



TOWN OF SIDNEY

Report to OCP Review Advisory Committee

TO: Chair and Committee Members
FROM: Corey Newcomb, Senior Manager of Long Range Planning
DATE: April 14, 2022 Folder No. 6480-20
SUBJECT: Summary of Public Feedback on Draft OCP

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to summarize public feedback on the draft Official Community Plan for the OCP Review Advisory Committee (“the Committee”) specifically highlighting several areas, and to briefly discuss next steps for the project.

BACKGROUND:

A first draft of the new Official Community Plan (OCP) was presented to Council on February 28, 2022. Following this, Council directed staff to undertake a six week process to engage with the community on the draft, and that feedback from this process be presented directly to the Committee for consideration and comment.

The six week period included the following community engagement activities:

- An online survey which ran for the entire six week period.
- Three in-person open house sessions at the Mary Winspear Centre on March 16th.
- A virtual open house on March 17th.
- Four “community cafes” on March 26th and 29th in various locations.
- A series of social media posts on the Town’s Facebook and Twitter accounts promoting the draft and various events.
- A series of advertisements in the Peninsula News Review promoting both the draft, the open houses, and the survey.
- A special edition of Town Talk focusing on the draft OCP was sent out to every household in Sidney that receives bulk mail (and also made available on the Town’s website).
- Posters and large format and sandwich board signs in various locations, promoting the draft.
- As directed by Council, letters were sent to every property owner whose land use designation is proposed to change, is adjacent to a change to multi-unit residential, or is proposed to be included in an expanded Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA).
- The project website was updated with various informational material, presentations, and an FAQ.

Overall, staff were pleased with the level of response during the engagement period. In addition to many phone and in-person conversations with residents explaining elements of the draft OCP, response rates for written feedback during the engagement period were as follows:

- The online survey received 350 responses.
- While the Town’s social media posts did not receive a substantial amount of direct engagement, each post did correspond with an uptick in survey responses.
- 78 people attended the March 16th open house sessions.

- 13 people attended the March 17th virtual open house.
- 122 people attended the March 26th and 29th community cafes.
- 82 emails from residents commenting on the draft.
- A petition was submitted with approximately 130 signatures regarding the proposed land use change at 2325 Harbour Road (discussed in more detail below).
- Long-form comments from the following community groups: Sidney Community Association, Saanich Peninsula Environmental Coalition (SPEC), Roberts Bay Residents Association, Friends of Shoal Harbour, and Saving our Sidney.
- Comments were also received from BC Transit, the Ministry of Lands, Water and Resource Stewardship (MLWRS) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MUNI).

DISCUSSION:

The results of the “support/don’t support” questions in the survey results demonstrated broad, although not unanimous, support for the directions in the draft OCP. There was majority support both for the general objectives of each goal/section of the draft, and also overall support for specific issues presented in the survey, such as height limits in Sidney’s downtown, expansion of the Town’s ESA’s, the extension of the waterfront walkway north to Rothesay Avenue, adding rental housing opportunities to Sidney’s ‘Neighbourhood Residential’ areas, as well as the document’s approach to action on climate change.

Specific comments, both in the survey itself and those received directly by email (*see summary package attached as Appendix A*), were much more varied, and cover an extremely wide and disparate range of opinions on each topic. A larger number of comments on a specific topic generally reflected decreased support for that idea in the survey. For example, many written comments focused on opposition to specific proposals in the land use map; this was reflected in the survey results with a larger proportion of responses opposed to the land use map overall. However, overall feedback in the survey was positive for every question.

Many emailed comments provided positive and helpful suggestions for improving the draft, often at a high level of detail. While there is not time to cover all these suggestions in detail in this report, staff will go through each of these comments individually and, where practical, amend the draft to reflect them. Generally these comments are minor in nature in terms of the overall effect on a given policy approach. Staff intend to return to Council with an updated draft that will reflect not only the larger thematic suggestions discussed below, but also more specific changes to policy resulting from these comments.

Based on the survey and written comments received, staff have identified five general themes where parts of the draft OCP need to be further developed or have not yet met the community’s expectations. In addition, three land use-specific issues were also identified. These are all discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1: Desire for increased identification and protection of natural assets and areas

This topic was initially raised by Council when they first reviewed the draft OCP on February 28th but has been echoed by other comments from the community since then. Generally, respondents felt that the ESA map should identify additional natural assets in Sidney, including some foreshore areas and the Tsehum Harbour Bird Sanctuary.

Comments also included suggestions for additional policy development related to enhancing the protection of these areas, particularly those that are public property and not covered by specific ESA Development Permit guidelines (which apply only to private property). Staff are now working to update the ESA map in the draft and incorporate additional policies that address these suggestions.

Theme 2: New “Multi-Unit Residential” designations around Neighbourhood Commercial

This issue received a wide breadth and variety of responses. As directed by Council, staff sent out approximately 1,000 letters to properties proposed to change to the ‘Multi-Unit Residential’ designation, or properties directly adjacent. Most responses to this proposed change seemed to one of two extremes; (1) that no further growth should be permitted in Sidney, particularly of the multi-unit residential type, or (2) that Sidney is not doing enough to address housing supply and additional locations for multi-unit housing are required.

In terms of the amount of land being added to the ‘Multi-Unit Residential’ designated areas, staff consider it to be fairly modest overall and located in appropriate locations, adjacent to existing commercial services and close to transportation and transit routes. (BC Transit’s response to the draft highlighted the need to locate new development in areas served by transit routes.) The vast majority of ‘Neighbourhood Residential’ designated areas in Sidney are not proposed to change (with the exception of the possible addition of rental housing opportunities such as garden suites, if the draft OCP is adopted as proposed in that regard) and generally staff believe that the modest areas of growth proposed do not represent a substantial change to the character or livability of existing neighbourhoods.

Two of the areas, one on Third Street south of Rothesay Avenue and the other between Mermaid Park and Malaview Avenue, have other policy goals also associated with the proposed land use change, specifically an extension to the waterfront walkway and a longer-term goal to renaturalize and reconnect vestigial segments of Mermaid Creek. Some respondents suggested that Multi-Unit Residential development is not a desirable outcome as part of achieving these goals; which could simply be achieved by the Town acquiring the land directly and creating parkland. Staff do not believe such an approach to be financially realistic given the cost of land in Sidney. Moreover, even without these goals, these two areas are in suitable locations for Multi-Unit Residential development, in close proximity to commercial services and transportation infrastructure.

Generally, staff believe that the modest areas of land use change being proposed are appropriate in terms of location and extent and are not considering any changes in the draft OCP.

Theme 3: Desire for more specificity around built form and density

This theme partly overlapped with issues raised in theme 2; some respondents felt that the OCP does not go far enough in specifying heights and densities for the various residential and commercial land uses. It was clear from the many comments on this topic that some residents desire a high level of certainty in the OCP around the specifics of future development, such as height and density. However, it is important to note that the role of an OCP is general in this regard; it is the Zoning Bylaw which sets specifics around the use, density and scale of a development.

That being said, staff understand the desire in the community for more specificity over and above what is currently in the draft, and will work to strike a balance between the OCP and zoning in revising the draft OCP.

Another issue raised that is related to density was a concern that the minimum lot areas specified in each land use category represented a significant increase in density in the ‘Neighbourhood Residential’ designated areas. Staff note again that it is the Zoning Bylaw which actually sets density on a property, and the current OCP already allows for minimum lot areas of approximately the same size, although it is expressed in a different way (units per hectare, or “uph” rather than minimum lot area). The Zoning Bylaw then sets specific lots areas in each zone, depending on the policy goals for each zone, up to the maximum “units per hectare” density in the OCP.

For example, although the “28 units per hectare” maximum density for Neighbourhood Residential in the current OCP allows lots as small as 357.5 square metres, lot areas in the Zoning Bylaw for this designation range from 357.5 square metres in the CD42 zone in all the way up to 930 square

metres in the R1 zone. (The proposed minimum lot area in the draft OCP is nearly the same at 350 square metres. But again, this is simply a minimum that must suit a wide variety of situations, not a policy objective for minimum lot areas in the Zoning Bylaw.)

However, staff acknowledge that the switch from uph to “square metre” lot area minimums in the draft OCP have introduced a certain level of uncertainty with some uses, such as duplexes. This will be addressed in the revised draft OCP.

Theme 4: The need for more parking

Many comments focused on fears of “parking issues” that may result from changes in use or permitted additional uses, such as garden suites, in residential neighbourhoods. Other comments focused on the need for those with mobility challenges, such as senior citizens, to have sufficient options for parking at their destination in downtown Sidney. Staff acknowledge all these concerns. While parking is perhaps one of the most difficult issues to effectively address from a policy standpoint, staff will review the draft again with the intent of providing additional policy and guidance around the allocation and provision of parking in Sidney, particularly with regard to potential future updates to the Zoning Bylaw.

Theme 5: Document Structure

Although this topic was discussed on several occasions by the OCP Review Advisory Committee and the Advisory Planning Commission, the issue of document structure was not raised directly in general community feedback. However, staff did note that many of the comments demonstrated that the structure of the draft OCP fell short in effectively communicating the intent of the OCP in areas that seemed to be of concern to the public.

The intent of the “goals-based” structure of the draft OCP was to tie together land use, transportation, and other relevant issues into a comprehensive approach to achieving the relevant goal of the OCP. However, from a practical standpoint, it is clear that the intended users of the OCP – the community itself – generally approach an issue as a single, stand-alone concern and look to the OCP for specific information in that area. They look to the OCP to better understand how the Town proposes to approach that issue they care about. Unfortunately, the goals-based approach makes it difficult to easily offer a readily accessible format in which a reader of the OCP can find this information and instead presents a complex, interconnected, and nuanced set of policies around broader questions.

While a complex and nuanced approach may be a desirable – and necessary – approach to some of the challenges that the OCP seeks to address, after considering the response to the draft from the community this may not be the most effective structure in which to present the relevant policy approaches. Staff believe that switching to a more traditional approach to structure (like that taken by the current OCP, based around land uses) would improve the document. This can be done without changing the policy itself; it can simply be reorganized in a more suitable format. Staff will work to address this issue in a revised draft.

Other Issues Raised

Staff also note the many other ideas and issues raised in the comments. In addition to the broad themes above, numerous comments also noted the following:

- The need for additional green space in conjunction with continued growth in the community;
- Improved residential neighbourhood connectivity/walkability (e.g. mid-block connections);
- The protection/enhancement of the creek in Melville Park; and
- Support for transit-oriented transportation hub in the downtown.

Staff agree that these are issues worthy of including in the OCP. Some of the issues raised, like ensuring there is adequate park space as Sidney grows, are already addressed in the draft (policies such as 4.5.19 and 4.6.3) while others are addressed but could be made more explicit.

Site-Specific Considerations

In the course of feedback, three specific sites have been raised in comments as requiring further attention in the draft OCP. These are discussed in detail below:

1. Cedarwood Motel site

Comments on this site have mostly come from residents in the immediate area who are seeking clarity on what a redevelopment of this property might look like. In the course of the OCP project, a developer with an interest in the site has presented a development concept to the community, although at present there is no development application. Planning staff have also provided feedback to the same developer regarding development concepts, as is typical in this situation.

Staff again note that many residents seem to be seeking from the OCP what only a specific development application can provide. Information on specific heights, densities and other development-specific information cannot be supplied by a general OCP document. However, staff also acknowledge that as per the discussion in “Theme 3” additional general parameters around built form and density do seem to be needed; in this case this would be provided as general guidance based on the proposed land uses for the site: Neighbourhood Commercial and Multi-Unit Residential. As noted above, staff will develop these updates for the revised draft.

2. 2325 Harbour Road

As noted above, several comments and a petition opposing the proposed change in land use on this property were received during the feedback period. The property was identified for a potential change in land use designation from Neighbourhood Residential to Harbour Road Marine Industrial. Although the zoning designation is not proposed to change at this time, nor is a specific development being proposed, this OCP land use change would be a first step toward those processes potentially happening at some point in the future.

The change is being proposed because of the property’s location and context at a busy corner where land uses change fairly abruptly from marine-industrial to residential. The current OCP and zoning designations of the property allow for a single-family home to be constructed on this corner, facing an active boat yard across Bowden Road and other marine-industrial uses across Harbour Road, increasing the potential for land use conflict.

A change to the Harbour Road Marine Industrial OCP designation could allow for a small mixed-use building that fronts Harbour Road, pulling it away from the residential uses to the south and east, creating a degree of separation and also linking that corner more completely to the Harbour Road streetscape. Zoning would specify uses, but in this case some ground floor retail or office space fronting on Harbour Road, with the potential for residential uses on upper storeys, would be appropriate. Industrial uses creating noise or fumes would not be recommended, given the proximity to adjacent residential uses and potential Blue Heron nesting areas. The intent is to create a transition site which creates a buffer between the more intense marine-industrial uses to the north and west, and the adjacent residential areas. A building on this property could be carefully sited, and the uses could be carefully permitted to ensure minimal impacts to residential properties, while contributing positively to the Harbour Road marine industrial area.

3. 2125 Beacon Avenue West (Gateway/Sidney Crossing site)

This site is proposed to be redesignated from “West Sidney Commercial” to “Downtown Commercial” in the draft OCP. The intent behind this change was to promote the concept of a more pedestrian-oriented commercial development in this location, with potential future

linkages north to the Galaran neighbourhood and east across the highway, avoiding the “strip mall” design of previous development proposals (e.g. parking in front of large format stores) acknowledging that the Town’s regulatory powers on this site are limited due to it being federal land leased to the Victoria Airport Authority (VAA).

Comments from the public were generally opposed to “retail” development on this property. The VAA expressed the opinion that given the unique circumstances of the site, a separate, unique designation would be most appropriate. Staff acknowledge that this site is unique and are currently considering a revised approach to this designation for inclusion in the revised draft OCP.

Next Steps

As noted above, staff will be reporting back to Council in the next few weeks, summarizing both feedback from the general public as well as that from the OCP Review Advisory Committee and the Advisory Planning Commission. This process will include specific recommendations on amending the draft to address the community and Committee comments. Staff then expect to bring forward a revised draft in May for Council’s further consideration.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That any comments by the OCP Review Advisory Committee regarding community feedback on the draft Official Community Plan be forwarded to Council for consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

I concur,

signed

signed

Corey Newcomb, MCIP RPP
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Randy Humble,
Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A: Summary of survey responses on the draft OCP