

2. VICTORIA 2020 - VISION AND VALUES

This short section is both a retrospective and prospective look at Victoria; where the City has come from in the last 25 years and where it is perceived to be going in the next quarter century. The vision and values for the future build on views expressed by residents at the public meeting on February 28, 1995 the direction and trends resulting from public input during the review and update of the *Official Community Plan*.

Twenty-five years ago, Victoria, with a population of 61,000, was very different in character from the City we see today.

The Downtown was declining in population as substandard upper floor apartments were condemned. Many buildings in Old Town were used as warehouses. Overhead power lines obscured heritage building facades. Planning was just beginning on strategies to revitalize Downtown through civic projects like Centennial and Bastion Squares, and the Conference Centre.

Most of the harbour was alive with industry; sawmills, ship building, grain elevators and barge slips. The Inner Harbour was an industrial concentration of tank farms, paint factories, pile drivers, fish plants and warehouses, but the waterfront was largely inaccessible to the public.

The older neighbourhoods, particularly James Bay, Fernwood and Victoria West, were in decline with many of their heritage homes badly in need of repair, and vulnerable to demolition and redevelopment. Today, residents of these neighbourhoods feel they are strong communities renewed with a deep sense of identity and pride in their heritage.

In public discussions to update this document, residents reiterated the values which emerged in the last 25 years. These can be synthesized in a Vision of Victoria 2020 that retains its human scale and integrates the social, economic, environmental, recreational and artistic

functions to provide a strong sense of community - a community that Victorians can continue to take pride in.

The following were identified as significant in a discussion of Vision and Values by participants at the public meeting on February 28:

“Importance of neighbourhoods as building blocks for a healthy vibrant city; ... integrate uses to provide choices and recognize the variety of lifecycles and cultural diversity; ... housing mix and form to reflect the social dynamics of the neighbourhood.”
(Discussion Group #10).

“Sustain and encourage neighbourhood values and community; innovative mixed use with careful planning.” (Discussion Group #4)

“Human scale - liveable, pedestrian-friendly, walk everywhere ... Retain the natural and built heritage, the streetscapes and vistas.”
(Discussion Group #5)

Over the last 25 years, Victoria has retained and restored many of the urban qualities and values to which cities aspire today. Moving forward and incorporating these values in the planning process, an insight into Victoria in 2020 emerges.

Demographic trends suggest that by the year 2020, when the population is forecast to be close to 87,000, the younger segment of the population will have increased. The growing element of a younger population needs to be considered in developing planning policies affecting families, youth and children.

Victoria has the capacity to accommodate the population increase, given under-utilization of planned capacity to date. Most of the population growth will be in Harris Green, several neighbouring blocks in North Park, as well as the Selkirk and Songhees. These will be areas of densification and compact communities of residential development, within walking access of facilities and services for living, working, socializing and playing. They will accommodate a diverse mix of population and housing.

Neighbourhoods will have their own distinctive gathering places; local parks within walking distance, opportunities to display arts and culture, a people-friendly environment. Innovative and creative ideas will be required to provide more affordable housing.

With changes in lifestyle linked to technological change, trends are emerging that have implications for planning policy, notably telecommuting and home-based business operations. Both activities suggest a greater need for local neighbourhood services and a reduction in the number of trips to and from work. The concepts of live/work accommodation, the urban village, main street and upper-storey accommodation are all part of mixed-use development, and are an integral part of strategies supporting the home-based business economy.

The harbour will be a focal point for the City. The Dockside, Ogden and Shoal Points and the Upper Harbour will be revitalized work places serving marine needs. The waterfront will be more accessible, with a continuous public path around the shoreline from Rock Bay to Dallas Road. This uninterrupted waterfront path will allow residents and visitors to enjoy the mix of activities which will make the harbour even more of a 'people place' and gathering centre for Victoria. The Wharf Street waterfront will have interwoven the fabric of the harbour to the City with its new market. For travelers arriving by water or by air, the Inner Harbour will be a very active 'gateway'.

Downtown will be a people-friendly place for the increased number of residents it will accommodate and for the businesses, shoppers/commuters and tourists. It will be a functioning neighbourhood, as well as the region's commercial and cultural heart. Its heritage buildings will be restored. Old Town will be much more active, as long vacant upper floors are reopened to active use. North Chinatown will have changed

from industry and parking lots to a mixture of offices, apartments and retail. Downtown will continue to be compact. It will remain possible to easily walk from one end to the other in a matter of minutes.

A transportation challenge will be to balance the need to move cars and transit, with space for cyclists and pedestrians, and within neighbourhoods, use traffic calming measures to enhance safety.

While considering these developments, resources should be conserved and the natural environment that forms the indigenous character of Victoria preserved.

Residents have indicated what they value in Victoria. The Vision builds on those values by integrating them into planning policies, so that they are enhanced rather than lost to growth pressures, to achieve Victoria 2020.