

## **Council Member Motion For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of 18 January 2024**

**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** 18 January 2024

From: Councillor Jeremy Caradonna and Councillor Matt Dell

**Subject:** Accelerating the network of greener, quieter, low-traffic streets

## **BACKGROUND**

Victoria has a long history of increasing the supply of safe and accessible community space via innovative street usage and selected road closures. Some of the more well-known low-traffic locations and pocket parks include the intersections of Blackwood and Kings, North Dairy and Doncaster, Cedar Hill and Lang, Pandora and Chambers, McClure Plaza, and Gladstone Mall (Fernwood Square), amongst many other examples.

It is important to spotlight Fernwood Square. Once upon a time, traffic flowed through the area that is now a car-free zone. In the mid-1970s, the Square was created, despite vocal pushback from many community members. In the end, a pedestrianized zone was created that runs only 60 metres from Fernwood Road to the western edge of the Square. This relatively small road closure has had a transformative effect on the culture and vibrancy of Fernwood. Today, the Square is a highly valued gathering place, a site of connection, lounging, active play, and patio seating. Every year, in June, Fernfest activates the Square with music, dancing, and food. Fernwood is not Fernwood without Fernwood Square, and a simple road closure is what made it possible.

The City has the potential to create new "Fernwood Squares" by closing down underutilized roads to install placemaking features and public amenities, add new green space, and expand the urban forest. Moreover, strategic road closures can create safer public spaces for increased liveability, especially for kids, families, seniors, and those with mobility challenges.

Partial road closures would align broadly with many of the official policies adopted by the city, including the Climate Leadership Plan, the Official Community Plan, and Go Victoria, all of which champion active living, public space, and low-impact modes of transportation. Further, street closures align with many aspects of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, including a Guiding Value ("embrace urban evolution, innovation, and adaptation"), a Transportation priority ("install new amenities and improve the 'moving experience' of pedestrians, mobility device users, and the public generally"), two Parks, Recreation, and Gathering Spaces priorities ("create more public gathering spaces with experiential features" and "accelerate policies and practices to realize the Urban Forest Master Plan"), an Economic Health and Community Vitality priority ("activate streets, sidewalks, patios, and public space, and support business initiatives and ideas"), and an Arts, Culture, Music, Sport, and Entertainment priority ("enhance supports and amenities for recreational, youth, and professional sports in the city").

## RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to identify, accelerate, and pilot partial or complete road closures to create or enable new boulevards, community spaces, placemaking initiatives, and green spaces; and that staff use some or all of the following criteria to guide and prioritize pilot projects:

- identify areas in which overall impacts to traffic flow are marginal;
- enhance safety for children, pedestrians, seniors, and those with mobility challenges, as well as pilots that enhance liveability and community vibrancy;
- consider ways of activating streets and supporting small businesses via new pedestrianized zones;
- choose projects that connect green spaces bifurcated by roads and/or connect school grounds to green spaces;
- ensure prioritization for greenspace, pollinator corridors, biodiverse native plants, shade trees, and, where possible, food-producing plants;
- where possible, implement bioswales, rainwater gardens, and other green stormwater strategies

Respectfully submitted,

Coun. Jeremy Caradonna

Coun. Matt Dell