

March 3, 2001

## CONFERENCE LAYS GROUNDWORK FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

**VANCOUVER** — More than 100 people representing residents, community agencies and people with interests in business and economic development in the Downtown Eastside have agreed to work together and with government to revitalize their community.

The three levels of government, who are partners under the Vancouver Agreement, organized the three-day meeting to engage, seek input and partner with the communities of the Downtown Eastside, and to help find common ground for future action.

The *Future Search Conference* participants have started to lay the groundwork for real change by providing input toward a strategy and a comprehensive vision for their community.

Some of the many areas of common ground the participants identified were:

- A safe community
- Attractive public spaces
- A thriving economy
- No open drug scene
- Community spirit

"The enthusiasm and hope evident throughout the conference is a signal to all those on the outside looking in that the Downtown Eastside is a vibrant community and that the people who make up this community will find a way out of their current difficult situation," said Secretary of State Hedy Fry (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women). "It's a diverse and resilient community, but the statistics hide these positive realities; ones that are just as real and important for its residents. The time has come to address the negative, but also to stress the positive. The community action plan is one more initiative that will help take us there."

"There's a lot of talent and energy in the Downtown Eastside, on all sides of issues," said Minister of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers Jenny Kwan. "What we heard and witnessed in that room over the last three days reflects the Downtown Eastside I know: aware and inclusive like no other community in Canada. We heard from all sides that people wanted to work things out for themselves, but not out of sight and not out of mind. We can respect and help facilitate that process, as community capacity building is an intrinsic part of the five-year Vancouver Agreement."

"There were a wide diversity of interests in that room — residents, business and community groups and they worked together for three days in an attempt to find common ground on a vision for the future of the Downtown Eastside," said City of Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen. "That, to me, is a significant step forward for the community and for Vancouver. Let's hope we can all continue to work together and maintain the synergy."

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Converge Consulting, who moderated this event, has agreed to work with the Downtown Eastside communities by organizing a second, follow-up Future Search Conference in about a month.

The Vancouver Agreement is a five-year collaboration involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Signed in March 2000, the Agreement focuses on three main areas: community health and safety; economic and social development; and community capacity building.

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