

executive summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Plan is called the “Downtown Core Area Plan” – a new name to reflect Victoria’s new reality and a new plan to envision and guide growth and development over the next 30 years. This Plan provides a benchmark for the Downtown Core Area’s economic health, quality and character of buildings and space and overall livability for its residents, businesses and visitors.

This Plan builds upon the success of previous planning initiatives and renews the vision for the Downtown as a special place through policy direction that provides strategic support and direction to foster an array of public, private and partnership-based actions to improve and maintain the Downtown Core Area as the Heart of the Region.

BACKGROUND

Since 1990, planning in Downtown Victoria has been primarily guided by the *Downtown Victoria Plan*, which was developed when Victoria’s Downtown was experiencing low population and economic growth.

In 2011, the situation is very different. According to population forecasts from the Capital Regional District, the Capital Region’s population will increase to 390,000 by 2016, and to 475,000 by 2038. This represents a 31 percent increase, or 111,000 new residents, in about 30 years. It is anticipated that the Downtown Core Area’s share of that growth will be approximately 10,000 additional residents.

In addition, other growth forecasts prepared for the City indicate that, by 2026, the total amount of new additional combined floor space demand for residential, office, retail, service and hotel room uses in Downtown Victoria will be in the

range of 853,800 m² to 1,174,300 m². If these forecasts are accurate, without increasing the development potential, the Downtown neighbourhood will experience a shortfall of between 110,600 m² and 616,900 m² within the next 10 to 15 years.

In recognition of these forecasts and the potential shortfall of land and development capacity within the Downtown neighbourhood, this Plan introduces an expanded plan area with related policies to accommodate population and development growth over the next 30 years.

This Plan therefore applies to the Downtown neighbourhood and the immediately surrounding areas, referred to as the Downtown Core Area, which includes not only the Downtown neighbourhood but also the Harris Green neighbourhood, the Rock Bay portion of the Burnside neighbourhood and parts of the North Park, Fairfield and James Bay neighbourhoods.

It replaces the *Downtown Victoria Plan* (1990), the *Harris Green Neighbourhood Plan* (1995) and the *Harris Green Charrette* (1997) as the principal guide for planning decisions made by the City of Victoria within the broader Downtown Core Area. It serves as a local area plan for the Downtown and Harris Green neighbourhoods, and provides additional guidance – in conjunction with their neighbourhood plans – for the portions of Rock Bay, North Park, Fairfield, and James Bay that are located within the boundary of the Downtown Core Area.

PURPOSE

The Downtown Core Area Plan provides land use, physical development, transportation and mobility, vitality and sustainability policies and actions for the neighbourhoods that fall within the Downtown Core Area. It is intended both to guide and influence the physical, social, environmental and economic conditions of the area, and to ensure a sustainable and balanced approach to growth over the next 30 years.

The City will use this Plan to evaluate the impact and suitability of public and private projects and initiatives related to land use, development, infrastructure and transportation, and will review all private and public projects and initiatives for their ability to help achieve the Plan's vision and goals.

KEY CHALLENGES

This Plan attempts to address a number of key challenges the Downtown Core Area will face over the next 30 years. These include:

- Ensuring the Downtown Core Area has enough residential and commercial space available to keep up with short- and long-term growth forecasts, without damage to the natural environment or the livability and quality of life in the Downtown Core Area.
- Remaining the primary centre for employment, tourism and culture within the Capital Region, and the preferred location for Provincial Government offices and services.
- Providing a mix of housing, services and facilities to encourage and support a socio-economically inclusive community.
- Maintaining the historic context of Old Town, Chinatown and the Harbour in balance with new development.
- Encouraging more owners of heritage buildings to rehabilitate and upgrade their properties.
- Fostering an urban core that is able to support a rapid transit system.
- Ensuring that new development complements both the existing architecture and natural environment of the Downtown Core Area.

KEY FEATURES

In response to these challenges, the Downtown Core Area Plan provides a framework for growth and development that balances urban design, transportation, community vitality and economic objectives. The key features that are contained in this Plan include:

1. DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- Provides a new framework for land use, building height and density that supports a strategic balance between employment and residential development.
- Concentrates higher density development along the Douglas Street/Blanshard Street corridor to relieve development pressure within the historic Old Town Area, Chinatown and Victoria Harbour.

2. STRENGTHENED CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

- Expand the Central Business District (CBD) as the primary location for offices and other forms of commercial development.
- Supports the retention of commercial land within the CBD.

3. DENSITY BONUS SYSTEM

- Establishes a density framework for the Downtown Core Area that balances the need for increased density in some areas with the need to maintain livable communities through the contribution and provision toward key public amenities.
- Restricts density in some areas to a pre-determined maximum density level, but allows developers the possibility of acquiring additional density in other strategic areas, up to a specified maximum, by contributing or providing toward key public amenities.

4. INCREASED HOUSING OPTIONS

- Accommodates and fosters a greater range of housing options throughout the Downtown Core Area by land use, urban design and transportation policies, including support for non-market housing.

5. PUBLIC AMENITIES

- Identifies strategies to acquire and develop specific key public amenities such as urban plazas, park spaces, Government Street Mall extension and the Harbour Pathway.

6. HERITAGE

- Introduces an additional financial incentive to support and encourage the seismic upgrading of heritage buildings within the Downtown.
- Explores the potential to expand the Heritage Tax Incentive Program within the Downtown Core Area and lengthen its term up to 15 years.

7. TRANSPORTATION

- Provides policies and action to support the integration of infrastructure and public realm improvements that support the use of alternate modes of travel including walking, cycling, transit and a future rapid transit system.
- Concentrates higher density and transit-supportive development within walking distance of the Douglas Street transit corridor
- Recognizes the importance of Downtown Victoria as a gateway for the movement of goods and people that support the local and regional economy.

8. ECONOMIC VITALITY

- Identifies the need to develop a local area plan for the Rock Bay District, with a focus on strengthening its function as a key employment centre, within an attractive urban setting.
- Supports the economic function and role of the working Harbour, while recognizing opportunities to improve public access to the waterfront.

9. LIVABILITY

- Identifies and supports the concept of improving vitality and livability within the Downtown Core Area through initiatives and strategies to create an attractive and functional public realm, well-designed and diverse built forms, a range of amenities to serve the daily needs of residents, businesses and visitors and an improved local economy.

IMPLEMENTATION

The *Downtown Core Area Plan* is a 30-year Plan that is premised on the concerted effort and collaboration by both the public and private sectors. This Plan identifies a range of specific actions and initiatives to transform the Downtown Core Area and make this Plan a reality. It is anticipated that a detailed implementation and monitoring strategy will be developed and maintained.