



News / Local News

How green is your Metro Vancouver city?

A view from space shows how green Metro's cities really are, and how much green space has been lost to development this century.

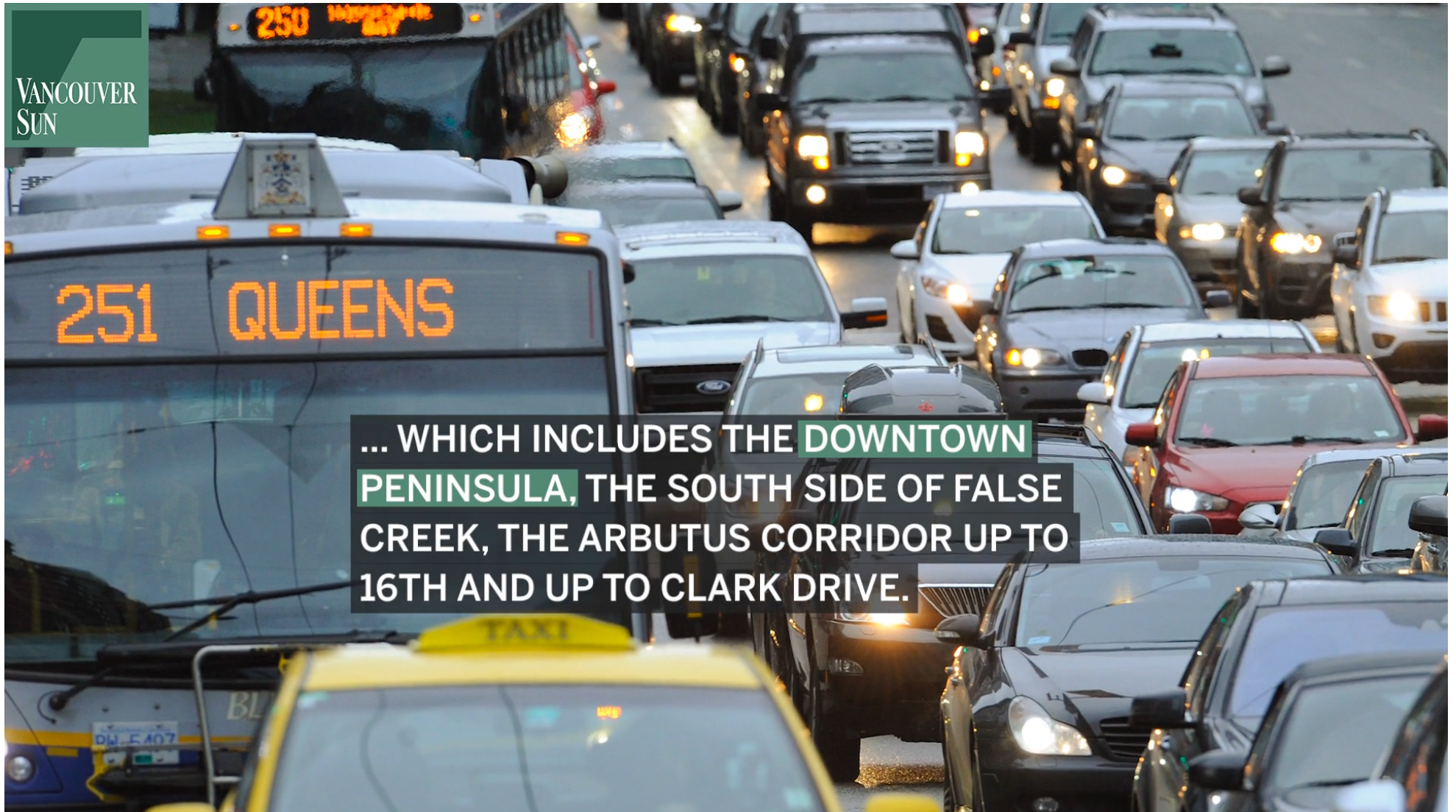
Nathan Griffiths

Aug 28, 2022 • August 28, 2022 • 4 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)



Enhanced colour satellite imagery shows vegetation estimates in Metro Vancouver from June 30, 2021. PHOTO BY SENTINEL HUB/EOS

A view from space shows how green Metro's cities really are, and how much green space has been lost to development in the past two decades.



... WHICH INCLUDES THE **DOWNTOWN PENINSULA**, THE SOUTH SIDE OF FALSE CREEK, THE ARBUTUS CORRIDOR UP TO 16TH AND UP TO CLARK DRIVE.

Postmedia analyzed satellite imagery of Metro Vancouver from 2000 and 2022 to estimate how urban green space has changed during that time.



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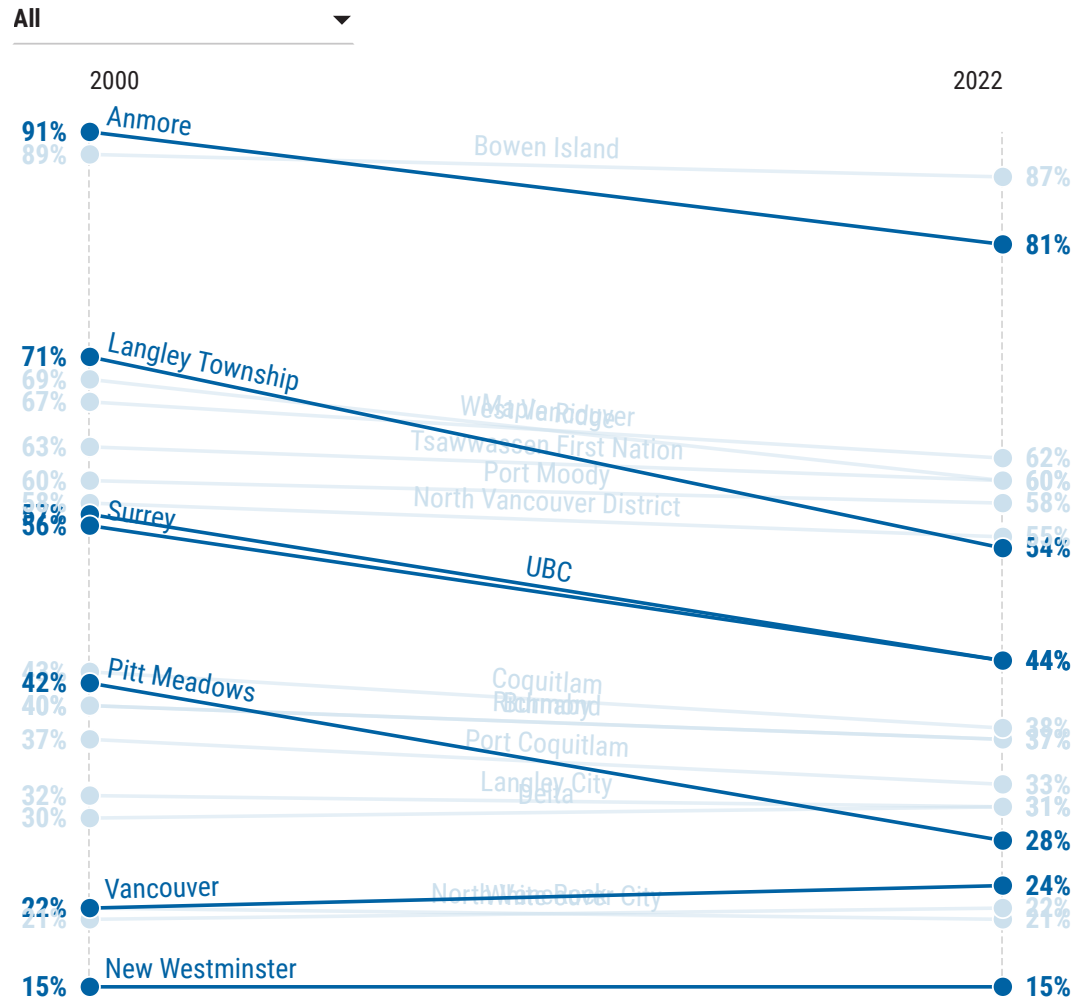
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The amount of green space has fallen in nearly every Metro municipality since 2000. Only three cities — Vancouver, White Rock and Delta — saw gains, and those were modest.

Vegetation fell most in areas that experienced significant growth and development since 2000 — UBC, Langley Township, Pitt Meadows, and Surrey.

How green is your city?

Estimated per cent of greenspace in Metro Vancouver municipalities, 2000-2022



Population growth and the accompanying development is the primary reason for Metro’s loss of green space, according to a 2019 report from Metro Vancouver.

At a regional meeting last May, Metro director Lisa Muri pointed out the competing demands of development and the need to maintain green urban environments.

“Every municipality is facing (tree) canopy decline with development,” she said.

Langley Township’s latest forest management survey notes that the loss of vegetation in the township “has primarily been due to forest lands being developed into residential areas.”


Satellite imagery highlights loss of green space in urban centres

Satellite imagery from 2004 and 2021 show how much urban green space was lost to development near the intersection of 65 Ave. and the Fraser Hwy. in Metro Vancouver.

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Both Pitt Meadows and Langley Township approved plans to improve urban forests and green spaces earlier this year. Surrey has had an urban forestry plan since at least 2016. Plans typically involve planting new trees each year, protecting existing trees and other natural areas, and introducing nature-

based rainwater infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens.

Vancouver is one of a handful of cities where urban green space has increased since 2000. The city planted 150,000 trees between 2010 and 2020 and has made significant investments in bioswales and other green rainwater infrastructure. Officials aim to double the number of street trees in low-vegetation neighbourhoods such as Marpole and the Downtown Eastside by 2030.

In addition to planting more trees to improve urban greenery, it is essential to preserve existing trees and green spaces, said Amelia Needoba, principle of Diamond Head Consulting.

“If you consider trees as living assets,” Needoba said, “they increase in value and benefits as they grow larger.”

“We would value a 100-year-old building that has heritage value,” she said. “But we don’t really think of trees the same way.”

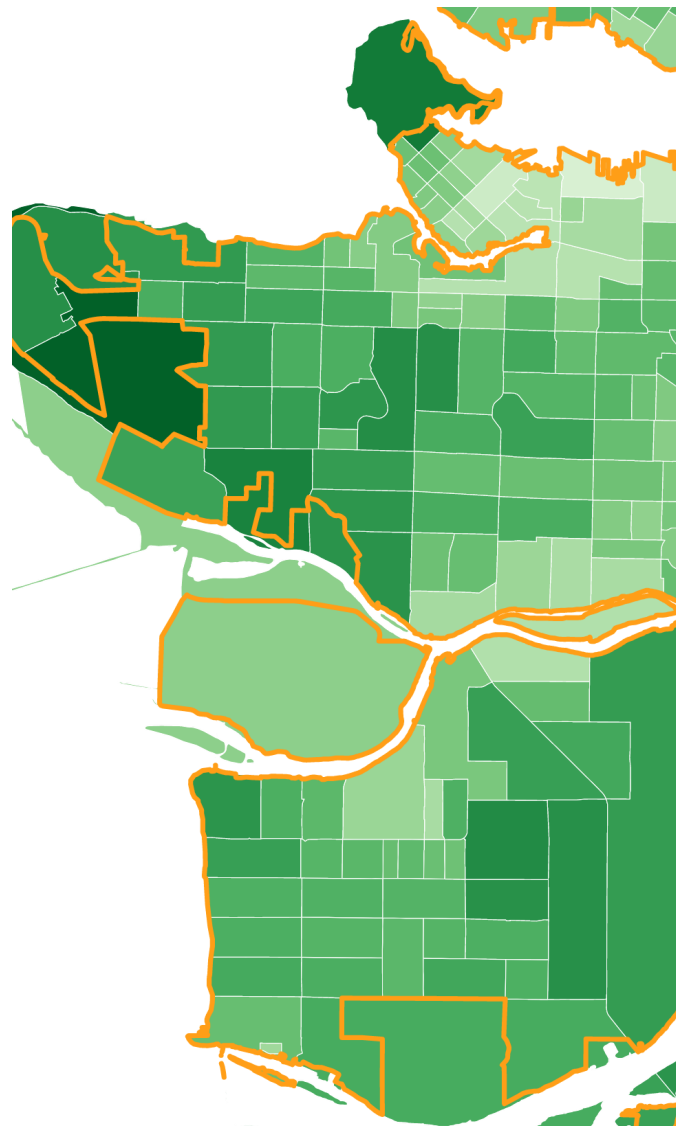
Needoba said educating people about the benefits and importance of trees is a critical part of ensuring a healthy, green urban environment, but said there was “still a lot of work to be done” to convince people to plant more trees.

Cities and non-profits can support residents in greening their neighbourhoods by subsidizing tree planting and maintenance on private property, or by helping to physically plant trees for those who aren’t able to do so, Needoba said. She highlighted the L.A.-based non-profit [TreePeople](#), which has programs that help promote and develop urban greening in neighbourhoods that don’t have much green space or the capacity to increase it.

Trees and other urban vegetation provide a range of benefits to cities and their residents, including shading and cooling, carbon storage, stormwater management, and homes for wildlife. A significant proportion of the nearly 600 people who died in B.C.’s heat wave last summer lived in neighbourhoods with limited greenery.

Estimated per cent of greenspace in Metro Vancouver census tracts, 2022.

Est. % urban vegetation 0%  84%



Source: [Sent](#) ... as well as Pitt Meadows, Surrey and Langley Township.

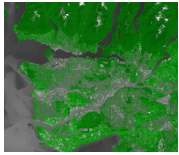
Easy access to trees and green spaces improves a large number of health conditions across the lifespan, including increased physical activity, longer life expectancies and improved pregnancy outcomes, according to Melissa Lem, a family physician and president-elect of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

“Research shows that just sitting in nature for 15 minutes can significantly drop cortisol, the primary stress hormone,” Lem wrote in an email, “while sitting on a city street doesn’t improve it at all.”

She noted that studies from Australia showed that people living in neighbourhoods with high levels of tree cover have lower risks of diabetes, heart disease, psychological distress and loneliness.

“By improving overall mental and physical health,” Lem wrote, “urban greening also improves people’s resilience against extreme heat and wildfire smoke caused by climate change.”

RECOMMENDED FROM EDITORIAL



Greening of Metro Vancouver 'ambitious but achievable,' report suggests

The local analysis, which was based off of a similar study by Statistics Canada, focused on parts of Metro Vancouver with a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre. It included trees, shrubs and other greenery on public and private land, as well as parks, gardens, and other green spaces. Regional parks and areas such as Stanley Park or much of the Agricultural Land Reserve, were excluded from the calculations in order to get a better sense of the level of greenery people experience without having to travel to a large park or rural setting.

ngriffiths@postmedia.com

twitter.com/njgriffiths

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