

From: Victoria Mayor and Council
Sent: Friday, July 8, 2022 1:24 PM
To: Public Hearings
Subject: Fw: Joint Letter to Mayor and Council - LAP (Villages and Corridors Plan) - NPNA, HQ, & Fernwood
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From: Courtenay Miller <[REDACTED]>
Sent: July 8, 2022 12:07 PM
To: Leanne Taylor <ltaylor@victoria.ca>; Rob Bateman <rbateman@victoria.ca>; Michael Angrove <mangrove@victoria.ca>; Development Services email inquiries <DevelopmentServices@victoria.ca>; Lisa Helps (Mayor) <LHelps@victoria.ca>; Sarah Potts (Councillor) <spotts@victoria.ca>; Marianne Alto (Councillor) <MAlto@victoria.ca>; Stephen Andrew (Councillor) <stephen.andrew@victoria.ca>; Ben Isitt (Councillor) <BIsitt@victoria.ca>; Sharmarke Dubow (Councillor) <sdubow@victoria.ca>; Jeremy Loveday (Councillor) <jloveday@victoria.ca>; Charlayne Thornton-Joe (Councillor) <cthorton-joe@victoria.ca>; Geoff Young (Councillor) <gyoung@victoria.ca>
Cc: [REDACTED] NPNA Board [REDACTED]; Sarah Murray [REDACTED]
Subject: Joint Letter to Mayor and Council - LAP (Villages and Corridors Plan) - NPNA, HQ, & Fernwood

Dear Mayor and Council,

I hope you all are doing well. Please find attached a joint letter on behalf of the North Park Neighbourhood Association, Fernwood Community Association, and Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee regarding the updated Local Area Plan (Villages and Corridors Plan).

Thank you, and I hope you all have a wonderful weekend.

Kind regards,

Courtenay Miller *(she/her)*
Land Use Planning Advisor
North Park Neighbourhood Association
[REDACTED]



The North Park Neighbourhood Association acknowledges the homelands of the Lekwungen Peoples, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, on whose lands we are living, working, and collaborating.

North Park Neighbourhood
Association
#185-911 Yates Street
Victoria, BC V8V 4Y9

Fernwood Community
Association
Land Use Committee
1923 Fernwood Road
Victoria, BC V8V 4Y9

Hillside Quadra
Neighbourhood Action
Committee
901 Kings Road
Victoria, BC V8T 1W

Re: North Park, Fernwood, and Hillside-Quadra's Local Area Plan (Villages and Corridors Plan)

July 8, 2022

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are writing collectively on behalf of the North Park Neighbourhood Association, the Fernwood Community Association, and the Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee regarding the planning process and the draft Villages and Corridors Plans for North Park, Hillside-Quadra, and Fernwood.

As outlined in each neighbourhood association's letters, several vital areas overlap regarding each Local Area Plan (LAP). These recommendations guide final revisions and are viewed as lessons learned for subsequent local area plan processes.

Process and Engagement

We recognize that this engagement process faced unprecedented challenges during a global pandemic. As a result, much of the engagement took place online, and many of the in-person events hoped for at the beginning of the process were not possible. With much of the process taking place online, those already impacted by lack of access to technology, internet, or technical abilities experienced obstacles preventing them from participating. Also out of the City's control was that the COVID-19 global pandemic significantly impacted everyday lives. The ability to dedicate time and mental capacity for a new process that included a steep learning curve (knowledge about local area plans in general, City documents, attending events online, etc.) was simply unavailable to many people in our communities.

We would also like to take a moment to remember that North Park and Hillside-Quadra were required to redirect efforts towards the encampments at Topaz Park, Central Park, and 940 Caledonia during this process. These encampments required significant attention from community

members and significant staff and volunteer time from each organization to support those in need—this limited capacity for engaging in the local area plan across the board.

Furthermore, throughout the process, many topics would have benefitted from the involvement of a Social Planner. While the City did hire a Social Planner at some point during the local area plan process, it was unclear what involvement they had. It felt very bizarre to be engaging in a two-three decade long planning process for three neighbourhoods without incorporating the expertise and lens of a Social Planner.

There are several lessons to be learned from the working group structure. Those of us in the working group feel that there was a high turnover of members and minimal engagement. Initially, meetings were held on a somewhat regular basis; however, this did not remain consistent throughout. The working group was often notified with updates on the process just days before crucial council meetings or sometimes after the fact. With a high turnover of members and infrequent meetings, the working group was limited in effectiveness. A few recommendations would be to compensate working group members who are volunteering through an honorarium, host hybrid meetings that offer in-person (with dinner & childcare) and online options, and establish a regular meeting schedule with agendas and meeting notes.

For those who participated in the local area plan update from the beginning, the process has felt “top-down” and City led. This is counter to the City’s engagement policy. While some obstacles were out of our collective control, there are some valuable opportunities for reflection that we can learn from to benefit and inform the next round of local area plans.

Villages and Corridors Plan

The draft plan captures some sentiments of all three communities but lacks and does not expand on how the community's needs will be met. It is challenging to meet the goals outlined in the LAP without adequate policy enforcement (amended OCP). Examples can be found in the plans where community-raised issues, such as lack of green space, were not adequately addressed.

While the Villages and Corridors plan was underway, several other City planning and policy development processes occurred simultaneously. These included revisions to the Downtown Core Area Plan, the proposed changes to neighbourhood boundaries, the Missing Middle Housing initiative, rapid deployment of affordable housing, and more. Based on conversations with community members and our own experiences throughout this process, there was a lot of confusion about how these various plans and initiatives related to, incorporated, and overlapped. When introducing the Villages and Corridors plan, for example, it was unclear whether it was

supposed to be part of the local area plan or was a different plan altogether. The Villages and Corridors plan was a new way of going about local area plans. We feel that more time was needed to educate the public before the process began and should have been incorporated throughout.

By focusing on Villages and Corridors instead of the historical local area plan process, the result was that many topics were no longer “within scope.” Many of the matters deemed out of scope were critical issues of importance to our communities. A fulsome local area plan should identify and guide how future growth and redevelopment should happen through the entire community, not just several locations within each community. The narrow scope made it incredibly challenging to meet the community’s needs and desires for progressive change.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned to inform future local area plan updates are as follows:

- A significant issue with this process was that many topics addressed were out of scope.

There were three primary examples from each neighbourhood association:

- *Hillside-Quadra*: Evergreen Terrace was deemed out of scope because it was a BC Housing property, yet Fairway Plaza was considered in scope. The City provided a lack of explanation, confusing the residents on what areas of the neighbourhood they could focus on.
- *North Park*: North Park is approximately 55 hectares. Royal Athletic Park, Central Park, Save on Foods Memorial Arena, 940 Caledonia, the Curling Club, and the Police Station make up just over 11 hectares. Meaning the City owns 20% of the land in North Park. These locations were deemed out of scope throughout the Villages and Corridors process and declared part of a different process.
- *Fernwood*: The Pandora Corridor was deemed out of scope despite being an area with considerable redevelopment. City planners framed this and other limitations as a method of focussing efforts where there is more pressure for change, along with an acknowledgement that these areas would be revisited at a later date. To date, no process has been delineated for how this revisitation is to occur.

As stated above, there were many concerns regarding the engagement process in all three neighbourhoods. Outreach needed to occur much earlier, utilizing all engagement methods through advertisements, flyers, postcards, online engagement tools, and focus groups. In this case, the outreach started very late, not engaging with the public until the fall/winter of 2021. It did not use all engagement tools, making it inaccessible to many community members.

From 2011 onwards, the City told community members to wait until the LAP had begun to discuss many of their concerns (ex., traffic calming on residential streets). However, once the LAP process started, many of these concerns were out of the scope of the process. The narrow scope was incredibly frustrating, resulting in many people's desires not being addressed.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to improve the process for Victoria's next round of LAP updates. Six key recommendations could significantly enhance the success of future LAPs:

1. Clarifying the new process: As mentioned above, Villages and Corridors were a new way of going about the local area planning process. When undertaking a new process, we feel that staff should have dedicated time and resources to developing the process, outcomes and objectives and sharing these with the community first. We feel this would have resulted in a shared understanding of expectations and processes amongst the community before any planning and consultation began.
2. Identifying parallel plans and processes: Included in the educational component of the Villages and Corridors plan should have been accessible and readily available information about the various plans and initiatives. It would have been valuable to show how these plans relate to each other, and what issues and areas are out of scope. This would result in a defined standard for all neighbourhoods, which is essential to ensure no discrepancies and confusion in the LAP process.
3. Triggering updates to parallel plans and processes: Repeatedly throughout the process, we were told that one topic area was out of scope because it was associated with or included in another process or plan (ex, Parks & Open Spaces Master Plan). However, there was no mechanism to trigger an update, amendment, or review of the other process or plan. We feel that the engagement from the LAP needs to inform other processes and updates and, where relevant, trigger an update or amendment to reflect the priorities identified by the community during the engagement.
4. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: While the Villages and Corridors plan for North Park, Fernwood, and Hillside Quadra was in consultation and development, the City's EDI office was working on the framework for embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion into City processes and work. The attention of this small team was understandably focused on this critical work. With that said, we feel that EDI practices were not adequately included in the Villages & Corridors process.
5. Evidence-based decision-making and priority setting: We recommend that staff use evidence-based decision-making as a central objective of future planning processes throughout the City of Victoria and that plans include objectives and measures of success.

Similar efforts are being used in Vancouver and Toronto to ensure that resource allocation, capital projects, and planning, in general, is benefitting those who need it the most.

6. **Engagement & Consultation:** We recommend that staff adopt an outcomes-based engagement and planning approach that provides versatile, well-communicated, responsive tools for community engagement.

Neighbourhood Specific Comments

This section of the letter provides a brief overview of North Parks, Fernwood, and Hillside-Quadra's main areas of concern addressed in each LAP letter.

North Park Neighbourhood Association

The NPNA found that the overall contents in the LAP are supportable and seem to reflect what residents have communicated throughout the process. There were three main areas of concern outlined in the NPNA letter:

- Increased focus on equitable access to green space as North Park has some of the most limited green space compared to other Downtown neighbourhoods.
- The City needs to work with the provincial and federal governments to address the situation on the 900 block of Pandora.
- Support the diversity of services in the Village so the community can avoid a further concentration of supportive services in the commercial core.

Fernwood Community Association

Aspects of the Fernwood LAP are tempered in that parts of the plan conflict with Fernwood as a community. The community has assessed four critical concerns in the LAP in the following areas:

- The concern for mature trees not being protected by the Tree Protection Bylaw due to being located on private land.
- Increased traffic congestion for Bay Street Village due to the encouragement of increased commercial development.
- Improved focus on accessibility and accessible access between corridors and connector streets.
- A further need for additional park space and outdoor community space.

There is a significant discrepancy between the Fernwood draft plans and the North Park draft plans. Both plans reference the need for more community-driven space at Cook and North Park Street. The proposed public space and road closure appears to be addressed in detail in Section 6 of the North Park Neighbourhood Plan but is mentioned briefly around the location in the Shared

Large Urban Villages section of the Fernwood Neighbourhood Plan (pg.41). This should be removed from both LAPs as it creates conflicts and areas of concern within both communities.

Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee

Hillside-Quadra’s letter provided feedback on the Villages and Corridors plans specific to the proposed 2022 additions. There are four main concerns outlined in the Hillside-Quadra letter:

- The messaging regarding the plan’s scope changed, confusing participants about how to be involved and on which issues they could comment.
- How the Official Community Plan (OCP) Bylaw will be amended.
- The unfair process regarding the significant additions to the LAP.
- Implications of new plan designations for future public processes.

Conclusion

The plans provide a good high-level blueprint for many aspects of the neighbourhood’s future but miss some critical components in each community. The impact of the pandemic and large encampments made the Local Area planning process very difficult. Some of the vital areas of concern are the lack of discussion on substantive issues, the context of the scope, and confusion on how the LAP process relates to other plans within the City. Please consider these recommendations and how the approval of the LAPs will affect the North Park, Fernwood, and Quadra-Hillside communities. Please view the feedback from these communities as lessons learned to improve the Local Area Planning process for neighbouring communities. The LAPs are meant to serve as guiding documents for multiple decades. Hence, it is vitally important to reflect the changes and future needs of neighbourhoods holistically and not limited in scope to select topics of immediate interest.

Thank you,

Sarah Murray
NPNA
Executive Director
[Redacted]

Courtenay Miller
NPNA
Land Use Planning Advisor
[Redacted]

Rowena Locklin
On Behalf of Hillside-Quadra NAC
Land Use Committee Co-Chair
[Redacted]

Ammar Mahimwalla
NPNA
Land Use Chair
[Redacted]

NPNA Board of Directors
On behalf of the Land Use Committee
[Redacted]

Soma Morse
Fernwood Community Executive
Land Use Committee Co-chair
[Redacted]