



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of July 14, 2022

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** June 24, 2022

From: Karen Hoesel, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development
Philip Bellefontaine, Director, Engineering & Public Works

Subject: **Government Street Refresh Vision and Design Concept**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Approve the Government Street Vision and Concept Design to guide future capital planning, detailed design, costing and phased implementation to align with planned infrastructure upgrades and anticipated land development projects from Humboldt Street to Pandora Avenue, and direct staff to incorporate design and construction costs into future financial plans.
2. Direct staff to maintain and improve pedestrian priority treatments previously implemented through the Build Back Victoria program including street furniture and planters, patios, programming and timed car-free zones. As part of these efforts, pilot a full-time closure between Humboldt and Courtney Streets to inform detailed design and implementation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with a summary of the Government Street Refresh process including engagement and the resulting recommended vision and concept design.

Government Street is Downtown's most prominent pedestrian priority street and, as the heart of Old Town, is a place of unique historical character and identity. At the same time, significant upgrades to underground and surface infrastructure, including street trees, along Government Street through Old Town are required over the short to medium term. These infrastructure upgrades are an opportunity to build the street back better to support Downtown businesses and create a more welcoming, inclusive and accessible people place. This includes extending the existing 'pedestrian mall' treatment between Humboldt and Yates streets through to Pandora Avenue, as long envisioned in the Official Community Plan.

As one of the City's most iconic destinations for visitors and locals alike, the streetscape refresh is also an opportunity to advance important City values and objectives through placemaking, cultural interpretation and programming. This includes expanding the narrative of the street to include Indigenous representation, celebrating the iconic architectural heritage and the Oldest Chinatown in Canada, and creating a public living room that is diverse, inclusive and welcoming to all. The refresh process also benefited from successes and lessons learned, and associated

outreach and engagement, from the pedestrian priority treatments along Government Street implemented as part of the Build Back Victoria (BBV) program in June of 2020.

The process included extensive public and stakeholder engagement, including early and ongoing collaboration with Songhees and Esquimalt nation representatives, and a project working group representing a broad spectrum of organizations and perspectives. Over 2200 people were engaged throughout the process, including over 1800 surveys completed, eight workshops, a public 'pop-up' open house, three working group workshops, and 12 presentations to City Advisory Committees. The significant interest in this process shows how valued and important Government Street is to the city and its residents, as an expression of the community's values and identity.

The result of this process and community input has generated a renewed vision for the street as described in Attachment 1, which includes:

- Expanding the 'pedestrian mall' treatment with wider sidewalks between Humboldt and Yates Street south to Pandora Avenue
- Installing new furnishings and landscaping
- Refreshing streetscape elements from Courtney Street to Yates Street, including expanded pedestrian areas and new furnishings
- Continuing the timed car-free zone from Humboldt Street to View Street
- Developing two new plaza spaces as book ends to Government Street through Old Town
- The opportunity to continue piloting pedestrian priority treatments on Government Street including a full closure to vehicles between Humboldt and Courtney Streets as part of development of a pedestrian plaza in this block.

The Government Street Refresh Vision and Concept Design are intended to guide incremental improvements along the street that will occur in tandem with phased infrastructure upgrades, implemented through annual Operations, Maintenance and Financial Planning processes.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present Council with a summary of the engagement, analysis and recommended conceptual designs for Government Street, between Humboldt Street and Pandora Avenue.

BACKGROUND

Government Street is Downtown's most prominent pedestrian priority street, a destination for locals and visitors alike, and a connector for people moving through the city. As the heart of Old Town, it is also a place of unique historical character and identity. Significant streetscape improvements were made to a portion of Government Street in the late 1970's to enhance pedestrian activity and emphasize its heritage significance, including the use of brick pavers, rolled curbs, widened sidewalks, street trees in planters, pedestrian lighting, street furniture and other streetscape elements between Humboldt Street and Yates Street.

The Official Community Plan and the Downtown Core Area Plan identify Government Street as a special urban design area with policies to extend the 'mall' treatment through to Chinatown. The Downtown Public Realm Plan (2017) expands on these policies, including more detailed streetscape objectives for Government Street from Yates Street to Chinatown, and to undertake a streetscape 'refresh' of the portion from Yates Street to Humboldt Street. The 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan includes an action to "create a 'people-priority' Government Street with a complete transformation of the street between Humboldt and Yates to be completed by the end of 2022."

This suite of policies and directions for Government Street were informed by workshops and engagement events led by the City and the Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA) over the past several years plus established policy directions in Go Victoria, the City's sustainable mobility strategy.

The Build Back Victoria (BBV) program for Government Street was initiated in June 2020 to support business recovery from the pandemic in the context of COVID-19 health and safety protocols and to support more pedestrian friendly public spaces for people to gather. Changes included increased public seating, space for performances and planters. In addition, an improved pedestrian experience was created by reducing the street from two vehicle lanes down to one and introducing a daily car-free zone between Humboldt and Yates Street between noon and 10pm.

In addition, gateway treatments were installed at several intersections along with new signage, the removal of the traffic signal at View Street and modified traffic signal timings at Fort Street to reduce delays for all road users and create a more pedestrian focused environment. These treatments provided more space for social distancing and have enabled the widespread expansion of patios, sidewalk cafes and other retail activities to further support pedestrian activity and business operations. Ongoing outreach with stakeholders and the public, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, have informed refinements to pedestrian priority measures, and revealed a strong level of support for these measures. Successes and lessons learned from the BBV program provided valuable information to the Government Street Refresh design process.

A phased upgrade of the City's water main infrastructure and streetscape is planned on Government Street between Broughton Street and Pandora Avenue between 2023 and 2027. At the same time, there are several locations within the study area where City assets, including traffic signal infrastructure, road and sidewalk surfaces, street furniture and street trees, are at or are nearing end of life and will need to be replaced. Coordinating these asset renewal projects with a refresh of Government Street guided by the proposed concept vision contained within this report will allow for works to be completed at an overall lower cost with reduced public disruption.

Process Overview

In June 2021, the City initiated the Government Street Refresh design process to develop a renewed vision, streetscape design, and implementation strategy for Government Street between Humboldt Street and Pandora Avenue. DIALOG Consultants was engaged to support conceptual design development, associated technical studies and support public and stakeholder engagement. The study scope included streetscape improvement potential, considerations for programming and cultural interpretation and multi-modal circulation considerations, building on the success of existing pedestrian priority measures implemented as part of the BBV program.

The Government Street Refresh public engagement process followed the City's Engagement Framework and included 'Inform', 'Consult', and 'Involve' levels of the International Association for Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation.

Three streams of engagement took place in three phases over a one-year period: engagement with the Songhees Nation and the Esquimalt Nation; public and stakeholder engagement, including a Stakeholder Working Group; and meetings with City Advisory Committees.

Indigenous Engagement

City staff worked with designated representatives of the Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation, who served as project consultants to help inform the draft design framework, draft concept design and provide feedback on the proposed approach.

The project team presented at community meetings to receive input and a stand-alone Lekwungen Survey, focused on the proposed Lekwungen features of the draft concept design, was developed in collaboration with the Nations and to seek additional feedback from First Nations' members.

Phase 1 of Indigenous Partner engagement involved staff (including a member of the City Family) consulting directly with representatives of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. Meetings were held individually and jointly with the Nations to introduce the project and gather feedback on a set of design themes, goals and objectives for Government Street. An in-person Indigenous "Walk-About" was held on Government Street. Input from our First Nations partners helped inform the Government Street Refresh design framework and draft concept design. The results of Phase 1, together with relevant background and technical analysis, informed the development of the design framework including a set of design themes, goals and objectives. A summary of Indigenous Engagement is available in Attachment 3.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

A complete summary of public, stakeholder and Stakeholder Working Group engagement and feedback can be found in Attachment 3. Highlights include:

- 2,249 engagement contacts
- 1,826 people completed a survey
- 75 people participated in a virtual open house/workshop
- 72 engaged visits at pop-up events
- 50 people provided written feedback
- 8 focus group workshops and meetings (business owners, tourism operators, event organizers, Chinatown representatives, Victoria Youth Council and the public)
- 3 Stakeholder Working Group workshops (25 members over three phases).

Phase 1 took place from June 22 to July 13, 2021. Engagement activities included an online survey and an ideas forum for the public to share and vote on ideas on how to enhance Government Street as a people place. A Stakeholder Working Group of 23 members representing a diverse range of community perspectives, Government Street businesses and organizations was established to advise on the draft concept design's development through both phases.

City Advisory Committee Engagement

The project's third stream of engagement invited five City of Victoria Advisory Committees to provide input during Phases 1 and 2. A total of 10 presentations were made to the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Active Transportation Advisory Committee, Art in Public Places Advisory Committee, Heritage Advisory Panel and the Advisory Design Panel. A summary of Advisory Committee feedback on the draft concept design is available in Attachment 3.

In addition, an inter-departmental staff team representing Community Planning, Parks, Engineering and Public Works, Fire Services, and Engagement was formed to help guide and inform the project.

What We Heard - Key Engagement Themes Informing the Concept Design

The following summarizes key themes from Phase 1 engagement:

- **Enhance as a pedestrian priority street:** Build on the success and lessons learned from the BBV program and make changes that support Government Street as a destination; maintain/expand durational car-free areas; balance pedestrian priority with commercial loading and access needs; reduce vehicle thoroughfare function of the street.

- **Embrace diverse cultural interpretation:** Expand beyond the built heritage and colonial history, include Indigenous narratives, art and story telling; important to not only shift, but fix the narrative of the street to tell the full story of this place; opportunity to educate about Indigenous past, present and future; opportunities for local Indigenous cultural expression and economic development; opportunity to make the street more culturally safe and welcoming.
- **Support business vitality:** Support a mix of local serving and visitor-oriented retail, food and beverage activity year-round; ensure the street feels safe and welcoming for people shopping and dining on the street.
- **Expand arts and culture:** Support opportunities for performance, events and festivals, all season; incorporate a diversity of public art including immersive, durational and digital forms.
- **Prioritize implementation in the northern two blocks:** This is the area most lacking in pedestrian amenity and requires shorter term infrastructure improvements, and therefore should be prioritized to create a better pedestrian connection to Chinatown.
- **Value street trees:** Street trees should remain a defining feature of Government Street to provide character, comfort and visual interest; existing Hornbeam trees are a defining and cherished streetscape element that should be maintained if possible; Hornbeam trees block heritage and business facades, and the low canopies block pedestrian flow and visual connectivity along the street.

Phase 2 of engagement took place from March 2 – 20, 2022 and focused on collecting feedback on a proposed concept design based on design goals and themes identified in Phase 1.

During Phase 2 of Indigenous engagement, two virtual meetings were held with each Nation’s representatives to introduce the draft concept design and obtain feedback. Staff also presented an overview of the draft concept design at a Songhees Nation community meeting. Based on the Nations’ input and approval, staff developed a Government Street Refresh Lekwungen Survey that focused primarily on the design’s proposed Lekwungen Plaza and landmark near Humboldt Street. The survey was shared directly with members of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations online and included print surveys and displays set up at the Songhees Wellness Centre and the Esquimalt Nation’s Office.

Phase 2 public and stakeholder activities included a virtual open house, along with a video and display boards presenting the draft concept design posted on the project web page and shared through social media. People were invited to provide feedback by completing an online survey or sending their feedback by email. Virtual focus group meetings were held with local businesses, the Chinatown community, local event organizers, tourism operators, City of Victoria Youth Council, the Downtown Residents Association and the public. An in-person pop-up event was hosted during the popular Saint Patrick’s Day Family Festival, which took place on Government Street between Fort and Yates streets.

A summary of Phase 2 engagement results and key themes is included as part of the concept design description in pages 9 – 15 of this report.

Phase 3 of engagement included meetings with the Stakeholder Working Group and Songhees and Esquimalt Nation representatives to review public, stakeholder and Indigenous feedback and discuss refinements to the design concept.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Current Context

1. Infrastructure Replacement

Replacement of the City's water main infrastructure on Government Street is planned from Broughton Street to Pandora Avenue in phases between 2023 and 2027 as part of the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) program and associated federal cost sharing. At the same time, there are several locations within the study area where City assets, including traffic signal infrastructure, road and sidewalk surfaces, street furniture and street trees, are at or are nearing end of life and will need to be replaced. Replacement of the watermain and street trees will require significant restoration of the roadbed, crosswalks, sidewalk and other streetscape elements. There are several under sidewalk basements within the study area that have also been identified as requiring assessment and consideration for potential decommissioning. Once detailed design is initiated, staff would also begin consultation with third party utilities such as BC Hydro and Fortis to ensure that any major utility upgrades are coordinated with the project.

2. Street Trees

The Urban Forest Master Plan provides policy direction to guide the preferred outcomes of the urban forest in the context of Government Street, including Goal 2: Protect, enhance and expand Victoria's urban forest and, Goal 3: Maximize community benefits for the urban forest in all neighbourhoods. Downtown has the lowest amount of tree cover in Victoria. Government Street's canopy cover was estimated at 14%, half of the city-wide average of 28%. Overall, Downtown has a canopy cover of less than 10%.

The majority of tree species growing on Government Street are European Hornbeam, introduced as part of the pedestrian mall construction in the late 1970's. These trees are planted within a significantly constrained growing environment open bottom concrete ring planters south of Yates Street, and in ground north of Yates Street. The dense, low and round canopy, achieved by annual pruning, creates a distinct pattern and character along the street. Street tree succession, canopy cover and sustainable maintenance is a key component informing the design concept.

A condition and site assessment carried out as part of the process found that over half of the trees within the study area are significantly constrained, showing signs of drought stress, and repairs to site and planting conditions are required within 5 years. Approximately 68% of the trees along Government Street have a life expectancy of 5-15 years and will require replacement over this period, while an additional 13% have a life expectancy of 1-5 years. It may be possible to extend the life expectancy of some trees in planters by replacing the planter infrastructure however, most trees are planted on or close to utilities which is also expected to limit their life expectancy. Replacement of underground infrastructure including lateral connections will likely result in disruption, including possible removal, of some existing street trees.

Present day engineering and requirements for utility protection would preclude many of the tree planting practices from the 1970s, which resulted in the trees that are present along Government Street today. The location of existing and planned future underground infrastructure preclude in-ground street trees along much of the street based on established setback requirements from infrastructure. Challenges for retaining trees and for accommodating additional and replacement trees include the condition of the planter infrastructure, soil volume constraints and most significantly, the proximity of underground utilities along the street. The street tree succession strategy developed as part of this process seeks to maximize street tree canopy coverage and urban forest benefits within these complex and constrained conditions. The street tree retention and succession strategy is summarized in Attachment 1, pp 36 – 40.

3. Accessibility

Improved accessibility on Government Street is a key goal of this project and relates to many facets of Government Street – the physical environment, programming, furnishings, and the overall experience. Best practices for shared streets and the application of universal design principles as well as additional academic study (Attachment 4, page 4-8), have informed the refresh vision and concept design. At the same time, universal design best practices, particularly for pedestrian priority multi-modal environments, are an evolving area of exploration and will continue to be explored throughout design development and phased implementation. This will include ongoing involvement of accessibility expertise, including technical inputs and audits as part of design iteration, and involving people with lived experience.

4. Emergency Vehicle Access and Fire Suppression

Lined with heritage buildings dating 100 years or older, and with many of them still requiring seismic and fire upgrades, providing sufficient access for fire trucks and accommodating their operational needs is a key input into the streetscape design. Feedback provided by the Fire Department has informed the design concept, including in consideration of the provision, locations and dimensions of stationing areas for fire trucks and the compatibility of street tree locations and species with stationing areas and ladder requirements. Further input and direction from Fire Department staff will inform future more detailed design and construction stages of the process.

5. Vehicle Circulation and Access

In June of 2021, a daily timed car-free zone between Humboldt and View Streets was initiated as part of the Build Back Victoria Program. This followed a period of full closure to general purpose vehicles between Fort and View streets implemented in June 2020. Prior to these changes, Government Street acted as a northbound thoroughfare and connector for motor vehicle traffic travelling to the north or accessing the Johnson Street Bridge, with approximately 2000 to 2500 vehicles a day at the southern end.

Additional analysis of travel patterns along Government Street and other streets in Downtown Victoria using the StreetLight Insights platform was conducted. Although there are certain limitations associated with this dataset, it can provide insights into general changes in travel patterns, including comparisons with data from prior years. The analysis found that while vehicle volumes and patterns changed with the pandemic, data collected between 2019 and 2021 indicates that traffic volumes have not significantly changed on adjacent corridors with the introduction of measures on Government Street. The analysis further indicated that in the 1100 block, more pedestrians were visiting Government Street in July and August of 2021 than prior to the pandemic in 2019. At the same time, the same block on parallel streets to the east (Blanshard Street and Douglas Street) had pedestrian flows in 2021 that remained below pre-pandemic levels in 2019, although pedestrian flows on this block of Wharf Street in 2021 exceeded those seen in 2019.

6. Built Environment and Architectural Heritage

Located in the heart of Old Town, the portion of Government Street from Humboldt Street to Fisgard Street has heritage significance, containing a collection of late nineteenth century commercial heritage buildings and linking the oldest Chinatown in Canada with the Empress Hotel and the Inner Harbour. The elaborate building facades, and fine grain and sawtooth profile of the buildings, are defining features of Government Street. Streetscape improvements constructed between Humboldt and Yates Streets in the late 1970's, including widened sidewalks, brick pavers, trees in planters along with pedestrian lighting and furnishing, have themselves become character defining features of Government Street in their own right. A refresh of streetscape elements from Humboldt to Yates Streets, and an extension of pedestrian priority treatments, is an opportunity to reflect and celebrate the architectural heritage of the street, while also introducing additional interpretative elements to include other cultural and historical narratives.

Pedestrian Priority Streets: Precedents & Best Practices

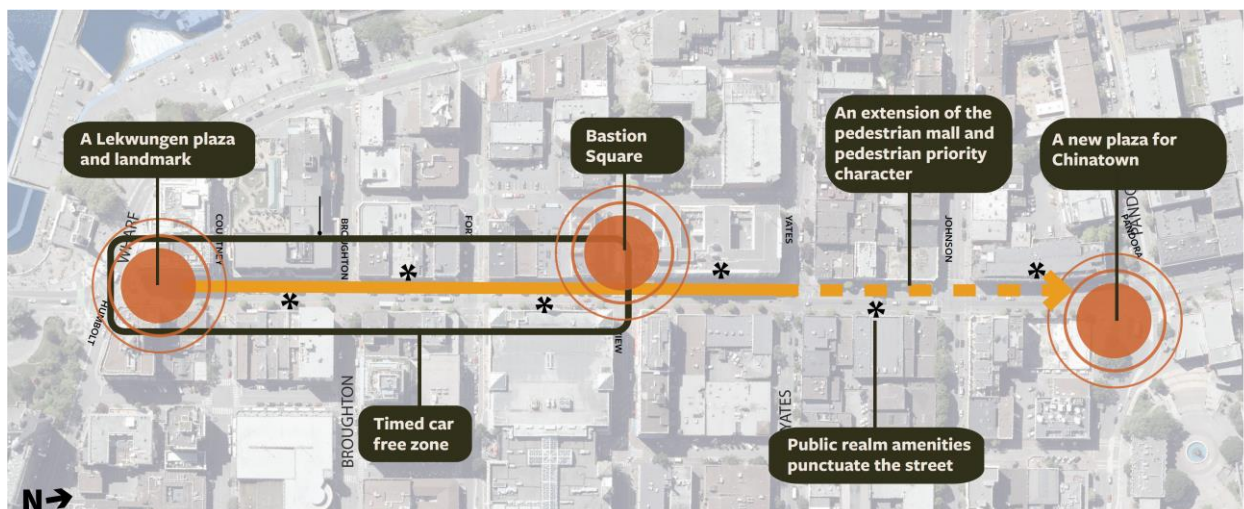
Research on other precedent projects and best practices for delivering pedestrian priority streets, including impacts on business health and community vitality, was carried out to inform the vision and concept design (Attachment 4). This included precedent research and interviews with staff from other relevant jurisdictions including Argyle and Grafton Streets in Halifax, Stephen Avenue in Calgary, Yonge Street in Toronto, and European examples. Other relevant and key highlights are summarized below.

- Build on existing foot traffic, and serve a diverse range of activities, programs and people day and night with a variety and mix of visitor and local oriented retail and services.
- Limit vehicular closures to be timed and/or seasonal; limit full vehicle closures to a single or partial block.
- Accommodate vehicle circulation on, and access from, the surrounding street network, and allow for vehicle cross movements.
- Keep the street well maintained and programmed with a combination and diversity of seasonal events and everyday activities.
- Balanced users are key: streets that prioritize pedestrians but don't fully exclude other users including bikes and vehicles are healthy and contribute to overall business vitality and street safety all year round.
- Undertake ongoing monitoring and evaluation to adapt to the changing economic landscape and peoples activity patterns.
- Monitor healthy business diversity to support economic development and local focus.
- Support convenient, comfortable, accessible and safe mobility options for accessing the street.
- Design for a range of people with different disabilities.
- Create an environment with reduced crossing distances, reduced vehicle volumes and reduced speeds within the environment where everyone recognizes there is different activity and users.

Proposed Design Vision and Concept

Following is a summary of the Design Vision and Concept for Government Street, along with a high level summary of public and stakeholder feedback. A more detailed overview of the design concept, and public and stakeholder feedback, can be found in Attachment 1 and Attachment 3, respectively.

The overall vision and design concept includes the following key elements:



- **An expanded public realm and continued car-free times from Humboldt to Yates** streets to provide flexibility for seasonal transformation of the street, additional sidewalk space to improve pedestrian circulation and through movement, and the potential opportunity for new trees to be planted in ground.
- **An extension of the pedestrian ‘mall’ treatment north of Yates Street to Pandora Avenue** as a continuation of the streetscape character, knitting together and inviting people north to Chinatown from the Inner Harbour, connecting other important downtown cultural amenities and destinations, and including a variety of public spaces to support the pedestrian priority treatment of this zone including diverse programming and cultural interpretative elements.
- **Two new cultural plazas as bookends to Old Town and gateways to the Inner Harbour and Chinatown:** 1) A Lekwungen plaza is proposed at the south end from Humboldt to Courtney Streets, expanding Indigenous cultural representation and programming in this key location; and 2) a new plaza for Chinatown on the southeast corner of Pandora Avenue at Government Street, reflecting the character and identity of Chinatown, including public art, cultural programming and activities, and a public washroom, to be implemented as part of developer-initiated frontage improvements associated with redevelopment of 603 Pandora Avenue (former Plaza Hotel site).
- **Enhanced public realm - a series of public realm amenities and public space typologies.** In addition to the two new plazas which anchor the study area, the streetscape is punctuated by furnishings and spaces that lend themselves to a variety of experiences and programming. The gateway to Bastion Square remains a key destination and component of the public realm. High quality materials, tree planting considerations, cultural interpretation and public art are included in the enhancements.
- **Planting and street trees** - A set of design strategies to replace existing trees and integrate new trees within the complex and constrained growing environment along the street are proposed. The number and location of street trees would be determined as part of the detailed design and phased implementation of the streetscape improvements. Strategies include:
 - Replace existing trees in planters, in a phased approach, with new trees in planters and partially in-ground and using soil vaults to both contain roots located over top of or adjacent to infrastructure and to improve soil volume and quality for trees to grow to maturity.
 - Maintain existing trees in-ground where healthy and compatible with new streetscape and underground utility alignment and layout.
 - Locate new trees in-ground where possible based on a case-by-case assessment, and where compatible with underground infrastructure or through the use of soil cells.
 - Incorporate stormwater capture, retention and release strategies where viable.
 - Support species diversity for environmental resiliency and visual interest.
 - Select species that are compatible with the urban and constrained growing environment on Government Street, and that meet the goals of the UFMP including climate resilience and canopy cover.

Overall level of support: There was a very strong level of support for the overall vision and concept, with 86% of survey respondents indicating support. 80% of respondents who identified as business owners expressed support.

7. Lekwungen (South) Plaza:

A Lekwungen cultural plaza and landmark are envisioned for Government Street between Humboldt and Courtney streets to recognize the Lekwungen People and celebrate the gateway between the Inner Harbour and Old Town. The concept design is premised on the creation of a flexible space that can transform between a street with vehicle movement and a pedestrian only plaza.



The concept includes terraced planters and seating with views to the harbour, patio spaces, a cultural pavilion building to support cultural programming, and a flex zone to accommodate north bound vehicle traffic outside of timed car-free periods. The plaza materials and public art, together with programming opportunities, provide the canvas for conveying the cultural role of this plaza for the Lekwungen people.

During timed closures, movable bollards indicate to vehicles that the street is closed allowing restaurants and movable seating to spill out into this space or for the space to be programmed with special events. From a mobility perspective, this block acts as a valve to motorized vehicular movement. When closed to vehicles, Government Street's role as a northbound connector will be significantly reduced.

Engagement feedback and level of support: Feedback indicated overall very strong support for the Lekwungen Plaza, with the survey indicating support from 84% of survey respondents, and 80% of respondents who identified as business owners. One design element which received low levels of support was maintaining vehicle access at this intersection outside of car-free periods. Feedback indicated that the public wanted to see this portion of the street permanently closed to vehicle traffic in order to expand on the pedestrian priority experience and contribute to a renewed sense of character.



Alternative Lekwungen Plaza Concept:

In response to public feedback, an alternative design concept has been developed for the Lekwungen plaza based on a full closure to vehicles. This allows for a more significant transformation of this block of Government Street into a public plaza.

Terraced seating and public spaces extend across the existing street to create an amphitheatre with views toward the Inner Harbour. A pavilion provides a central destination and programming space throughout all seasons. Expanded plaza space allows for the opportunity for a small public washroom.

A combined space for fire department staging and commercial loading is maintained at both the northern and southern ends of the block. At 65 metres in length, this is the shortest block on the street which, together with the emergency vehicle staging areas, provides access for fire suppression and commercial loading. This concept is premised on emphasizing Government Street as a pedestrian priority street, and supporting greater opportunities for seasonal events, festivities and cultural programming within the plaza. Piloting a full closure within the envisioned plaza space between Humboldt and Courtney Streets is recommended to assess impacts and trade-offs and inform detailed design and implementation.

8. Courtney to Yates Refresh

From Courtney to Yates Streets, a refresh and infrastructure maintenance program is envisioned, enhancing its pedestrian priority and introducing higher quality and more permanent streetscape elements based on the temporary interventions implemented as part of the BBV program. Commercial loading zones and timed daily vehicle access to the street would be maintained. A single travel lane between Courtney and View streets will provide more public space and areas for community programming. The one-way north travel lane is designed to be flexible during timed car-free zones, welcoming pedestrians, bicycles, scooters, skateboards, horse drawn carriages, and pedi-cabs. Physical barriers such as gates or removable bollards and signage define timed car-free periods. Northbound traffic between Yates and View streets would be maintained at all times.

When open to vehicles, speeds would be reduced through streetscape design and lowered speed limits. As upgrades are made along the street, existing curbs and let downs would be improved where they provide barriers to physical accessibility. Gradual replacement of street trees at or nearing end of life would occur, phased to minimize visual and construction impacts and to integrate with surface infrastructure renewal along the street. This includes identifying opportunities for trees in-ground within the expanded pedestrian zone in areas that are free from underground infrastructure.



Engagement feedback and level of support: Feedback indicated overall very strong support for the Courtney to Yates Streets refresh design, with the survey indicating support from 82% of survey respondents, and 76% of respondents who identified as business owners.

9. Yates to Pandora Re-Design

Under the proposed design concept, the pedestrian mall experience at Yates is extended north to Pandora, including wider sidewalks and street furniture, while maintaining two-way vehicle access. New street trees would be planted in the expanded pedestrian space at the edge of the new curb and in-ground wherever possible.

This would establish a clear route of passage for people walking and strolling. Drop-off and pick up areas, vehicle and bicycle parking and loading areas are incorporated along the street. New seating areas, including flex spaces for programming and patios, create a welcoming destination. A design feature and landmark would acknowledge the historic creek and former boundary between Chinatown and Old Town.

Engagement feedback and level of support:

Feedback indicated overall very strong support for the Yates to Pandora Streets refresh design, with the survey indicating support from 82% of survey respondents, and 77% of respondents who identified as business owners.



10. A Plaza for Chinatown

Realignment of the Government and Pandora intersection is an opportunity to create a new public plaza for Chinatown, by reimagining the existing sidewalk area and converting the existing circular vehicle service lane to pedestrian space. This plaza is envisioned to be a focal point for the Chinatown community and would include landscaped planters and in-ground trees, public and patio seating, and a public washroom with the potential to integrate a small kiosk to support regular activation and eyes on the plaza, and considering design linkages with Centennial Square.



Creative integration of play elements, materials and design features reflecting the character and identity of Chinatown, and a flexible design to support a range of programming and events, including Chinese New Year celebrations, will continue to be informed by further and on-going engagement with the Chinatown community. More detailed design and construction of this plaza is anticipated to occur as part of the application process for and redevelopment of 603 Pandora Avenue, the site where the former Plaza Hotel was located.

Engagement feedback and level of support: Feedback indicated overall very strong support for the Chinatown Plaza concept, with the survey indicating support from 85% of survey respondents, and 81% of respondents who identified as business owners.

11. Cultural Interpretation, Reconciliation and Equity

Today, sections of Government Street strongly emphasize the colonial and early settlement history of the city. In order to provide a welcoming and inclusive streetscape, several treatments and approaches can be used to demonstrate the City's commitment to cultural interpretation, reconciliation and equity.

Expanding the narrative of Government Street to educate and build increased awareness about the Indigenous history and continued presence and stewardship of these lands by Indigenous peoples is a key direction provided by Songhees and Esquimalt Nation representatives. Telling the "full story of this place" is one of the most important aspects of this project and was strongly supported through public and stakeholder engagement. Future changes to Government Street are not about replacing or removing heritage elements or narratives but expanding and fixing the narrative to include other stories, perspectives, and histories. The City will continue to protect and express architectural heritage and history of the city as the approach to heritage conservation and interpretation are updated and adapted in the context of reconciliation.

Collaboration with Esquimalt and Songhees Nation representatives included partnering on a successful grant application to the Heritage B.C. 150 Time Immemorial Grant Program (Attachment 5) to develop a cultural interpretative strategy along six blocks of Government Street in the Old Town heritage district in support of implementation. It is envisioned that this work would be led and directed by the Nations, with support and additional resources provided by the City. This interpretive strategy will include considerations for Indigenous public realm cultural heritage and programming. It will gather both tangible and intangible (living) cultural assets of Lekwungen people through a variety of outreach, engagement, and research activities. Outcomes will inform detailed streetscape design, programming and public art investments, from everyday finishes such as benches, tree grates, lighting and paving patterns to ephemeral elements such as planting, audio or light installations. A variety and combination of public art, potentially including sculptural, digital, durational and performance-based could also be included. The process itself will help foster stronger ongoing working relationships between the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and the City of Victoria.

Future detailed design efforts will also include an ongoing dialogue with the Chinatown community to inform the Chinatown Plaza at Pandora Avenue. Through this work, the City will ensure that the cultural interpretation, art, programming and design at the northern end of the corridor are shaped by and reflects the history and current contributions of the Chinatown Community.

12. Parades and Events

The Concept Vision is premised on the idea that parades and events involving vehicles and floats, or that otherwise require greater roadway width, are accommodated on adjacent streets, such as Wharf or Douglas Streets. Government Street would then become a destination for parade-supportive programming. For example, Government Street would become the place to get hot apple cider and go to a winter market during the Santa Light Parade, go to a community event after the Pride Parade, or to meet friends at a restaurant or outside for a picnic. With its pedestrian priority, Government Street would still be able to support smaller events, protests and parades focused on pedestrian-oriented activity.

13. Mobility

The overall vision for Government Street is premised on its continued transformation into a vibrant and flexible people-priority street that functions as a destination rather than a vehicle thoroughfare. This includes designing for adaptability to allow the street to accommodate a range of different needs, activities and events based on time of day, day of the week and season.

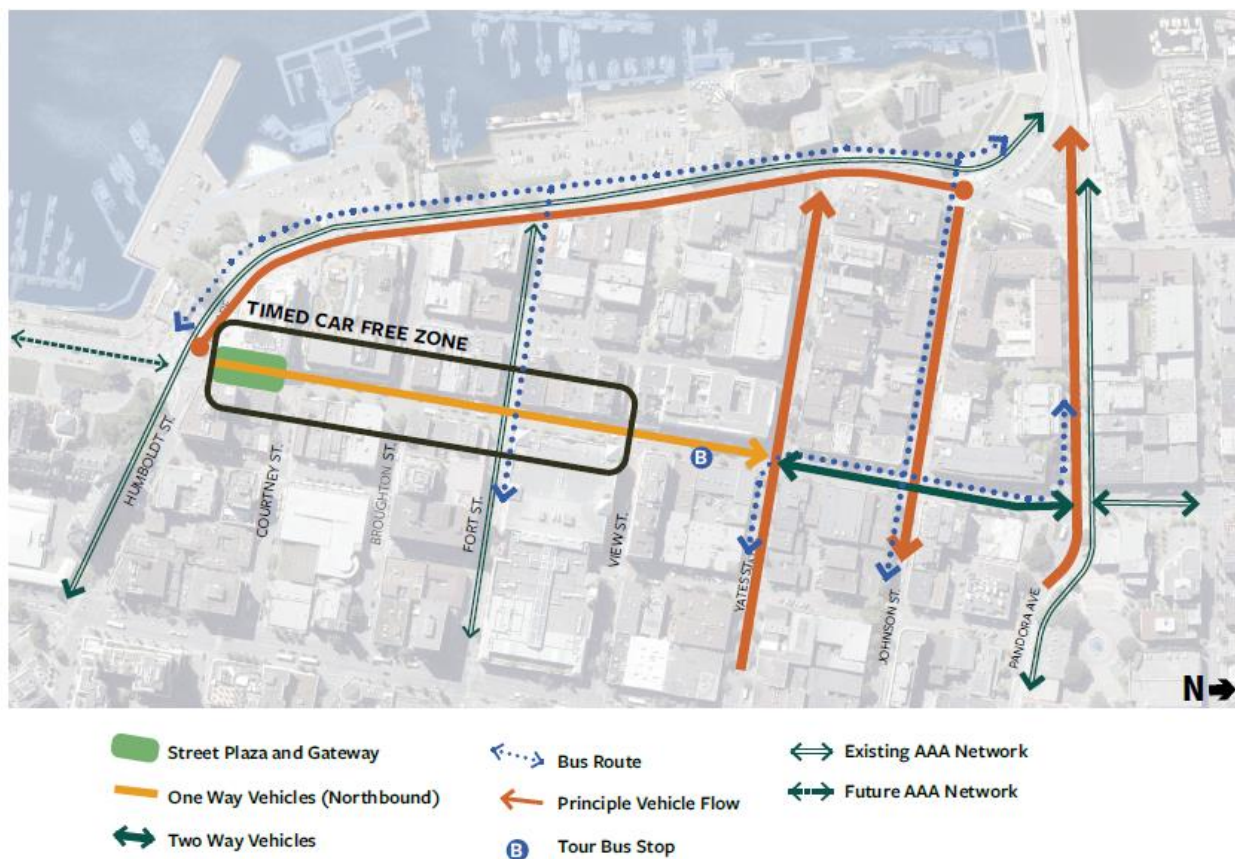
The proposed design prioritizes pedestrians through wider sidewalks, permeable roadways and expanded seating areas. The design also envisions Government Street as a place for people who are biking for leisure, making connections to the broader cycling network, and who are visiting Government Street as a destination. Skateboards, bicycles and other mobility devices are welcomed in this slow, shared environment.

Timed daily car-free zones are proposed to remain from Humboldt to View streets, with northbound vehicle traffic in a single lane accommodated when the roadway is open. One-way northbound vehicle traffic is maintained at all times from View to Yates streets. Two-way vehicle traffic is maintained between Yates Street and Pandora Avenue, with a single travel lane in each direction. In the design concept, people cycling would share the road with motor vehicles, relying on reduced vehicle volumes and speeds for increased comfort.

The broader Downtown mobility network provides access to Government Street, while through-movements will be accommodated on surrounding streets such as Blanshard, Douglas and Wharf streets. East-west streets will help to provide space for commercial loading, accessible and short-term parking, passenger pick up and drop off, and links to nearby parkades.

Two-way traffic will be introduced on Courtney Street west of Government Street later this year, complementing recent changes to facilitate two-way traffic on View Street east of Government Street. BC transit services would continue to be accommodated north of Yates Street.

A full closure to motor vehicles from Humboldt to Courtney Streets has been explored and can be piloted as part of ongoing temporary interventions and programming.



14. **Phase 2 Engagement highlights:** Over the span of three weeks, the City received comprehensive input from 1,063 people in the online survey, through 50 emails, and by the project leads participating in eight virtual focus group sessions with members of the public, local businesses, tourism operators, event organizers, City of Victoria Youth Council, Victoria Downtown Residents Association and leaders in the Chinatown community. 86% of survey respondents indicated support or strong support for the overall concept, with the following summary of key themes also identified:

- **Welcoming and safe** – through programming, maintenance and services
- **Support local businesses** – don't place competing pop-up vendors or food trucks next to competing businesses
- **Programming and Events** – dedicated space to support a diversity of performance and events with a combination of Community and City led events.
- **Washrooms and seating** – More public washrooms throughout and more seating that is accessible and covered to protect from sun and rain
- **Permanent high-quality restaurant patios** – Standardize requirements to create permanent, high-quality restaurant patios mixed with public seating and patio spaces
- **Accessibility** – Significant support for accessible seating with backs, accessible sidewalks/curbs/ roadways and intersections, with nearby accessible drop-off parking.
- **Green space** – More green space and tree canopy, including balancing large canopy trees in ground with smaller trees in planters and including opportunities for native plant species.

15. Implementation

The Government Street Refresh design concept is intended to provide guidance for future incremental improvements on the street, delivered as part of annual operations/maintenance, underground and transportation capital programs, and land development applications.

In this regard, while the concept may or may not be realized immediately, it will not 'gather dust' assuming the associated capital funding is provided, and the appropriate delivery team is in place.

The Government Street Refresh design concept represents one of the most complex projects delivered by the City in many years, with multiple phases, and competing demands and priorities of aging infrastructure. It also requires high levels of engineering and coordination between underground utility replacements, under-sidewalk basement assessments, the replacement and redesign of traffic signals and streetlights which are at end of life, the replacement of street trees which are nearing end of life, road repaving, sidewalk widening as well as potential relocation of third party utilities. Thorough infrastructure planning and design are especially important on a corridor with high quality aspirations such as Government Street to minimize the risks of future underground infrastructure repairs.

Expected to be delivered over several years, the project will be occurring in one of the City's most high-profile areas and all the benefits of refreshing Government Street described in this report, also represent future complexity with seasonal constraints or restricted construction timing, ongoing outreach and liaising with businesses, and other key stakeholders.

Against this background, dedicated engineering design and construction staff will be recruited to ensure the complex and high-impact demands associated with the delivery are properly met.

16. Phasing and Next Steps

This report seeks Council authorization to develop an implementation strategy and initiate detailed design reflecting the planned first phase of construction. This would involve the water main

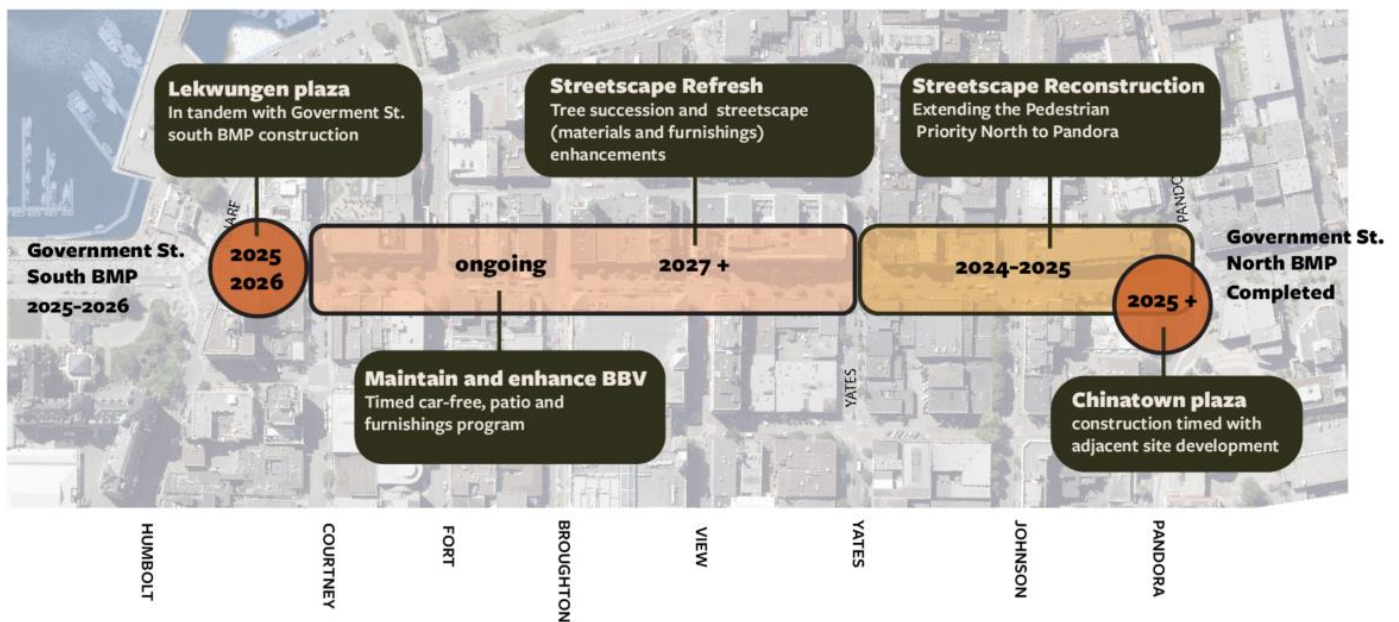
replacement from Pandora Avenue, southwards to just past Yates Street, provisionally scheduled to start in 2023 as part of the DMAF program and supportive contributions of underground infrastructure upgrades and replacements.

Subject to formal plan dates, the first of the surface improvements within this extent of Government Street would follow occurring in 2024/2025 involving sidewalk widening, the re-design and replacement of several signalized intersections and road re-paving. Depending on the status of any future development applications at Pandora/Government, coordination of construction of the proposed plaza would also be required.

Should Council direct staff to implement a pilot project of a full closure of Government Street between Humboldt and Broughton Streets, this will allow staff to come back to Council in the future with recommendations as to whether to make it permanent in advance of the design of the Lekwungen Plaza.

In the “Refresh Zone” between Courtney and Yates, watermain upgrades between Broughton and Yates Streets are planned to occur before the end of 2028. This would be followed by surface restoration, and phased replacement of street trees.

Phased implementation will be timed to minimize construction impacts and disruptions to businesses and users of the street. The conceptual phasing strategy is illustrated in the diagram below. The anticipated timing of each phase is subject to risk to change based on budget and staffing resources and the creation of a dedicated project team, contractor pricing and availability, unexpected scope due to under sidewalk basements or third-party utilities, community and agency partner engagement and coordination with adjacent development.



OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Accessibility Impact Statement

The Government Street Refresh Vision is premised on advancing key goals from the City’s Accessibility Framework, including removing barriers to people of all abilities, and creating a more welcoming, diverse and safe environment. Future detailed design and implementation will include ongoing involvement of accessibility expertise, including engaging with an accessibility consultant

with lived experience, to provide technical inputs and accessibility audits, as part of design iteration.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

The Government Street Refresh vision and implementation strategy advances the following 2022 Action (11) under the Objective: Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods (Objective 8): *Create a 'people-priority' Government Street with a complete transformation of the street between Humboldt and Yates to be completed by the end of 2022.*

Impacts to Financial Plan

In anticipation of the Government Street Refresh concept design coming before Council, the 2022 Financial Plan included \$500,000 to allow the start of the first phase of the project between Yates and Pandora, described in this report. If the concept is approved, staff will initiate the initial design work and recruitment of a project coordinator to support successful delivery of the future phases.

The 2022 Financial Plan also identifies a budget of \$1.5 million for 2023 and \$1.5 million for 2024. As detailed design progress and phasing is confirmed, these will be confirmed as part of future Financial Plan submissions.

With the high-profile nature of this project, the sensitive location in the heart of downtown and the complex and multi-layered nature of the work, additional demands on staff resources in areas of business relations and outreach, urban design, transportation and Parks, Recreation and Facilities are expected. These will be assessed and brought forward for consideration as part of the 2023 Financial Plan process.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The Government Street Refresh Vision and Design Concept are consistent with the *Official Community Plan* (2012) which includes direction to enhance the pedestrian corridor along Government Street Mall through the extension of public realm improvements northward to Pembroke Street.

CONCLUSIONS

The Government Street Refresh Vision celebrates Government Street's past success while allowing for its ongoing growth and transformation in the context of achieving and balancing City goals and priorities. With all its complexities, this project presents a clear path forward to guide the continued enhancement of Government Street as a welcoming, inclusive and diverse people place that is a true reflection of the City's values and identity.

Respectfully submitted,

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Director, Engineering and Public Works

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

- Attachment 1: Vision Report
- Attachment 2: Background Report
- Attachment 3: Government Street Refresh Engagement Summary
- Attachment 3A: Appendix A – Indigenous Engagement
- Attachment 3B: Appendix B – Public and Stakeholder Engagement, Phase 1
- Attachment 3C: Appendix C – Public and Stakeholder Engagement, Phase 2
- Attachment 3D: Appendix D – Stakeholder Working Group Engagement
- Attachment 4: Best Practices and Disability and Business Impacts Study
- Attachment 5: 150 Time Immemorial Grant Program Application
- Attachment 6: StreetLight Traffic Analysis Memo Summary