

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
SPRING CONVOCATION  
June 11, 12, 13 and 14, 2013

Convocation Address  
By Dr. Barry Downs  
Architect and founder of DA Architects and Partners

An honorary Doctor of Laws was conferred on Barry Downs during the Beedie School of Business ceremony on Tuesday, June 11, 2013. This is Dr. Downs' Convocation address:

Madam Chancellor, President Petter, members of the Board of Governors and Senate, Faculty members, honoured guests, and especially graduates and their families and friends. I thank you for this special honour and recognition today. I would also like to acknowledge my family and friends who have been so supportive over the years and my good friend, Professor of Communications, Richard Gruneau, for his generous introduction.

My heroes changed when a group of UBC professors and other determined advocates for change, got together with successful businessman and investment Fund entrepreneur Arthur Phillips to form TEAM, the Elector's Action Movement. A new civic political party was born.

By 1974, they gained control of Vancouver City Council and championed a remarkable visionary process of land use renewal, social equality and heritage building preservation. Planning of small scale housing enclaves, people-friendly neighbourhoods and livable green communities began in earnest.

In these endeavours, participatory planning emerged as City-supported developments were assessed by local area citizen groups in conjunction with architects, planners, economists and engineers. Policy was decided by consensus. Subsequently, for the City, Jack Volrich, Mike Harcourt and Gordon Campbell upheld many of the significant objectives achieved in this time period.

A decade later, more challenging conditions were faced. New urban design criteria, for highly densified neighbourhoods, were determined from the north side of False Creek (Expo Lands), the Downtown Core and Coal Harbour developments. Market driven, few projects addressed non-market family housing on site, and many of the residential tower units were rented out by absentee owners.

Indeed, inflated land and building costs encouraged housing to be built as a commodity instead of as a privilege. However, the provision of primary schools, lively streets, sufficient garden settings and linear parks, did animate most initial urban neighbourhoods as demographics and tenures evolved. Disappointingly, Downtown Eastside remained a work in progress with unknown results ahead.

Today - as graduates of the Beedie School of Business from this splendid University - you will determine the urban business and domestic environments of the future.

New challenges await your energetic and creative input and unique Information Management skills. You will need to encourage your government builders and bureaucrats to mandate the environmental quality of workplace and home as a central objective of all new Metro development initiatives.

Innovative new housing solutions must be generated in order to provide a more affordable product. This would include building renewal, demolition, sensitive renovating within the suburbs, creating duplex units and laneway housing as well as allowing secondary suites.

In these projects, entrepreneurship should embrace social sustainability and recognize that, with resolve, a mix of income, household types and age groups should and can be accommodated in balanced neighbourhoods.

Research preservationists today believe that the development of single family housing communities should be provided in small density. Small footprint cluster housing, fee-simple Row

houses (as found in Boston and London) and townhouse-encapsulated mid-rise tower complexes are viable housing alternatives. High rises need not be everywhere. The tower-only sustainability argument can challenge quality of life standards.

Your Business acumen will allow you to question new development trends and determine the impact of gentrification and dislocation.

Of course, sustainable accountability will be a part of your decision making and those of the organizations you work with. Increasingly, green policies are seen as good business, yet the degree of implementation will be measured against factors. Ongoing tensions and change will require well-reasoned responses.

These possibilities for high quality eco-friendly environments and affordable housing are but a few which can be achieved today. Creative solutions will call for updated expertise and advocacy - and the support of all interested parties.

Indeed, humane living environments, compelling public places and stimulating economies are at this time more necessary than ever. As realized in the past, we know your vision and learned contribution will make a difference and forever enrich the lives of others.