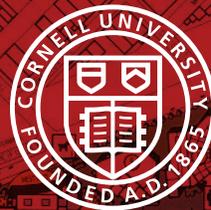
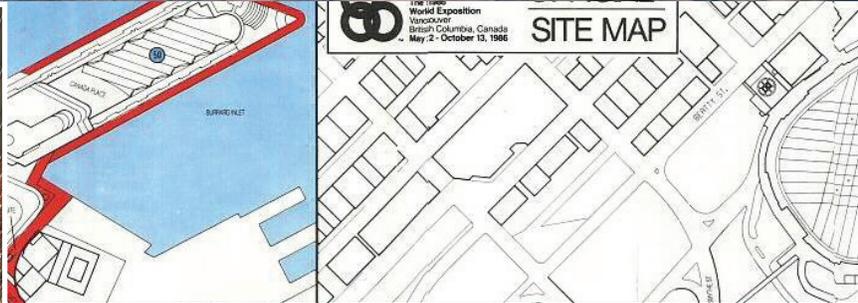


# Baker Program's Inaugural International Trip to Vancouver



**Cornell  
Baker Program  
in Real Estate**

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# I: Connecting a City to the Water

In March 2016, second-year students in the Baker Program in Real Estate embarked on a trip to Vancouver, British Columbia to meet with the people and companies that have played a role in shaping Vancouver into the celebrated international city it is today. Starting with a bold plan begun in the 1980s to connect the city to its waterfront, Vancouver has spent the following decades on a transformation spree that is the envy of urbanists the world over. Throughout a five-day itinerary, students visited the projects and neighborhoods that epitomize this transformation.

The trip began by meeting at the waterfront with Larry Beasley, former Co-Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver. Beasley was instrumental in driving the City's efforts to build the seawall, the pedestrian and bike paths along the water, and in crafting the zoning and developers' requirements that would allow for the appropriate density, housing types, and public spaces. The resulting development has been coined "Vancouverism," a planning movement that has inspired hundreds of other cities across the globe.

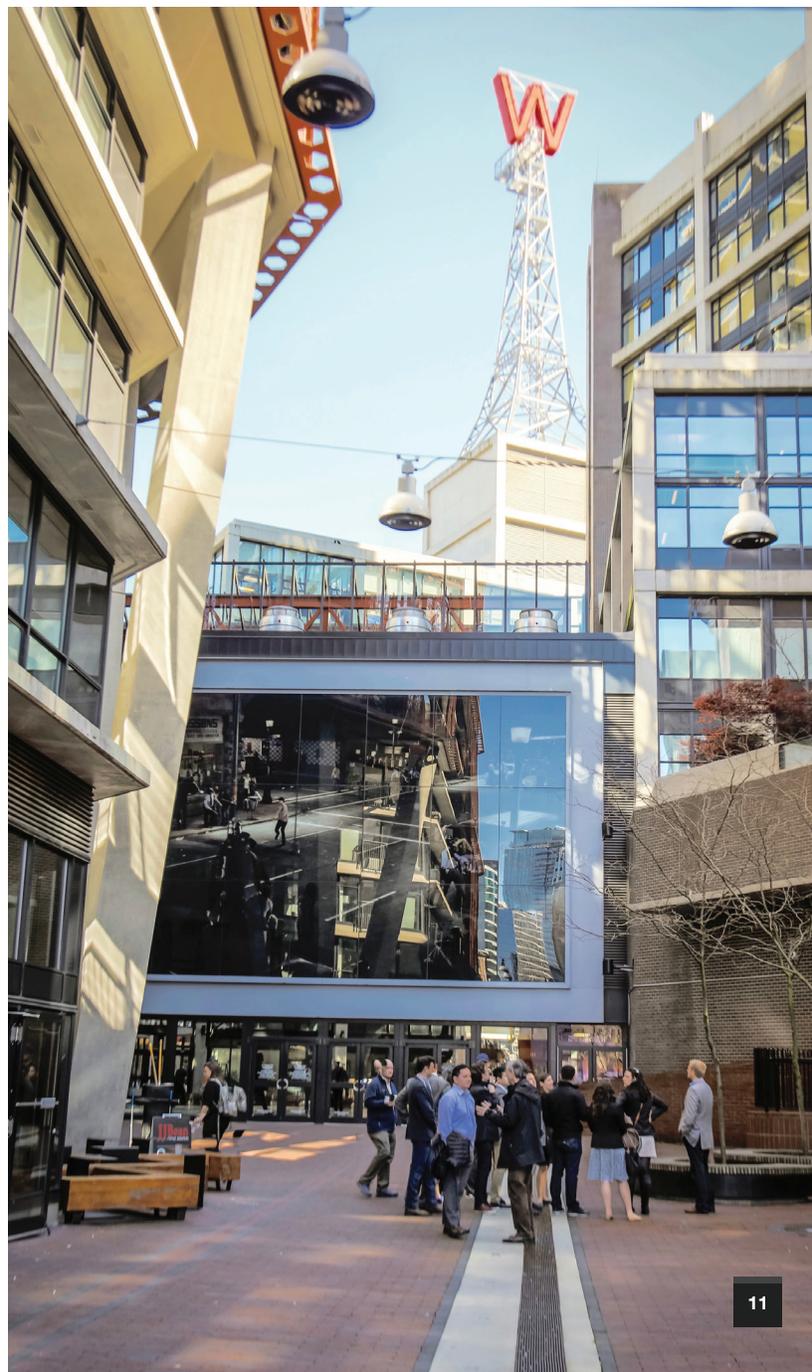
Beasley spoke of specific measures, such as mandating the right amount of space between towers so that occupants aren't uncomfortable (90 feet), and requiring ground floor uses of retail in the appropriate locations. He mentioned the importance of townhouse-style housing along the edges of residential towers, which are popular with families moving from less-dense neighborhoods. Underground parking also provides for efficient land-use without the impediment of parking lots or lost floors above-ground. The urban form along the waterfront has been carefully designed to allow for large view corridors, so that residents along the waterfront and further inland are able to see the water. The spaces are ideal for streetscapes, parks, and openings that enhance the pedestrian experience, providing residents with public amenities at their front doorstep.

Another challenge is how to manage the two modes of travel along the waterfront. No – not cars! Instead, pedestrians and cyclists. The waterfront paths are split between bike and pedestrian modes, with the pedestrian path along the edge of the seawall, which is embellished with ample trees, planters, and benches so that residents may enjoy the water at their leisure, or get to where they are going with ease. The split helps to keep accidents to a minimum, and the flow of travel at the right pace.

In addition to parks and open space, the waterfront development included the construction of a new school and playground so that local residents could easily raise children without the need of a car or bus to deliver their youngsters to school. The convenience and space programming was intended to "crack the nut" to get suburban families into the City – and it succeeded. Beasley, the team at the City,

and the waterfront developers came together with the public at large to determine what was necessary through hundreds of public meetings, thousands of private consultations and conversations, and a marketing effort that directly addressed each housing group.

**Through a strategy of transparent and open engagement, Vancouver developed the model for comfortable and sustainable urban living. Though a City of over 600,000 (2.3 million in Metro-area), Vancouver can be comfortably traveled across by foot or bike in the fraction of an afternoon, and the City is consistently ranked as one of the most livable cities on the planet. The City boasts its own steam district, and new transit stations have recently opened to continue expanding the light-rail network.**



## II: Railyard Rust to Glass & Steel

### “Why is Vancouver here?”

Six-term Vancouver City Council Member Gordon Price posed this question to the assembled Baker Real Estate students. The members of the group paused, then a few hands were raised.

“Forestry?”

“Fishing?”

“Shipping?” Bingo.

Price perked up:

“What does Vancouver have?”

**A natural deep water port.**

In fact, Vancouver has one of only a handful along the entire west coast of the Americas. The City of Vancouver was built on trade, primarily with Asia. It is a City founded on the most enduring human activity: exchange. The exchange includes all sorts of things: commodities, consumer products, ideas, DNA. As humans, we are a social, interconnected species, and Vancouver has served as an international cross-roads since millworkers cut and shipped wooden beams for the gates of the Forbidden City in Beijing in the late 1800s.

Vancouver’s modern development cannot be adequately described without the former Expo 86 site. Its 204 acres sitting along the northern bank of the False Creek Inlet in the heart of Vancouver represented one of the greatest redevelopment opportunities in any large city. Prior to Expo 86, the site was home to Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and various industrial uses, but in preparation for redevelopment the site was cleared and acquired for the more than 70 pavilions and 43,000 events that would compose the 1986 World Fair. It was a resounding success, bringing-in over 20 million visitors that included various foreign dignitaries, celebrities, and entertainers, putting Vancouver on the map of modern, international cities. But what to do with the land afterwards?

This was the question posed by the City, as it considered possibilities for the future of the waterfront. What should the zoning be, and who should take on the projects? Vancouver had already experienced a wave of dense construction throughout the 1960s and 1970s as developers built point towers in the midst of re-zoned residential neighborhoods



on the west end of the City, but the density proved too unpopular, and a resident backlash reversed the trend. With the growing population, and a difficult site to redevelop, density along the waterfront appeared to be a necessity.

In addition, immense difficulties would lie ahead in securing sales to multiple developers for portions of the site: how would each be zoned, and how could the site be developed into one cohesive and connected area with the appropriate public amenities? The answer was one developer: Concord Pacific. Although controversial at the time due to its majority foreign ownership (Li Ka-Shing of Hong Kong), Concord became the ideal partner due to its long-term commitment (on-going for nearly 30 years), engagement with the City and its residents, and for their buy-in on the municipality’s preferred development plan. Concord had also been one of the primary developers for the Expo 86 construction, so the firm was already intimately familiar with the property. The results are remarkable, and have since become a benchmark for successful urban planning.

Concord’s SVP of Development, Peter Webb took students through each phase of the project from the early days of David Lam Park, to the Parkview, Kings Landing, and The Erickson, the only building designed by, and bearing the name of the world famous Canadian architect Arthur Erickson. With just two final phases to complete along the eastern portions of the site, Concord will have developed about 15,000 units throughout 50 buildings on the 204 acres, in addition to parks, seawall construction, public pathways, community centers, schools, and various other public amenities. With pre-sales still closing-out in a matter of weeks (and sometimes days), Concord’s development success looks to continue for quite some time.

**Concord has expanded well-beyond Vancouver and into cities across Canada and the UK. It has completed over 100 large residential and mixed-use projects, and has about 50 projects in various stages of planning and development.**



### III: A Total Work of Art

Buildings are not supposed to look like Vancouver House – they are supposed to be larger at their base than at their top, not the other way around, and they are supposed to have a “regular” form, not one that evolves over the height of the building. For followers of the Westbank Corporation, this atypical building comes as no surprise. Ever since the company was founded by Ian Gillespie in 1992, it has used design to push the proverbial envelope while creating mixed-use, urban destinations.

Second year students in the Baker Program in Real Estate toured two properties, TELUS Garden and the Woodward’s Building, and visited developer Westbank’s office where they learned about the under-construction Vancouver House. From touring these projects and speaking with Westbank employees, it became clear how the company’s emphasis on design and creating projects that are a total work of art lead to the mantra “Gesamtkunstwerk”.

TELUS Gardens is a one million square foot (SF) mixed-use development anchored by the telecommunications company TELUS, which has 488,000 SF of office space, 450,000 SF of residential space, and 40,000 SF of retail space. In discussing the building, design architect Gregory Henriquez stated “the goal [is to] design an office building to inspire its occupants, animate Georgia Street, and set a new standard for sustainable workplace design in North America.”

Multiple generations of Vancouver residents spent their Saturday and Sunday afternoons shopping at Woodward’s, a shopping institution in the Gastown neighborhood of Vancouver. By 1993, the surrounding neighborhood had decayed and Vancouverites were reticent to venture to the store. As a result, the store closed and sat vacant for several years. When Westbank began its redevelopment efforts, it was still hard to convince residents to return. To address this challenge, Westbank created a 1,000,000 SF mixed-use space that has market and non-market residential, institutional, retail, office, and community uses housed within a combination of new and existing buildings. The project has had great success, becoming a catalyst in the neighborhood’s resurgence.



Upon completion, Vancouver House will become an iconic feature of Vancouver’s skyline. The 49-story tower will “twist” at its base to accommodate a nearby highway – ground level floor plates will be approximately 6,000 SF while those at the top of the building will be nearly 13,000 SF. Designed by acclaimed international architect Bjarke Ingles, the 600,000 SF mixed-use project will be anchored to its site by an intricate podium that accentuates the site’s unique location, and even takes advantage of the space below the Granville Bridge. The completed project will house 388 residential units, amenities, retail, and community spaces.

**The second year students were inspired by their visit to Westbank, impressed by how the developer embraces difficult sites, and the degree to which art plays a central role. Or, in the words of Ian Gillespie, “Every city needs to have some special moments that take your breath away, that say to you: Okay, this is something unique. This is something beautiful.”**

