

# Campus Vision 2050: Q&A with Michael White

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*Image: Michael White in the CIRS building*

After a year of extensive engagement with the campus community, neighbourhoods and its host nation, Musqueam, UBC is preparing to release a draft vision for the Vancouver campus. The 30-Year Vision will guide how the physical Vancouver campus changes and grows to better support the needs of our community.

We heard from the campus community on what mattered most to them when thinking about the future of the campus. Questions and concerns around affordability, connectivity to the region, climate change, campus ecology and the relationship between UBC and Musqueam were brought forward.

Michael White, Associate Vice-President for Campus + Community Planning for the UBC Vancouver campus answers some of these questions that have helped shape the vision.

**UBC recently launched Climate Action Plan 2030, with some ambitious targets around reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. How does the vision support these climate action targets?**

While planning for significant growth, the university remains committed to its ambitious climate action targets (up to 85% reduction of GHGs over 2007 by 2030 for the campus). We're achieving this through smart land use planning, and building and infrastructure design. This includes converting the academic district energy system to low carbon energy sources and avoiding new construction through the reuse and renewal of existing buildings and infrastructure.

There are similar plans for the campus neighbourhoods. A new Neighbourhood Climate Action Plan (NCAP) will update the existing plan for the neighbourhoods, and address greenhouse gas emissions in neighbourhoods. For example, the NCAP will address emissions from buildings by staying ahead of provincial energy step code requirements for buildings; converting the existing neighbourhood district energy system to a low carbon energy source; and, identifying options to decarbonize existing buildings.

The vision also supports a transit-oriented campus that reduces the reliance on cars. This means supporting the arrival of SkyTrain to campus and enhancing green mobility like improved services for the transition to electric vehicles.

**As the campus plans for growth, what's being done to mitigate impacts on campus ecology and biodiversity?**

The Campus Vision 2050 process has confirmed the campus must continue to grow in response to the acute housing crisis facing our community and to meet the needs of the university. Work is underway to ensure this growth happens in a way that lowers carbon emissions, supports local ecology and biodiversity, and delivers associated amenities, services and infrastructure.

Working in parallel with a climate action plan update for the neighbourhoods, this includes protecting high-value green spaces, and the forested area around UBC Farm, while focusing on compact development to preserve land for new green spaces. We're looking at opportunities where we can extend or augment forest corridors, including new tree canopy, rain gardens and green spaces to support wildlife habitat and increase campus biodiversity. Work on these strategies is happening over the next 12-18-months as part of more detailed planning for the campus and neighbourhoods.

Through deeper engagement with Musqueam and academic partners, we are expanding our knowledge of Indigenous ways of planting and the role that our landscapes play in education and our social wellbeing. These learnings will inform campus development moving forward.

**The process has explored doubling the number of residential units on campus. Why is that much growth needed?**

The university must grow in order to meet the needs of a growing region. Metro Vancouver is projected to grow by 35,000 people a year—a million more people by 2050.

In their long-term growth strategies, the region has directed development to existing urban areas like UBC. We need to plan for the increased pressures on housing, transportation and infrastructure that comes with any growing region.

In addition to providing great places to live and play, our campus neighbourhoods also help support UBC's priorities, including affordable housing for the community, through revenue generation. Continuing to build livable, accessible campus neighbourhoods will provide the financial support that's needed to create a campus that meets the needs of its community, while supporting the academic mission of the university.

This means more housing for students, staff and faculty, more support for bringing SkyTrain to UBC, enhanced amenities and infrastructure that's needed to accommodate the projected population growth, and funding to support the evolving academic and research needs of the university.

### **Through Campus Vision 2050, UBC is contemplating transformational change. When will the campus start to look and feel distinctly different from what it is today?**

One of the most significant opportunities for the university is to add more housing for our growing community.

Over the next 30 years, about 9,000 new homes will be built in expanded Wesbrook and Hawthorn neighbourhoods and two new neighbourhoods in the areas around the current stadium and Acadia Park. Through the Housing Action Plan update as part of Campus Vision 2050, more of these homes will support more student housing, more below-market rental housing for faculty and staff, expanded faculty home ownership, and rental housing for campus workers unaffiliated with UBC.

This new development will be accompanied by amenities, like an additional grocery store, and services, such as childcare. Any new development is designed with accessibility in mind, making people of all ability levels feel welcome.

It will also build on the features and urban design that give the campus its unique character so it continues to feel like the place we know and love.

The vision also shows how our experience getting to, from and around campus will be improved through the arrival of rapid transit and more support for pedestrians, cyclists and other modes of active transportation, with a focus on accessibility and safety.

Through engagement with our community, we've also identified a number of more immediate opportunities that will take shape over the next three to five years. These include:

- the completion of capital projects in the academic core such as the Gateway building and Musqueam welcome plaza
- additional faculty, staff and market rental housing in Wesbrook Place
- new student beds in Vanier student residence as well replacement student beds that will address seismic risk and aging buildings

- enhancements to our green corridors on the academic campus through indigenous planting, tree retention and increase understory planting and;
- renovation of existing prayer rooms on campus that will support the needs of a multi-faith campus community

**What do we know about academic growth expectations and what our future enrollment will look like? With so many unknowns, how can the university plan for the future?**

The development of this vision was grounded in the notion that our teaching, learning and research spaces need to be flexible, functional and responsive to the evolving needs of the academic community. The vision works within a high-level framework, the Academic Infrastructure Plan, that identifies the amount of space that's needed to support the academic mission of the university and respond to changes in pedagogy, demographics, technology and societal trends.

We will also explore what kind of growth and change is needed across UBC's regional presence, including leveraging opportunities such as the proposed Surrey campus.

This approach is informed by historical growth and enrolment trends and discussions with Deans and faculty heads about the future of learning, teaching, research and partnerships.

**Why is this planning process moving so quickly? Is this pace necessary?**

Recent events like the pandemic and effects of climate change have taught us that action is needed now. We need to confront the affordability crisis, take bold action to mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure that our campus lands support the evolving and growing needs of our community today and for coming generations.

This means taking immediate action to increase affordable housing for our campus community that supports diverse housing needs. We also need to take immediate collective action to ensure the university meets its climate action targets of reducing campus greenhouse gas emissions.

And we need to ensure that our academic community has the infrastructure needed to rapidly respond and adapt to industry and technological advancements that support this university's academic mission.

**We've heard that the engagement process for Campus Vision 2050 is the most comprehensive ever undertaken by the university. What's so different and why is it important?**

The daytime population of UBC now exceeds 80,000. It's a vibrant and diverse community made up of learners, researchers, healthcare workers, retail and service workers, thought leaders, residents – the list goes on.

To develop a vision that truly reflects this community, our engagement efforts need to be inclusive and accessible.

We are working collaboratively with our campus community, especially equity-seeking groups, to build an engagement program that reduces barriers to participate and surfaces voices typically underrepresented in a process like this. This means providing the community with multiple opportunities to share their voice, through online surveys and both in-person and virtual workshops. We also joined community events and scheduled staff and faculty meetings to meet people where they are.

A key element of our engagement was deepening the university's relationship with Musqueam by co-developing an engagement process with Musqueam for Campus Vision to better understand and incorporate Musqueam values, needs and interests. Through Campus Vision 2050 UBC will be addressing Musqueam interests, such as strengthening Musqueam welcome and presence on campus, creating spaces where Musqueam feel they belong, integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices into campus landscapes and planning for SkyTrain, in coordination with Musqueam.

### **What are the next steps?**

The final vision will be presented to the UBC Board of Governors in March 2023. Once approved, it will serve as an inspiration and guide for updating the Land Use Plan and sub-plans including the 10-Year Campus Plan, future Neighbourhood Plans and other implementation plans and policies.

In the summer, the updated Land Use Plan will be submitted to the provincial government for adoption.

### **Any final thoughts you'd like to share with the campus community?**

I want to thank everyone who attended workshops, open houses or completed our surveys. Your thoughts, ideas and stories have played an integral role in making the draft Vision for the campus real and connected. But it's not over yet. There's still time to provide your insights. Please review the draft Vision and let us know if we've got it right!

*The Draft 30-Year Vision will be released on January 17<sup>th</sup> and the campus community will be invited to provide their feedback. Visit the [Campus Vision 2050 website](#) to learn more about how you can get involved.*