

Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of October 3, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** September 19, 2019

From: Andrea Hudson, Acting Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Subject: *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Lessons Learned from Victoria's Local Area Planning Program*

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the report *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Lessons Learned from Victoria's Local Area Planning Program* for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present lessons learned from recent local area planning processes – both successes and challenges – to inform the next phase of local area planning.

The *Official Community Plan* (OCP, 2012) represents a comprehensive framework for sustainability and liveability, providing direction on how Victoria can grow and change over the coming decades. The OCP identifies local area plans as an important tool in the implementation of community-wide objectives and policies, based on the local context and applied at the local level.

Since the adoption of the OCP, four neighbourhood planning processes have been completed and three plans adopted. These processes have resulted in several achievements, including successful engagement events and policies which support housing choice, employment opportunities, and sustainability. However, challenges were also experienced, so these processes also provide important lessons learned which will inform future local area planning.

Lessons learned from these processes include:

- *Local area planning scope and connection to City-wide objectives:* It is important to clarify the community-wide vision and goals, and the role of local area planning in helping these goals come alive in a local context. It is also important to clearly define and communicate a manageable scope for local areas plans. While participants desire the opportunity to express a full range of concerns and ideas, it is also important to keep the process focused and accessible, avoid duplication of citywide efforts, and set clear expectations of what can be achieved through local area planning.
- *Public engagement:* Previous local area planning processes indicate a need to diversify the voices heard through engagement, with a focus on renters, those under age 40, young families and low to moderate-income households. Some stakeholders also desired more accessible

data, clearer connections between data and decision-making, and clearer linkages to citywide initiatives. Earlier processes included many successful event formats which can be built upon to achieve these objectives.

- *Process and timelines:* The planning process can be streamlined by better connecting planning and implementation, particularly the development of design guidelines, model zones and OCP amendments, in a timely manner. This can allow sufficient time for each engagement phase, without lengthening the overall process or duplicating engagement, and therefore allow stakeholders to participate in the full process without burnout. Where there is interest, citizen-led efforts and topic-based committees can be integrated earlier, on topics relevant to the scope of local area planning.

These lessons learned have been used to inform the framework for the next phases of local area planning, to be presented at an October Committee of the Whole meeting. Following this, staff will also bring forward a proposed approach to planning for “missing middle” housing types (townhouses, house-plexes, etc.).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present lessons learned from previous local area planning processes, both successes and challenges, to inform the next phase of local area planning. Derived from the lessons are a set of principles to shape the process for the next phase of local area planning.

BACKGROUND

The Official Community Plan (OCP, 2012) represents a comprehensive framework for sustainability and liveability providing direction on how Victoria may grow and change over the coming decades. The OCP identifies local area plans as an important tool in the implementation of OCP objectives and policies. In this way, local area planning is a dialogue through which City-wide priorities, policies, and initiatives are translated into more detailed, locally specific guidance for consideration of future development and City investment. Like all City plans, policies and bylaws, local area plans should be broadly consistent with the OCP and other citywide policies and initiatives, in order to support community objectives throughout all neighbourhoods.

The OCP envisioned a range of types of local area plans including corridor plans, urban village/town centre plans, district plans, neighbourhood plans, or area plans, as appropriate. After adoption of the OCP in 2012, engagement with neighbourhood associations resulted in a direction for neighbourhood plans to continue to be the focus of local area planning.

Existing neighbourhood plans were created between 1986 and 2002, meaning that a child born early in the planning processes may be embarking on a career and forming a new household today. While there is much in these plans that still may be relevant, the OCP identifies a range of trends and needs, including imperatives to act on climate change, sustainable mobility, housing needs, and changing demographics (including regional growth patterns, the formation of new households and the anticipated doubling of Victoria's senior population). More recently, the Downtown Core Area Plan (DCAP, 2010) was adopted in 2010.

Since adoption of the OCP, new neighbourhood plans have been adopted for Burnside, Victoria West and Fairfield neighbourhoods, and a draft plan for Gonzales has been put on hold at Council's direction, until completion of all other neighbourhood plans.

A key focus of these most recent neighbourhood planning processes has been:

- the refinement of land use and transportation policies and amenity objectives for villages, corridors, and town centres
- the refinement of infill housing policies and design guidelines within Traditional Residential Areas
- identification of desired local transportation improvements
- collaborative and iterative engagement incorporating opportunities for community-led events and activities.

Lessons learned from these previous processes are summarized in this report and have informed the key principles that will be proposed for the next phase of local area planning.

Accelerated Local Area Planning

Through the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, Council had directed staff to examine options for accelerating the delivery of local area planning for all remaining neighbourhoods that needed plan updates. A new program was conceived with the aim to complete multiple neighbourhood plan updates within a three-year period, with the following phasing:

- Phase 1: Fairfield, Gonzales, Victoria West
- Phase 2: North Park, Fernwood, Rockland, Jubilee
- Phase 3: Hillside-Quadra, Oaklands, James Bay

A one-year timeframe per phase was envisioned to complete pre-planning, visioning, co-creating of the plan content, plan drafting and refinement, and approval. While focused on land use, transportation and public space, these plans touched on a wide range of topics identified by the community. It proved challenging to deliver these plans on schedule while simultaneously allowing stakeholders to feel they had sufficient time to be heard on all topics of interest, leading to added rounds of engagement.

The phasing determined for accelerated local area planning was based on both quantitative factors such as land area targeted for growth and recent development pressure, as well as considerations that emerged from staff analysis and community association meetings, such as existing working relationships between neighbourhoods and the complexity of local planning issues. At the time, both Fairfield (due to various rezoning proposals) and Victoria West (due to master-planned developments in the Core Songhees area) were experiencing the most development pressure and therefore identified in phase 1. Gonzales was included due to its shared neighbourhood association with Fairfield and similar land use planning considerations.

The next phase of planning was intended to include contiguous neighbourhoods Fernwood, North/South Jubilee, North Park and Rockland, as well as Oak Bay Avenue Village. A final phase was to include Hillside-Quadra, Oaklands, and James Bay in order to focus on shared planning issues such as the Hillside Avenue corridor, and to allow the Capital Park project to progress further.

Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan called for continued development of local area plans, without an accelerated approach, but with opportunities to provide grant funding to community associations to commence pre-planning work while they await their formal planning process with City staff. The strategic plan provides additional direction to identify opportunities for affordable housing in all neighbourhood plans.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Lessons Learned from Recent Local Area Planning

This section presents lessons learned from neighbourhood planning processes in four neighbourhoods (Burnside, Victoria West, Fairfield and Gonzales), and suggests ways in which the future local area planning process will respond.

1. Scope and connection to City-wide objectives

- Clarify citywide vision and goals, scope of LAP process, and outcomes from the outset: It was not always clear to participants that local area planning was meant to support community-wide goals, including those goals related to sustainable mobility, walkable neighbourhoods and housing choice and affordability. Communicating this more clearly can help avoid divergence from City-wide policies and ensure an efficient and meaningful process.
- Topical focus of neighbourhood planning: Topics which participants focused on most included infill housing, corridors and villages (character, scale, public realm), transportation (safety, choice and locations of concern), parks and amenities. While it is important to give participants the opportunity to address a full range of concerns and ideas, it is also important to create a manageable scope, to avoid duplication of City-wide efforts (for example, in areas like green building, climate adaptation or density bonus policy), and set clear expectations of what can be achieved through local area planning. While some stakeholders desired significant content on specific topic areas, many stakeholders felt the breadth of topics in the neighbourhood plans made them hard to access, understand and comment on.

How lessons learned on scope and connection to citywide objectives will be applied:

- Establish a clear relationship between Local Area Planning and community-wide objectives: Local Area Planning should be rooted in key City-wide objectives regarding housing choice and affordability, sustainable mobility, climate change mitigation and adaptation, building a diverse and inclusive community and supporting community well-being.
- Focus on areas designated for growth in the OCP, where planning is needed (Fig. 1): Within these areas, focus on integrated land use, transportation, urban design and public realm planning for:
 - villages and town centres
 - mobility corridors (arterial and secondary arterial roads and frequent transit routes)
 - surrounding areas of medium to higher-density residential and commercial uses
 - areas experiencing pressure for change.

Housing for Traditional Residential Areas will be explored through a parallel, City-wide process to implement Council direction on missing middle housing forms (e.g. townhouses, houseplexes).

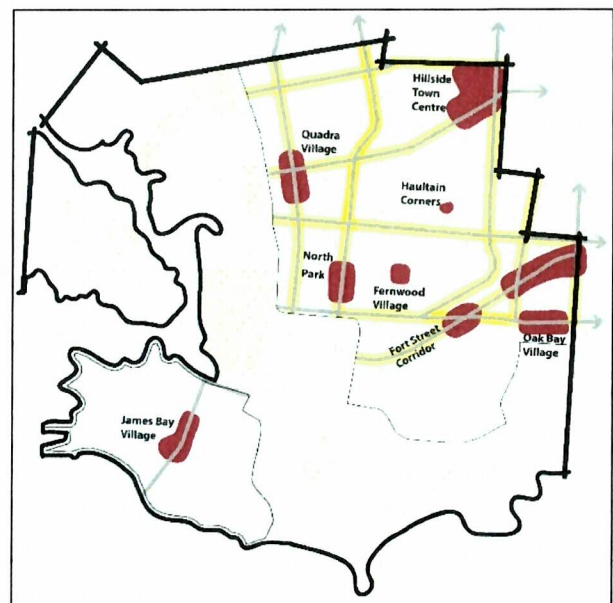


Figure 1.

Pre-planning may identify topic areas not related to land use which are deemed in scope and merit further exploration. Opportunities would be provided to integrate these topics into consultation and/or for collaborative or community-led exploration of these topics.

- *Avoid duplication of City-wide efforts:* Communication and process should make clear what initiatives are being taken at a City-wide level, such as implementation of the Climate Leadership Plan, the *Victoria Housing Strategy*, the *Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan*, Sustainable Mobility (Go Victoria), Growing in the City and Urban Forest initiatives. Non-land use topics within local area planning should focus on identifying gaps in City-wide policy, and opportunities for City-wide objectives to come to life in local areas.
- *Define larger study areas that cross neighbourhood boundaries:* Larger, more cohesive study areas based on corridors, villages and town centres and surrounding areas will better provide the flexibility for engagement to focus on the places, activity nodes and patterns that people identify with.

2. Public engagement

Lessons learned from staff's experience with public engagement processes and techniques included the following:

- Some stakeholders desire to see more data or better understand trends, communicated in accessible formats and clearly linked to decision-making.
- *Align and integrate LAP engagement* with other City initiatives and processes, where possible, to design an efficient, co-ordinated process to keep participants engaged.
- *Diversity is strength.* Engaging community members with a diversity of experience, perspective, and expertise helps broaden engagement and ground conversations.
- *Community champions representing a broad diversity of viewpoints key to success.* Community members who step in to be ambassadors of the process and outcomes play a key role in success of the process.
- *Build on successful meeting and event formats.* Community/participant-led techniques were most successful when supported by staff with templates, materials, and engagement planning, and where it was clear how outcomes would integrate into the broader process and timelines. Examples of successful engagement formats include:
 - sounding boards placed in key public areas
 - staff “pop-ups” at community events to inform people about the plan
 - “pizza and planner” events
 - events held at venues such as local coffee shops
 - “Now, Wow, How” and Ideas Fair events held in Vic West and Fairfield
 - walk-shops
 - design charrettes
 - collaborative events with the community like the workshops hosted by Gabriel Ross to attract business owners during the Burnside Gorge planning process
 - question-and-answer sessions
 - storefront pin-up of ideas which occurred over two weeks in Cook Street Village.

How lessons learned on public engagement will be applied

- *Use a storytelling approach in communications and dialogue sessions:* Storytelling is envisioned to address two needs: to communicate data, trends and community objectives in a way which

is accessible and helps build shared understanding; and dialogue sessions (whether in person or virtual) can help bridge gaps among stakeholders of different perspectives, needs and life stages.

- *Incorporate data-driven engagement and show links to decision-making:* Stakeholders identified a strong desire for data and projections regarding housing needs, population, travel behaviour, and development. Data will be presented in an easy-to-access format, which will include a *Community Planning Profile* and may include presentations or video, to help build a shared understanding. Studies, such as economic analysis and architectural testing, will be built into the work plan so that they occur in a timely manner. An updated projection of needs for multi-unit and ground-oriented housing, and an OCP Capacity Assessment is recommended to be completed prior to charrettes, as the new regional population and housing projections show an expected increase in Victoria's population (to approximately 110,000 people in 2038, rather than the previously projected 100,000 people by 2041).
- *Expand efforts to attract a diversity of people:* This includes a diversity of household types, tenures, income, age, and background. Increase participation of groups who have been less likely to participate in previous neighbourhood planning, including youth, young families, those under 40, renters, and people with lower incomes. Work closely with existing community serving groups, including neighbourhood associations utilizing grants for pre-planning, to diversify engagement and determine which events and techniques would be most successful for different audiences. Work with existing boards and committees (e.g. Youth Council, Renters' Advisory Committee, Accessibility Working Group, Active Transportation Advisory Committee) and community institutions (e.g. schools).
- *Include successful event formats and opportunities for community-led engagement:* Work with community associations and other interested stakeholders to develop pre-planning activities focused on developing a shared understanding of trends, identifying issues of concern, and utilizing funding made available by Council. Provide opportunities for community-led or collaborative events throughout the process, including opportunities to form short-term, focused groups around non-land use topics which fall within the scope of local area planning.
- *Charrette-based approaches are effective tools to plan for land use, urban design, transportation and public realm for villages and corridors,* but can include more robust and well-publicized pre-charrette kickoffs and post-charrette events, with clearer communication of the connections between the charrette workshop and the larger public events. The post-charrette storefront pin-up over two weeks in Cook Street Village that was part of the Fairfield Neighbourhood Plan process is one successful example.

3. Process and Timelines

Earlier local area planning processes led to comprehensive neighbourhood plans addressing a broad range of topics, including infill housing and topics which are being addressed at the City-wide level. This broad scope, the need to work around engagement "black out" periods (e.g. holidays and the summer), the time required to ensure people felt they had been heard across the range of topics, and added local area planning should seek ways to streamline and focus the process.

- *Streamline and incorporate implementation (development permit guidelines, model/template zones, and OCP amendments) into process and engagement in a timely manner:* Previous planning processes often saved consultation on design guidelines for later phases of engagement and did not include the creation of model zones. Some stakeholders indicated a desire to comment on specific details that were more appropriately included in design guidelines or zoning than in a local area plan, or indicated they couldn't express support or opposition to aspects of plans without seeing this greater level of detail.

- Topic-based committees formed late in the Fairfield process in reaction to key interest areas. This extended timelines and did not integrate well with overall process given they were not anticipated at the outset. However, this demonstrated an opportunity to plan for the emergence of interest-specific focus groups or committees earlier in the process.
- Ensure realistic timelines to support a robust public engagement plan. This does not require more time for a planning process overall, but rather ensuring that each step of the process relates directly to the scope of local area planning and provides enough time for focused, iterative engagement and for policy preparation, avoiding duplicative rounds of engagement.
- Have clear mandate and Terms of Reference for Working Groups. Tension arose between a desire to have decision making/advisory role on policy development and plan content vs. focusing on process elements and networking.

How lessons learned on timeline and process will be applied:

- A clearer scope with a limited number of topics over which local area plans have influence, will help to streamline process and focus engagement, making the best use of the public's time. This will allow the development of a clear timeline for plan phases, with sufficient time in each stage of the process to have robust engagement and policy development.
- Undertake key implementation actions concurrent with plan development and approval (e.g. OCP amendments, drafting of design guidelines and zoning bylaws), to establish clear linkages between community input and policy outcomes, allowing participants to be involved from beginning to end within a reasonable time.
- Focusing working group's efforts on the charrette process (from pre-charrette to post-charrette) will help to make the best use of a working group's time, while limiting burnout. The process may also be open to other community-initiated groups coming together to discuss specific areas of interest which could fall within the scope of local area planning.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

As this report is a reflection on previous planning processes as is recommended to be received for information, there are no options provided for Council's consideration. These lessons will inform a subsequent report that will provide Council with options and recommendations for the next phase of local area planning.

Accessibility Impact Statement

Local area planning will be informed by City-wide policies for considering accessibility, including the upcoming Accessibility Framework.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Reflecting on lessons learned to help improve how the City undertakes future initiatives aligns with the principles and values of the Strategic Plan, in particular, *nurturing a culture of continuous learning with each other, staff and the public.* The lessons learned also supports Strategic Plan Objective 8 (Strong Livable Neighbourhoods), which includes an action to develop local area plans.

Impacts to Financial Plan

This report has no impacts to the Financial Plan.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

This report is consistent with the OCP, in particular Section 20: Local Area Planning, which envisioned a range of local area plans with a focus on corridors, villages and areas expected to undergo growth and change.

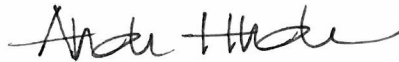
CONCLUSIONS

Recent local area planning processes has resulted in several successes, including the adoption of three neighbourhood plans which are consistent with the OCP and many citywide objectives; the adoption of new development permit guidelines; and successful events which engaged a range of community members. At the same time, these processes provided a number of lessons learned which will be applied to the proposed approach for future phases of local area planning, to be presented to Committee of the Whole in October 2019.

Respectfully submitted,



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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date:

Sept. 26, 2019