

On July 20, 2011, the District of Saanich hosted a meeting to bring together the Stakeholder Committee with the urban design consultant team of D'Ambrosio architecture + urbanism and Landeca Services Inc. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce this next phase of the Shelbourne Corridor Action Plan focused on the creation of a set of land use and development design guidelines for the Shelbourne Corridor study area. Specifically, the objectives of the meeting were:

- To introduce the urban design consultant team to the Stakeholder Committee members;
- To share information with respect to work completed by the Stakeholder Committee and the Shelbourne Corridor Action Plan project to date as background to the urban design study;
- To introduce the topic of urban design and review best practices in planning, design and development while considering the challenges and opportunities of the study area; and,
- To solicit Stakeholder Committee input on the key elements of urban design as they relate to the study area.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION NOTES

The evening was structured into three general parts:

LISTEN + LEARN_ How did we get here and where are we going?

- Harold Stanley introduced the project and invited participants to introduce themselves and provide a brief description of their background and interests.
- Harold Stanley provided a brief update on the status of the transportation planning work being completed by Urban Systems and provided a review of the Shelbourne Corridor Vision Survey and policy framework for the urban design study.

IMAGINE + ENVISION_ What is Urban Design?

- Franc D'Ambrosio presented a slide show of urban design best practices, including an overview of Shelbourne Valley and Introduction to the urban design elements of Land Use, Movement, and Form and Character.

COLLABORATE + CONVERSE _ What do we aspire towards?

- This portion of the event was structured to allow for small focus group discussion on the topics of Land Use, Movement, and Form and Character.
- The following notes summarize some of the key discussion points and ideas generated during the focus group sessions.



LAND USE

Parks and Open Spaces

- When considering whether there are any land uses “missing” from the corridor/valley study area, the first issue raised was one of the lack of green space and the need to respect the natural environment and ecology of the corridor.
- More and better green spaces – parks and natural areas – are needed.
- The valley should be respected and restoration/daylighting of Bowker Creek should be pursued.
- Parks and open spaces are needed to complement additional density envisioned for the corridor; parks must be provided to offset density and to ensure there are adequate places for people living in multi-family developments to have access to play spaces and green spaces.
- Community gardens where people of all ages have access to food production could be incorporated into the plan area; there is potential for community gardens to be co-located with school sites, a community centre or multi-family developments.

Community Centre and Gathering Place

- There is potential to consider the development of a new library and civic centre within the study area – particularly in the Cedar Hill Centre (Shelbourne Village) area.
- The Monterey Centre in Oak Bay was noted as an example of the type of community gathering, meeting and activity space envisioned.

Cedar Hill Centre

- This area was noted as the key community focus for the neighbourhood – and was referenced as Shelbourne Village.
- All of the land uses exist – local shops and services, places to live and work, etc.; however the character of the area could be improved to make it feel more inviting.
- In particular, the addition of a community centre (as described above) was noted.

University Centre

- The group discussed the potential for the University Centre to develop into a district with a mix of uses similar to university districts in other cities/towns with post-secondary educational institutions. It was noted that most other university towns have a “funky” district in the surrounding area accommodating places to live, shop, gather and recreate. This concept was noted as an idea for the transformation of the University Centre area.
- The development of high tech industries or incubator industries associated with the knowledge economy was noted as a strong opportunity for the area to capitalize on the University of Victoria’s presence.
- In general – this area also needs more green spaces and the lack of street trees was noted as an issue.
- At present the centre/intersection of Shelbourne and McKenzie acts as a regional corridor and there is desire to see the area transform into a more urban centre and as a place to go rather than go through.



Feltham Village

- At present, the area has a strong village feel; however, there are some concerns for pedestrian safety – particularly that of seniors – when crossing the street to access the services.
- The local grocery store was noted as a key amenity contributing to the sense of village.
- Additional mixed-use development would be welcome to provide more places for living within the village area.
- Due the size of the village centre, it was noted as being walkable; however, the sidewalks need to be improved to make it feel better and be more inviting.

Hillside Centre

- There was a noted disconnect between the lands within Victoria and those within Saanich and a need to knit the area back together through coordinated land use development and urban design was highlighted.
- Bowker Creek daylighting and the addition of connected green spaces was noted.

Density

- With respect to density, it was noted that the project should attempt to identify specific sites where additional density could be accommodated to provide a level of certainty to land owners and the community about future growth and development.

MOVEMENT

- The key issue with respect to movement was noted as safety and the need to reduce traffic speeds, separate modes of travel and introduce speed limits.
- Reducing the impact of parking on the public realm by locating parking in the back was supported; support for curb-side street parking was also noted.
- There is a desire to see the flow of movement improved in a balanced fashion between all modes of travel within the study area. Currently all modes suffer a “start-stop” frequency that adds to the poor appeal of the area.
- Improvements to the legibility of the routes through urban design elements was noted so that it is clear to all users where to go and how to get from one place to another; at present, the public realm largely supports vehicle movements and additional elements to improve the legibility of the spaces for pedestrians and cyclists are needed.
- There is a need to improve access to transit and to enhance the transit stop areas in terms of amenities and location (proximity to services/ distance from conflicts/ intersections).
- The addition of bike racks was noted.
- Enhancements to the pedestrian environment in terms of crosswalks and connections to amenities were noted.
- The concept of “mobility” was noted as an alternative to “movement” as it implies ability and human-power motion.
- The potential for roundabouts was explored, and it was noted that under the right conditions may be a viable TDM measure.



- Where pedestrian or cycle access is improved, it was recommended that flexibility to parking requirements be mandated in policy (i.e. if a pedestrian route removes a parking space the trade is considered equal). It was noted that some businesses were amenable to this trade but that existing policy prevented them from making changes.
- A reduction in the level of service for vehicles was acceptable to the stakeholders in return for improved levels of service for other modes of travel (cycling, walking, transit). Or at a minimum, balanced levels of service across all modes of travel.
- A need to improve access to the corridor and from the corridor to destinations East and West was noted. While the corridor mainly serves a North –South function, opportunities were identified to improve the cross connectivity as well.
- Opportunities were highlighted to improve the pedestrian crossings at intersections. Here, it was stressed that the distances pedestrians were crossing, often were too great for the time permitted for seniors and those with mobility limitations, and that these distances need to be shortened.
- A strategy identified to improve the cyclist use of the corridor, was to include parallel routes that meander about the corridor, with key crossings prioritized and with links to other cycle facilities and paths.
- A strategy noted to improve the pedestrian use of the corridor, beyond improving the safety and minimizing the vehicular conflicts, was to link pedestrian routes into the adjacent neighbourhoods, and to make the pedestrian routes complete.

FORM AND CHARACTER

- The group noted an emphasis on viewing the study areas as a valley rather than a corridor and that in the future it would be a more green and accessible community with a public market, mature boulevard plantings and additional parks and green spaces for nature and recreation, in addition to amenities for youth and seniors. Support for transit and local businesses was also noted as part of the future vision.

Unique Elements of the Valley

When asked to identify the elements of the valley that make it unique, the following were noted:

- Mt. Tolmie
- Shelbourne Village (with commercial and residential on both sides of the street)
- Bowker Creek
- Topography – the valley
- Flat topography along Shelbourne (a positive for cyclists)

Future Character

When asked to identify elements that would contribute to future character of the area the following were noted:

- Restoration of streams and creative management of stormwater so as to emphasize the green elements of the community.
- Provision of amenities for cyclists so that the flat valley feature could be used more safely by cyclists.



Shelbourne Valley Urban Design
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- Completion of the corridor's boulevard tree planting with the addition of new London Plane trees where they are missing.
- Restoration of the traditional agricultural valley through the addition of green spaces that could be agricultural lands, conservation lands or parklands. In particular, there is potential for the addition of productive farm lands within the study area.
- Restoration of Garry Oak ecosystems.
- Recognition of history through restoration of natural features – Garry Oaks, meadows, barns, etc.

Present Corridor/Valley Character

- At present, it was felt that much of the corridor has a similar character and while each node has unique features, the sense of sameness along the road is the result of an emphasis on the vehicle, which has eroded some of the more distinct features of each area.
- It was noted that as you pass through the corridor the style of building changes and reflects the progression of development through the decades.

Signage

- The addition of sidewalk marking was noted as a potential urban design strategy.
- The creation of common park signage to facilitate park usage was noted.
- There is potential for signage/banners to be used to mark special community activities and for flags or banners to mark the entrance to each node/centre.
- At present, it was felt that the signage is mostly vehicle-oriented and that in the future the addition of pedestrian-oriented signage and features would improve the character.

Public Spaces

- At present, there are no real public spaces within the valley and there is a strong desire to see the addition of a community gathering place, particularly in the Shelbourne Village area.
- A public market could be added/accommodated in the Shelbourne Plaza parking lot as a gathering place and amenity for the community.
- The addition of trees, retail shops, public amenities, picnic benches, play spaces would improve the area.
- All new development must include green infrastructure, bioswales, permeable paving as amenities for the community/natural environment.
- Potential for green roofs/patios on roofs was noted.
- The addition of a community centre with day care and library was noted.
- The use of roundabouts, and the potential to “green” the streets was noted.

Building Design

- Participants noted that they like the Richmond Gate project and that it is an example of the type of building design desired – local, natural materials, green walls, LEED, human-scaled.
- Building heights of 2-3 storeys at the front staggered/stepped up from the street was supported.



- Emphasis on the streetscape design as a key issue; maximize the ROW to accommodate public spaces for people/cyclists is a priority.
- Parking lots should not be at the front/street, but rather in the back.

Public Art

- The addition of flags and signage was noted as a good strategy – particularly on pathways as a means of defining routes.
- Community-oriented art designed by the community was noted as a preference. (i.e. developed through small-scale community events).
- Art that can evolve over time was also suggested.
- The use of paint and colours to define areas was noted.
- Definition of crosswalks through special treatment with respect to materials was noted.
- There is a desire to see public art connected to the landscape and building design.
- Potential for sculptural bike parking as functional public art.

SHARE + SUM UP_ What have we learned?

At the end of the focus group discussions, each team had an opportunity to report back to the larger group to share the highlights of their session. While each group focused on their specific topic area, many common themes emerged from the discussion as a result of the integrated and interconnected nature of the issues and elements of urban design.

In particular, the following key issues were noted:

- Increase **safety for all users** along the valley corridor to ensure a **balanced system** of transportation and movement/mobility is achieved.
- Support **mixed-used development** and additional density, together with **additional parks/green spaces**, that will bring more people to support local services and contribute to a stronger sense of community.
- Emphasize and **enhance the natural features** of the valley to ensure the preservation of the natural environment as additional density is developed.
- Identify Cedar Hill Centre as “Shelbourne Village” and work toward the creation of a **community centre/community gathering place** in the heart of the valley.
- Integrate public art and streetscape elements that **reflect the local community** into the public realm to contribute to the sense of identity and character along the valley.
- Create **stronger connectivity** within the valley in terms of pedestrian and cyclist amenities as well as between land uses and amenities.

The next step in the study will be the development of draft design guidelines and graphic materials to depict the ideas and address the issues raised to date, working toward a public open house session in the fall. Stakeholder Committee meetings will continue throughout the process to allow for updates on the status of work and ongoing collaboration.

