

DRA Board Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2024

Present: Sandra Severs (President), Jeremy Zhao (Vice President), Doug Boyd (Treasurer), Michael Demakiling, Dawn Moorhead, Jordan Royer, Neil McKinnon, Furkan Kucukdurmaz, Sherry Lee (Secretary)

DRA Neighbourhood Engagement Coordinator: James Davis

Call to Order, Welcome, Land Acknowledgement and Approval of Agenda

Councillor Update – Regrets were received from Councillor Thompson

Executive Report: Sandra (report attached)

- Coby Young and Ian Sutherland have resigned as board members and co-chairs of their former respective committees.
- Michael will volunteer as liaison between DRA and Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA). Sandra will make the appropriate connections.
- Slide deck from the Community Safety and Wellbeing conference may be shared with board members upon request.

Standing Committee Reports – Q and A

- **Urban Livability Committee (ULC)** and **Urban Ecology and Agriculture Committee (UEC):** Michael (report attached)
- **Climate Solutions Committee:** Dawn (report attached)
- **Communications and Membership Committee (CMC):** Doug (report attached)
- **Governance Committee:** Jeremy
- **Land Use Committee (LUC):** Ian/Jordan (no report)
- **Community Engagement Committee (CEC):** James (report attached)

External Meeting Reports – Q and A

- **Victoria Community Association Network (VCAN):** Sandra (report attached)
 - Board feedback requested for draft letter (recommendation embedded in report) requesting the City to include the protection, retention and addition of green space in the revised OCP.
- **900 Pandora Good Neighbour Group:** Sandra (no report)
 - Victoria Counsellor has put out call for support to provide emergency shelter in neighbouring municipalities. Support from neighbouring municipalities is limited. Victoria anticipates unhoused individuals may be sent to Victoria for shelter.

Other Business

- **Greater Victoria 2025-2035 Destination Master Plan Launch:** Jeremy reports back
 - <https://www.destinationgreatervictoria.com/destination-master-plan>
 - Issues impacting land use include the tourism sector's wish to build more hotels, and potential Victoria Conference Centre building upgrade.

- **DRA participation on public events** (e.g. Wicked Victoria) for the purpose of community engagement, and **priorities of the Community Engagement Committee**
 - Discussion highlighted support for both consistent participation in public events DRA traditionally attends to continue exposure and membership engagement, and more proactive planning regarding public engagement commitments.
 - Discussed consideration of other community association models (e.g. James Bay) for frequent/monthly member meetings through opening up board meetings.
 - Ongoing community events are current avenues for community engagement.
 - An idea to conduct community engagement mapping was raised to clarify DRA programming/engagement activities and potential engagement populations. (e.g., SWAT, Program matching, gap analysis)
- **Recent Board resignations and succession planning**
 - Discussion on whether additional co-chair supports for 2 current committees are required, given recent resignation impacted chairing capacity.
- **Social media engagement practice** in regard to Bluesky switchover (Jeremy)
 - Board expressed various opinions regarding potentially switching from X to Bluesky as a social media platform.
 - Board agreed to maintain X account but suspend activity, while leaving a message directing users to access alternative social media platforms (Facebook & Instagram) for community event information.
- **Discussion of outstanding issues and recent events**
 - Victoria Event Centre closing discussion: no further update aside from expressed regret by Council members regarding closing.
 - Oddfellow Building (1313/1317, 1319/1327 Douglas St.) follow up: pending conversation about use and new occupants
 - Fireworks ban discussion follow up: no update, DRA does not intend to involve in further debate.

7:30 p.m. Meeting concludes

Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 17, 2024, at 5:30pm

Executive Committee Report – November 2024

Wiser Projects Report - Sandra has had coffee/lunch with all members of Council with the exception of Councillor Coleman who is out of the country on Council business. Sandra will follow up with Councillor Coleman upon his return. The response to the report has been favourable and this has been a good opportunity to strengthen relationships with members of Council and discuss issues of importance to the DRA.

900 Block of Pandora Design Charrette – The second meeting of the design charrette has been held and a concept design presented for consideration to those in attendance. Two options were discussed, a proposal which did not change the nature of the street substantially and one that was creative and reimaged what the block could look like. The general consensus was that the plan going forward should represent the best of the group’s creative thinking. Because any changes to the block will require significant financial outlay, going for a temporary measure in the hopes that more money will become available at the later date seems unwise. The architects are considering the feedback and will report in at a future date.

Community Safety and Wellbeing Leaders Advisory Committee – The conference planned for October 27-30 entitled “Intentional Transformation- Reimagining Inclusive Community Safety and Wellbeing” was held at the Conference Centre with 150 people in attendance. Sandra participated in this conference and the following one run by the organization **Strong Cities** called “Preventing Hate & Building Social Cohesion Amid Global Crises: Unleashing the Potential of Cities in Western Canada & the Western United States.” The Community Safety and Wellbeing plan is currently being drafted and will be presented to Council in the following months.

Letters – Sandra is working on submissions to Council regarding the proposed 2025 budget as well as an invitation to comment from Victoria Police Department who have begun the search for a new Chief of Police. Any thoughts/suggestions from the Board are appreciated.

Small Business – Sandra has had a preliminary conversation with two members of the Downtown business community to discuss ways in which the DRA and small business owners might cooperate more extensively to support each other. Among the topics discussed were street disorder, identifying village hubs/nodes in the neighbourhood and engaging in place-making activities to strengthen their identity and supporting small business during the upcoming holiday season.

Resignations – We have received with regret the resignations of Colby Young (co-chair of the Urban Livability Committee) and Ian Sutherland (co-chair of the Land Use Committee) from the DRA Board and committee work.

**Urban Livability Committee
and
Urban Ecology and Agriculture Committee
Reports**

Victoria Downtown Residents Association

November 19, 2024

Urban Livability Committee

Updates

Pandora Breakfast - December 2024

Michael Demakiling, board member and chair of the Urban Livability Committee, and his partner Kris are organizing a Pandora Breakfast event tentatively scheduled for December 21, 2024. This event aims to bring together a group of volunteers to share kitchen space and prepare breakfast meals for delivery to our neighbours in the Pandora area. It's a wonderful opportunity to foster community spirit and support those in need.

We are also looking to collaborate with organizations such as SOLID, Qom Qem, and AVI to create an event similar to what Nikki from the Backpack Project organized last year on December 21, 2023. Since Nikki will be out of town on the 21st, the committee is looking to work with other groups to plan a similar initiative.

Looking ahead, our goal is to host several more Pandora Breakfast events throughout the winter season in the new year. Further details about the event will be shared in the coming weeks.

Sidewalk Talk

At the beginning of the month, the Urban Livability Committee met with Bernice, leading a unique project called Sidewalk Talk that aims to combat loneliness and promote community through active listening.

Sidewalk Talk is a nonprofit initiative that originated in the fall of 2014 in San Francisco. It was founded by two therapists who were inspired to address loneliness, violence, and inequality issues. They aimed to create community spaces for heart-centered listening, fostering connection and belonging among individuals. The initiative gained traction, and on May 7, 2015, the first listening event saw participation from twenty-eight listeners, marking the beginning of a movement that would inspire communities beyond San Francisco.

The core objectives of Sidewalk Talk include improving mental health outcomes, reducing loneliness, and promoting a sense of community through active listening. By providing space for individuals to share their stories and be heard, the initiative aims to shift

perspectives and instill hope. Participants in Sidewalk Talk can learn valuable listening skills, practice empathy across diverse backgrounds, and contribute to a supportive community that prioritizes connection.

Overall, Sidewalk Talk empowers individuals to create a world that values connection and understanding, leveraging the transformative power of listening to bring people together. The Urban Livability Committee believes that pop-up events like these are beneficial for Downtown residents as they offer a space for meaningful conversations in a fast-paced urban environment. Amid feelings of loneliness, these events encourage active listening and empathy, helping to break down barriers and strengthen community bonds. By allowing individuals to share their stories, Sidewalk Talks promotes understanding and support, ultimately enhancing mental health and overall quality of life in the city. The Urban Livability Committee will work with the Co-Leaders Bernice (B) and Dorraine to support their listening training program, plan pop-up events for volunteers to sit with folks downtown, and offer a unique space to be heard. We will update you on this unique project as it comes along. To learn more about Sidewalk Talk, visit <https://www.sidewalk-talk.org/>

Urban Ecology and Agriculture Committee

Updates

Yates Street Community Garden

Waitlist Count: 264 (As of November 18, 2024)

General Updates

Downtown Victoria Second Community Garden

The Urban Ecology and Agriculture Committee continues to work on establishing a second community garden in Downtown Victoria.

Urban Food Table and CRFAIR Community Garden Roundtable Meetings

Michael Demakiling, chair of Urban Ecology and Agriculture, recently met with Arielle, co-chair of the Urban Food Table, to discuss potential collaborations on food system projects. Additionally, Michael attended CRFAIR's Community Garden Roundtable - Session 3 on November 18th, where he connected with a wonderful group of individuals involved in community gardens and food systems. Through these meetings, Michael learned about the increasing emphasis on sustainable practices within urban food systems. The focus is on reducing food waste, promoting urban agriculture, and supporting local food production. These initiatives are essential for minimizing the environmental impact of food systems and fostering a circular economy.

Community involvement plays a crucial role in the success of urban food systems, with initiatives such as community gardens, farmers' markets, and food cooperatives making a significant impact. These activities not only provide residents with access to fresh, local produce but also strengthen community bonds and connections among individuals.

Cities are becoming hubs for innovative solutions to food-related challenges, with techniques like vertical farming, hydroponics, and aquaponics gaining popularity. These methods allow for the efficient use of urban space and resources, enhancing the viability of urban farming initiatives.

Ensuring access to healthy and affordable food for all residents is a vital goal of urban food systems. Various programs and policies are being developed to address food insecurity and promote equitable access to nutritious options for diverse populations.

Collaboration is key among organizations such as the Victoria Urban Food Table and the Food Eco District (FED), which work alongside local governments and communities to create supportive policies for sustainable food systems. These joint efforts help align initiatives and contribute to the establishment of a more resilient food network. As a result, Michael, the chair of Urban Ecology and Agriculture, will take a more active role and participate with

other organizations to have a better understanding of urban food systems and how the Urban Ecology and Agriculture Committee can support such unique initiatives.

Climate Solutions Committee November 2024

1 **White roofs** Project lead: Manosij Majumdar

Mano has extensively researched the benefits, ramifications, and practicalities of this project. Two downtown buildings, both housing non-profit organizations, have been identified as likely starting points for this project and conversations are ongoing. Detailed information is available in the Committee's September report.

2. **Boulevard Climate Gardens** Project lead: Jet Black



Jet - workshop facilitator and inspiration

Like Mano, Jet has extensively researched the requirements for her project and details are available in the Committee's September Report.

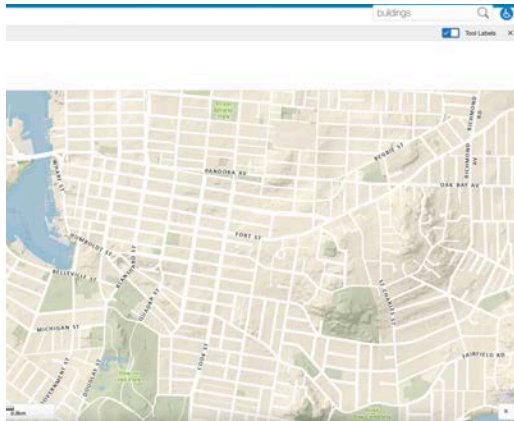
A well-attended, informative and fun Climate Boulevard Workshop was held October 19, facilitated by Jet (above) and led by Landscape Architect, Erin Renwick. Most participants created the rudiments of a plan for a boulevard in their neighbourhood and all were provided comprehensive resources for further action and learning.



Participant drawing to-scale garden plan

3. Mapping project Project Lead: Dawn Moorhead

This is a three part project to create: 1) a list of downtown contacts to further enable community engagement and participation; 2) data collection of facts related to existing downtown building electrification; and 3) a published, interactive map showing downtown progress in building electrification which translates to greenhouse gas emission reductions.



Orca and audience at October rally

other organizations' tents and tables, and lots of questions conversations, and camaraderie. Rallies were held across Canada under the slogan "Later is too late!". October 1 is National Seniors Day and the message was "We're Seniors for Climate acting for a better world free from destruction caused by burning fossil fuels."

4. Seniors for Climate, October 1, 2024

Coolkit members and seniors from around the island turned out on October 1 for a rally and information fair at the legislature. Our coolkit tent and table featured a petition objecting to tree removal in Centennial Square and information about "Victoria" Coolkit, the VDRA Climate Solutions Committee, and an upcoming workshop. There were speakers, music, many



Our table was swamped (in a good way)!

5. Centennial Square Redesign objections

A “Victoria” Coolkit petition signed by many of our members, friends and neighbours was sent to Mayor and Councillors in October. In it we objected to the seemingly needless demolition of three trees in Centennial Square, including the “Mighty Sequoia”.

AN INCONVENIENT TREE?

On Jul 11, 2024 Victoria's mayor and a majority of council members approved the updated concept design for Centennial Square and directed staff to proceed with implementation as outlined in the Centennial Square Revitalization Project Concept

Design Report. (<https://pub-victoria.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISIStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=386fd51a-15e8-4c75-afd9-a31191954313>, minute 3.50) That is a death sentence for the mighty sequoia, healthy sweetgum, and beautiful Shirofugen Japanese flowering cherry, which was gifted to Victoria by Morioka, Japan, to celebrate the cities' twinning in May 1985. (<https://pub-victoria.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=98060>, page 13).

The city and some electeds have mentioned a number of reasons for this decision. We find none of these reasons to be insurmountable, . And some are not publicly available - such as the “detailed technical assessment of each” living tree. (Ibid., page 15)

As the city has declared, we are in a Climate Emergency. The sequoia is living proof of the resiliency we will all need from now on. It is incontrovertible that we depend on trees for our survival, that we need more trees downtown, and that they help mitigate and adapt to climate change. In downtown and Harris Green neighbourhoods, the space available to plant anything declined by 15% and 21% respectively between 2013-2019. (City of Victoria, Vegetation Canopy Change Detection Analysis, 2013-2019, Phase 02 Project) In the past two years Harris Green is losing or has lost to development numerous mature trees on Yates, Cook, and Meares, to name a few.

In regards to the inconvenient sequoia:

“That a previous generation planted that tree in that place is a gift to us all. The trees that are most appreciated by the community are almost never the ones that were perfectly placed, perfectly formed, or perfectly considerate of all other infrastructure and social uses around

Those trees that capture the public's appreciation are almost always norm-benders... You cannot recreate or engineer the social and ecological and historic textures of a tree that captures the public imagination like this one.” (Ryan Senechal, Sessional Lecturer at UBC's Faculty of Forestry; practicing consulting arborist/urban forester) them.

We demand that the City of Victoria explore every alternative to cutting these trees down. From the information publicly available, this has not been done.

Respectfully,

Neighbourhood Engagement Coordinator Report - November 2024

Updates since last board meeting:

Queer Open Stage - The October edition took place on October 16th and was attended by approximately 40 people.

City Talks Panel Discussion - The DRA had an info table at this event put on at the Dock by the Greater Victoria Placemaking Network and Sidewalking Victoria. Board member Michael Demakiling was one of three panelists who shared their thoughts on the future of the Downtown neighbourhood.

Grant reports - A report was submitted to the CRD for the funding they provided for the summer concert series, and we also reported to the City of Victoria for the My Great Neighbourhood Grant that we received for the Yates Street Mural project.

Funding applications - A proposal was submitted to the new OUR DWTN Ideas Fund for funding to host two outdoor film screenings in 2025, one in March and the other in October. We anticipate hearing back from the City by the end of November. Work continues our Community Gaming Grant application, which is due on November 30th.

Emergency Preparedness - Two locations (Regents Park and Yates on Yates) have been selected for the Connect & Prepare pilot, which will be launching next week. We will be running two workshops for each location before the winter holidays and then recommencing the program in mid-January, with the aim of wrapping up the pilot in March.

Upcoming events:

Queer Open Stage - The November event is happening on Wednesday, November 20th and the featured performer will be folk musician Élise LeBlanc.

Communications and Membership Committee Report – November 2024

Update on Committee activities since the October 2024 report:

- **Newsletter / Other Communications to Members:**
 - The October newsletter was issued on October 15. Statistics from Mail Chimp indicate that it was opened by 37.3% of subscribers.
 - We intend to send out the November newsletter by November 21. Contributions are welcome.
- **Web site**
 - We continue to add posts to the News page and add events to the Events page of our website.
 - 362 site sessions for October (down 24% from the previous month). The most viewed posts were the History of Downtown Victoria page, the information on Board members page, and the letter to Mayor and Council re the rezoning of 837 Broughton Street.
- **Social Media**
 - The number of posts over the past month, and the current number of followers are:
 - Facebook - 3 posts, 1074 followers
 - Instagram - 3 posts, 1137 followers
 - X (Twitter) - 2 tweets, 1132 followers
 - Note: we have created a new account on Bluesky with the intention of migrating from X to that platform.
- **Other**
 - 3 new members since the last report. As a note, we send welcome letters to all new members inviting them to become involved with DRA activities, and, where applicable, to become an ambassadors for posting notices of our events in the buildings where they live.
 - 2 new newsletter subscribers since the last report

Submitted by

Doug Boyd

Chair, Communications and Membership Committee

VCAN Report – November 2024

The wrap up meeting of the Garry Oak mapping project took place on Saturday, November 16th at the NeighbourHub. Representatives of 11 of the 13 neighbourhoods were present with neighbourhood maps showing where remnants of Garry Oak ecosystem exist in the City of Victoria. The first phase of the project is now complete with a grant report to go to the city.

A further application to the City's My Great Neighbourhood Grant program will be written to move the work forward in identifying areas of biodiversity that need to be protected. In addition a draft letter was circulated for discussion about requesting the City include the protection, retention and addition of green space in the revised OCP. The text of the letter is as follows:

Recommendations

That the following criteria/requirements be added to the Official Community Plan:

1. Commit to protecting 30% of Victoria's land for biodiversity to align with provincial and federal government policy.

2. Mandate new global urban planning standards of 30% to 40% private and public green space for every proposed and approved development. C40 Cities recommends 30-40% green infrastructure, which includes: soil, trees, shrubs, groundcovers, hedgerows, pollinator and rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavers.

3. Substantially increase funding for new green spaces and parks, planting of new trees to increase the city's tree canopy, preservation of existing trees and endangered urban ecosystems. The enhancement of our existing ecosystems and the creation of new green spaces are essential for improving air and water quality, economically-significant biodiversity and reducing GHG emissions and should take precedence over all non-core funding. Urban forests provide important places of refuge for people living in dense areas.

Priority for funding should go to those neighbourhoods who have the least amount of parks per person.

4. Revise Tree Protection Bylaws and OCP Form & Character "housing" Development Permit Areas to cover gaps in protection. Tree Protection Bylaws are outweighed by zoning bylaws. OCP DPAs can state community objectives for ecosystems, biodiversity, and vegetation (not only trees) to reduce carbon emissions and water and energy use. Significant and highly endangered Garry Oak trees found nowhere else in Canada takes precedence over development and should not be removed because of a proposed development. **If a Garry Oak is present development must work around its location.**

5. If a proponent cannot meet the 40% green space requirement on land proposed for development, an alternative would be for them to fund the purchase of significant green space in the same neighbourhood where the development will occur.

6. Commit to the 3-30-300 rule as Saanich is proposing to do. The 3-30-300 rule offers benchmarks for cities to promote equitable nature access. It dictates that individuals should see three trees from their dwelling, have 30 % tree canopy in their neighbourhood, and live within 300 m of a high-quality green space.

Background

Victoria is a highly urbanized city with small pockets of trees and green space that hold remnants of the city's once rich native habitat. In total there are 212 ha of parks in all of Victoria which works out to 13% of the municipal land base. The largest areas include the coastal bluffs at Finlayson Point; forests, woodlands, wetlands, and meadows in Beacon Hill Park; and Garry oak woodlands at Summit Park. Other natural areas include Cecelia Ravine Park, Moss Rocks Park, Robert J. Porter Park, Banfield Park, Holland Point Park, and other shoreline areas. (Parks Masterplan)

Yet even with all these parks there are only **91 hectares** (225 acres) of sensitive ecosystem areas (City of Victoria, 2016) which house globally significant ecosystems that support our tourism economy, are found nowhere else in Canada, and are symbols of our cultural heritage; namely Garry Oak and Arbutus trees (and their associated understory species). Clearly Victoria needs to do better.

Beyond the city's parks the majority of trees are found on private land. With 80% of land private, and 30-40% tree canopy targets, we need canopy on both private and public land. "The single greatest impact to the urban forest comes from the incremental loss of greenspace associated with development and densification. In addition to removal of large mature trees, there is a loss of soils and space that could be used for future generations of trees. It takes a significant amount of space to grow a large tree. As land uses change and neighbourhoods are redeveloped, it is critical to ensure that adequate greenspace is being reallocated on-site or elsewhere to sustain the future urban forest. Failure to do so will result in a forest that is diminished in size, more fragmented, less productive and more vulnerable to change—the antithesis of sustainability." (Urban Forest Masterplan).

The Urban Forest Master Plan recommends the development of a Biodiversity Strategy that includes measurable objectives for the protection, recovery or enhancement of sensitive ecosystems, species at risk and other important flora and fauna. Council already committed to implementing the masterplan when they took office by including the following statement in the City Strategic Plan: **Accelerate policies and practices to realize the Urban Forest Masterplan.**

Conclusion

When consultation occurred for the Parks Masterplan participants were asked what should be prioritized for park land acquisition? The top three priorities were 1) land with sensitive ecosystems; 2) waterfront sites for parks and pathways; and 3) locations that more equally distribute parks in all neighbourhoods. When compared with the 12 other

objectives for parks like promoting recreation or gardening for instance, the majority (70% or more) said **'protecting and highlighting natural areas and environmental stewardship' as THE most important objective.**

Since the Parks Masterplan was created in 2017 very little has been done to implement it with negligible parks created. With plans for increasing density in the Official Community Plan it is imperative that parks and green space be prioritized above all other non core funding. It is essential to have this recognized in the Official Community Plan for the future people who will live here, for our children and for the plants and animals that call this place home.

FOR DECISION