



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of May 21, 2020

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** April 30, 2020

From: Karen Hoesel, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Subject: Downtown Core Area Plan Update

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Direct staff to undertake an update of the *Downtown Core Area Plan* focused on enhancing liveability through improved building design considerations.
2. Direct staff to report back with proposed updates to the *Downtown Core Area Plan* and a related Official Community Plan Amendment Bylaw to update development permit area and heritage conservation area guidelines.
3. Consider consultation under Section 475(2)(b) of the *Local Government Act* and direct staff that no referrals of the Official Community Plan Amendment Bylaw are necessary to the Capital Regional District Board, Island Health, Songhees Nation, Esquimalt Nation, provincial or federal governments, Township of Esquimalt, District of Saanich and the District of Oak Bay.
4. Consider consultation under Sections 475(1) and 475(2) of the *Local Government Act* and direct staff to undertake consultation with the project technical working group along with downtown property owners, residents, businesses, the development industry and heritage community on the proposed amendments to the *Official Community Plan* through a combination of printed materials and digital engagement tools such as an online open house and a project website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with a recommended approach for updating the *Downtown Core Area Plan* (DCAP, 2011). The DCAP was originally approved in 2011 and provides guidance for growth and development in the Downtown Core Area over a 30-year period. Ongoing monitoring of the Plan was identified as a way to track its overall implementation and success, and to inform periodic updates to ensure the plan remains current, effective and responds to emerging issues.

The DCAP identifies the importance of high-quality urban design at varying scales, from the overall shape of the city skyline to the form and placement of individual buildings and details for streetscape designs. The DCAP seeks to create well-designed, attractive and liveable places for people, which in turn help to enhance the Downtown Core Area's economic and social health.

The *Official Community Plan* (OCP, 2012) directs 50% of the City's future population growth (approximately 10,000 new residents by 2041) to be accommodated in the urban core. Since 2015, the share of development in the urban core has been exceeding this target, and recent Capital Regional District population projections based on BC Stats anticipates higher growth in Victoria and the region than previously projected. Therefore, undertaking improvements to the DCAP is recommended to ensure that continued development results in a well-designed, livable and vibrant downtown.

The proposed approach for updating the DCAP includes involvement and collaboration with key stakeholder groups. Staff have had initial meetings with representatives of these groups to help inform the scope of this update. Enhanced liveability and improved building design are the primary desired outcomes that were identified through initial stakeholder input. These groups will help identify key issues, share technical information, consider potential solutions and communicate project updates and information with their respective organizations.

As staff are recommending that the DCAP update be focused on improving guidance for building design, it is expected that amendments to the OCP to update development permit and heritage conservation area guidelines will be an outcome of this project. In accordance with the *Local Government Act*, Council must turn its mind to the level of consultation required to inform potential amendments. Staff recommend the use of printed materials and digital engagement tools and resources to support the continued involvement of the working group and to facilitate public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present Council with a recommended approach for updating the *Downtown Core Area Plan* (DCAP).

BACKGROUND

The DCAP was originally approved in October 2011 and has provided guidance on matters related to growth and development within the Downtown Core Area, including policies and guidelines to support the review and evaluation of development permits, rezoning applications and improvements to the public realm. One of the key goals outlined in the DCAP is to ensure its success by undertaking periodic monitoring, reviewing and updating of the plan, as well as to maintain alignment with other related City policies, plans and regulations. Therefore, the proposed DCAP update will help to ensure that it remains current and effective and responds to ongoing feedback from the users of the plan such as communities, development industry, and Council.

The implementation of the DCAP to date has included the development of a range of supporting policy and regulatory documents such as the *Harbour Vitality Principles* (2014), *Downtown Public Realm Plan and Streetscape Standards* (2017), *Zoning Bylaw 2018*, and most recently the review and update of the *Old Town Design Guidelines* (2019). Together, these seek to create well-designed, attractive and liveable places for people, which is an important aspect in maintaining an economic and socially healthy downtown that supports and accommodates the *Official Community Plan* growth target of accommodating 50% of population growth up to 2041 within the urban core area.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Downtown Growth

The *2018 CRD Regional Growth Strategy* forecast a 20.8% population increase for Victoria between 2011 and 2038. However, the CRD recently completed a draft update of the population

forecast as part of the *CRD 2019-2038 Population, Dwelling Units and Employment Projection Report* that now identifies a 32% population increase by 2038. The growth in dwelling units by 2038 has also been increased from 27% to 31%. This increased growth forecast, along with the *Official Community Plan* target that directs 50% of the City's future population growth to be accommodated in the Downtown Core Area, reinforces the importance of undertaking this review to facilitate improved building designs that support liveability and growth within the Downtown Core Area.

Focused Update

Over the past nine years, the DCAP has been used by staff, Council, landowners, communities and the development industry to guide new development within the Downtown Core Area. During this time, staff have applied the DCAP to refine and evaluate development applications, which has resulted in the identification of various opportunities for improving interpretation, clarity and effectiveness of the document. Staff have also continued to receive periodic feedback on the DCAP from key stakeholders. Therefore, to ensure the DCAP remains current and effective, staff have proposed to undertake a review and update of the plan with a primary focus on enhancing liveability and improved building design. The proposed approach does not include a review of land use policies, as these have not been identified as a key issue through initial feedback.

Initial Feedback

Initial discussions with stakeholder groups as well as with City staff identified several desired outcomes that were commonly supported by stakeholders, such as:

- a stronger emphasis on the importance of achieving and maintaining a skyline and building forms that reinforce the change in topography from the waterfront to the central business district (urban amphitheatre concept)
- integration of clearly stated objectives for each guideline to improve interpretation
- addressing design opportunities and challenges for smaller sized or residual lots
- increasing building separation to improve liveability conditions for residents
- better integration of useable outdoor amenity space on terraced setback areas of buildings
- encouraging more innovative use of materials and building designs
- avoiding homogenous building designs
- clearly stated description of the role and function of view corridors
- strengthened design guidelines to address the potential impact on adjacent heritage buildings outside of Old Town
- context-specific design guidelines for the inner harbour area
- exploring the relationship between building height, density and desired building forms for the context of the Downtown Core Area.

Resource Implications

Given staff's ambitious work plan for 2020 and the need to advance other priority items from the *2019-2022 Strategic Plan*, staff have proposed a limited project scope. It is recommended that this project be focused on aspects of the DCAP that have a direct influence on improved building design and liveability, and that will support the review and evaluation of development applications. Based on a multitude of factors including initial stakeholder engagement, staff's experience applying the DCAP over the past nine years and the CRD's growth projections which indicate continued development pressures in the Downtown Core Area, staff recommend this focused review as the most critical update needed at this time, and the best use of resources.

Review Process and Technical Working Group

The process to review and update the DCAP includes the establishment of an 11-person technical working group composed of self-appointed representatives from each of the following organizations:

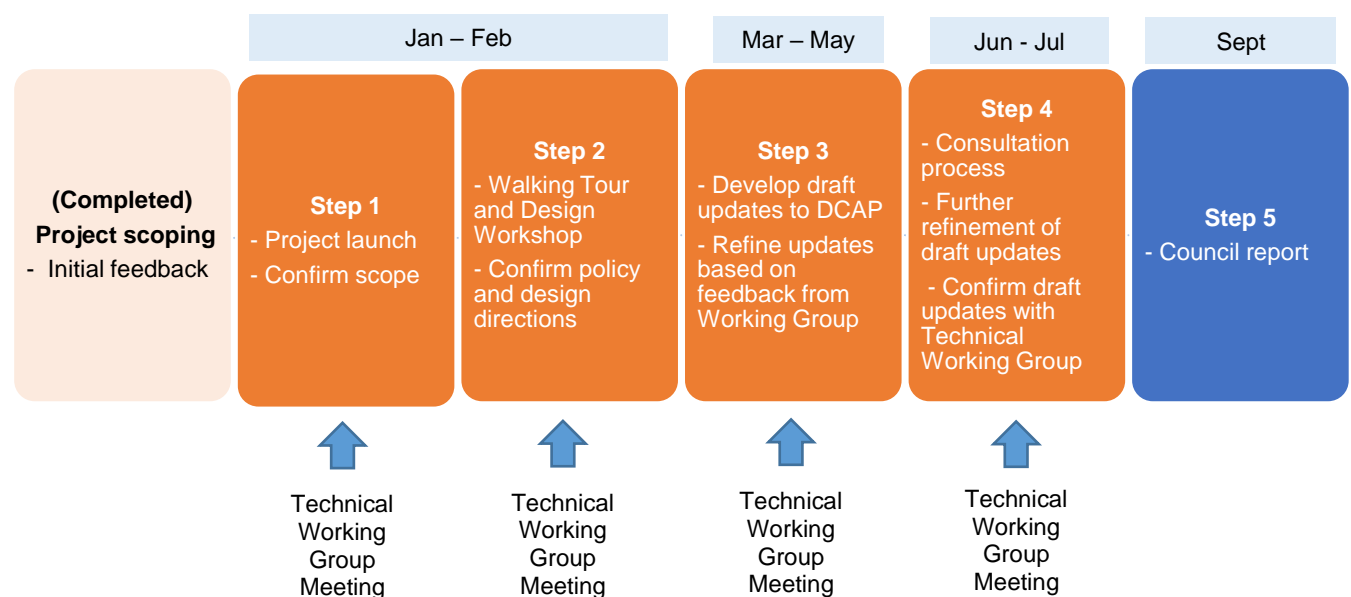
- Victoria Downtown Residents' Association (2)
- North Park Neighbourhood Association (2)
- Advisory Design Panel (2)
- Urban Development Institute (2)
- Heritage Advisory Panel (1)
- Renters Advisory Committee (1)
- Architectural Institute of British Columbia (1)

To date, the working group has provided advice to planning staff through a series of meetings, workshops and a walking tour to better understand key urban design issues facing the downtown core area. Amid the current COVID-19 pandemic, staff confirmed with the working group the potential use of online video conferencing and email to maintain the involvement of the working group. Staff will also continue to explore other appropriate tools and resources to undertake broader public engagement. This may include a combination of both printed materials and digital tools such as an online open house and project website.

The technical working group will provide a highly valuable role in identifying initial areas for improvement, confirming the project scope, informing the proposed guidelines through feedback, sharing information and reviewing the draft guidelines prior to broader public engagement. Technical working group members will also be responsible for communicating project information with their respective organizations.

Timeline

Project scoping and seeking initial feedback from stakeholders commenced in January-February 2020, and the project is anticipated to be completed in Fall 2020 as illustrated in the timeline below. This process includes opportunities for receiving public feedback from the Technical Working Group and individual stakeholder groups. Given social distancing requirements, staff will explore and identify the most appropriate tools, including online engagement tools, to share project information and collect public input. Public engagement efforts will also include referrals to the City's Advisory Design Panel and Heritage Advisory Panel. All feedback received will be considered for making further refinements and will be presented to Council for consideration.



Consultation on Potential OCP Amendment Bylaw

Any OCP amendments that may arise from the DCAP update will require consultation in accordance with the *Local Government Act*, including a requirement for Council to consider the appropriate amount and type of opportunities for consultation with persons, organizations and authorities it considers will be affected.

In accordance with the *Local Government Act*, when an amendment is proposed to the OCP, the local government (Council) must, in addition to the public hearing, provide one or more opportunities it considers appropriate for consultation with persons, organizations and authorities it considers will be affected. Specifically, Council must:

- (a) consider whether the opportunities for consultation with one or more of the persons, organizations and authorities should be early and ongoing; and
- (b) specifically consider whether consultation is required with the following:
 - (i) the board of the regional district in which the area covered by the plan is located, in the case of a municipal official community plan;
 - (ii) the board of any regional district that is adjacent to the area covered by the plan;
 - (iii) the council of any municipality that is adjacent to the area covered by the plan;
 - (iv) first nations;
 - (v) boards of education, greater boards and improvement district boards;
 - (vi) the Provincial and Federal governments and their agencies.

In consideration of the geographic extent of the DCAP boundaries and the focus of this update on building design and liveability considerations, staff recommend that Council consider “persons affected” by any potential OCP amendments to encompass property owners and residents in the Downtown Core Area, as well as the downtown business community, development industry and heritage community. Step 4 of the project timeline described in this report will address the consultation process on the proposed OCP amendments, as required through the *Local Government Act*. Staff will also report back to Council with the results of the consultation process and the draft OCP amendment bylaw. Approval of the OCP amendment bylaw also requires a public hearing, which provides an additional opportunity for public input.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The review and update of the DCAP will consider accessibility as it relates to form and character, exterior design and landscaping in accordance with related criteria from the *BC Building Code* and the *City of Victoria Accessibility Framework*.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

This project supports Objective 8: Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods, as this project is intended to result in more liveable neighbourhoods in the Downtown Core Area.

Impacts to Financial Plan

This project will not have any impacts to the *Financial Plan* and any costs required for engagement will be provided through an existing budget for the Downtown Core Area Plan implementation.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

This project is consistent with the *Official Community Plan* (2012) which encourages high quality architecture and urban design that enhances Victoria’s unique character and sense of place. Any

proposed OCP amendments that may arise from the DCAP update will require consultation in accordance with the *Local Government Act* and consideration by Council for alignment.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed approach for updating the DCAP will ensure it remains current and is better able to enhance liveability through improved guidance for the design of new buildings and additions within the Downtown Core Area.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert Batallas
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Community Planning Division



Karen Hoese, Director
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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date: May 15, 2020