

March 22, 2019

To: Mayor and Council, City of Victoria

Re: 950 Kings: Securing a Future for a Community Hub in Hillside-Quadra

Dear Mayor and Council,

As the neighbourhood association of Hillside-Quadra we have worked with the neighbourhood to create a vision for a dynamic community hub at 950 Kings Rd. Please consider the need/time sensitivity for this beneficial proposal that would re-invigour the Hillside-Quadra neighbourhood and help absorb the large regional developments that are the Summit at Quadra Village and Evergreen Terrace (present and future).

### **The Need**

- Quadra Village Community Centre (QVCC: legal name Downtown Blanshard Advisory Committee) is the busiest Community Centre in the City and is located across from the largest concentrated low income housing complex in Greater Victoria. It is a key part of community life for people from all walks of life ( including diverse economic and cultural backgrounds) and offers a valuable range of community social service and recreation programs and events such as Quadra Village Day. The capacity of the Centre and the Quadra Village Neighbourhood Gym is nearing capacity and the organization can enhance the community even further with expanded space and security of tenure. The 1.2 million dollar annual operating budget coupled with the fact that the Community Centre itself did all the fundraising and even land purchasing towards the 1996 built Community Centre are reflections of how much QVCC itself has brought in community benefit to date.
- The former Blanshard Elementary School at 950 Kings (across the road from QVCC) was integral to the urban renewal planning that allowed for the planning and construction of Evergreen Terrace and Blanshard Street itself. In the quadrant bordered by Bay, Hillside, Quadra and Blanshard this 1.4 hectare school site was a key hub for the community featuring playing fields, playground equipment, park like frontage, the gymnasium and two floors of classrooms. It gave children, families and other residents room to roam and play in this densely populated quadrant featuring a number of townhomes but primarily apartment living.

### **The Vision**

- When the school closed the site became increasingly unavailable to local residents, peaking with the purchase and planning of the Summit of Quadra Village. Boredom amongst tweens/youth and a lack of access to reasonable playspaces became visible in the neighbourhood. While the use of the (now named) Quadra Village Community Gym has been a good first step

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towards community access to the remaining 3.5 acre parcel of the school building and property the City has a unique opportunity to purchase 950 Kings and with it a future that could include:

- welcoming green space accessible to residents
- Community Centre operated amenities such as the Quadra Village Neighbourhood Gym, daycare and other community program space
- potential for a northern Library Branch on the scale of the new Emily Carr (Uptown) branch or the Goudy branch (Langford)

- The quadrant featuring Evergreen Terrace and the (under construction) Summit at Quadra Village has two large regional providers/interests in BC Housing and the Capital Regional Hospital District that do not have mandates that readily flex to include neighbourhood amenities that are not about housing or hospitals. As a result there is a danger that the building and lands at 950 Kings will become part of an over concentration of regional amenities that don't account for quality of life in Hillside-Quadra. By purchasing 950 Kings, the City of Victoria would be investing in enhancement of a vulnerable neighbourhood through access to green space and valuable community services.

### **Time Sensitivity**

- An emerging dynamic is that we were alerted in late January that the Capital Regional District / Capital Regional Hospital District staff are actively planning for 950 Kings. They have developed plans for mixed market housing and a residential health facility at 950 Kings. I let them know that we were promised consultation in advance of planning for 950 Kings by the CRHD and that we had been invited (through a CRHD Board motion) to be a part of multi stakeholder meetings with BC Housing, Capital Regional Hospital District, Capital Regional District (Housing) and School District 61. Despite reminders of this the meetings and consultation haven't happened. The reality is that CRHD staff have been working hard on this with two lenses/mandates (CRD Housing and Island Health) . So far, they are purely examining this as an opportunity to do something within their mandates. I have been told bluntly that the items in our briefing note (above) are not likely to be seen as a match with the CRHD or CRD Housing mandates. Michael Barnes agreed to take the ideas of neighbourhood gym, daycare, greenspace and library forward for consideration but he is not hopeful and we have not heard back. A multi stakeholder project on the site could lead to some opportunities (eg: community space for daycare at the Burnside School redevelopment) but with the CRHD and CRD solely calling the shots we are in tough. As well, small gains at 950 Kings do not address the fact that Evergreen Terrace and other dense housing projects in Hillside-Quadra are still here without any of the relief that was once present with Blanshard Elementary School and its fields. Instead the entire Blanshard Elementary School and grounds is projecting to be a landing spot for 3 regional priorities (complex care, residential health and housing) and kids and families in this quadrant of the neighbourhood will be bordered by Quadra, Blanshard Bay and Quadra with limited accessible green and amenity spaces in between). The time to act is definitely now as the



CRHD is saying they won't extend the Quadra Village Neighbourhood Gym lease beyond its expiry in 2021 as it is clearing the way for redevelopment.

**The Benefits**

- Acting now to ensure to make the strategic purchase of 950 Kings Rd from the Capital Regional Hospital District will ensure that the green space and amenities help build community capacity, health and accessibility to the full spectrum of the neighbourhood and community
- Ongoing access to recreational opportunities including gym access for the Community Centre which has had such access since 1974. Continuance of programs such as Kindergym, youth recreation nights and cultural dance.
- Investing in healthy options for local, children and youth from low income backgrounds secures healthy opportunities and helps improve social conditions and act as a useful tool in crime prevention
- Community Centres offer a return of \$7-\$10 of programming for every \$1 invested by the City
- An addition of up to 60 childcare spaces in a City that is increasingly short of childcare
- Increased access to literacy building resources in a lower literacy neighbourhood

Thanks for considering this request for the City to purchase 950 Kings is an important, unique and time sensitive request that will benefit the short and long term health of Hillside-Quadra, surrounding neighbourhoods and the City as a whole.

Sincerely,



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