

**Mission**

*Strengthening the Oaklands community by providing programs, services and resources for its residents, businesses and visitors.*

July 29, 2016

Mayor and Council  
City of Victoria  
1 Centennial Square, Victoria BC

Dear Mayor and Council:

**Re: Structure and accountability for community engagement**

The City of Victoria has established a very ambitious agenda over the last couple of years, from small-scale improvements for pedestrian safety to city-wide projects such as the Biketoria bicycle path network and much more. Concurrent with these initiatives, City Council has made a serious commitment to engage citizens in planning and decision making processes. Oaklands Community Association (OCA) wishes to extend our sincere appreciation of the City's efforts but we also recognize the challenges for all involved with such enormous undertakings.

Victoria conducted 25 consultation processes in 2014 and 86 in 2015, as stated by a City planner. The effort required to keep track of and respond to such a high increase in city announcements, invitations and requests for engagement is just not sustainable for community-based organizations with as broad a mandate as ours. However, OCA recognizes the importance of our continued involvement in civic engagement with the City of Victoria and its citizens. Thus, in addition to the letter of June 5, 2016 sent to you from several neighbourhood associations, OCA would like to contribute our perspectives and comments on the above-noted topic.

Oaklands Community Association echoes other neighbourhood associations' concerns with recent community engagement processes for public policy, land use and infrastructure projects in Victoria. In reference to the City's Civic Engagement Strategy (2012), as well as OCA's recent experiences with both city-wide and specific public initiatives in Oaklands, we would greatly appreciate the City Council's consideration of the following in your deliberations on future engagements:

- Recognize and support the recommended role of neighbourhood associations in civic engagement as outlined in your Civic Engagement Strategy (p.20). We have a broad community mandate with membership comprised of all who live, work, volunteer or own property in the Oaklands neighbourhood.
- Assist neighbourhood associations to shift from reactive mode to proactive mode. Over the past year, OCA and its members have experienced multiple frustrations with municipal consultations and communications mishaps associated with: Biketoria, Doncaster pathway development, Ryan Street repaving and sidewalk construction, establishing the Department of Civic Engagement and Strategic Planning, Doncaster Street upgrades and proposed Higgins Street upgrades.
- Consult specific neighbourhood associations on civic engagement planning when a public initiative directly affects our respective neighbourhoods. In addition to incorporating local insights and networks, this directive will engage neighbourhood associations early in the process and avoid the last minute scramble that occurred under the Biketoria initiative earlier this spring.

- Allocate adequate staff/consultant time and associated resources to ensure successful engagement outcomes. Neighbourhood associations can help mobilize networks, communicate with members of the community, and support city efforts. Two weeks' notice may be enough time for a Board, CALUC or staff member to attend a public meeting but it is not enough time to represent the interests, concerns and suggestions of our members. To ensure that OCA involvement and participation is representative of our neighbourhood, and to fit within our meeting and communication schedules, the Board and Land Use Committee need 4-6 weeks' notice at a minimum, depending on the scale of our involvement.
- Ensure City staff members and consultants have the tools, time and resources needed to successfully complete all components of a consultation process, including timely reporting to stakeholders and citizens on how their contributions are being considered or incorporated into recommendations and decisions. For example, this year OCA Land Use Committee invited City staff to report back to the community on the Doncaster Path consultations and final plan. Although this happened very late in the process (only a couple of days before construction began), the staff explained how each community concern and suggestion was accounted for in the pathway design and why some suggestions couldn't be adopted. Despite the overall frustration with gaps in communication and consultation for this local project, this final step was appreciated immensely and the staffs' responsiveness has contributed toward building better relations between the City, its citizens and OCA.

In the letter of June 5, seven neighbourhood associations invited the City to take advantage of Victoria's existing system of neighbourhood organizations and CALUCs as an avenue for civic engagement. Concerned residents of our neighbourhood have also expressed their interest in OCA as a consultation conduit for public development proposals. Although we have limited capacity, with anticipated improvements resulting from the CALUC Review and the Public Engagement Road Map, OCA will do its best to participate in and support City engagement efforts. However, we cannot do this without thoughtful consideration from Council and City staff on issues related to proper assignment of timelines, and your respective roles and decisions that affect our ability to engage.

It is clear that everyone is working hard to build collective capacity for community engagement. The City of Victoria's Civic Engagement Strategy is a good baseline, with an accurate assessment of the challenges of engagement and recommendations to address these challenges. The document reminds us of the need to be patient as the City implements the Strategy. Ongoing reflection and learning from front-line experiences is also a necessary part of this process.

This letter is respectfully submitted by the Oaklands Community Association in the hope that our comments and suggestions will help improve the City's efforts in engaging neighbourhood associations and members of our community.

Sincerely,



Kim Walker  
President, Oaklands Community Association  
[board@oaklandsca.com](mailto:board@oaklandsca.com)

/cc Jason Johnson, Community Associations/CALUCS, Traci Fontana-Wegelin

Oaklands Community Centre  
2827 Belmont Ave #1, Victoria BC V8R 4B2

Oaklands Neighbourhood House  
2629 Victor Street, Victoria BC V8R 4E3