



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of July 13, 2017

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** June 28, 2017
From: Jonathan Tinney, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development
Subject: Downtown Public Realm Plan Adoption

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council approve the City of Victoria Downtown Public Realm Plan, 2017 to replace the City of Victoria Downtown Beautification Strategy and Kit-of-Parts, January 26, 1995.
2. That Council direct staff to amend the Subdivision and Development Services by-law to reference the Downtown Public Realm Plan to direct frontage improvements for development within the downtown.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown Public Realm Plan establishes a renewed vision, design framework and set of principles, strategies and standards for ensuring a unique, walkable, timeless and high-quality downtown environment befitting of its role as the Provincial Capital. This plan is further premised on respecting and showcasing Chinatown, Canada's oldest Chinatown and a National Historic Site, as well as Old Town, one of the country's largest heritage conservation areas.

Continued growth in the number of people living and working in the downtown core increases the importance of public streets and open spaces to function as high-quality amenity spaces and 'outdoor living rooms'. At the same time, key public spaces and streets such as Centennial Square and Douglas Street are showing signs of age and a lack of vitality.

Further, individual streetscape improvements that have occurred over the years have been somewhat piecemeal. This has resulted in a patchwork quilt of materials, furnishings and colours, and a somewhat cluttered and complex public realm environment in some locations, detracting from legibility and accessibility and posing challenges for maintenance and operations.

This Downtown Public Realm Plan includes identification of priority public realm improvements over the short, medium and long term, and steps for implementation; as well as, a detailed catalogue of furnishings, materials, colours and specifications to guide improvements and updates to downtown streetscapes. In this way, the Downtown Public Realm Plan clarifies important requirements for public spaces, waterfront and streetscape design.

Plan highlights include:

- design directions, priorities and implementation actions for Government Street, Centennial Square and Douglas Street

- a reduced number of character precincts and a simplified palette of street furnishings, colours and materials to create a more unified, cohesive and durable public realm environment
- maintaining and focusing important heritage features such as cluster lights in Old Town, the Inner Harbour, and other key downtown streets, and the Pagoda Lights in Chinatown, while introducing a new more modern lights and other streetscape elements in select precincts.

BACKGROUND

Between September 2016 and March 2017, stakeholders and members of the public were engaged to develop a new Downtown Public Realm Plan as part of the *Visual Victoria* Planning Process. This process took place over three phases and was led by the consultants, PWL Partnership Landscape Architects, together with an interdepartmental working group with staff from Engineering and Public Works, Parks, Arts and Culture, Community Planning, and Engagement.

Development of a new Downtown Public Realm Plan was a key action from the Downtown Core Area Plan adopted in 2011 (*Visual Victoria* also included development of a new City-wide Wayfinding Strategy which was adopted in April 2017). Upon adoption, the new Downtown Public Realm Plan would replace the existing Downtown Beautification Strategy and the associated “Kit-of-Parts” (adopted in 1995.)

The process included three public workshops, four stakeholder workshops, presentations to the Heritage Advisory Panel, the Accessibility Working Group, Greater Victoria Place Making Network, and on-line surveys and questionnaires. Members of the stakeholder group included representatives from business, resident, tourism, arts and culture, neighbourhood, Council Committees and other groups and organizations. In March 2017, a draft Downtown Public Realm Plan was shared with the public and stakeholders for additional input and feedback.

A summary of feedback from phases 1-3, including a summary of feedback on the complete draft document, are included as an attachment to this report.

DOWNTOWN PUBLIC REALM PLAN OVERVIEW

The Downtown Public Realm Plan establishes a renewed vision, design framework and set of principles, strategies and standards for ensuring a unique, walkable, timeless and high-quality downtown environment befitting of its role as the Provincial Capital. This Plan is further premised on respecting and showcasing Chinatown, Canada’s oldest Chinatown and a national historic site, as well as Old Town, one of the country’s largest heritage conservation areas.

This plan includes identification of priority public realm improvements over the short, medium and long term and steps for implementation; as well as, a detailed catalogue of furnishings, materials, colours and specifications to guide improvements and updates to downtown streetscapes. In this way, the Downtown Public Realm Plan clarifies important requirements for public spaces, waterfront and streetscape design for both public and private sector professionals engaged in the facilitation, design, approvals and implementation of public realm improvements and infrastructure. The overarching purpose and intent of the document is to support the creation of a memorable and positive image of the Downtown and the city as a whole based on its rich history and vision for the future, while enhancing its unique identity and supporting vitality, accessibility and usability.

The first section of the plan presents the background and rationale for the plan. Section two lays out the design framework including a set of principles, strategies for implementation, and priority public realm improvements. Section three is comprised of a set of design guidelines and specifications to guide developer initiated (frontage) improvements and capital projects, as well as maintenance and upgrades for public streets and open spaces. Section four presents the implementation framework including a set of priority actions and projects along with timing, partnerships, departmental responsibilities, and other implementation considerations.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Downtown Victoria has a rich cultural and architectural heritage and is considered to be one of the most vibrant, walkable and recognizable downtowns in North America. These characteristics, along with the significant role played by the city's public spaces, contribute to Victoria's unique identity, liveability and urban vitality. Past public and private investments in the city's urban fabric have created and revitalized a number of walkable districts in and around the downtown core with distinct visual identities and strong destinations for both visitors and residents.

Since the early 20th century, sub-districts such as the Inner Harbour Causeway/Provincial Legislative area and the city's two Heritage Conservation Areas – Chinatown and Old Town – have been recognized as diverse components of a compact, multi-faceted city core. The city's public realm and open spaces also link a host of key destinations, services and attractions both within and outside the downtown core. In addition, key corridors such as Douglas Street and Government Street, connect major citywide attractions and destinations and provide key points of entry into the downtown area and a focal point for business activity.

The 1995 Beautification Strategy formalized and expanded a number of character precincts, each with its own colour palette, street furniture and paving materials. At the same time, individual 'frontage improvements' and business precinct branding have sometimes deviated from the Kit-of-Parts. In addition, a number of public realm improvements have occurred over the years, most notably to Government Street, Broad Street and Douglas Street. Further, Victoria's Downtown Core has expanded and the original character precincts have evolved. Together, this has resulted in a patchwork quilt of materials, furnishings and paving patterns creating a busy, inconsistent and sometimes cluttered public realm that can be, at times, challenging to navigate and costly to maintain.

Continued growth in the number of people living and working in the downtown core increases the importance of public streets and open spaces to function as high-quality amenity spaces and 'outdoor living rooms'. At the same time, key public spaces and streets such as Centennial Square and Douglas Street are showing signs of age and a lack of vitality.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

The Downtown Public Realm Plan is guided by the following principles:

- **Simplify** the palette of furnishings and materials to create a 'quiet canvas'
- **Activate** underutilized public spaces through short, medium and long term strategies
- **Slow Down** by embracing the pedestrian pace and activity in the downtown
- **Connect** key downtown public places and create route alternatives by emphasizing and linking a network of alleyways and mid-block connections
- **Respect** context and history to ensure materials enhance, rather than detract, from rich and diverse architectural heritage
- **Prioritize** public realm improvement projects and focus on implementation
- **Play:** Integrate play elements into the public realm

Key plan strategies and approaches include:

- a reduced number of character precincts and a simplified 'kit-of-parts' to:
 - i. create a more unified, cohesive and 'timeless' downtown public realm environment that is responsive to different character areas
 - ii. support the rich architectural heritage and business vitality that gives the downtown its unique identity and character
 - iii. support a more efficient maintenance program over time through the use of fewer, and more higher-quality, durable materials.
- focus higher quality materials and features at block corners with a simplified treatment mid-block
- ensure high-quality and continuous tree planting where possible
- a simplified colour palette for metal components of street furniture and lights:
 - i. glossy black to create a timeless, unified downtown aesthetic and support a wide-range of architectural styles and periods
 - ii. red in Chinatown to maintain and enhance unique identify and character.
- reintroduction of City-owned bench design for both wooden and metal benches
- a renewed pedestrian light strategy that:
 - i. focuses cluster lights to emphasize and further distinguish iconic status of Old Town and Inner Harbour Precincts and key streets (Yates, Fort, Broughton and Courtney) outside of these precincts
 - ii. maintains 'Pagoda' style lights in Chinatown
 - iii. proposes a new 'modern heritage' style light for Newtown and Rock Bay Precincts.
- a detailed set of streetscape standards and catalogue of product specifications to streamline and simplify development approvals and capital projects
- an emphasis on use of established and readily available furnishings and materials where possible
- an emphasis on use of City-owned furnishing designs and fabrication where practical
- clear description of linkages and integration with other plans and initiatives related to the downtown public realm.

Priority Public Realm Improvements

The Downtown Public Realm Plan identifies priority public realm improvement projects and actions, including a high-level site assessment and design directions to guide future, more detailed designs for the following key projects:

- **Centennial Square:** A vision for long-term change beginning with smaller scale, temporary interventions:
 - i. create 'active edges' with temporary installations and activities and, over the long term, through new building development
 - ii. create better connection and open up to Douglas Street
 - iii. open up the Square to better support events, festivals and other activities.
- **Government Street:** Enhancing this pedestrian priority street as a true 'shared space' where pedestrians set the pace for all modes of travel:
 - i. short term: refresh pedestrian mall from Wharf Street to Yates Street
 - ii. medium term: complete the street: extend pedestrian mall treatment to Chinatown
 - iii. envision long-term change: design for a curb-less, shared festival street environment.

- **Douglas Street:** a vision for a highly urban, transit-oriented corridor with its own identity.
 - i. short to medium term:
 - a. develop a street and pedestrian light strategy scaled and unique to Douglas Street
 - b. develop a unique kit-of-parts
 - c. continue implementing continuous street tree canopy
 - d. seek opportunities for temporary implementation to test long-term vision.
 - ii. Long term: reconfiguration as a rapid transit corridor with greater pedestrian emphasis.
- An implementation framework including:
 - i. priorities and timelines
 - ii. project phasing
 - iii. departmental roles and responsibilities
 - iv. considerations for departmental work plans
 - v. partnerships and funding considerations.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Downtown Public Realm Plan includes an implementation framework including identification of short, medium and long term actions, project phasing, departmental roles and responsibilities, considerations for departmental work plans, partnerships and other funding opportunities.

Implementation of the updated streetscape furnishing, materials and repainting will occur gradually over time through a combination of the following three mechanisms:

1. **Developer Initiated Improvements:** New streetscape standards will be implemented as part of improvements undertaken for new development in the downtown either through required frontage improvements, or through negotiated public realm investments.
2. **Operations and Maintenance Program:** New streetscape furnishing and materials specified in this plan will be implemented over time as part of the City's regular program of maintenance and replacement. This will include identification of priority streetscape improvement areas.
3. **Capital Plan and Projects:** Priority public realm improvements identified in the plan, such as streetscape improvements to Government Streets and Douglas Street, updates to Centennial Square, and phased re-development of Ship Point, will be planned and implemented on a case-by-case basis through the financial planning process with funding sources and timing balanced with consideration of available resources and other City priorities based on Council Direction.

Implementation Framework

Major capital projects, such as implementation of separated bike lanes and the Harbour Pathway, will include implementation of the new streetscape standards where appropriate. Additionally, priority capital improvements may also be undertaken either on a stand-alone basis or concurrently with other works (either public or private) to meet key strategic plan goals of the City. Once approved in the financial plan, including additional resources if required, these projects will be incorporated into the work plans of affected departments.

Short Term (0-5 Years)

	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERSHIPS	IN CURRENT WORKPLAN	PRIORITY LEVEL
1	Centennial Square Master Plan	» Undertake a Master Plan process for Centennial Square and adjacent buildings addressing short medium and long term objectives and site program directions established by this plan.	Planning	DVBA	Yes	High
2	Government Street Streetscape Update (Wharf to Yates)	» Confirm design and location of new furnishing, planters, and street trees, as directed by this plan.	Planning	DVBA	No	High
3	Government Street Streetscape Implementation	» The streetscape of Government Street will be implemented according to the outcomes of Action 2.	Engineering and PW	DVBA	No	Medium
4	Downtown Pedestrian Light Strategy	» Identify and specify new pedestrian light and implementation program as directed by this plan.	Engineering and PW	-	No	Medium
5	Douglas Corridor Street Light and Furnishing Strategy	» Identify new street and pedestrian light program and furnishing program and an implementation strategy for Douglas Street within the Downtown Study Area.	Engineering and PW	DVBA, BC Transit	No	Medium
6	Ship Point Master Plan Phase I Implementation	» Undertake a Master Plan based on the site and program objectives established by the harbour Vitality Principles and implement Phase 1.	Planning	GVHA	Yes	High
7	Conceptual and Detailed Design for Government Street (Yates to Herald Street)	» Undertake Conceptual and Detailed Design for Government Street from Yates to Herald Street based on objectives and design directions established by this plan, and in the context of the larger Government Street Corridor including consideration of re-instating 2-way traffic, incorporation of bike facilities, and reconfiguring the intersection of Wharf and Government Street as a major Downtown Gateway.	Planning	DVBA	No	Medium
8	Undertake a Waterfront Public Art Strategy	» The Arts Culture and Events department to spearhead a Waterfront Public Strategy.	Arts and Culture	DVBA	No	Low

Medium Term (5-10 years)

	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERSHIPS	IN CURRENT WORKPLAN	PRIORITY LEVEL
9	Government Street Improvements (Yates Street to Herald Street)	» Based on detailed design and results of Action 8, Government Street will undergo a series of improvements from Yates Street to Herald Street.	Engineering and PW	DVBA	No	High
10	Douglas Street Conceptual Design	» Undertake conceptual design to reconfigure Douglas Street within the downtown study area as a Transit Oriented Corridor and major pedestrian promenade as directed by this plan.	Planning	DVBA, BC Transit	No	Medium

Long Term (10+Years)

	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERSHIPS	IN CURRENT WORKPLAN	PRIORITY LEVEL
11	Douglas Street Detailed Design	» Based on the conceptual design and results of Action 11, a detailed design to be developed for Douglas Street.	Engineering and PW	DVBA, BC Transit	No	High
12	Douglas Street Construction	» Construction of Douglas Street improvements based on detailed design and results of Action 12.	Engineering and PW	DVBA, BC Transit	No	Medium

Downtown Public Realm Working Group

An interdepartmental Staff Working Group will be formed to monitor and identify implementation opportunities and provide guidance to capital projects related to public spaces in the downtown. The committee will be coordinated by the Planning Department and meet quarterly and more frequently as needed, and be made up of representation from the Arts and Culture, Engineering/Street Operations, Public Works, Parks, Planning, and Engagement departments.

Impacts to Financial Plan

As part of the 2018 Budget process, a funding request will be brought forward for Council's consideration to implement key short term actions related to Government Street improvements. This includes detailed design and costing for an update to street furnishings and landscaping for the portion of Government Street from Wharf Street to Yates Street and schematic design and costing for the Government Street mall extension from Yates Street to Chinatown. In addition, staff will ensure that the Downtown Public Realm Plan is considered along with other departmental capital plans to help identify priority public realm projects and to inform and update the Capital Budget process each year.

2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan

This project advances multiple Strategic Plan objectives, including *Engage and Empower the Community*, *Strive for Excellence in Planning and Land Use* by enlivening public spaces, *Enhance and Steward Public Spaces, Green Spaces and Food Systems* by undertaking a Centennial Square Master Plan, and *Create a Multi-Modal and Active Transportation Network* by making walking safe, comfortable and enjoyable.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

This project is consistent with the *Official Community Plan*. It advances Transportation and Mobility objectives through Right-of-Way improvements that enhance pedestrian comfort and interest. It advances Placemaking (Urban Design and Heritage) objectives through public realm design features which contribute to place character and integrates heritage considerations. It also advances Economy – Tourism and Visitor Services objectives by strengthening the appeal of Victoria.

Accessibility Impact Statement

A key objective of the Downtown Public Realm Plan is to create an accessible and barrier-free downtown pedestrian environment. Draft plan concepts and approaches were presented to the Accessibility Working Group in fall of 2016, and was feedback collected. Representatives from the Accessibility Working Group were also part of the Project Stakeholder Team which met four times throughout the process.

The Public Realm Plan proposes use of long-lasting, quality materials that are easily accessible and promote safety for all ages and abilities, and a materials palette that will facilitate barrier-free, universal accessibility throughout Victoria's downtown public realm. Public realm furnishings, materials and applications included in the Plan document are consistent with the MMCD standards and guidelines.

The plan includes a recommendation to use tactile domes to mark pedestrian crossings in the downtown. The City will be undertaking pilot projects in the fall of 2017 to study and test the functionality of tactile domes throughout the City as a means of improving accessibility for those with limited visibility. In response to feedback received from Accessibility Working Group representatives on the draft Plan document at the March 30, 2017 Stakeholder meeting, the draft Plan was revised to incorporate a more simplified approach to paving materials and patterns at intersections to enhance accessibility, and specifically, legibility for those with visual impairments.

CONCLUSIONS

Staff, with the support from a consulting team, have worked with the public and stakeholders to update the vision, framework and design standards for the downtown public realm, and further, to identify priority projects and implementation steps. The Downtown Public Realm Plan will improve the walkability, legibility and accessibility of the City, support tourism, and contribute to a memorable and positive image of Victoria. Staff recommend beginning implementation of identified Short Term Actions upon adoption of the Strategy, reporting back to Council as part of the 2018 financial planning process for funding to support implementation

Respectfully submitted,

Joaquin Karakas
Senior Urban Designer
Community Planning

Jonathan Tinney
Director
Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

Date: _____

List of Attachments:

- Attachment 1: City of Victoria Downtown Public Realm Plan
- Attachment 2: Summary of Feedback on Visual Victoria (Downtown Public Realm Plan Component)