

May 04,2009

Mayor and Council  
City of Victoria

**Subject:** Updating Neighbourhood Plans and the Official Community Plan

In March of 2007 Council instructed the newly formed City of Victoria Neighbourhood Planning Division (NPD) to undertake a review of updating the Official Community Plan (OCP) and neighbourhood plans and come back with their recommendations. One year later in March of 2008 based on those recommendations our previous council passed a motion which gives the NPD the go-ahead to start the process for updating the Official Community Plan (OCP) for the city and to include within that plan the process for updating neighbourhood Plans, with a time frame of **two to three years** for completion. Once the process for updating neighbourhood plans has been created within the OCP then a single neighbourhood would be selected to complete their neighbourhood plan under this process time frame **of one to two years**. If the process is successful the city will then permit the rest of the neighbourhoods to commence their updates (another **one to two years**) to complete).

I know that you know that this timeline is unacceptable and to take two years to create a document, that just talks about a plan, to create a plan, to include a plan, that one of us can try. It doesn't install a great deal of hope and confidence in how this story is going to end.

At the last council meeting on the topic and several sequent different meetings, members of council and the Mayor clearly stated that they are not prepared to wait years for the OCP and neighbourhood plans to be updated and offered some alternative suggestions. The Fairfield Gonzales Planning and Zoning Committee supports those recommendations and would like to take this opportunity offer some additional suggestions as well.

#### **Principal Goals**

- To preserve the aspects that define our neighbourhoods while continuing to embrace responsible growth and development.
- To have it clearly understood that our neighbourhood plans and other similar documents are valid and current until such time that they are updated, amended, revised or replaced.
- To immediately start the process for updating neighbourhood plan and to do so through a bottom-up approach. (meaning: public-driven , city- guided and council-supported)
- To have the outcome of all updates, amendments, revisions or the complete replacement of neighbourhood plans adopted within Official Community Plan (OCP)

#### **Alternative Approach**

The suggestions put forth by members of council included, expediting the overall process, doing a comprehensive update of neighbourhood village plans and validating existing neighbourhood plans and other such documents. Other suggestions put forth by various neighbourhood Land Use Committee representatives included, updating Victoria's Official Community Plan and Neighbourhood Plan simultaneously, accepting existing plans and related documents as valid, doing a bottom up approach with regards to the neighbourhood plan updates and adopting all outcomes into the OCP. The one thing everybody was adamant about was no more studies, no more delays, no more excuses. Council has recently demonstraightened their desire to change the way of doing business, not only to involve the community, but to work with the community. What better subject to continue this new approach of doing business then the update of the OCP and especially neighbourhood plans.

#### **Proposed recommendations for updating the OCP and Neighbourhood Plans put forth by the Fairfield Gonzales Planning and Zoning Committee supported by the Association.**

1. That the information within all existing neighbourhood plans and other similarly related documents be regarded as valid and current until such time as the document or specific information within has been superseded through an approved, community supported process.

2. The update of neighbourhood plans or sections within be done in a bottom up manner giving the neighbourhoods and other participants ownership in the process and the outcome. This can be achieved by the city provides the overall guiding criteria with regards to participation, content and timeline. Once the community demonstrates to the city its ability to meet the requirements, it may proceed with the project. Specific staff services will be provided at stages to guide and council the community through to the completion of the project, this would include reviewing the wording of the documents. Upon completion, a review of the documents by council and hopefully a recommendation to proceed to a Public Hearing and the subsequent adoption into the OCP.
3. That council approve an expedited process that will see an immediate start to a comprehensive review and, where required, update to the section of neighbourhood plans that apply to the village or commercial community center. It is important to note that this would be an update of a section of existing plans and not the creation of new precinct plans.
4. All outcomes of any amendments, revisions or updates of neighbourhood plans in the future be adopted within the Official Community Plan for the city. The neighbourhoods own the plan and this is a means to preserve their integrity. Future changes to the plans must be supported by the neighbourhoods through community consultation and approved by council.
5. Should a single project or item trigger a review or an exemption, from the OCP or existing neighbourhood plans and other similarly related documents, that it be required to meet a predetermined specific list of criteria for such action. This would expedite the process and significantly reduce undue cost, delays, speculation and controversy, by providing a framework for all of us to work within. We understand that exceptions will arise, but having the criteria may prompt the reasons why a particular exception should be allowed.

In order to fully utilize the time this would also be a great opportunity for neighbourhoods to form other focus groups who are interested, knowledgeable and passionate in a specific topic such as heritage, transportation, parks, environment, social planning, zoning and other such topics and to do the initial ground work (research & recommendations) in their specific topic of interest with an understanding of how it must fit into the overall document. This would lay the foundation for the overall update of individual neighbourhood plans. It is our recommendation that the creation or updating of the OCP take a similar approach. Then representatives from each group work together to integrate these sections into the overall plan. It has been our experience that people are motivated and challenged when driven by passion for a specific topic.

We are confident that given some resources and commencing a public driven, city guided, and council supported update of the neighbourhood plans that once we have the focus groups formed, we could not only have a draft document of a village plan to present to council we could have a draft document of the completed neighborhood plan update.

For years we as neighbourhood associations and committees have worked together assisting each other in every possible way. Taking on a project of this nature would only encourage this to continue. What better model could there be for the city when you have neighbourhoods who may be better equipped to take on such a project and are willing to assist those who are not yet in that position. Only a couple years ago Fairfield completed a comprehensive visioning process that involved hundreds of participation and is the accepted foundation for updating community plans. Not only was this accepted by council, it was also suggested by them to be used as a model for all other neighbourhoods in their visioning process.

The Fairfield Gonzales Planning and Zoning Committee area of responsibility covers, Fairfield, Gonzales, Humboldt Valley, and Cathedral Hill, combined we have the highest number of development applications in the city overall. Yet according to the City of Victoria, **Fairfield is the only neighbourhood in the city that does not have a neighbourhood plan, let alone one that is outdated.**

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Planning and Zoning Committee