



## Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of April 8, 2021

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** March 29, 2021  
**From:** Karen Hoese, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development  
**Subject:** Referral of Proposed Esquimalt OCP Amendment at 819-823 Esquimalt Road

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### RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to:

1. Forward this report to the Township of Esquimalt as comment on the Township's referral of the Official Community Plan (OCP) amendment for 819-823 Esquimalt Road.
2. Communicate that Council finds the provision of housing, and seniors' housing, in the Esquimalt Road Corridor supports broader objectives of the City of Victoria's OCP and Victoria West Neighbourhood plan by allowing housing convenient to services, amenities and transit, thereby benefiting the region.
3. Communicate that Council encourages the Township of Esquimalt to recognize the status of Esquimalt Road as part of the City of Victoria's bicycle network, the CRD's Priority Inter-Community (PIC) network, its status as a commuter cycling route in Esquimalt's earlier *Bicycle Network Plan* (2001), as well as a Frequent Transit Corridor in the BC Transit Future Plan; the opportunity to align with future Bus Rapid Transit implementation; the opportunity to improve what are currently sub-optimal bicycle facilities along Esquimalt Road; and the value of the urban forest, in order to:
  - a. determine a desired cross-section for Esquimalt Road which includes sufficient space for safe cycling facilities, pedestrians, and street trees;
  - b. consult with City of Victoria Engineering staff in developing the above cross-section;
  - c. seek Statutory Right-of-Way or highway dedication to achieve this cross-section along this section of Esquimalt Road and frontage works as part of redevelopment, as appropriate.
4. That this motion be added to the daytime Council meeting of April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to consider a referral from the District of Esquimalt regarding a proposed Official Community Plan (OCP) amendment at 819-823 Esquimalt Road and provide comments to the Esquimalt Municipal Council. The proposed OCP amendment would permit a seniors-oriented mixed-use building with 92 residential units and one commercial unit. The development is proposed at a density of 2.75:1 floor space ratio and a building height of eight storeys. The proposed OCP amendment is generally in alignment with Victoria's OCP objectives regarding the location of diverse housing opportunities within walking distance of amenities, shops

and services for daily living, and transit, with good access to the downtown core. The proposal benefits the regional housing market by supporting additional housing for seniors, a demographic that is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, within the core of our region. At the same time, the City of Victoria encourages the Township of Esquimalt to consider if there are any impacts on existing purpose-built rental units.

The proposal, as presented, does not address significant questions regarding the design of bicycle facilities or width of right-of-way along Esquimalt Road, which is a designated bicycle route in both the City of Victoria's *Official Community Plan, 2012 (OCP)*, the approved *Bicycle Network (2016)*, and as part of the Primary Inter-Community (PIC) network in the CRD's *Bicycle Master Plan (2011)*. Additionally, Esquimalt Road already sees some of the highest transit ridership of the regional transit corridors and is expected to see increased bicycle and pedestrian activity; therefore, it is recommended that Esquimalt staff consult with City of Victoria staff on an appropriate design and request for a Statutory Right-of-Way or highway dedication from the applicant to work towards a consistent vision for Esquimalt Road. These comments align with comments previously provided by the City of Victoria regarding an OCP Amendment referral at 899 Esquimalt Road.

Staff also encourage consideration of the urban forest and stormwater impacts, by encouraging healthy street trees and mitigation of stormwater runoff. Potential interactions of curbside parking with urban forest canopy, bicycle lanes and transit operations should be considered.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to consider a referral from the Township of Esquimalt regarding a proposed Official Community Plan (OCP) amendment at 819-823 Esquimalt Road and provide comments to the Esquimalt Municipal Council.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Township of Esquimalt is considering an application for an OCP amendment and rezoning to permit a seniors-oriented mixed-use building with 92 residential units and one commercial unit. The development is proposed at a density of 2.75:1 floor space ratio and a building height of eight storeys. The proposed amendment would change Esquimalt's current OCP designation for "Neighbourhood Commercial Mixed-Use" to "Commercial/ Commercial Mixed Use."

## **ISSUES & ANALYSIS**

### Land Use and Housing Considerations

The proposal is compatible with land use planning within Victoria, as the Esquimalt Road Corridor in Victoria contains a number of multi-unit residences of different types and is designated to allow further multi-unit development, both in Victoria's OCP and the *Victoria West Neighbourhood Plan (2018)*. Recognizing that the housing market is regional and that both Esquimalt and Victoria are core municipalities within the region, the provision of senior's housing in a location convenient to services, amenities and transit is also in alignment with Victoria's OCP.

The proposal does not indicate if any existing purpose-built rental housing units would be impacted or displaced by this proposed development. If there are impacts, the City of Victoria encourages the Township of Esquimalt to consider mitigation strategies.

## Transportation Considerations

The City of Victoria encourages increased visits to Victoria's urban core by walking, cycling, transit and related modes of transportation, as identified in the OCP and the *GoVictoria Sustainable Mobility Strategy*. Vehicle use is a key source of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and creates congestion in the region. Improving pedestrian, cycling, and transit infrastructure to provide a safe, consistent and high-quality experience is essential in ensuring these modes are the preferred choice for more trips, and ultimately meeting the region's growth and climate objectives.

Esquimalt Road is a designated bikeway in the City of Victoria's OCP and is identified as part of the long-term bicycle network in the City's designated *Bicycle Network* (2016). It is also identified as part of the Primary Inter-Community Network in the CRD's *Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan* (2011), and designated as a Frequent Transit Corridor in the BC Transit Future Plan with priority for Bus Rapid Transit improvements.

The site of the proposed OCP amendment is located along a part of Esquimalt Road which currently has a conventional (unprotected/unbuffered) bicycle lane of no more than 1.5m width. Evidence shows that these types of bicycle lanes are appropriate for confident cyclists who form a minority of the population, but are less appealing to larger parts of the population who would like to bicycle more, but are concerned about safety. Even for an unprotected bicycle lane, a minimum width of 1.8m is recommended by the BC Active Transportation Design Guidelines. Protected or buffered bicycle lanes can also support people using e-bikes, tricycles and certain mobility devices. The introduction of curbside parking as presented, although supportive of commercial activities, limits space for street trees that could provide a buffer between pedestrians and motor vehicles as recommended in the BC Active Transportation Design Guidelines, and further constrains cyclists by providing no buffer between traffic and parked vehicles. Street parking could also introduce delays to transit operations on a priority route with express service and regional significance in future phases of BC Transit's Bus Rapid Transit implementation.

There is significant existing, and expected future residential density, commercial destinations, and schools along the Esquimalt Road corridor, indicating that there will likely be significant pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including that of vulnerable persons. In the Township of Esquimalt, Esquimalt Road is currently 20m wide, while the desired width for an arterial road in Victoria is 25m-30m.

The plans shared with the City of Victoria do not clearly indicate if a Statutory Right-of-Way or highway dedication would be requested from the developer, nor what types and dimensions of sidewalk, boulevard and bicycle facilities are envisioned on Esquimalt Road.

Therefore, the City of Victoria urges Esquimalt to consider obtaining sufficient right of way from any new development along Esquimalt Road to support a future vision which includes safe active transportation facilities.

## Urban Forest and Stormwater Considerations

Victoria also recognizes the importance of street trees as part of the urban forest, enhancing air quality, climate resilience and pedestrian experience and reducing stormwater runoff. The proposed roof garden is seen as a positive aspect of this development in mitigating climate change and urban runoff impacts. Given the proposed site coverage, the City of Victoria encourages the inclusion of healthy canopy street trees within the right-of-way and consideration for alternative stormwater solutions such as raingardens.

## **OPTIONS & IMPACTS**

### *Accessibility Impact Statement*

The provision of 92 units of seniors' housing will increase the number of market-rate accessible housing options in the core of our region. The location is proximate to services, amenities and transit that can be reached by those with mobility limitations.

### *2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan*

Not applicable, as the proposal is within the District of Esquimalt.

### *Impacts to Financial Plan*

There are no impacts to the financial plan.

### *Official Community Plan Consistency Statement*

The proposal is not located in Victoria, but is broadly consistent with the OCP objectives of adding diverse housing choices, including seniors' housing, and locating housing within walking distance of services, amenities and transit. It is unclear if the proposal would enhance OCP objectives regarding active transportation, including designation of Esquimalt Road as a primary bicycle route.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The proposed amendment is compatible with City of Victoria OCP and *Victoria West Neighbourhood Plan* goals related to sustainable land use and the provision of housing near shopping, services, amenities, transit and employment.

The City of Victoria has key comments regarding width and design of the Right-of-Way of Esquimalt Road related to this project, in order to support access to the downtown core by walking, cycling, or transit, with particular concerns for supporting the shared designated bicycle route and key regional transit route along Esquimalt Road, and to consider urban forest and stormwater management opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc Cittone  
Senior Planner  
Community Planning Division

Karen Hoese, Director  
Sustainable Planning and Community  
Development Department

**Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.**

### **List of Attachments**

- Referral from Township of Esquimalt of Proposal for 819-823 Esquimalt Road.