

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;