

May 24, 2016

To: Mayor and Council

Re: Structure and accountability for community engagement

The City of Victoria is blessed in its ability to attract people from all over the world who would love the opportunity to share their experience in addressing a range of issues. The City of Victoria has acknowledged the importance of having ongoing dialogue with and between citizens, which it has formally adopted in “Foundations for Success: A Strategy to Improve Civic Engagement”. According to this document, the City’s process for civic engagement has been formalized using the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Part of the stated reasoning for this move is that, “...*citizens and stakeholders have tremendous amounts of useful knowledge, ideas and energy to share with elected officials and municipal staff as they identify and examine community issues...*”¹. This statement is particularly true of the volunteers actively working in the City’s twelve neighbourhoods to improve life for our residents and businesses.

As signatories to this letter, we fully support the City’s efforts to engage citizens at the project level using the CALUC process and are satisfied with the current process being used to review and improve this important tool.

We are less satisfied with the level, process and clarity of engagement undertaken on broader and arguably more important policy and land use initiatives, such as:

Biketoria; the Great Neighbourhood Fund granting process; sheltering in parks, placemaking initiatives; the Parks Master Plan; City and neighbourhood events; wastewater treatment; sale of school district lands (where the City is involved); the Food Security bylaw; and conflicts between the OCP and pending neighbourhood plans.

We invite the City to partner with the network of neighbourhood organizations to take advantage of our local knowledge and experience in engaging residents and businesses through the City-mandated and well-established CALUC process. We have valuable insights into how to best engage our immediate neighbours on issues of particular concern at the local level.

Potential solutions for improving the engagement process include

- Consulting with neighbourhoods to help set the agenda, timelines and structure for engagement initiatives
- Conducting and sharing assessments on the outcome of consultation
- Acknowledging that neighbourhood businesses and residents have local, collective wisdom and may be able to offer solutions rather than just input
- Conducting regular reviews of the Official Community Plan with communities
- Utilizing the CALUC process of community dialogue as standard practice for municipal land use & planning projects; and

¹ City of Victoria report, 2015

It is the expectation of the signatories that the City adhere to its stated commitment of not only engaging citizens in meaningful consultation but also declare the level of engagement in each instance according to the IAP2 spectrum – “inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower”. On important land use issues, we expect that the level of engagement the City commits to is based on dialogue with stakeholders and is commensurate with the irreversibility and magnitude of potential impacts.

We welcome the opportunity to speak about this in more detail.

Burnside Gorge Community Association

Downtown Victoria Residents Association

Fairfield Gonzales Community Association

Fernwood Community Association

Hillside Quadra Neighbourhood Action Group

James Bay Neighbourhood Association

North Jubilee Neighbourhood Association

North Park Neighbourhood Association

Oaklands Neighbourhood Association

Rockland Neighbourhood Association

South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association

Victoria West Community Association

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