



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of July 18, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** May 29, 2019
From: Kerri Moore, Head of Business and Community Relations
Subject: Government Street Report

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Defer the decision to open Government Street to pedestrians' pilot to 2020
2. Direct staff to research other cities with people first multi-use streets and determine best practices,
3. Direct staff to bring forward a budget request as part of the 2021 Financial Planning process to undertake a detailed design and cost estimate to implement the short term actions identified between Humboldt and Yates as approved in the 2017 Downtown Public Realm Plan for consideration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update to Council based on a business charrette organized by the Downtown Victoria Business Association, an approved Downtown Public Realm Plan, lessons learned from the 2018 Government Street pedestrian mall pilot, and new information received from businesses in 2019.

In May 2015, the Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA) conducted a Government Street charrette with the objective to create an action plan to address issues and capitalize on opportunities on Government Street, from Humboldt to Pandora. The findings from this charrette have not been presented to Council for consideration until now.

In April 2017, the Downtown Public Realm Plan was adopted by Council. The plan identifies Government Street as a priority public realm improvement. It includes a set of short, medium and long term actions based on broad engagement with the public and businesses that occurred through the planning process, and also on the results of the 2015 DVBA Government Street charrette.

In August and September of 2018, the Government Street businesses initiated a soft closure of Government Street on Sundays (with the exception of long weekends) from all vehicular traffic between Yates and Fort to pilot a pedestrian mall. As it was not formally a special event, there was little animation and promotion and a number of challenges that included signage and physical barricades.

In March 2019, the Government Street businesses requested the DVBA to arrange a meeting to discuss concerns about Council's decision to close Government Street, specifically the gathering and analysis of data to inform the decision and why the recommendations from the 2015 charrette had not been implemented.

Staff are now proposing Council defer the 2019 pilot to close Government Street to 2020 and undertake a refresh of ageing streetscape elements as directed in the Downtown Public Realm Plan, with the aim to create a more human scale, pedestrian oriented people place on one of Victoria's most renowned streets.

PURPOSE

To update and seek Council direction based on a previously approved downtown public realm plan and information received from businesses from both the 2015 charrette and in 2019 regarding the closure of Government Street.

BACKGROUND

Government Street is the Downtown's most prominent pedestrian priority street and one of its signature destination retail high streets. Streetscape improvements emphasizing Government Street's role as pedestrian priority street, including the use of brick pavers, rolled curbs and widened sidewalks, were completed from Wharf Street to Yates Street in the late 1970's. The Downtown Core Area Plan adopted in 2011 includes a direction to extend the established pedestrian oriented streetscape character from Yates to Pembroke. The 2016 Bicycle Master Plan identifies Government Street from Wharf Street to Pandora as part of the long-term AAA bicycle network.

Downtown Victoria Business Association – Charrette in 2015

The DVBA organized a charrette in May 2015 with the objective to create an action plan to address issues and capitalize on opportunities on Government Street from Humboldt to Pandora. There were over 50 charrette participants and at that time 65 ground floor businesses identified between Humboldt and Pandora. Participants were asked the following questions:

What is your dream/vision for Government Street?

What actions will create the Government Street of your dreams (short/med/long-term)?

Some of the highlights for the short and long-term actions were; better way-finding, beautification with flowers, paint, dealing with unsightly buildings, finding a new major tenant, having pop out cafes, sidewalk shopping, hiring an expert urban planner to design/implement changes, letting current merchants out onto the sidewalk. The full charrette report is included as Appendix A.

Downtown Public Realm Plan

The Downtown Public Realm Plan establishes a renewed vision and framework for the design of public streets and other open spaces in the downtown. The plan identifies Government Street as a priority for improvement, including:

- Short Term: Reconfigure Government/Wharf/Humboldt intersection (currently under construction as part of the Wharf Street AAA bike corridor)
- Short Term: A streetscape refresh from Yates to Humboldt, including furnishings, and replacement of street trees and planters (given their deteriorating condition and lack of suitability for this location)

- Medium Term: Incorporate a 2-way AAA bike facility, including consideration for reducing traffic volumes and re-introducing two-way vehicle traffic in support of a more pedestrian and bike oriented 'shared street' approach
- Long Term: Extending the 'pedestrian mall' character from Yates Street to Chinatown (as recommended in the 2011 Downtown Core Area Plan)

Government Street Pedestrian Mall – Pilot 2018

In the summer of 2018, Council directed staff to pilot a Government Street closure and one business took the lead and organized the closure. The pilot closed Government Street between Yates and Fort from August 12 to September 16 (originally scheduled until Sept 30) on Sundays only. As it was to be piloted as a soft closure and not a special event, there were a number of issues related to a lack of signage and animation and no decorative ways to close the street other than formal construction barricades. For the last three Sundays, the City engaged the Greater Victoria Placemaking Network to support the closure and animate it with tables, chairs, games, etc.

Government Street Businesses – Meeting in 2019

In response to Council's strategic objectives under 'Strong Liveable Neighbourhoods' and the 2019 action to 'Continue the open Government Street to pedestrians pilot and consider pedestrian-only Government Street in 2020-2021 budget process' the Government Street businesses requested the Downtown Victoria Business Association convene a meeting held on March 26, 2019. The meeting included Councillor Thornton-Joe as the DVBA Councillor Liaison. Questions and concerns from businesses related to the Council's intended outcome of a closure, the gathering and analysis of data to inform the decision and why the recommendations from the 2017 charrette had not been implemented. The businesses noted other events which involve street closures such as Car Free Day, Wicked, and the Santa Claus Parade, which they support due to the positive community impact even though retail sales suffer during those events. However, to close the street in the peak tourist season, which for many businesses is their highest revenue generating period to sustain them during the shoulder/winter months could force some business to close.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The City has received feedback from the Government Street businesses expressing their concerns and request that further research and data analysis be done to inform Council's decision on a closure. Feedback from the DVBA has indicated a desire to proceed with recommendations for Government Street from the Downtown Public Realm Plan, specifically, the refresh of furnishings, planters and street trees from Wharf Street to Yates Street.

Scheduling short and long term actions must also consider timings for infrastructure upgrades. Utility master plans identify various pipe replacements and upgrades for Government Street that are required for asset renewal, capacity to service a growing downtown and provide greater seismic resiliency. Major projects include replacement of the watermain between Broughton Street and Herald which is tentatively scheduled for 2021.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

OPTION 1 (RECOMMENDED):

- Defer the decision to open Government Street to pedestrians' pilot to 2020 or 2021,
- Direct staff to research other cities with people first multi-use streets and determine best practices,

- Direct staff to bring forward a budget request as part of the 2021 Financial Planning process to undertake a detailed design and cost estimate to implement the short term actions identified between Humboldt and Yates as approved in the 2017 Downtown Public Realm Plan for consideration.
- Coordinate timing of short term actions in conjunction with other major infrastructure work.

OPTION 2

- Council to provide alternate direction to staff

Impacts to Financial Plan

The \$25,000 budgeted for the closure could be re-allocated to start the initial concept design and class D cost work in 2019 to identify the budget required for a detailed design in 2021.

2019 - 2022 Strategic Plan

The strategic action to continue the open Government Street to pedestrians' pilot and consider pedestrian-only Government Street in 2020-2021 budget is outlined in the 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Objective #8: Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

This initiative is consistent with the *Official Community Plan* which encourages public realm design enhancement to acknowledge the importance of streets and other public spaces to the social life of the city, and to continue to animate street life through festivals, celebrations and special events (Placemaking policies 8.33 and 8.38).

Respectfully submitted,

Kerri Moore
Head of Business and Community Relations

For
Joaquin Karakas
Senior Urban Designer

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date: July 12, 2019

List of Attachments

- Appendix A: DVBA Government Street Charrette
- Appendix B: Downtown Public Realm Plan, Government Street – Shared Space