

## Local Area Planning

### Community Issues, Opportunities, and Implementation

We heard a lot. Where do we go from here?



Local area planning provides the City with an opportunity to have in-depth discussions with community members about how things are working, not working, or could be improved at the local level as we plan for the future. The process focuses on four main areas (with room for additional topics as identified by the community):

- Making room for diverse housing choices
- Supporting safe, sustainable mobility
- Creating joyful and welcoming public spaces
- Supporting the evolution of walkable urban villages

Local Area Planning also seeks to support, build on or identify local gaps in city-wide plans and policies, like the *Victoria Housing Strategy*, *Urban Forest Master Plan*, *Sustainable Mobility Strategy*, *Climate Leadership Plan*, or *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, which were themselves informed by broad public input.

The City learns a lot about what matters and what is desired. However, the products of local area planning (including neighbourhood plans) are not always the best way to address what we heard, investigate ideas, or implement projects. Much of what was heard requires attention beyond the local scale and deserves a citywide perspective.

This document supplements local area plans by highlighting issues and ideas beyond the neighbourhood plan scope and identifying existing or potential paths forward. It will be a living document over the course of local area planning to monitor and track these issues and ideas. It can be used to inform city initiatives in that time period or support larger updates to the OCP in the future.

## What Local Area Planning Achieves

Local area planning provides a chance for neighbours to come together and consider how they want their community to evolve in the coming decades and respond to anticipated changes and opportunities.

### Updating the Official Community Plan

Victoria's *Official Community Plan* (OCP) is the bylaw the City maintains to plan for and manage future growth and change. It provides a high-level vision for how land within the city will be managed in the long-term. Part of the role of the OCP is to ensure that the city has enough capacity to meet the needs of the existing and anticipated future population, while working toward established goals and objectives (for instance, reducing GHG emissions).

As much of the conversation in local area planning often revolves around land management - future housing needs, services, and amenities to support a growing and changing population – updates to the OCP often follow local area planning. Indeed, the OCP is a living document with an embedded adaptive management framework. The plan is intended to be reviewed and updated regularly, and local area planning is a key way in which the City keeps its OCP fresh.

The OCP was nearly a decade old when the latest phase of local area planning began. At this time, population projections had increased slightly since the time the OCP was originally adopted. And, like cities across the globe, Victoria was increasingly feeling the pressures of the housing crisis and the climate emergency.

All of this background information established a clear direction: through local area planning the city would need to update its OCP to respond to these changing and emerging circumstances. Local area planning would be the vehicle by which Victoria would make room for more, diverse housing in the right locations. Local area plans that had been established before this new understanding would also be revisited to ensure the response is addressed citywide.

In this sense, local area planning is about more than just the village, the corridor, or the neighbourhood.

### Implementing and Contributing to Other City-wide Plans

Adopted plans like the *Victoria Housing Strategy*, the *Sustainable Mobility Strategy*, the *Climate Leadership Plan*, and *Victoria 3.0* all guide local area planning with higher-level citywide objectives.

In some cases, these plans rely on local area planning for implementation. For example, local area planning can make room for diverse housing choices in walkable and wheelable locations near transit, thereby supporting objectives of the *Sustainable Mobility Strategy*, *Climate Leadership Plan*, *Accessibility Framework*, and *Victoria Housing Strategy*. This action also supports rental housing objectives by alleviating pressure to redevelop existing purpose-built rental housing. The process may identify local gaps in the greenways or active transportation networks, generate ideas for new green spaces, or seek to secure cultural venues whose needs are identified citywide. In some cases, this may lead to updates to other plans.

What we learn through local area planning, and other citywide processes and initiatives can also feed into the 10-year review and update of the Official Community Plan.

## We Heard About More Than Housing and Land Use Though

Local area planning gives great focus to land use and housing, as these are key considerations for the future, and planning for them can advance many shared goals related to climate action and equity. However, the comprehensive community engagement processes that shape local area planning also naturally generate other ideas, topics, issues, and concerns from the community about living, working, playing, and doing business in the city.

This document is intended to identify some of those key ideas, issues, and opportunities and highlight how they might be implemented or addressed through existing or future City programs and policies. This document will be a “living document” through the ongoing phases of local area planning and may also serve as resource for the 10-year review and update of the Official Community Plan. Discussions of key topics follow.



## Affordability

Throughout this process we heard concerns related to affordability, particularly of housing. These concerns ran the gamut, with sometimes conflicting desires, including desires for:

- More transitional housing for those experiencing homelessness.
- More and different types of non-market housing.
- More and different types of market rentals for those struggling with the competitive market, including family size units, pet friendly units, and student housing.
- More security for renters.
- More condos for first-time homebuyers and downsizers.
- More missing middle housing.
- More seniors housing.
- More housing choices for larger and multi-generational families.
- More housing located adjacent to transit routes, cycling route and mobility hubs.

While local area planning can make room for different types of housing, thoughtfully considering the scale and location of residential uses required to balance multiple objectives, it requires a layering of other policies and actions to achieve the desired, and needed, diversity in supply. These policies are often incorporated in the *Victoria Housing Strategy* (where municipal tools exist), but also require actions of other governments and organizations, including through funding and regulatory changes to address both supply and demand.

Another concern was that all neighbourhoods (and indeed, the region) accommodate a diversity of housing. Some hold a perception that southeastern neighbourhoods of Victoria, as well as Oak Bay, do not provide capacity for diverse forms of housing, including non-market housing. Some expressed this as a desire for more housing choice in areas rich with amenity, others expressed it as a concern that parts of the city were concentrated with low-income residents and a lack of community support.

### What we're doing now

- Implementing 44 actions in the *Victoria Housing Strategy*, with priority actions that address key topics of concern heard through local area planning planned for the near-term or underway:
  - Family Housing Policy, and
  - Rental Incentives Program.
- Ongoing actions such as acquisition of land for affordable housing or partnering with housing providers and implementation of the *Tenant Assistance Policy*.
- Updating the *Inclusionary Housing and Community Amenity Policy*, including to incorporate outcomes heard through local area planning.
- Making room for diverse housing choices through the phased village and corridor planning process, including revisiting recently planned for neighbourhoods to identify additional opportunities.

### Directions to explore

Continue to provide room for diverse housing choices in all neighbourhoods, by completing the phased village and corridor planning process, considering housing opportunities both near transit corridors in quieter, off-corridor residential areas.

## Parks, Facilities, and Community Funding

The growing population is putting increased pressure on existing parks and community facilities. We heard specific questions regarding the future of City-owned, operated, or funded facilities as well as local community centres. Many residents desire more public access and program diversity at Royal Athletic Park, and certainty about the future of the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre, and other community centre needs. The local area plans reflect desires for these sites, as a means of documentation, but defer to other processes to determine actions and outcomes.

We heard a strong desire that publicly accessible green spaces not owned or managed by the City (notably, green spaces on current or former school sites managed by the School District) be maintained to a high level of quality. While these desires are also documented in the plans, coordination with the School District should consider all publicly used sites across the city.

We also heard a desire for more assurance regarding the process for establishing new green spaces and updating existing green spaces.

### What we're doing now

Identified projects and processes include:

- Replacement of the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre
- Development of a park acquisition strategy
- Future plans for Royal Athletic Park
- Renewal of the Quadra Village Community Centre
- Development of a new community centre in North Park
- Renewal of the City's dogs-in-parks program

### Directions to explore

The *Parks and Open Space Master Plan* provides high-level direction which are still generally supported by the community, but without a more specific strategy for realizing those directions, residents find it difficult to interpret priorities (e.g., when exactly their local park will be improved and why other actions might come sooner). This lack of understanding sometimes translates to concern that policy directions will not be realized, making it more difficult to contemplate how the community can grow, accommodate housing, and address climate action.

The City's *Strategic Plan 2019-2022* identified an action to develop a Parks and Open Spaces Acquisition Strategy during 2022, to identify priorities for parkland acquisition that align with the OCP, the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan, and other City plans. Prioritizing this in the near term, as well as other parks planning actions could alleviate community concern. This action would also benefit from the equity framework.

## Greenways, Walking, Rolling and Public Realm Improvements

Traffic concerns, sidewalks, and connectivity were frequently cited topics in the local area planning process. Support for safe crossings, traffic calming, and walking and rolling improvements came through loud and clear from our conversations with the community. These are typically documented in the local area plan. However, how and when the City prioritizes improvements requires a citywide perspective, and should include considerations of equity, safety, costs, and benefits.

Sidewalk widening and public realm improvements like seating or boulevard trees often occur through re-development, so will be a consideration when making room for new housing through the local area planning process (e.g., a desire for a corridor to be transformed). However, a citywide perspective is also needed to reconcile which corridors should prioritize which modes, and then, what capital projects or development regulations would advance those priorities. A common, specific concern we often hear about are obstructions (e.g., utility poles) in older, narrow sidewalks.

### What we're doing now

The City's **Traffic Calming Program** focuses on addressing safety and liveability using techniques such as traffic circles, speed humps, traffic diverters, and road markings to either slow vehicle speeds or reduce vehicle volumes. Local streets are candidates for these types of treatments – they are not typically found on busier collector or arterial roads which are designed to move transit, emergency vehicles and higher volumes of traffic. The City has an established program which targets calming areas around schools, parking, local streets with collision history or with atypical speeds or volumes. Sometimes traffic calming is delivered on greenways or cycling corridors with a goal to make it more inviting and safer for active transportation. The City has a systematic approach to reviewing and evaluating suggestions from the community and an annual process for implementing traffic calming. Suggestions that emerge through local area planning process will be shared with the City's transportation division and the neighbourhood association.

*GoVictoria*, the City's Sustainable Mobility Strategy, recognizes that right-of-way – the public space between property lines – is a valuable and limited resource. Allocating existing right-of-way or getting additional space for different uses like public transit stops, commercial loading zones, accessible parking stalls, or bike lanes requires careful evaluation and consideration of trade-offs. Sidewalk improvements, for example, are often realized through redevelopment of private properties. However, requiring too much space from a private property can sometimes limit the viability of re-development, constraining our ability to meet housing and local economic development objectives or our ability to improve the public realm with other features like public art or seating. **Corridor studies** are planned for key corridors in each of the neighbourhoods to provide further direction for regarding priority travel modes and right-of-way needs. These studies will inform specific parameters for zoning updates.

In 2019, the city completed a **sidewalk condition assessment** which identified over 1200 locations across the city where sidewalks are partially obstructed by hydro poles, signs, or other obstacles. Undergrounding utilities is a major undertaking and requires significant investment. While it is something that can be achieved with a large scale re-development project, it is also costly, can limit options for tree placement and requires partnerships and approvals with regulatory agencies. Instead of undergrounding, options might be pursued to widen the sidewalk in select areas by adding a curb bulge and removing a parking space or by localized widenings of the sidewalk, with each obstruction having a specific set of challenges that must be reviewed.

**Public Realm Guidelines for Urban Villages** are anticipated to be completed later this year. These guidelines will provide guidance for street furnishings, trees, lighting, and other elements of the public realm in urban villages and indicate desired sidewalk widths and organization to improve walking and rolling.

Updates to the *Official Community Plan* are also underway in 2022 to incorporate new transportation maps that have evolved through past local area planning processes and other initiatives like the Victoria RapidBus implementation strategy.

#### Directions to explore

General policies are provided in local area plans and design guidelines to **underground utility poles and enhance greenways**, and otherwise improve the public realm, where opportunities arise. The City will continue to identify opportunities to reduce barriers in the built environment, add crossings, and improve connectivity through **planned capital investments**, like upgrading a water main or replacing a sidewalk.

We heard strong support throughout engagement for improving greenway features and connections in and around Fernwood, North Park and Hillside-Quadra, including some varying views on what the main purpose of a greenway should be. While the concept and network of greenways has evolved since it was first introduced in 2003, these routes are often described as pathways, streets and routes that are pleasant for walking, rolling or riding. Some greenways may be limited to pedestrian access only while other greenways may be on roadways. All greenways should be accessible and welcoming. In 2020 Council set aside one-time funding to support public realm enhancements on designated Greenways. In future a dedicated fund could be established to support smaller scale improvement and placemaking projects.

## Arts, culture and placemaking

Ideas around strengthening neighbourhood character and a sense of community by encouraging public art, performance, and placemaking in the public realm were all strongly supported in the local area planning engagement process. Both outdoor and indoor venues for live music was requested in all three neighborhoods, as well as preservation and enhancement of existing cultural spaces.

### What we're doing now

While some strong directions to support these desires can be set in City plans and policies, such as Neighbourhood Plans, feedback from the public confirms a want for community-led cultural expressions, practices and placemaking. As part of Strategic Objective 8 in the *Strategic Plan, Strong Livable Neighbourhoods*, the **City of Victoria Placemaking Toolkit** was completed in 2022. The toolkit focuses on grassroots, community-led placemaking that can be implemented through existing City programs and grants, such as murals, signage and parklets.

The **Neighbourhood Led Action Plan Guide** serves a similar purpose, but with a wider scope. Developed by members of the City's Neighbourhood Team, it is intended to equip residents to design and implement a Neighbourhood Led Action Plan (NLAP). An NLAP helps residents identify priorities for improvement over a five-year period and is distinct from local area planning in that it is led by the community, generally concerns areas defined by neighbourhood boundaries, and can be funded in various ways such as through the **My Great Neighbourhood Grant** and/or private fundraising.

**Create Victoria Arts and Culture Master Plan** was adopted in 2017. Create Victoria aligns ideas, people, and resources around a shared vision to realize the city's creative potential and guide the City's \$1.7 million investment in arts, culture and events over a five-year period. Part of the Master Plan is also the **Victoria Music Strategy**, which specifically outlines the role of music in the city and a series of recommendations to grow the music sector.



## Parking Management and Modernization

How curb space is used and prioritized is another topic that was often discussed through local area planning. *Go Victoria* recognizes that there is increasing and competing demand for curb space in our growing community and that we must maximize this use for the public good. Whether it be residential parking, time-limited parking, loading zones, transit stops, or even public seating – *Go Victoria* aims to take a values-based approach to allocating and managing curb space.

There is a high cost for building new parking, both in monetary terms (underground parking is expensive and costs are often passed onto renters and homebuyers) and in terms of what is sometimes sacrificed for parking (such as green space, amenities, or space for the urban forest to grow). While some see planning for future housing and development as the opportunity to reduce parking requirements in new buildings and move toward a ‘car-light’ lifestyle, others are concerned that such an approach would just add more competition for limited curb space.

### What we’re doing now

The City regularly evaluates how curb space is used in villages, on local streets and busier roadways. Changes can and will be made to meet the changing needs of the community. Part of the challenge is finding the right balance between storage of private vehicles and meeting the needs of people with disabilities, supporting business access, or providing space for other uses like bicycle parking or curb bulges.

Some current priorities include:

- Supporting commercial operations and business activity through temporary programs like Build Back Victoria.
- Growing our network of public on-street EV charging stations.
- Dedicating parking and curb space for car share vehicles.
- Adding commercial loading zones – both standard and larger size to accommodate different business needs.
- Building on-street bicycle parking corrals.
- Expanding accessible parking on streets and introducing new regulations for private development projects to increase the quantity and quality of accessible parking stalls.

### Directions to explore

To advance objectives on increased sustainable transportation mode share, reduced vehicle ownership and lower household transportation expenses, new solutions to managing parking demand from new development are required. The City is planning to undertake a **comprehensive review to Schedule C of the City’s Zoning Regulation Bylaw** to modernize parking requirements and consideration how to formally integrate transportation demand management (TDM) measures in new buildings. Given the capacity for new housing in diverse forms that is envisioned through local area planning, advancing this work in the near term should remain a top priority.

Local area plans include general polices to **test parking management strategies** for different curb uses, particularly near villages, such as timed parking, shared parking, paid parking, car share stalls and other measures. However, current resources within the transportation department limit capacity to fully implement and monitor novel parking management strategies, that may warrant a citywide lens. Future plans and budgets may consider allocation of these resources.

## Heritage

Victoria's heritage is highly valued, and many consider heritage in the built form to be an important part of community identity. We heard concerns about how heritage would be prioritized as the city grows and changes, including a desire to:

- Retain heritage assets or other features that provide a sense of place.
- Ensure new development is sympathetic to existing heritage context, including heritage in the built environment as well as environmental heritage (such as covered streams and green spaces that reflect the area's past).
- Celebrate heritage that may not be as tangible in the built environment today, including First Nations and immigrant heritage.

As with all topics, there was a range of opinions about how to balance heritage priorities and desires with the local level changes required to address housing equity and climate action. Some desired more resources for identifying important heritage assets, enacting heritage protections, or recommending heritage conservation areas. Others felt the tools and processes did not provide adequate emphasis on intangible heritage.

### What we're doing now

The City has a **robust heritage program** with several properties designated or protected through 15 Heritage Conservation Areas (HCAs) and 958 properties on the Heritage Register. The *Inclusionary Housing and Community Amenity Policy, Official Community Plan* and local area plans all recognize the preservation of heritage as a public benefit to be considered during rezoning. Additional tools including the Tax Incentive Program and grants for other built forms provided through Civic Heritage Trust further support heritage preservation.

The program is strongest and more widely used for downtown and mixed-use buildings. Documentation of heritage resources outside of Old Town and key landmarks is limited, as systematic neighbourhood surveys have not been completed. In addition, another key tool in identifying properties with heritage merit – the Heritage Register – has seen few additions from neighbourhoods outside of Downtown.

Different approaches have been taken during **past local area planning processes**. For example, the Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan benefited from a community-led survey identifying key homes of heritage merit, the findings of which were incorporated in the neighbourhood plan (however, any HCA recommendations were removed at the request of homeowners). During planning for the Fairfield Neighbourhood, a series of heritage-focused meetings were held, and recommendations made for designating HCAs (however, these proposals proved controversial and were removed from the draft plan). Council then directed creation of a Citizen-Led Heritage Conservation Area program. This program is meant to address resident desires to pursue heritage status. In the recent phase of local area planning, policies and guidelines for key heritage assets were included in local area plans, and additional information about heritage assets was incorporated to better reflect what we know about heritage in areas that are envisioned to change.

### Directions to explore

Given the extent to which heritage is discussed in local area planning processes, but the difficulty which it can be addressed, a citywide conversation regarding ways to advance the program may be required. Elements that could be considered in an updated heritage program may include:

- Supplementing the Citizen-Initiated Heritage Conservation Area program to provide opportunities for heritage staff to consider and recommend sites or areas for conservation outside the confines of local area planning, with a more comprehensive lens.
- Undertaking coordinated heritage surveys to identify important aspects of tangible and intangible heritage in all of Victoria's neighbourhoods.
- Based on these outcomes, consider use of the City's Heritage Register to recognize heritage sites worthy of protection, with particular consideration to balance objectives related to growth management.
- Greater focus throughout on intangible heritage, indigenous heritage, immigrant heritage and archaeology to round out the stronger protections available for heritage in the built form that is largely colonial.

## Community Well-being, Safety, and Inclusion

Throughout engagement we heard strong feelings related to individual and community well-being. There was ample recognition that the impacts of the housing crisis and the opioid crisis are acutely affecting many members of the community. Sentiments about the impacts of these dual crises were typically fervent and ranged widely in assumptions and conclusions.

Many community members felt strongly that supportive housing and other services to help address these crises were needed immediately. Others raised concerns that there was not thoughtful consideration of how supportive housing and support services should be located to best balance objectives of supporting those in need, while enhancing a complete community where all residents feel both safe and welcome (this was especially prominent in feedback regarding North Park and Pandora Avenue in particular, where a concentration of services exists).

### What we're doing now

The City of Victoria, working closely with partners and other levels of government, has embraced a strong response to the pandemic, including the ways it escalated the housing crises.

The City's *Strategic Plan* further identifies the following action:

*Strike a Peer-Informed Task Force to identify priority actions to inform a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy actionable at the municipal level, i.e. prevention, advocacy, integration of services, and education.*

The development of the City's Equity Framework, a priority in the City's *Strategic Plan* under the objective of Good Governance and Civic Engagement, is underway and will provide direction and guidance to departments across the City. This work is being led by the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), which was established in 2021 to advance the City's equity initiatives and social justice objectives.

Many of those who live in or frequent Fernwood, Hillside-Quadra, and particularly North Park, want to see tangible public realm improvements specifically targeted towards safety improvements. This has been a consideration in the development of the updated Design Guidelines coming out of the recent local area planning process.

### Directions to explore

Addressing these global crises is a challenge that many cities across North America face. They are complex problems deserving of thoughtful solutions that require coordination among experts and decision makers at all levels of government. The outcomes of the above actions, as with many actions noted in this document, could be further contemplated for exploration and implementation through 10-year review and update of the *Official Community Plan* and ongoing updates to other citywide plans and the City's *Strategic Plan*.

## Family and Childcare

Recent approaches to engagement have allowed the City to hear more from young families and those with children at home (who have in the past tended to be underrepresented in engagement). We've heard that young families struggle to find childcare for your children and are frustrated by the lack of options and competition. We heard similar frustrations about the lack of afterschool care programs and competition for extracurricular activities for older kids. One of the most common concerns though was related to the cost of living. For most families, housing and transportation are the highest household costs, and for families with young kids in care, daycare costs tend to come in at a close third.

As noted earlier, a common concern was related to housing costs and concerns related to population growth – both that the city isn't keeping up with the growing housing need, making competition for family-sized housing even worse, and that the population growth would put pressure on schools and daycares.

### What we're doing now

The ***Childcare in Victoria Implementation Plan*** was adopted by Council in December 2021 following intensive data collection and engagement with community partners back in 2019. In 2022 staff have been working on amendments to the City's Zoning Bylaws as well as communications and process improvements. Current data will also be updated to reflect the population changes since 2019 and more accurately reflect the childcare needs across the city.

The *Victoria Housing Strategy* includes an action to develop a Family Housing Policy. In the interim, local area plans include policies to encourage family-sized and family-suitable housing. Zoning updates emerging through local area planning will also consider opportunities to encourage more two-bedroom units, including in rental tenure zones.