

# CITY OF VICTORIA

## Committee of the Whole Report

**Date:** April 22, 2008                      **From:** Mark Hornell, Manager of Community Planning

**Subject:** Downtown Plan Update – Preferred Option

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### Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to recommend a preferred option as the basis for preparation of a draft Downtown Plan Update. The report summarizes four options for managing growth to 2026 in the Downtown and adjacent areas, presented at a public open house held at City Hall on November 7, 2007. The results of the public consultation process, including an online survey and written submissions, have been received.

The report addressed three issues related to the options:

1. Accommodating forecast growth;
2. Complexity in community preferences; and
3. Consistency with identified goals.

The report concludes that preparing a draft Downtown Plan Update on the basis of Option 3 – Crosstown, with the provision for harbour pathway extensions and public park space at Rock Bay drawn from Option 4, provides a sound basis for moving forward that responds well to expressed public preferences and triple bottom line considerations, accommodates forecast growth, and includes desired additional public access to the Upper Harbour waterfront, within a marine-oriented industrial context.

### Recommendation:

That Council direct staff to develop a draft Downtown Plan Update on the basis of Option 3 – Cross Town, with the inclusion of public park space and harbour pathway extensions adjacent to Rock Bay.

Respectfully submitted,

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## 1. Purpose

To recommend a preferred option as the basis for preparation of a draft Downtown Plan Update.

## 2. Background

Attachment A describes four options for managing growth to 2026 in the Downtown and adjacent areas, presented at a public open house held at City Hall on November 7, 2007. All four options:

- Seek to accommodate 10–15 thousand additional residents, and forecast demand for 853,000 to 1.2 million m<sup>2</sup> (9–12 million square feet) of new building floor area;
- Retain the scale, place character and heritage values of Old Town, Chinatown and the Inner Harbour precinct;
- Assume development of rapid transit on a dedicated corridor along Douglas Street;
- Assume development of circulating transit within Downtown;
- Assume development of the Harbour Pathway along the Inner and Upper Harbourfronts, and at least one acre of new parkland; and
- Propose public realm and urban design improvements to complement existing quality of place and transition to adjacent neighbourhoods.

**Option 1 – In Town** would keep new development tight to the existing Downtown boundary, with opportunity for increased density and height in the north end of Downtown adjacent to Chinatown. **Option 2 – Up Town** would focus new development and increased building height along the rapid transit corridor north to Bay Street. **Option 3 – Cross Town** complements the rapid transit corridor focus of Option 2, with a high density corridor running east into Harris Green focused on Yates Street. **Option 4 – Around Town** would generally limit height in all new development areas to create a mid-rise high-density central area, where waterfront industrial uses are redeveloped over time as Rock Bay emerges as a high density, mixed-use and residential area. General descriptive features of the four options are summarized below:

Characteristic	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Area of Analysis	106 ha. (262 acres)	128 ha. (317 acres)	128 ha. (317 acres)	133 ha. (327 acres)
- % Residential	13.6%	20.6%	20.4%	30.3%
- % Commercial	20.4%	15.4%	16.7%	13.0%
- % Mixed Use	42.9%	42.4%	41.3%	44.4%
- % Industrial	10.9%	10.2%	10.2%	1.4%
Max. Buildable Density (FSR)	6.0:1	7.0:1	7.0:1	6.0:1
Blocks with Density >5.0:1	20	22	24	2
Maximum Height (extent of area covered varies by option)	59 m.	72 m.	72 m.	59 m.
Potential New Residential Units	5,200 - 6,800	8,000 – 10,500	8,000 – 10,400	9,500 – 12,400
Potential New Residents	7,800 – 10,200	12,000–15,700	12,000–15,600	14,200 – 18,600
Potential New Jobs	13,200–17,200	12,000–15,700	13,700–17,900	10,200 – 13,300
Industrial Land Area	11.6 ha.	13.2 ha.	13.2 ha.	1.8 ha.
Blocks with mid-block walkways	37	45	45	46
Circulating Transit Route Length	3.2 km	3.7 km	4.6 km	5.5 km

### 3. Issues

- (1) Accommodating forecast growth.
- (2) Complexity in community preferences.
- (3) Consistency with identified goals.

### 4. Analysis

#### (1) Accommodating forecast growth

The Coriolis report, *Analysis of the Urban Development Potential of Downtown Victoria 2006-2026*, provided 20 year estimates for floorspace demand for residential, office, retail and service, and hotel room uses. The total demand was projected to be between 853,800 – 1,174,300 m<sup>2</sup> of new floorspace to 2026. Existing capacity of the Downtown and Harris Green (including parcels that are either vacant or built at less than 50% of their existing zoning entitlement) was estimated at between 557,400 and 743,200 m<sup>2</sup>. In comparing forecast demands with estimated capacity, Coriolis identified a shortfall of between **110,600–616,900 m<sup>2</sup>**. Under current conditions, the report concludes that remaining development capacity will be absorbed within 10–15 years, with opportunities for office and possibly hotel development diminishing more quickly, due to the ability of residential use to outbid office for available development sites.

The development capacity of each option can be estimated by combining the current estimate of vacant and underutilized land, with the density assumptions for each option, and comparing these figures to the annual demand forecasts from the Coriolis report. As summarized in the table below, all options have the capacity to accommodate the 20 year demand forecast under a low annual demand/high capacity scenario, with potential buildout ranges between 28 and 37 years. However, under a high demand/low capacity scenario, Option 1, at 16 years performs only slightly better than current conditions; Options 2, 3, and 4 can accommodate forecast growth with buildout periods ranging from 19–21 years.

Capacity/Demand	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
<b>Estimated Capacity - Low</b> (m <sup>2</sup> residential and commercial)	910,300	1,133,900	1,185,700	1,210,500
<b>Estimated Capacity - High</b> (m <sup>2</sup> residential and commercial)	1,190,400	1,482,800	1,550,500	1,583,000
<b>Low Annual Demand</b> (m <sup>2</sup> /annum)	42,700	42,700	42,700	42,700
<b>High Annual Demand</b> (m <sup>2</sup> /annum)	58,700	58,700	58,700	58,700
<b>*Years to Buildout - Low</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>**Years to Buildout - High</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>

\* Years to Buildout - Low: indicates the length of time to reach option buildout under a scenario that combines estimates of Low Capacity with High Annual Demand

\*\* Years to Buildout - High: indicates the length of time to reach option buildout under a scenario that combines estimates of High Capacity with Low Annual Demand

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**(2) Complexity in community preferences:**

Attachment B summarizes the process and findings of public consultation on the four Options. The findings represent the views only of those individuals and organizations that participated in the process, not a random survey. Approximately 350 people attended the open house and 194 surveys were completed. Thirty-one written submissions were received and are included in Attachment C. Overall, the findings reveal that among respondents:

- Option 3 – Cross-Town is the most preferred Option: 46% of total respondents and 49% of Victoria respondents ranked Option 3 their most preferred Option.
- Option 1 – In-Town is the least preferred Option: 65% of total and Victoria respondents ranked it their least preferred Option, and only 3% their most preferred Option.

A substantial number of respondents (37% of total, 36% of Victoria respondents) identified Option 4 – Around Town as their most preferred Option. However, Option 2 – Up Town was the preferred second choice of most respondents (35% of total, 39% of Victoria respondents). One can conclude from these findings that a clear majority of respondents prefer to see future Downtown growth and development with a focus on the Douglas Street rapid transit corridor.

The results are somewhat contradictory with regard to how Option 3 can be enhanced. Respondents pointed to the retention of the working harbour in Rock Bay, the development of a dynamic skyline, increased growth and density in Downtown and Harris Green, as clear benefits of Option 3. However, when asked to identify how Option 3 could be improved, the inclusion of residential and mixed uses in Rock Bay, as well as providing greater parks and public access to the Rock Bay waterfront (ideas from Option 4), were most frequently suggested by respondents.

These contradictions become more evident in the responses to survey question 4, which asks respondents to identify three ideas from any of the Options that they dislike the most. Removing industry from Rock Bay was disliked by 31 respondents, whereas keeping Rock Bay industrial was disliked by 26 respondents. Similarly, 22 respondents disliked the idea of permitting greater height Downtown, whereas 19 disliked height restrictions. The survey results reveal that the future development of Rock Bay (industrial or mixed use/residential?) and building height (greater height/or restricted height?) are polarizing issues.

Of items not specifically included or addressed in the four Options that respondents believe should be included in the Downtown Plan, the top ten include:

- 1) establishment of a pedestrian only zone;
- 2) light rail transit;
- 3) arts and cultural amenities;
- 4) improved parking;
- 5) urban design/streetscape improvements and affordable housing (tie);
- 6) urban design/architectural improvements;
- 7) social housing and housing for the homeless;
- 8) improved social services;
- 9) community gardens/markets and pocket parks (tie);
- 10) cycling enhancements.

**(3) Consistency with identified goals:**

Attachment D summarizes the findings of a triple bottom line (social/economic/environmental) assessment of the four Options, that groups the specified goal statements identified in Phase One of the Downtown Plan Update process according to Council’s three sustainability goals from the Corporate Strategic Plan: environmental sustainability; social and cultural development; and economic vitality. The assessment is qualitative and reflects the perspectives of Planning & Development Department staff. The numeric score ascribed to each Option (out of a possible total of 15) reflects a relative ranking of how each Option performed against the stated objectives. As the Options focus on different ways to manage forecast growth over the next 20 years and do not present fully fleshed-out alternative plans, the assessment only addresses those goal statements that permit distinctions between the Options to be made.

Due to the qualitative nature of the assessment, conclusions drawn are highly value-dependent. While this approach lacks quantitative rigour, it does provide a structure for dialogue on the success or failure of each Option in meeting identified goals. The following table summarizes the assessment results, concluding that Option 3 best responds to triple bottom line considerations.

Option	Rating by Council Goal			Total (/15)	Summary Comments
	Env't Sust.	Social Cult. Dev't	Econ. Vitality		
1	2	3	2	7	Modest expansion; focus on rounding out/filling in the Downtown; maintains marine/industrial in Rock Bay; building heights complement historic precedents; un-dynamic skyline; under-builds rapid transit corridor; does not accommodate forecast growth.
2	4	3	4	11	Strong transit corridor focus; accommodates forecast growth; keeps marine-oriented Rock Bay industrial; areas east of Government Street convert to mixed-use/high-density residential; height/density along Douglas/ Blanshard gives dynamic skyline backdrop; office core reinforced; new growth south of Arena frames/enlivens Pandora Green; opportunity for green infrastructure focus in Rock Bay and adjacent areas.
3	4	4	4	12	Strong transit focus complemented with thrust to realize potential of Harris Green/north Pandora Green; Strengthens/focuses existing office/retail core; extends mid-rise, mixed-use pattern north to Bay Street; most dynamic skyline proposal; working harbour maintained; opportunity for green infrastructure north of Chinatown; walking distances greater than Option 1 or 2, provides basis for circulating transit.
4	3	4	2	9	Low-profile/spread development pattern; dominated by residential/mixed uses; working harbour in Rock Bay eliminated; small expansion of office/retail core; human-scaled/street-oriented, highly walkable; significant public park/open space at Rock Bay; Rock Bay/north Douglas corridor growth focus could undermine Harris Green's potential; possible reduced regional role for Downtown.

#### **4.a. Options**

- i. Endorse Option 3 – Cross Town, as the basis for preparing a draft Downtown Plan Update.
- ii. Endorse Option 3 – Cross Town, with inclusion of public park space/harbour pathway extensions adjacent to Rock Bay.
- iii. Direct staff to prepare a draft Downtown Plan Update on the basis of one of the other Options.
- iv. Direct staff to prepare another option for Council's further consideration.

#### **4.b. Resource Impacts**

No additional resource impacts on staff time or budget for either Option i, ii or iii. Option iv will further delay the project timeline and shift a portion of staff and budget resources away from preparation of a draft Plan Update.

#### **4.c. Conclusions**

Staff conclude that Option 3 – Crosstown, with the provision for harbour pathway extensions and public park space at Rock Bay drawn from Option 4, best responds to project goal and triple bottom line considerations and provides a sound basis for the preparation of a draft Downtown Plan Update. This option also responds well to expressed public preferences and includes desired additional public access to the Upper Harbour waterfront, within a marine-oriented industrial context. Option 3 presents a balanced option, that focuses future height and density along regional rapid transit and arterial traffic corridors and the Douglas/Blanshard geographic ridge, giving the opportunity for an articulated and dynamic skyline that steps building height up from the harbour, protecting public views of the water and the Sooke Hills beyond.

Similarly, the development of a secondary cross-corridor heading east along Yates Street provides an opportunity to accentuate the centre, giving further impetus to the renewal of Harris Green, and provides the opportunity for the articulation of a secondary skyline profile for the City core. The preservation of a marine industrial focus for Rock Bay, supplemented by the expansion of a mid-rise, mixed-use district north from Chinatown, strikes a balance between redeveloping underused portions of Rock Bay, with the retention of an active working harbour, a unique economic asset for Victoria.

The incorporation of public park access to Rock Bay, as a focal point along the Harbour Pathway, was identified as a desirable feature to be added to Option 3 in the consultation process. The development of the Harbour Pathway project has already identified portions of the Upper Harbour for potential public access. Although there is the potential for land use conflict between public recreational and marine industrial uses, the ability for shared industrial and public use of urban waterfronts has been proven in other cities.

#### **5. Recommendation**

That Council direct staff to develop a draft Downtown Plan Update on the basis of Option 3 – Cross Town, with the inclusion of public park space and harbour pathway extensions adjacent to Rock Bay.

**6. List of Attachments**

Attachment A – Downtown Plan Update Options Booklet (available online at [http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/departments\\_plnpln\\_downtown.shtml#options](http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/departments_plnpln_downtown.shtml#options))

Attachment B – Summary of Public Consultation Process and Findings

Attachment C – Written Submissions Received

Attachment D – Triple Bottom Line Assessment of the Four Options