



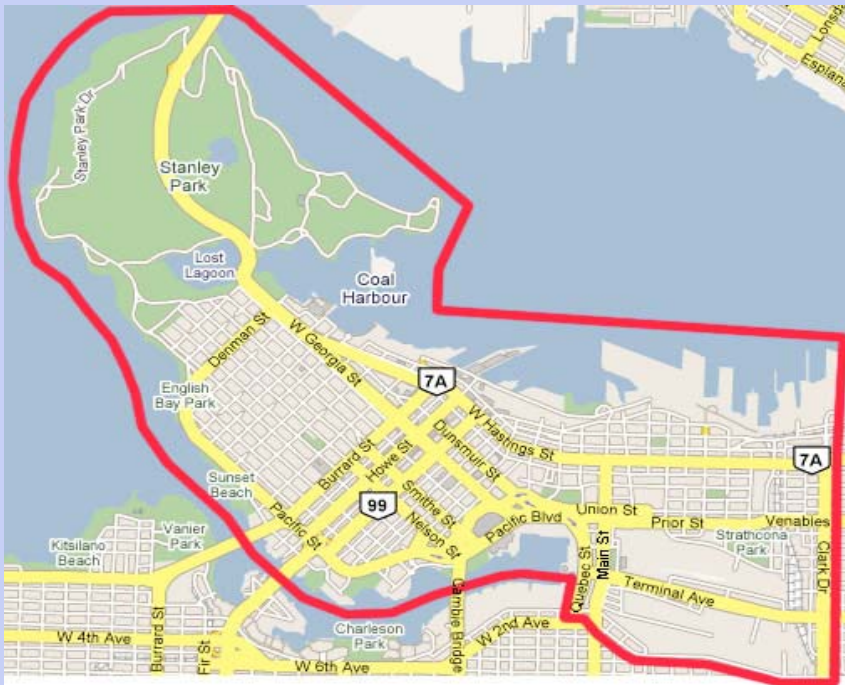
# **Vancouver's Downtown Community Court**

Honourable Judge Thomas J. Gove  
February 28, 2008

# Why is a Community Court Needed?

- Street Crime Working Group recommendation
- Problem-solving approach
- Offender profile:
  - 50% suffer from mental disorder and/or substance abuse
  - 70% of offenders have been on income assistance
  - Overlap of clients and service providers

# Geographic Area



- The court will take in approximately 1,500 accused per year
- The court will handle broad range of crimes, including:
  - theft
  - breaking into cars
  - fighting
  - drug possession

## What the Court will do

- Take a problem-solving approach to address root causes of criminal behaviour
- Hold offenders accountable in timely way
- Contribute to liveable community and create new opportunities for community participation in the criminal justice system

# Problem Solving

- Judiciary can't solve problem alone
- Integrated team to assess, plan, case manage offenders
- Goal is to address root causes of criminal behaviour
- Culturally appropriate planning and services for Aboriginal offenders

## Timely Process

- Offenders will appear in court within 2 to 10 days
- Court team will work toward early decisions and resolution at the first or second appearance
- Reduced “opportunities to fail”
- Sentences will begin immediately
- Community work service, where imposed, will begin immediately

## Case Study

### “Luke” in Provincial Court

- Profile:
  - 24 years old
  - No convictions before age 22
  - Drug addicted, homeless, unemployed, stealing, possibly mentally ill
- Usually, offender is in jail until time served; then released with same problems prior to jail.
- Sentenced to house arrest in treatment house.
- Has to find his way there from Port Coquitlam Pre-trial Centre.

## **Case Study**

### **“Luke” in Community Court**

- **Process Luke will follow:**
  - meets with Community Court lawyer
  - interviewed by triage team
  - His circumstances and needs are assessed
  - team accesses databases for more information
  - mental health assessment
  - Community Court Plan developed by triage team
  - Court appearance and sentencing



# Range of Sentences

- Jail
- Community work service
- Information sessions
- Intensive supervision

# Community Work Service

Community work service will:

- repay the community for harm done
- be served in the community where offence was committed
- begin the same day or day after sentencing
- be for a relatively short number of hours (four to eight hours usually)
- use the opportunity to link the offender to services (e.g., health authority, income and employment assistance)

## Community – Part of Solution

To be effective, the Downtown Community Court needs:

- ongoing dialogue with community representatives
- understanding of what is most important to community
- understanding of ways offenders can repay community
- partnerships with business associations, residents associations, service providers, church groups, etc. to create meaningful work and other opportunities for offenders

## **Justice System – Part of Solution**

- Holding offenders accountable more quickly will encourage pro-social behaviour and increase public confidence in the system and the judiciary
- Justice system can be a method to connect individuals to services and to keep them connected
- Where not court-mandated, justice system can still facilitate access to treatment and services

**Early Solutions, Faster Justice**

**Justice Reform in British Columbia**