

August 18, 2019

Dear Mayor and Councillors

Councillor Alto kindly rearranged her schedule to meet with us on Friday August 16th to discuss ideas about how to address the property tax issue for the Victoria Edelweiss Club. Thank you very much for reaching out to us!

After discussing alternatives, it has become clear that the only quick and long-lasting fix is for Council to simply amend the Official Community Plan (OCP) with regard to the Urban Place Designation for the Victoria Edelweiss Club and other similar facilities. We believe this can be done before year end and well within the time frame of the upcoming assessment valuations for 2020.

Attached for easy reference are a dozen examples of other amendments to this OCP to change the Urban Place Designation of specific properties.

The OCP is meant to be a guideline for the City's development in the next decades. Council surely does not want existing cultural clubs to disappear in the next few years as a result of onerous property tax assessments. Therefore a bylaw amendment to designate them as cultural/recreation and protect them from redevelopment pressure is needed.

This is not a major revision of the overall intent of the OCP. It is simply correcting the few properties that were inadvertently designated for redevelopment during the 30 year time frame of the OCP planning period. The Assessment Act recognizes "Recreation/Non-Profit" as a separate classification, and similarly Victoria's OCP can also recognize Recreation/Non-profit use.

We submit that what is needed is a report to Council recommending a Bylaw change be processed to amend the OCP to designate the Victoria Edelweiss Club and similar facilities as "Public Facilities, Institutions, Parks and Open Space". There is no reason that this designation (Institutions) cannot apply to non-profit and cultural uses.

It is our goal to continue the Edelweiss Club as it is for many more years, serving a variety of groups and needs within the social fabric of the City, and we appreciate the efforts of Councillors Alto and Thornton-Joe in trying to find solutions to this issue.

By acting this fall, Council will be seen as decisive and effective in putting the community's needs ahead of development.

Sincerely,

Angela Plasterer
Treasurer, Victoria Edelweiss Club

Official Community Plan – Summary of Amendments

Date of Amendment	Bylaw No.	Description
July 11, 2013	Bylaw No. 13-025	Change the Urban Place Designation for 626 Gorge Road East to Urban Residential
July 24, 2014	Bylaw No. 14-007	Change the Urban Place Designation for 1802 Chambers Street and 1147-1163 North Park Street to Urban Residential
April 16, 2015	Bylaw No. 15-002	Change the Urban Place Designation for 1521 and 1531 Elford Street from Traditional Residential to Urban Residential
March 10, 2016	Bylaw No. 16-030	Change the Urban Place Designation for 1146 Caledonia Avenue from Traditional Residential to Urban Residential
June 23, 2016	Bylaw No. 16-053	Change the Urban Place Designation for 605-629 Speed Avenue and 606-618 Frances Avenue from Urban Residential and General Employment, respectively, to Town Centre, and to include those lands in Development Permit Area 4: Town Centres
July 14, 2016	Bylaw No. 16-002	To change the Urban Place Designation of 1310 Gladstone Avenue from Traditional Residential to Small Urban Village
June 22, 2017	Bylaw No. 17-043	To change the Urban Place Designation for the rear portion of 986 Heywood Avenue from Traditional Residential to Urban Residential
July 13, 2017	Bylaw No. 17-071	To make changes to Urban Place Designations in order to implement the future land use directions identified in the Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan
May 3, 2018	Bylaw No. 18-014	To change the Urban Place Designation for 1050 Pentrelew Place and the south portion of 1201 Fort Street from Traditional Residential to Urban Residential, and to change the boundary of Development Permit Area 7B (HC) – Corridors Heritage to include the south portion of 1201 Fort Street
May 10, 2018	Bylaw No. 18-056	To make changes to Urban Place Designations and Development Permit Areas in order to implement the future land use, urban form and character directions identified in the Victoria West Neighbourhood Plan
October 4, 2018	Bylaw No. 18-088	To change the urban place designation for 2732 Doncaster Drive from Traditional Residential to Urban Residential
March 14, 2019	Bylaw No. 18-046	To change the urban place designation for 1303 Fairfield Road from Small Urban Village to Large Urban Village

TO: Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

July 30, 2019

Re: Victoria Edelweiss Club, OCP and speculative taxes

This letter requests Council's assistance to ensure that this 50 year cultural club, part of the heritage of Victoria, is not destroyed by property taxes based on potential redevelopment. The issue is: property assessment of the Edelweiss Club has increased this year from \$1.1 million to \$3.9 million dollars. The result of this increased assessment is that the property taxes nearly quadrupled, from \$11,000 to \$37,000!

We are not asking for a handout or exemption - but hope you'll work with us to achieve a sustainable property tax rate for non-profit and recreation facilities, to ensure their survival.

As you are aware, BC Assessment now values properties on "highest and best use", recently interpreted to mean comparing to other land sold for the highest density and most valuable development allowed under the same OCP designation. Using this "method", BC Assessment determined that the Edelweiss Club site is much more valuable as a 6 storey development site than as a 50 year old cultural club used by thousands.

Council can easily fix the problem of excessive taxation of non-profits:

a) by Resolution, change the OCP designation for recreation/non-profit properties to "Public Facilities, Institutions, Parks and Open Spaces" (its definition includes recreational and cultural uses). By confirming that the current use is intended to stay indefinitely, Council would immediately eliminate the opportunity and the pressure for redevelopment, and reduce property values/taxes accordingly. This OCP designation could be applied to other non-profit properties in Victoria, such as the Canadian Legion, the Italian Club, Polish Club, Norwegian Club, etc.

b) Council could choose to significantly lower the mill rate on non-profits. For 2019, Victoria's published mill rate for "Residential" was 3.1564, while "Recreation/Non-Profit" was more than double that at 7.1031.

These steps would support the goals and policies of Victoria's Official Community Plan, which noted that "many facilities, venues and other cultural spaces are owned by institutions, agencies, organizations, community groups". The relevant OCP goals are listed in the attachment, and include:

- to keep a wide range of cultural spaces available and affordable,
- to work closely with partners to seek and deliver community based recreational, educational, cultural and social programs,
- to continue to promote arts and culture facilities, programs, services and events,
- to enhance support to local, non-profit groups engaged in arts or culture programs.

Victoria Edelweiss Club provides the Victoria community with a variety of cultural events, an auditorium space, meeting rooms and one of the best dance floors in the city. For example, this coming Saturday we are hosting a mandolin orchestra from Germany, along with a local German choir.

We very much appreciate your consideration of our request, and hope that Council will take steps to protect this valued community amenity.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Plasterer
Treasurer, Victoria Edelweiss Club

Mona Jane
Director, Victoria Edelweiss Club

Specific excerpts of policies and goals from Victoria's Official Community Plan:

15.15 Work closely with community centres, seniors centres, community organizations, the public library, citizens and other partners to seek innovative opportunities to sustain, enhance and deliver community based recreational, educational, cultural and social programs.

15.16 Develop and maintain partnerships with senior governments, the health authority, neighbouring municipalities, community organizations, informal groups, the private sector and others to build community capacity, and to provide a range of facilities and community services to serve people throughout their lives, including:

"the greatest challenges for the arts community are the relatively high costs of rental space and the limited availability of suitable venues. There are also funding issues with fewer senior government programs than in the past and few prospects for new programs in times of economic constraint. The City has a central role in cultural plans, policies, programs and incentives."

"Many facilities, venues and other cultural spaces are owned by institutions, agencies, organizations, community groups and local businesses."

16 (e) That a wide range of cultural spaces are available and affordable...

16.5 Continue to promote arts and culture facilities, programs, services and events including those available through civic support and the efforts of governments, public agencies and community and business partners.

16.10.4 Enhance support to local, non-profit groups engaged in arts or culture programs;

Presentation August 8, 2019

Good evening, my name is Anne Topp, My address is 674 Polyanthus Cres.

I am speaking to you tonight in support of the Edelweiss Club located in James Bay. You have heard about the property tax issue, BC Assessment Authority and OCP policies. **I want to follow that up by reminding Council of many Goals, Objectives and Policies you have adopted in your Community Plan in support of Non profit Cultural Clubs and how these need to be realized.**

A sentence Community Well Being section states " **Community well-being relies on the city's "soft" infrastructure, such as the net work of services, partnerships groups and other social relationships that collectively help people achieve their basic needs, support each other and reach their full potential.**"

This is followed by supporting objectives and in particular 15A which states " **That a mix of housing, services, facilities and programs encourage and support a socio-economically and culturally inclusive community.**"

Think about it. If the City of Victoria had to provide the facilities, that is land and the buildings and community programming, that long time, cultural, non-profit societies such as the Edelweiss Club and others, have offered to our community for over 50 years you would be very hard pressed to do it. There just isn't the land or building space or the money to replicate what the Edelweiss Club and other existing clubs and organizations like it provide. The City really needs each and every one of these volunteer run, non profits to complement what you do provide.

The **Community Development Section** states that the " **City work closely with community organizations to sustain, enhance and deliver community based recreational, educational, cultural and social programs.** Unfortunately that is not what is happening in the real world outside of the words of the OCP.

The Arts and Cultural Section of the Official Community Plan contains equally as many Goals, Objectives and Policies that clearly indicate that Council supports the work that non profits do in the city to meet the social, cultural, educational, and physical needs of citizens.

In particular **Policy 16.10.6 states " Identifies tools to secure new cultural spaces including senior government funding; land donations; developer contributions, private donations; and, changes to regulations."** and

Policy 16.11 states " Maintain and regularly update an inventory of cultural resources". Surely Cultural Clubs existing in the City for over 50 years are just such a resource.

What is the point of all this you may be asking.

Given that one of BC Assessment Authority's key criteria in determining value **appears** to be the "Urban Place" designation of a parcel (indicated on Map 2 page 37 of the OCP) it is critical that the Council actually pay attention to the designation of existing parcels on this map if they really believe in all those goals, objectives and policies in support of community and arts and culture.

The Urban Place Designation of Non Profit properties must reflect what such a property is actually used for and not what might happen under an OCP designation at some time in the future and a subsequent future rezoning.

Currently, as you have already heard the Edelweiss Club has a 6 story Condo development designation.

I truly don't Believe Council intended for parcels like the Edelweiss Club to be taxed out of existence as an unintended consequence of such a long term OCP designation.

This means that the "urban place designation" shown on Map 2 can either build community up or, it can tear it down.

Council has the means and authority to make changes to the OCP. Such a change to the urban place designation for the Edelweiss Club, and perhaps, other cultural clubs, would build community rather than tear it down.

Changes to enable the Edelweiss club to continue to exist would better reflect, what Council actually thought they were getting in respect to their aspirations of building community through partnerships in support of arts, and culture.

I respectfully request that Council make the necessary changes to the OCP to recognize and support the groups that already exist and work on behalf of community in the City of Victoria and in particularly the Edelweiss Club.

And do it soon so that this issue with the Assessment Authority is one and done as we move into 2020..

Good evening Mayor Helps, Members of Council

August 8, 2019
Angela Plasterer

I am here as Treasurer of the Victoria Edelweiss Club on Niagara Street in James Bay.

This city was built by immigrants from somewhere else, and their cultural heritage continues to be carried forward through its cultural clubs: Chinese, Ukrainian, German, Polish, Norwegian, Italian, Philipino, and many more.

Victoria's Official Community Plan policies and goals include protecting our heritage. Section 16 speaks of

“Ensuring that a wide range of cultural spaces are available and affordable...

Continue to promote arts and culture facilities....

Enhance support to local, non-profit groups engaged in arts or culture programs”

Unfortunately, new property assessment methods are undermining these goals, and will soon wipe out the cultural clubs unless the City takes action to protect them.

BC Assessment now values properties based on the highest density allowed under their Official Community Plan designation. For the Edelweiss Club, this allows a 6 storey condo development, instead of a 50 year old cultural club used by thousands.

So our property value was increased this year from \$1.1 million to \$3.9 million dollars! And even more unreasonable - if it really was a condo building, the taxes on the entire non-existing 6 storey use would be at the “residential” mill rate of 3.1 But unfortunately, the “Recreation/Non-Profit” property tax rate on the entire amount is more than double that rate, at a factor of 7.1

As a result, taxes went from \$11,000 to \$37,000! Unaffordable! Club had to borrow to pay this!

We are not asking for a handout or exemption - but hope you'll work with us to achieve a sustainable property tax rate for non-profit and recreation facilities, to ensure their survival.

We are asking Council to change the OCP designation for the Edelweiss Club property. By amending the designation, Council would confirm their intent to keep cultural clubs such as this, and eliminate the pressure for redevelopment. This would reduce property values and taxes accordingly. Maybe designate as “Public Facilities, Institutions, Parks and Open Spaces” (which definition includes recreational and cultural uses). Could consider this for other recreation/non-profit properties as well, such as the Pro Pat Legion and the other cultural clubs.

Further, Council could consider changing next year's mill rate for non-profits. Having “Recreation/Non-Profit” property taxes at only 1/3 less than Business and Industrial rates is not sustainable. (7.1 rate vs. Business and Industrial rates of 10.9)

Currently our assessment is being appealed. If Council could provide us with a letter that the OCP designation for the Edelweiss property is being changed, BC Assessment would immediately reconsider the value of the land. We are not interested in having expensive land in the future, we want to protect and be able to maintain these facilities that were built 50 years ago by volunteers with their money and time, so that the community can continue to benefit.

Victoria Edelweiss Club provides the Victoria community with a variety of cultural events,

an auditorium space, meeting rooms and one of the best dance floors in the city.
In addition to the club events, literature group and language lessons, many other local groups use the building on a regular basis:

Several First Nations groups hold their spring and their fall ceremonials there
this week a mandolin orchestra is visiting from Germany,

The Coast Guard trains there every month,

Dance groups include weekly Swing events, English Country Dancers, the Latin-African dance society, Dance Temple, Scottish dancers, as well as champion ballroom dancers from around the world

Weekly Yoga is held there, and many strata meetings from around Victoria,

Weddings, Celebrations of life, Philipino 18th birthday parties,

Family reunions

A Sensei event from Japan

3 choirs and 2 bands practice there

“Be Connected” holds its annual party for 200 special needs kids

Victoria’s surgeons hold their annual event for the hospital staff of both hospitals

And many more besides....

We appreciate your consideration, and hope that Council will take steps to protect this valued, and affordable, community amenity.

October 24th speaking notes

Good evening Mayor and Council,

My name is Anne Topp. I am speaking to you as volunteer on behalf of the Edelweiss Club in James Bay.

The issue of excessive assessment and resulting increase in City Property Taxes was first brought to the attention of some Councillor in February of 2019. In August of this year when I last spoke to Council, I emphasised the OCP policies that Council adopted in support of building community. This evening I am asking you individually and collectively to act in support these policies by endorsing the motion to undertake a rezoning and OCP amendment for 108 Niagara Street to reflect the current non profit cultural club use.

Without these amendments to Zoning and OCP designation, the Edelweiss Club, a valued community asset, will continue to face re-development pressure and unsustainable assessments. The recent development boom and the increase in land values per the OCP Designation has resulted in the Edelweiss Club being unfairly assessed as if this parcel was intending to redevelop.

To clarify any miss-understandings that Council Members may have I want to emphasise the following points.

Number 1 This non profit society does not have money available for the 2020 taxes if changes are not made. They will be looking at taking a loan to pay property taxes.

Number 2. Some Councillors may believe that a meeting room in a new condo building would suffice. You may not know it, but more than 100 different community groups use this building for a wide variety of activities year round. Dancing is one activity but it is much more than only a Dance club.

Number 3. Some councillors may believe that a permissive tax exception would do. However that would not eliminate on going redevelopment pressure as a result of assessments and furthermore would rely on successive Council's ongoing largess.

Number 4. Endorsing a motion to undertake rezoning and an OCP amendment tonight is necessary to meet the BC Assessment deadline of October 31, to reduce the valuation for the 2020 tax roll. I understand that rezoning will not be complete but endorsing the motion will send a serious message to the BC Assessment Authority.

Number 5 Some Councillors might not understand the Edelweiss building is important to the community. You have received hundreds of emails from individuals that value this building and the many activities it supports.

Please vote to approve the motion before you tonight. Together we can find a permanent solution through a Council initiated rezoning and OCP amendment for 108 Niagara Street which would address the property tax issue facing the Edelweiss Club.

Thank you.