for actual sub-campus scale projects; and
- With community engagement, we will continue to collaborate actively to help create a diverse, distributed and unbranded network of thought leaders and practitioners working together to co-craft a new story in line with the emerging regenerative sustainability themes. Increasingly, we are engaging with complementary networks of practitioners, officials, universities and others.

1 Thanks, to Collins and Porras, for their characterization of ‘the genius of the ‘and’” (as opposed to the “tyranny of the ‘or’”).

We invite anyone interested to be in touch with our project team:

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RESOURCES

REGENERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS SUMMIT
WEBSITE
(contains links to White Paper, Summit Presentations, Summit Notes, visual recordings and photos)

http://rnp-sustain.sites.olt.ubc.ca/

EVENTS AT WHICH TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION
(contact jen.crothers@ubc.ca to add suggestions)

• May, Seattle: Living Future (http://living-future.org/)
• June, Vancouver: SB13 (http://sbconferences.org/sb13-vancouver-pushing-the-boundaries-net-positive-buildings/)
• November, Boston: EcoDistricts Summit (site to be updated for 2013) (http://pdxinstitute.org/summit/)
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REGENERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS SUMMIT

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION