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INTRODUCTION

Since it was first established in 1843 as a trading post for the Hudson’s Bay Company, Victoria has evolved into a Provincial capital city that is recognized across Canada and around the world for its tourism, education, heritage conservation, recreation, arts and culture and high quality of life. It is also renowned for its ability to retain both its character and its charm even while it continues to experience significant growth and development.

Victoria is the core city of the broader metropolitan Capital Region and its 12 additional municipalities and three electoral areas. (SEE MAP 1: THE REGION) The Downtown Core Area is the city’s (and the region’s) urban centre. Approximately 188 hectares (465 acres) in size, it is a mixed-use community that provides a blend of institutional, commercial, industrial and residential activities throughout a series of neighbourhoods. (SEE MAP 2: CITY-WIDE CONTEXT) The Downtown Core Area makes up the heart of the region’s Metropolitan Core as described in the Capital Regional District’s Regional Growth Strategy. Building upon its function as the region’s primary centre for business, employment, culture, entertainment and tourism, the Downtown Core Area Plan lays out a vision, goals, policies and actions that will ensure Victoria remains a truly remarkable place to live, work and play well into the 21st century.



Map 1: The Region

THIS PLAN

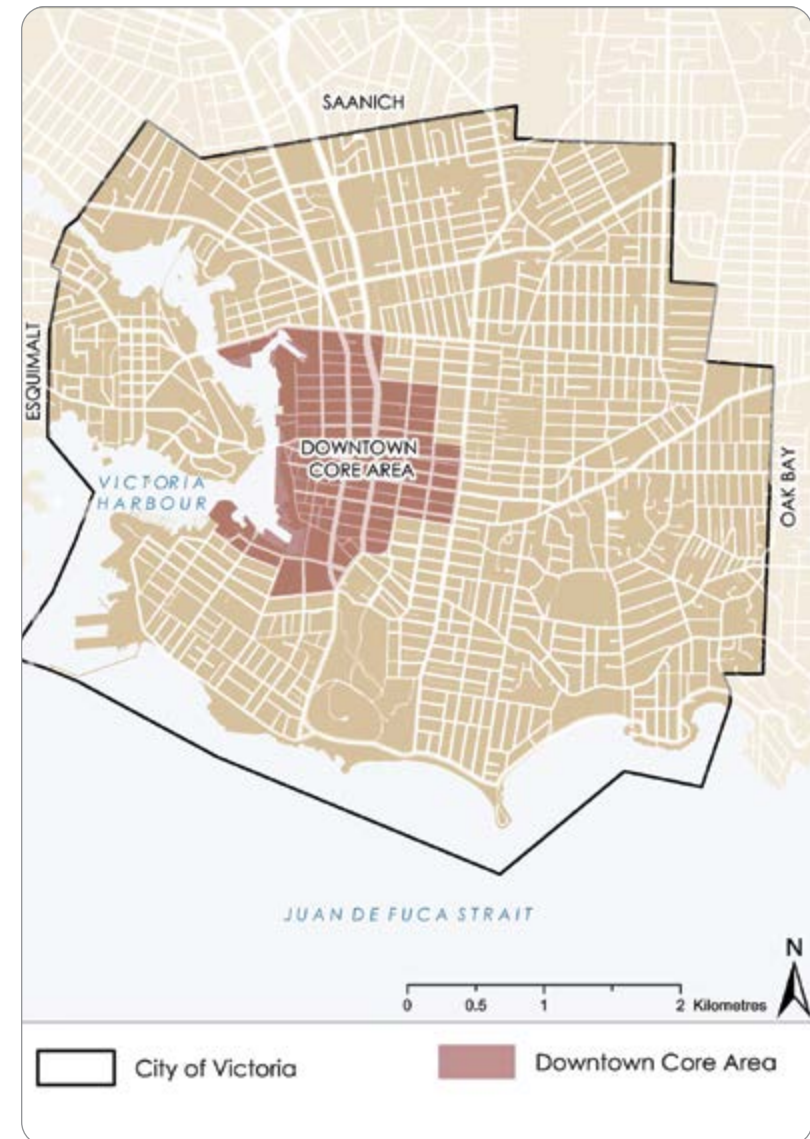
This Plan is called the “Downtown Core Area Plan” – a new name to reflect Victoria’s new urban reality.

Since 1990, planning in Downtown Victoria has been primarily guided by the *Downtown Victoria Plan*, which provided a general framework to shape the physical, economic and social form and function of downtown Victoria. When that plan was first developed, however, Victoria’s downtown was experiencing low population and economic growth. Today, in 2011, the situation is very different. Victoria has grown significantly in recent years, with steady growth expected to continue for at least the next two to three decades.

The Downtown neighbourhood alone will not be able to accommodate forecast population, employment and development. The inventory of vacant or under utilized land within the Downtown will continue to diminish over the next ten years to a level that will not be able to accommodate future demand. Challenges and opportunities that affect the Downtown neighbourhood also affect the broader Downtown Area and adjacent neighbourhoods as they too evolve to become more urban. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach to planning that considers the context, function, transitions and relationships among each neighbourhood is necessary.

This Plan applies to the Downtown Core Area, a broader area that 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. (SEE MAP 3: PLAN BOUNDARY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

This Plan 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 Downtown Core Area, and it will serve to implement the policy direction for portions of the Urban Core as described in the new *Official Community Plan*. It serves as a local area plan for the Downtown and Harris Green ...field, and James Bay that are located within the boundary of the Downtown Core Area in conjunction with their local area plans.



Map 2: City-Wide Context

PURPOSE

The Downtown Core Area Plan provides land use, physical development, transportation and mobility, vitality and sustainability policies and actions for the area that is located within the boundary of this Plan. (SEE MAP 3: PLAN BOUNDARY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS) These policies and actions are 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 in conjunction with other related policies, guidelines and regulations 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.

The City will also use this Plan as a guide in preparing operating and capital budgets, defining department work programs and determining public improvements.

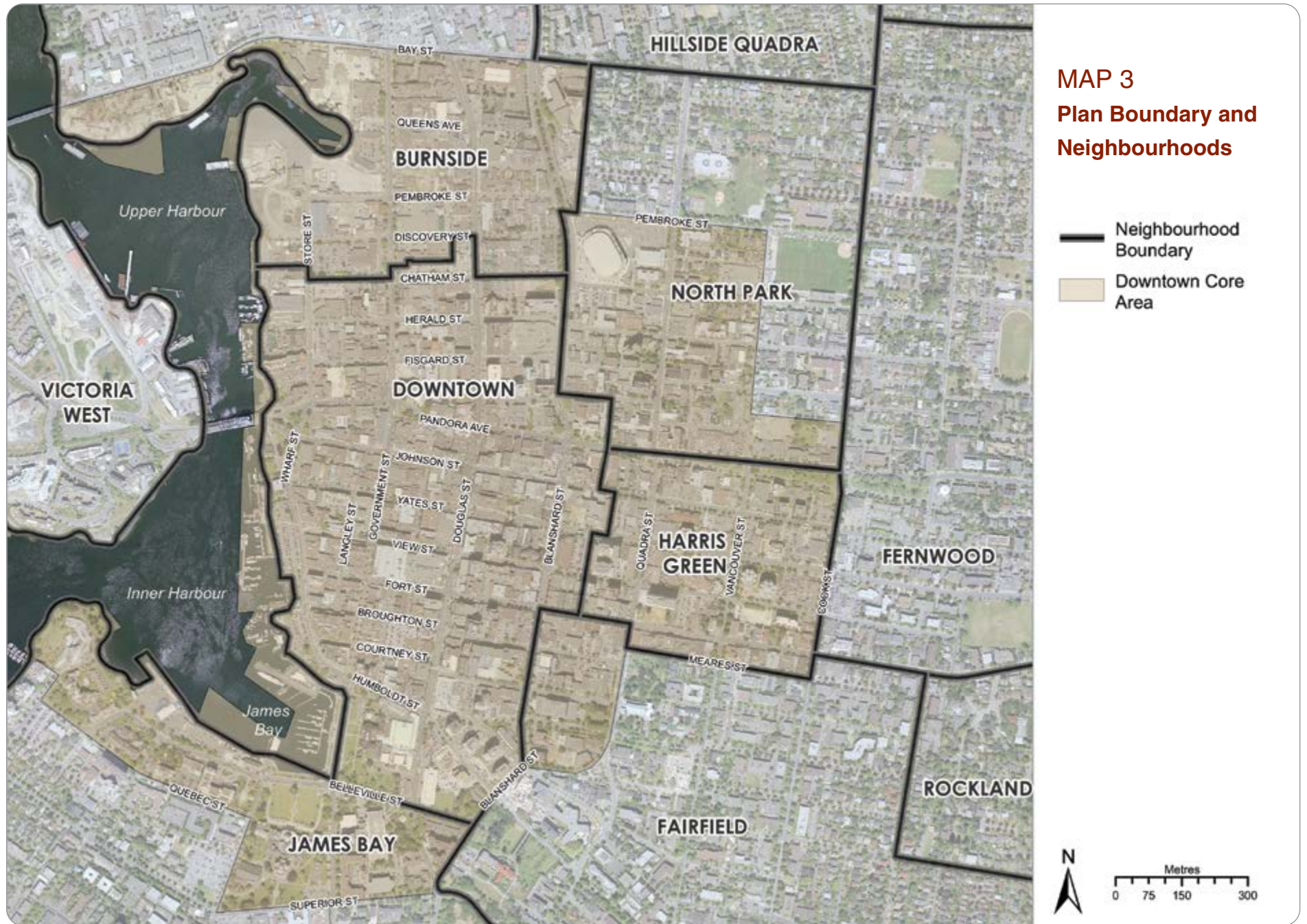
DISTRICTS

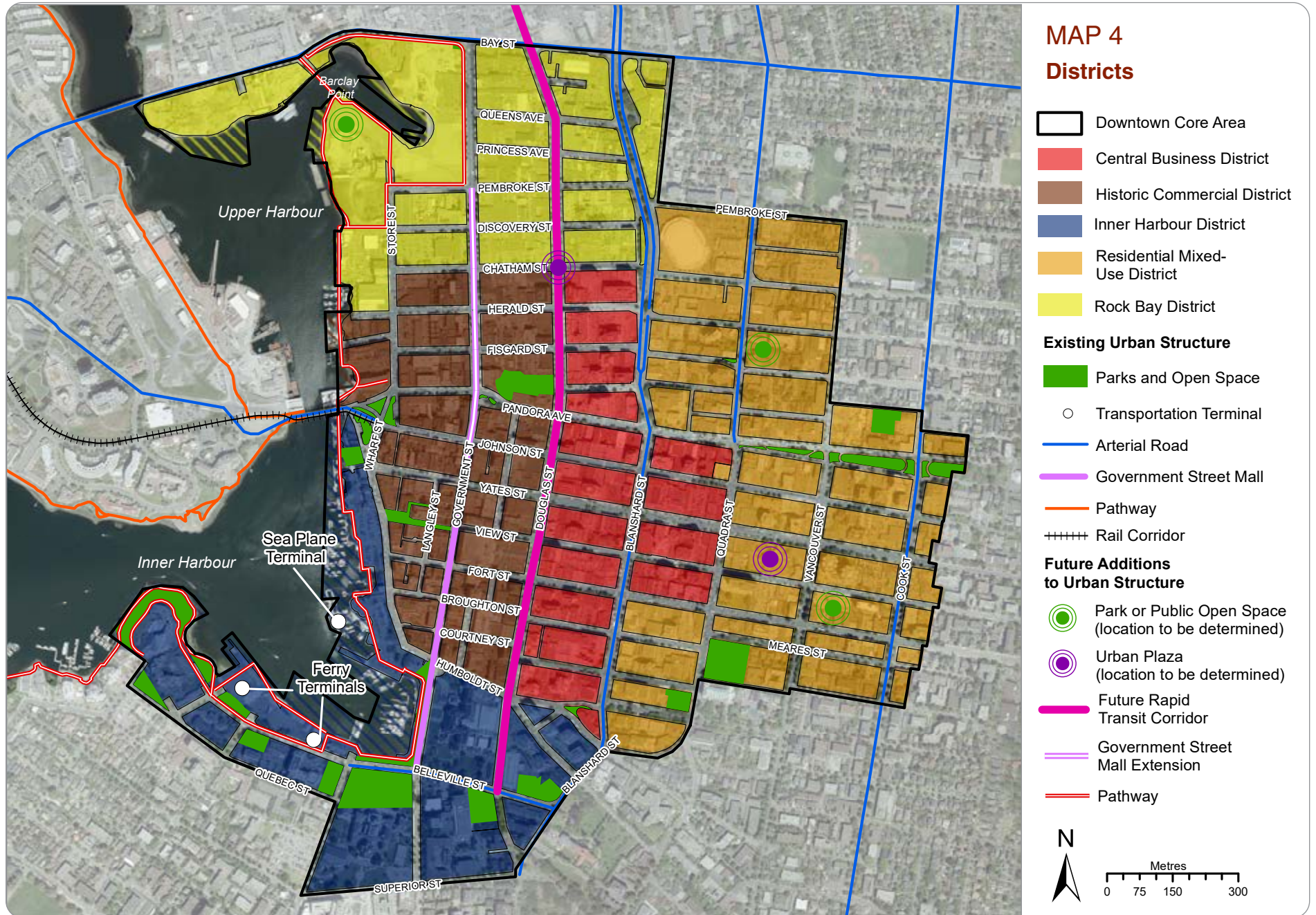
For the purposes of this Plan, the Downtown Core Area is divided into five districts:

- Central Business District
- Historic Commercial District
- Inner Harbour District
- Rock Bay District
- Residential Mixed-Use District.

(SEE MAP 4: DISTRICTS)

The new districts do not replace existing neighbourhoods and their names, boundaries or special character areas. Rather, they are a way to recognize that there are unique social, physical and environmental characteristics in certain parts of the Downtown Core Area that cut across neighbourhood boundaries and unite broader geographic areas.





MAP 4 Districts

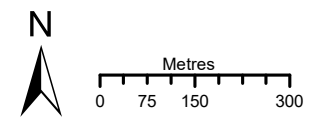
- Downtown Core Area
- Central Business District
- Historic Commercial District
- Inner Harbour District
- Residential Mixed-Use District
- Rock Bay District

Existing Urban Structure

- Parks and Open Space
- Transportation Terminal
- Arterial Road
- Government Street Mall
- Pathway
- Rail Corridor

Future Additions to Urban Structure

- Park or Public Open Space (location to be determined)
- Urban Plaza (location to be determined)
- Future Rapid Transit Corridor
- Government Street Mall Extension
- Pathway



FOUNDATION

The Downtown Core Area Plan is based on:

- Forecasts of significant population growth for this region and Victoria over the next 30 years, and the corresponding effect that growth will have on demand for office, residential and other space.
- A vision and a series of Goals for a Downtown Core Area that reflect what the City of Victoria heard clearly from the people who live and work here through a number of community workshops: that all future growth and development must strengthen the city's character, respect its scale, and support sustainability.
- A set of assumptions about the physical, social and economic conditions (existing and required) that will influence the achievement of the Downtown Core Area Plan's vision and goals.

FORECASTS

Recent forecasts related to demographics and growth provide the foundation for the range of topic areas and related policies and actions described in the Downtown Core Area Plan. Key findings for the Downtown Core Area include:

POPULATION GROWTH

- In 2008, the Capital Region as a whole had a population of about 364,000, while the City of Victoria had a population of approximately 80,000, and the Downtown Core Area had a population of about 6,050.
- According to population forecasts from the Capital Regional District (CRD), 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 the next 30 years. The CRD estimates that Victoria's share of that growth will be approximately an additional 20,000 residents, for a total population of just over 100,000 by 2041.
- According to Census information, the population in the Downtown neighbourhood increased by 17% between 2001 and 2006. The Harris Green neighbourhood population saw a 7% increase. Although more current Census information will not be available until 2012, the current population is assumed to be somewhat higher based on the various residential buildings that have been constructed since 2006 in these neighbourhoods.

EMPLOYEES AND VISITORS

- Based on 2008 statistics, on a typical workday in that year, the Downtown Core Area welcomed about 33,800 employees as well as thousands of additional shoppers and visitors.

DEVELOPMENT FLOOR SPACE

- Other more recent growth forecasts prepared for the City indicate that, by 2026, the total combined floor space demand for residential, office, retail, service and hotel room uses in the Downtown Core Area will increase by an additional 853,800 m² to 1,174,300 m².
- If these forecasts are accurate, without increasing the development potential in the Downtown Core Area, the area will experience a shortfall of between 110,600 m² and 616,900 m² of space within the next 10 to 15 years, undermining Victoria's ability to accommodate the full range of uses, retain the current balance between office and residential space, and remain the primary employment centre for the Capital Region.

VISION

The Downtown Core Area will offer an array of vibrant urban neighbourhoods surrounding a thriving, pedestrian-friendly Downtown core. All people will benefit from a high quality public and private environment and a broad range of employment, housing, shopping, and recreational opportunities, all within a well-connected and attractive urban environment that embraces the Victoria Harbour, celebrates its heritage, Victoria's role as the Provincial Capital and provides a model for livable and sustainable urbanism.

GOALS

1. To retain Victoria's prominence as the capital of British Columbia and the Downtown Core Area's position as the Heart of the Region where people love to work, live and play by:
 - 1.1. Ensuring the Downtown Core Area has enough residential and office space available to keep up with short- and long-term growth forecasts and remain the preferred location for Provincial Government offices, services and associated institutional buildings.
 - 1.2. Supporting the location of leisure, education, arts and cultural activities within the Downtown Core Area to both encourage greater local use and increase tourism and investment.
 - 1.3. Reinforcing the role of a transportation gateway and working Harbour as an essential part of Victoria's economic base.
 - 1.4. Developing a long-term retail strategy to confirm the economic importance of retail activity within the Downtown Core Area.
 - 1.5. Supporting the redevelopment of the Rock Bay District as a key employment centre.
 - 1.6. Providing a broad range of easy to access community services and public amenities, such as transit, pedestrian and cycle paths, retail, health and medical services, childcare facilities, playgrounds, schools and recreational facilities.
2. To contribute to the Downtown Core Area's rich sense of place by:
 - 2.1. Creating memorable streets and places that serve both to attract people and to benefit the community.
 - 2.2. Celebrating Victoria's architectural and cultural heritage at every opportunity.
 - 2.3. Ensuring that new development complements both the existing architecture and natural environment of the Downtown Core Area.
 - 2.4. Incorporating and linking public amenity spaces, such as open spaces, parks, plazas, pathways and the waterfront, throughout the Downtown Core Area.
3. To establish walking, cycling and public transit as the preferred modes of travel within the Downtown Core Area by:
 - 3.1. Establishing complementary land use and transportation policies, initiatives and infrastructure.
 - 3.2. Using Greenways to create attractive and safe transit/walking links throughout the Downtown Core Area.
 - 3.3. Providing safe and direct walking connections throughout the Downtown Core Area that also link public spaces, such as parks, plazas, open spaces and the waterfront.
 - 3.4. Concentrating higher density and transit-supportive new development within walking distance of the Douglas Street transit corridor.
4. To ensure excellence in building types and design within the Downtown Core Area by:
 - 4.1. Encouraging high quality architecture and diversity in the design of buildings and surrounding public areas.
 - 4.2. Recognizing historic buildings for their value and benefit to the Downtown Core Area, and encouraging their rehabilitation, seismic upgrading and integration with new development.
 - 4.3. Supporting context-sensitive developments that complement the existing Downtown Core Area through siting, orientation, massing, height, setbacks, materials and landscaping.
5. To offer a variety of housing options within the Downtown Core Area by:
 - 5.1. Developing diverse housing types and sizes to attract both individuals and families, including smaller units as well as rowhouses, townhouses and stacked townhouses.
 - 5.2. Continuing to encourage the conversion of upper storeys of Downtown heritage buildings to residential use with the financial incentives available through the City's Heritage Tax Incentive Program, and considering the idea of broadening the program's base within the Downtown Core Area.
 - 5.3. Supporting new residential development that integrates a blend of market and non-market housing.

6. To ensure the success of the Downtown Core Area Plan by:
 - 6.1. Monitoring, reviewing and updating the Downtown Core Area Plan and related policies and regulations in response to changing social, economic and physical conditions.
 - 6.2. Maintaining policy alignment between the Downtown Core Area Plan and all other related City policies, plans and regulations.
7. To exemplify environmental stewardship and ensure the Downtown Core Area evolves into an environmental showcase for the built, natural and social environments by:
 - 7.1. Encouraging new development and existing development to incorporate the use of green building technology, infrastructure and environmental design.
 - 7.2. Developing and integrating green building criteria and objectives into the approval process for both public and private development.
 - 7.3. Supporting public and private initiatives that result in the remediation of brownfield sites, especially along the Harbour.
 - 7.4. Wherever appropriate, encouraging the re-use and retrofit of existing buildings.

ASSUMPTIONS

The Downtown Core Area Plan assumes that:

1. Annual population growth within the Downtown Core Area will continue to support a projected increase of approximately 10,000 people over the next 30 years.
2. The Regional Growth Strategy will continue to support attaining a 40 per cent modal share of non-auto modes of transportation for trips to and within the Metropolitan Core by 2026.
3. The Downtown Core Area will continue to function as the largest employment centre in the region.
4. The City, BC Transit and the Province will continue to enhance and support transit services along Douglas Street through transit-supportive land use policies, activities and infrastructure.
5. The City will use the Plan to identify and prioritize capital projects within the Downtown Core Area as part of its financial planning, budgeting and departmental work programs.

6. The City will initiate amendments to development standards, policies, processes and plans (including local area plans, the *Zoning Regulation Bylaw*, Special Policy Areas and Design Guidelines) if required to implement and further refine the policies of the Downtown Core Area Plan.
7. The City will maintain consistency between the Downtown Core Area Plan and other policies and regulations to reflect the vision and goals of the Downtown Core Area Plan.
8. The Downtown Core Area will serve as the bulk of the Metropolitan Core in both the *Regional Growth Strategy* and the *Official Community Plan*.
9. The City will develop an Implementation Strategy/Action Plan for the Downtown Core Area Plan. The strategy will include a review of local development standards as well as a formal process to monitor and amend the Plan. It will also be used to identify requirements for developing the City's capital budget and departmental work programs.
10. The City will consider public-private partnerships as well as financial and regulatory tools such as development cost charges, density bonusing and tax incentives to help realize the Downtown Core Area Plan's vision and goals.

The City will review and re-evaluate the Plan if these Assumptions change significantly over time.

ORGANIZATION

The Downtown Core Area Plan is divided into ten sections and appendices. Each section including this Introduction, deal with a different aspect of the Plan and each provide both area-wide and District-specific policies and actions where applicable.

URBAN STRUCTURE

Explains the key elements of urban structure (space, movement and building form) and establishes the importance of ensuring any future physical improvements to the urban structure serve to enhance and improve the Downtown Core Area's livability and quality of life.

DISTRICTS

Describes the five Districts of the Downtown Core Area and provides policies and actions to not only preserve each District's unique character, but also to provide opportunities for improvement.

DENSITY

Introduces a framework for guiding density throughout the Downtown Core Area that balances the need for increased density in some areas with the need to maintain livable communities. Also explains a new density bonus system, intended to support the provision of key public amenities, affordable housing, and provide financial support for the conservation of heritage properties.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Describes the need for sustainable transportation and mobility systems that give priority to pedestrians, cyclists and transit, and how those systems can be achieved.

URBAN DESIGN

Explains the principles of successful urban design and how they should be applied to the Downtown Core Area's skyline, built forms, parks and open space and public realm.

HERITAGE

Details the presence and reinforces the value and importance of heritage properties in the Downtown Core Area.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Provides a policy framework for addressing various components of sustainability, including the natural environment, green buildings and infrastructure, and the transformation of the Rock Bay District into a key employment centre that incorporates sustainable planning, development and infrastructure.

COMMUNITY VITALITY

Addresses the importance of economic vitality, housing, public amenities, arts and culture, recreation, entertainment, special events and social services in building truly complete communities.

IMPLEMENTATION

Describes how the City will implement the physical improvements and the heritage, cultural, transportation and environmental initiatives, policies and actions described in this Plan.

APPENDICES

Include detailed guidelines and supporting information for specific aspects of the Downtown Core Area – such as views, public realm improvements, and building design – that support the vision, goals, policies and actions contained in this Plan.