



## Fernwood Community Association Report: Engagement Regarding Proposed Neighbourhood Boundary Changes

Submitted to the City of Victoria by the Fernwood Community Association Land Use Committee  
August 3, 2021

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### Executive Summary

From February to July 2021, the Fernwood Community Association Land Use Committee engaged with residents of Fernwood regarding three proposed boundary changes from the City of Victoria Committee of the Whole. Engagement included virtual meetings, direct email communication, and exchanges on social media. The LUC also received letters to council forwarded from individual authors, and a petition organized by a local resident. After analyzing the comments received, the FCA LUC has the following recommendations:

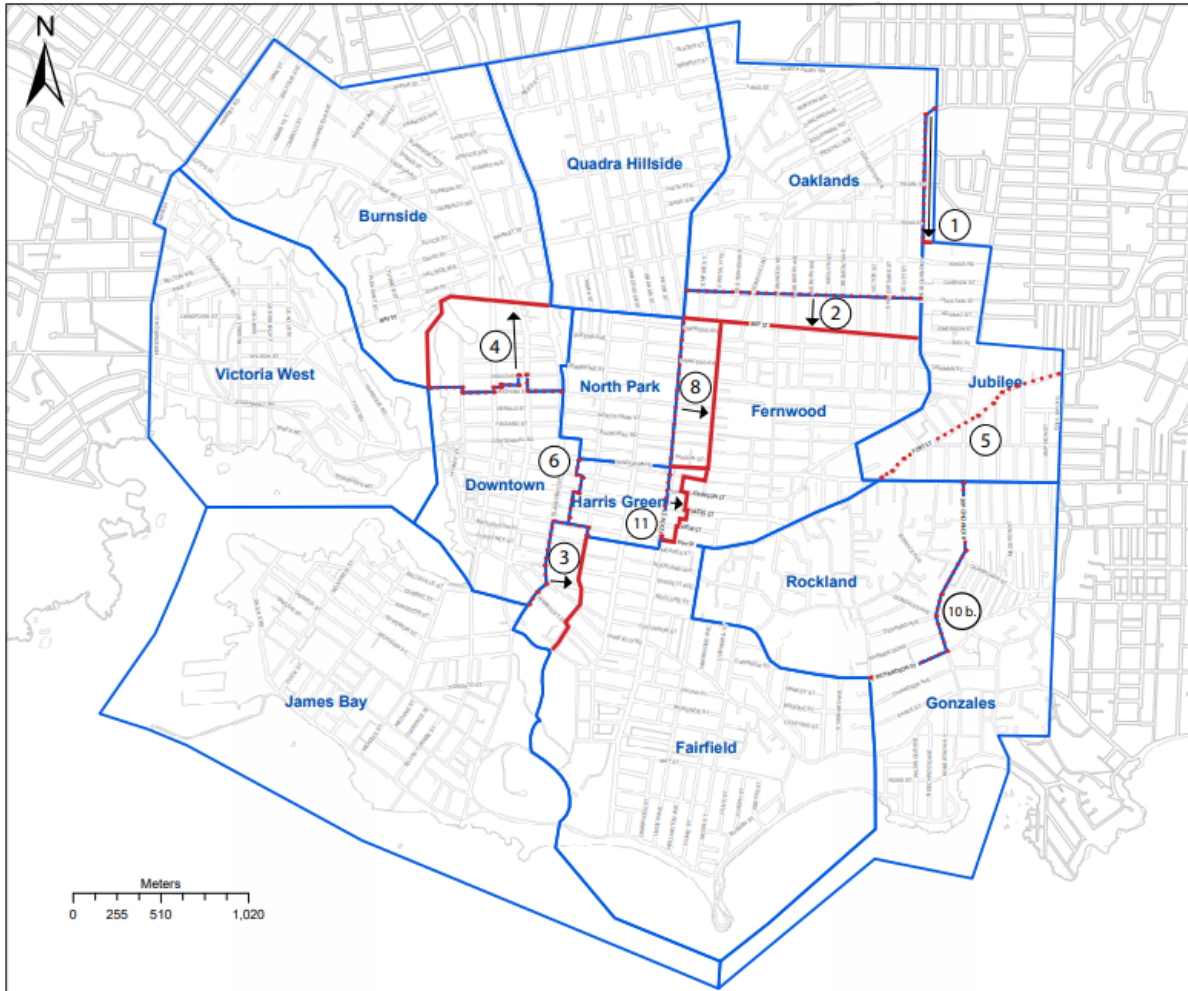
1. Proposed Change from Cook to Chambers: There is clear opposition to this change. Our recommendation is that this proposal be rejected.
2. Proposed Change from Haultain to Bay: There is less clarity about this change; a decision on this proposal should be suspended and the CoV should support both the FCA and the Oaklands Community Association to organize opportunities to discuss this proposal.
3. Proposed Change from Cook to Boundary Drawn Along Property Lines: There was little community engagement with the proposal for the downtown change. However, it goes against the CoV's own rationale for boundary changes, in that it creates an anomaly rather than amending one. Our recommendation is that this proposal be rejected.

In addition to these recommendations, the LUC concluded that the rationale for the proposed changes does not seem particularly robust; residents struggled to understand it for the entire six-month engagement process. In the absence of a clear rationale, speculation took hold that painted the CoV in a negative light. This should be carried forward as a lesson learned if the CoV is serious about meaningful community engagement, as a lack of transparency about the vision for proposed changes resulted in a great deal of theorizing that undermined trust.



## Background

A City of Victoria (CoV) Committee of the Whole workshop identified three potential neighbourhood boundary changes that would affect the community of Fernwood (2, 8, and 11 on the map below).



- #2 – move the northern boundary of Fernwood from the current boundary of Haultain St. to Bay St. The residences, businesses, and all other land between Haultain and Bay would become part of Oaklands.
- #8 – move the western boundary of Fernwood from the current boundary of Cook St. to Chambers St. as far as Pandora Ave. in the south. The residences, businesses, and all other land between Cook and Chambers would become part of North Park. This would include George Jay School and its lands.
- #11 – along the southwestern boundary, move the boundary of Fernwood from Cook St. to a new line drawn around existing properties just east of Cook. The land affected would become part of Harris Green. This would include the greenspace along Pandora between Chambers and Cook.

All three changes would have the effect of making the Fernwood community smaller.



The rationale for these changes provided by the City of Victoria was:

- Reconciling geographic anomalies that may fit better in an adjacent neighbourhood
- There may be opportunities to better match boundaries with the neighbourhoods residents perceive themselves to be living
- Neighbourhood populations vary substantially and may present challenges for neighbourhood associations, e.g. too big for effective representation or too small to recruit volunteer support
- Some village centres are divided between neighbourhoods

The Fernwood Community Association (FCA) Board delegated a response to these proposals to the Land Use Committee (LUC) Co-Chairs, Dr. Kristin Atwood (applied sociologist) and Alieda Blandford (research librarian). These volunteer community leaders gathered, analyzed, and synthesized the response of the Fernwood Community to the proposed changes. This document reports on the findings of Ms. Blandford and Dr. Atwood's engagement with the Fernwood community.

## Timeline

### February 2021

- City Council workshop identifies potential boundary changes

### March 2021

- Proposed changes are put forward as motions to direct staff to investigate
- FCA delegates response to the LUC
- LUC holds first discussion meeting
- LUC requests to know the City's engagement plan on this issue from our staff liaison
- Neighbours begin self-organizing in response to the proposed boundary change from Cook to Chambers Street

### April 2021

- Original deadline for community engagement. Several neighbourhood associations advocate for more time through the Victoria Community Association Network (VCAN). The deadline is extended. FCA is informed the new deadline for the staff report is September.
- CoV Have Your Say website created
- LUC produces a "frequently asked questions" (FAQ) document about the proposed changes for Fernwood and posts on the FCA website

### May 2021

- FCA successful advocates through their Council liaison to require the City to mail out a flyer to all residents who would be affected by the proposed changes
- CoV survey launches
- LUC holds second discussion meeting, with guests from North Park Neighbourhood Association, Oakland Community Association, and the Downtown Residents Association.

### June 2021

- FCA monitors mail out from City and learns that neighbours in the area most affected by the Cook and Chambers proposal have not received their mailout with less than 2 weeks before the survey concludes. This is reported to our City staff liaison and our City council liaison
- Mail out is completed
- LUC holds space at monthly meeting for continuing the conversation



### July 2021

- CoV provides survey responses to LUC through our City staff liaison
- Community associations are informed that their responses are required by July 16
- LUC advocates for a deadline extension since this does not provide sufficient time for a fulsome volunteer-organized response; CoV extends the deadline by two weeks to August 3.

## Data, Methods, and Analysis

Data on Fernwood residents' responses to the changes were compiled from several sources:

Source	N Responses
Zoom meetings held by the LUC	121
Direct email to LUC	10
Letter to Mayor and council cc'd to LUC	1
Petition organized by independent community member	146
Facebook comments from Fernwood Community Association and Fernwood Community Network pages*	49
Subtotal engagement responses by community**	327
City of Victoria Have Your Say Engagement Survey***	206

\* These are the pages to which the LUC posted information to solicit comments directly. There are of course many other sources of social media information, but those other sources would not represent direct engagement from the LUC.

\*\* Total engagement does not equate to unique individuals, as persons may have participated in more than one source.

\*\*\* 475 individuals responded to the survey, of which 206 were in Fernwood. Results were not provided for only Fernwood residents; however for each of the three boundary proposals the LUC was provided results that included a subset from Fernwood and the other community involved (e.g., Fernwood and Oaklands for the Haultain-to-Bay proposal).

Comments from all sources were stratified based on which proposed change they responded to and analyzed as follows and analyzed using these approaches<sup>1</sup>.

- A content analysis approach was used to identify whether comments were in favour or opposed to a proposed change
- Thematic analysis was used to identify reasons why a respondent was in favour or opposed
- Thematic analyses followed the principles of a grounded theory approach which allowed for the emergence of additional themes related to the process and rationale for the proposed changes.

Some comments address more than one theme and some comments expressed questions or concerns without taking an explicit position in favour or opposed to the proposed changes.

Comments that were not directly related to the proposed boundary changes were sometimes provided, particularly through social media. These included general comments about the communities and their histories; questions that were unrelated to the issue of the proposed boundary changes; and general comments about the CoV. These were excluded from analysis. Also excluded was a social media exchange that requested a recap of one of the Zoom meetings which an individual had been unable to

<sup>1</sup> For more information on qualitative sociological approaches, consult Denzin, NK and Lincoln YS, Eds (2011). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. See also Holstein, JA and Gubrium, JF, Eds. (2008). *Handbook of Constructionist Research*. New York: Guilford Publications.



attend. For the purposes of this report, a cut-off was established for inclusion of emails, letters, and social media responses of August 1, 2021.

Given the volume of responses received and the relatively short turnaround even with the addition of two weeks, this report does not quote verbatim from comments received verbally at meetings, but instead summarizes them. Transcription is labour-intensive and it was deemed not the best use of limited volunteer time. All meetings were recorded for transparency.

## Findings

This section presents findings specific to each of the proposed changes, followed by a section on general comments that apply to all changes and to the process of community consultation that occurred.

### Proposed Change from Cook to Chambers

#### Support for and Opposition to Change

64 comments specifically related to this proposed change were received from all sources.

Source	N in Favour	N Opposed
Zoom meetings	5	22
Direct emails	0	9
Letters to Council	0	1
Social Media	3	11
Petition*	n/a	13
Total	8	56

\* 146 individuals signed a petition against this boundary change. The petition provided an option for individuals to comment on why they were signing. These comments have been included in the analysis. The petition comments were provided by the organizers, who were not affiliated with the FCA or its LUC.

The CoV survey asked individuals to rate their agreement in response to the question “should this portion of Fernwood be joined to North Park”. Of the 264 responses received from residents of Fernwood or North Park, 170 (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed while another 23 (9%) were neutral, leaving 27% who agreed or strongly agreed. The majority of respondents (77% of this subset) were from Fernwood.

### Key Themes Related to Support and Opposition

Thematic analysis of responses identified two primary themes related to support and opposition of this proposed change.

#### Theme 1: Personal and Community Identity

Community identity was of great importance in the discussion about this proposed change. Multiple comments were made from all sources from individuals who would be affected by the change, stating that they identified as a member of Fernwood and that this identification was important to their sense of self. For example, one comment noted that this is “more than just a name change” because being a part of Fernwood is a core part of their understanding of who they are. One comment from someone who identified as being in Fernwood said, “the people between Chambers and Cook are part of my community!”.



A number of comments contained words related to the emotions the responder felt in contemplating the change; comments like “very upset”, “saddens me greatly” were frequent. One individual said, “when I first heard about this proposal... I was a bit more than distraught,” while another spoke of feeling like they were being “pushed out” of the community they identified with. Several comments talked about the proposed change as representing a loss; for example, one comment said, “we would be losing a sense of collective community which has been nurtured over many years.” A number of individuals who identified themselves as living in the area that would be impacted took care to specify the length of time they had been living there, such as “for over 20 years” or “since 1985”, which can be seen as a way to signify that they felt they had longstanding roots as members of Fernwood.

Not all comments expressed such strong emotion, particularly not those in social media. Two social media exchanges occurred where individuals expressed disagreement about whether the contested area “felt like” North Park of Fernwood, with individual posters expressing support for each interpretation. It should be noted that in both instances, the specific area being discussed is the commercial area on the east side of Cook Street that is designated as North Park Village, which is only a portion of the area where the boundary is proposed to change (North Park Village is generally understood as being located between Caledonia Avenue and Grant Street, whereas the proposed change extends to Pandora Avenue).

Related to community identity, two less commonly presented responses were that the boundary change seemed “incongruent with the history of both neighbourhoods” and that there might be “economic ramifications for homeowners in terms of cache difference between both neighbourhoods”.

#### Theme 2: Questioning the Rationale for Change

A second key theme related to the sense that there was no strong rationale for this particular change; one individual who would be affected by the change stated, “I have real difficulty with the idea that this boundary change in any way ‘aligns peoples’ sense of space with where they reside. I can assure you I am absolutely fine with my current alignment as a Fernwoodian.”

In many cases this feeling that the proposal lacked a robust rationale led to speculation as to the “real reason” for the change. There were a number of theories posited for this particular change, including that it was being driven by the North Park Neighbourhood Association’s “own interest” or that it was “an attempt by CoV to retrofit the boundary to work within the Villages and Corridors model it has adopted in place of a community plan – rather than just creating a community plan that fits what already exists on the ground.”

As well as emerging from comments specifically related to this proposed change, comments related to the stated and perceived “real” rationale for the changes were made more generally as well, and these are discussed in a subsequent section of this report.

#### Other Themes

Other, less common themes included:

- Concern about implications such as for schools, zoning/density, business sponsorship of community events, and community association funding
- Belief that a main artery (Cook St.) is a better boundary than a “side street” (Chambers St.)
- Suggestion that neighbours currently have well-established processes for liaising with their neighbourhood association for assistance that would be disrupted by having to change



associations and rebuild “existing networks [and] processes... for navigating their concerns around issues like housing and development”.

### Proposed Change from Haultain to Bay

#### Support for and Opposition to Change

26 comments specifically related to this proposed change were received from all sources.

Source	N in Favour	N Opposed
Zoom meetings	13	2
Direct emails	1	1
Letters to Council	0	0
Social Media	4	5
Total	18	8

The CoV survey asked individuals to rate their agreement in response to the question “should Bay Street be the new border between Fernwood and Oaklands<sup>2</sup>”. Of the 282 responses received from residents of Fernwood or North Park, 85 (30%) disagreed or strongly disagreed while another 41 (15%) were neutral, leaving 55% who agreed or strongly agreed. The majority of respondents (73% of this subset) were from Fernwood.

#### Key Themes Related to Support and Opposition

Thematic analysis of responses identified one primary theme related to support and opposition.

##### Theme 1: How a Border Should be Defined

The most substantial theme related to this proposed change revolved around how a border between neighbourhoods should be defined. A number of comments suggested that the proposed change should be made because “Bay is an obvious border” and because “Haultain is functionally the Oakland’s cultural main street”. In social media, there were two exchanges wherein a poster expressed surprise because they thought that Bay Street was already the border.

However, there was also opposition to the change from individuals who would be affected by it. One comment said, “are neighbourhoods defined by busy roads/business interests or by the people who live in them with a sense of place and belonging to a community?”

Some individuals living in the area indicated that they felt a closer affinity to Oaklands, but others identified more closely with Fernwood, with one commenting “this is our neighbourhood too”. One comment stated, “the borders are really inconsequential as long as our communities have good neighbours.”

##### Other Themes

As with the previous proposed change, comments specifically related to this proposed change also questioned the rationale for the proposal, with one comment asking whether there was some financial benefit to Oaklands that would result, while another said, “names and location of coffee shops is kind of [a] silly reason. I think we need more details on the real reasons.”

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to call attention to the inconsistency of wording the CoV survey questions between the different proposed changes. It is not clear why the question would not be asked in a standardized way for all changes.





At a Zoom meeting where Oaklands Community Association members attended, they mentioned that there are only two seats available for non-residents on their Board. They commented that these seats are often sought by people living between Haultain and Bay Street who wish to be involved in Oaklands; thus, changing the border could affect the volunteer base for the Board. Although this is not technically feedback from Fernwood residents, the LUC felt it worth mentioning.

### Proposed Change from Cook to Boundary Drawn Along Property Lines

#### Support for and Opposition to Change

3 comments specifically related to this proposed change were received from all sources.

Source	N in Favour	N Opposed
Zoom meetings	0	2
Direct emails	0	1
Letters to Council	0	0
Social Media	0	0
Total	0	3

The CoV survey asked individuals to rate their agreement in response to the question “should this portion of Fernwood be joined to Downtown/Harris Green (proposed) neighbourhood?”. Of the 188 responses received from residents of Fernwood or Downtown/Harris Green, 109 (58%) disagreed or strongly disagreed while another 17 (9%) were neutral, leaving 33% who agreed or strongly agreed. The majority of respondents (74% of this subset) were from Fernwood.

#### Key Themes Related to Support and Opposition

Thematic analysis of responses identified one primary theme related to support and opposition.

##### Theme 1: Impact on Other Voluntary Associations

This was that when this change is considered in conjunction with other proposed changes that will impact the Downtown/Harris Green community, the size of downtown will increase substantially. Coupled with the already higher rate of development that occurs downtown, this will create undue burden on those residents who dedicated their volunteer hours to supporting the community voice in land use decisions for that area. As with the previous proposed changes, there was also speculation about the “real reason” for this change, with one comment stating, “given Council’s density push, this is rather interesting... further confirmation of what is really going on here.”

At a Zoom meeting where the Downtown Residents Association attended, they voiced a concern that adding this area could strain their volunteer base. Although this is not technically feedback from Fernwood residents, the LUC felt it worth mentioning.

##### Concern Identified by the Land Use Committee

Although not raised by community members, the LUC Co-Chairs would like to state that using property lines to distinguish between neighbourhoods is far from common practice and that such a change would, in fact, create the kind of anomaly that the proposed boundary changes purport to eliminate. The FCA LUC is hereby on record as being opposed, in principle, to the creation of neighbourhood boundaries that follow individual private property lines. Not only is this an inconsistent practice; it also





presumes that the property lines will not change in the future, which is far from assured given the way that developments over time consolidate and divide properties to suit current needs.

## General Comments on the Process and Rationale

### Key Themes of General Comments

Analysis of the comments received identified a number of concerns that were not related to a specific boundary change, but rather to the process and rationale of all boundary changes. Four key themes emerged that were unrelated to any specific proposed change.

#### Theme 1: Requests for a Comprehensible Rationale

The most common general theme related to a lack of understanding regarding the rationale for proposed changes. Put quite simply, numerous comments asked, “why is this happening?” and relatedly, responses questioned why it was happening now, or why it had to happen “so quickly”. As with comments directed to a specific proposed change, general comments often suggested that the rationale they were being provided with did not seem legitimate. In the general comments, this was often phrased in terms of “who benefits”, illustrated well by these two social media comments<sup>3</sup>:

*“I simply want to know, what are the practical impacts of this? Will it affect my property taxes, the zoning of my land and surrounding properties? It’s got to have some effect; otherwise why do it? Balancing the geographic boundaries and neighbourhood associations does not seem adequate”.*

*“Who benefits from these changes and how? This isn’t just about roads and houses. It is about people who are part of a community. In many cases it is about people who chose to live in a specific community and become active participants. How can that be taken away from them?”*

Again, many general comments speculated on the “real reasons”, typically concluding that the changes were in some way related to making things easier for developers.

#### Theme 2: References to “More Important” Work

A second general theme was an appeal to focus on more important work. One comment asked, “isn’t there anything better for them to be doing?” while another said, “in my view, given the myriad of issues the city is grappling with, boundary changes should be last on the list.”

When something that was considered “more important” was specified, it invariably related to housing and affordability, illustrated in the comments of one responder who said, “there is no benefit to the residents for this change. House the homeless and stop looking for make-work projects.”

Indeed, “make-work” was a term used in multiple responses from different sources to indicate that the proposed boundary changes were not important. The proposed changes were also labelled “busy work” and contrasted with “the REAL issues we have now” to indicate that commenters did not consider boundary changes important.

In a small number of social media comments, the reference to “more important” work was framed in terms of asking why the respondent should care about this issue over other issues.

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<sup>3</sup> While we have generally refrained from extensively quoting verbatim from responses, it was felt that both comments encapsulated the theme so well that they should be included in their entirety.



### Theme 3: Concerns about the Engagement Process

A third general theme related to the process of community engagement. There were two components of the engagement process with which comments took issue.

First there was the issue of a lack of overall awareness. Responders who were involved in self-organizing noted “most of the residents we spoke with had no idea the City was proposing these changes” and this lack of awareness is reflected in comments from other residents who noted that “if it wasn’t for [neighbours self-organizing], we’d be kept in the dark about yet another scheme”.

A number of residents who live in affected areas had participated in the Zoom calls and were aware that they should be receiving a mail out about the proposed changes. One reached out the LUC via email to inform us, “we who live in the immediate area did not receive our flyers until the deadline for the survey had nearly passed – we were watching for it!”

Second, a concern was identified related to a lack of collaborative engagement. In particular, comments suggested that prior to any workshop at the Committee of the Whole, there should have been an engagement process that included members of the community, so that when Council first examined the issue, they were doing so with background information about how those who lived in the affected areas felt about the proposed changes.

Relatedly, some commenters took issue with what they perceived to be a lack of effort on the part of CoV to produce a meaningful engagement tool, as illustrated in this comment from a direct email, where the responder indicated “I did fill out an online survey from the city (as I recall it was a couple yes/no questions with no option for comments)” before providing more fulsome comments on the specific proposed boundary change that affected them.

Finally, one commenter expressed concern that changes were being made “without the consent of the people who live there”.

### Theme 4: Engagement with the Idea of “Sense of Place”

A fourth general theme that surfaced, although significantly less common than the others, was related specifically to the idea of a sense of place. Some questioned how the CoV could know what individual residents’ sense of place is (one asked “is there some sort of metric that the City is using?”) while others wanted to know why the focus was on these specific areas and not other areas that might be similarly contested in terms of residents’ sense of which community they belonged to.

As with responses to specific proposed boundary changes, some comments emphasized the importance of community identity to an individual’s sense of self, as illustrated in the social media comment that “the issue of boundary change when it meant neighbourhood change [is] a really emotional one. People are very attached to the communities in which they live or identify as living in.”

### Other Themes

Other, less common, themes included:

- Wondering about consequences for property values (without identifying a specific proposed change)
- Three comments referenced the CoV 2019-2022 Strategic Plan to point out there was no mention of proposed boundary changes in that plan



## Conclusion

The FCA LUC has put considerable effort into engaging residents about the three proposed neighbourhood boundary changes that will affect Fernwood. As a result of this engagement, the LUC recommends the following in response to each proposal.

### Proposed Change from Cook to Chambers

There is clear opposition to moving the boundary from Cook to Chambers. This holds true across all sources of data, including the CoV survey. Our recommendation is that this proposal be rejected.

### Proposed Change from Haultain to Bay

There is less clarity about moving the boundary between Haultain and Bay, with different viewpoints emerging from different sources. Our recommendation is that a decision on this proposal be suspended and that the CoV support both the FCA and the Oaklands Community Association to organize opportunities to discuss this proposal, with a particular effort to reach those that would be affected by the change, so that their voices are not diluted.

By “support” we mean time, staff assistance, and financial assistance as required. Note that the time required for community-led engagement may exceed what the CoV believe could be accomplished by CoV staff, because community leaders are volunteers who are generally simultaneously engaged in multiple other issues related to land-use and community planning. It is essential that the CoV work at the community’s pace in order to build trust and ensure that all voices are heard.

### Proposed Change from Cook to Boundary Drawn Along Property Lines

There was little community engagement with the proposal for the downtown change, likely because the proposed change does not affect any buildings that are currently residential. However, as an LUC we object to drawing boundaries around a specific property line and doing so goes against the CoV’s own rationale for boundary changes, in that it creates an anomaly rather than amending one. Our recommendation is that this proposal be rejected.

## A Final Note

In conclusion, the LUC would like to reiterate that the rationale for these proposed changes does not seem particularly robust and residents struggled to understand it for the entire six-month engagement process. Despite repeated requests for further clarity, including asking those Councillors who directly proposed the boundary changes, residents never felt like they fully understood the point of the proposals.

In the absence of a clear rationale, speculation took hold that painted the CoV in a negative light. This should be carried forward as a lesson learned if the CoV is serious about meaningful community engagement, as a lack of transparency about the vision for proposed changes resulted in a great deal of theorizing that undermined trust.

## For More Information

For more information contact the FCA LUC co-chairs at [fernwoodlanduse@gmail.com](mailto:fernwoodlanduse@gmail.com). A reminder that this report relates only to the engagement undertaken by the FCA LUC with members of the Fernwood Community, and does not reflect the opinions of those who live in other areas or the personal opinions of the LUC co-chairs as individuals.