

MINUTES
HOUSING STRATEGY TASK FORCE
Saanich Municipal Hall, Council Chambers
Via Electronic Communications
January 21, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Chair de Vries and Vice Chair Harper

Staff: Cameron Scott, Manager, Community Planning; Current Planning; Nadine Kawata, Planner, Community Planning; Alanna McDonagh, Planner, Community Planning; Matt Blakely, Planning Technician, Community Planning; and Tara Da Silva, Senior Committee Clerk

Facilitators: Lani Brunn, Lead Facilitator, CitySpaces; Julia Bahen, Facilitator, CitySpaces

Members: E. Dahli; S. Dutchak; C. Forester; C. Friesen; E. Gibson; G. Gillespie; R. Kelley; L. Mari; M. Poirier; D. Posavad; J. Reilly; L. Spalteholz; J. Tarbotton; K. Wiseman; V. Wynn-Williams

Regrets: M. Holland

CALL TO ORDER

Chair de Vries called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

- A reminder was given that the meetings are being webcast and about Saanich's Respectful Workplace Policy. This meeting's focus is Uptown Douglas Plan, focus areas, principles and strategies, and consolidated actions.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by D. Posavad and Seconded by G. Gillespie: "That the minutes from the November 26, 2020, and the December 10, 2020, Housing Strategy Task Force meetings be adopted."

CARRIED

- Throughout developing the Uptown-Douglas Plan (UDP), staff have liaised with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) and Community Associations.
- The next opportunity for input from these stakeholders and the general public will be when the Plan comes before Council.
- Councillor de Vries noted that staff had spent a significant amount of time to ensure that this Plan aligns with other strategies, plans and processes. An economic development strategy would be new. It would define Saanich's economic aspirations, contain a land-use component, and look at the UDP as a key employment centre.

MOVED by L. Spalteholz and Seconded by G. Gillespie: “That the Task Force support, in principle, the Uptown-Douglas Plan (UDP), while highlighting the following key feedback themes:

- **Desire to explore potential opportunities to increase maximum height provisions throughout the Plan area to create a more bold vision for growth;**
- **Support for the prioritization of public realm improvements and social infrastructure in parallel with and, where possible, in advance of new developments;**
- **Concern about the impacts of new development on existing affordable housing units and the potential displacement of tenants;**
- **Need for assurance that the UDP enables project viability and responds to economic and market conditions and trends; and**
- **Importance of the need for growth and density in other Centres, Villages and Corridors to meet the diverse needs of current and future Saanich residents as a complement to UDP.”**

CARRIED

MOVED by G. Gillespie and Seconded by D. Posavad: “That the Task Force forward the following comments on the Uptown-Douglas Plan (UPD) to Council for consideration as part of the Plan approval and/or implementation process:

- **Consider identifying minimum building heights for some or all land use designations;**
- **Consider increasing the maximum height in the Core designation;**
- **Assess changes to the tapering of building heights in the Plan area that recognizes taller building forms throughout, and consider options for additional tapering of properties outside the Plan area;**
- **Include additional policies to support the viability of affordable and supportive housing projects and protect existing affordable units;**
- **Assess revisions to the urban design guidelines that restrict tower flood plate where project viability could be negatively impacted;**
- **Assess proposed viability of development through changes to land use and building height designations to ensure building forms are conducive to current and emerging practices; and**
- **Explore the development of an Economic Development Strategy, on a District or Regional scale, to support the ongoing implementation of the UDP, and include:**
 - **Analysis for existing and future employment lands;**
 - **Development of an Industrial Land Strategy;**
 - **Assessment of Uptown-Douglas objectives and policies to ensure they align with the economic development vision; and**
 - **Consideration of Saanich-specific solutions, with a focus on looking at the balance of employment and housing (made in Saanich solution).**

CARRIED

PROPOSED NEW FOCUS AREA, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING DEMAND

- **Proposed Strategy: Prioritize housing for homes first**
 - **Proposed Actions:**
 1. **Pursue the power to tax-empty homes to disincentivize speculation and to bring underutilized housing back to use as rental.**

2. Implement short-term rental regulations to try to protect long-term renters but ensure that there is room for homeowners and renters to make supplemental income from their principal residence.
- Proposed Strategy: Stabilize land value through policies and regulations
 - Proposed Actions:
 1. Develop a new policy to stabilize land values prior to the launch of new planning programs.
 2. Develop a density bonus in policy that aims at stabilizing land values while delivering a greater supply of housing.
- Proposed Strategy: Understand and manage the impacts of housing demand
 - Proposed Actions:
 1. Coordinate with all levels of government and with expert partnerships to identify global, national, regional, and local trends impacting housing affordability and identify gaps in the existing housing and demographic data.
 2. Work with partners in senior levels of government on tax and financial regulation reforms that aim to limit speculative housing investments and introduce a greater equity in our current approach to taxing house related income and well to help create a more equitable housing system.

COMMENTS FROM FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION ON ADDRESSING DEMAND

- This area is really about supply and less so about demand.
- Perhaps this area is out of the municipality's scope and could better be handled through UBCM.
- Toxic demand has already been addressed by Provincial policy.
- There is a need to stabilize land values without creating new problems.
- There isn't agreement that demand is a new focus area – speculation is a function of a lack of supply.

DRAFT CHANGES TO FOCUS AREAS AND NEW DRAFT STRATEGIES

1. Focus Area 1: Increase affordable and supportive Housing (new title)
 - a. Strategies:
 - i. Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing on Municipal Land
 - ii. Reduce barriers to affordable and attainable housing through incentives, tools, and policies.
 - iii. Encourage alternative tenure models and housing types to increase affordable and attainable housing options.
 - iv. Align land use, sustainability, housing and transportation planning to help reduce household expense.
 - v. Support a regional response to homelessness and improve pathways to housing stability.
2. Focus Area 2: Promote and protect rental housing
 - a. Strategies:
 - i. Support a greater diversity of rental housing options in established neighbourhoods.
 - ii. Improve the stability and affordability of existing and development of new rental housing.
 - iii. Explore tools to support tenants and landlords to improve access to rental housing.

3. Focus Area 3: Support housing diversity and supply
 - a. Strategies
 - i. Support a diversity of infill housing opportunities and initiatives in established neighbourhoods within the Urban Containment Boundary
 - ii. Ensure new housing adequately meets key local needs identified in the Housing Needs Report.
 - iii. Utilize growth management plans and tools to support housing supply, affordability and diversity.
4. Focus Area 4: Reduce barriers to housing
 - a. Strategies:
 - i. Reduce barriers to housing by simplifying and streamlining approval processes.
 - ii. Update and revise programs for financing growth while building complete communities and promoting affordable housing.
 - iii. Initiate Zoning and Bylaw changes that will proactively lead to reduced barriers to housing affordability, diversity and supply.
 - iv. Set priorities and monitor progress towards meeting Housing Strategy objectives.
 - v. Support housing actions that lead to equitable housing outcomes.
 - vi. Ensure adequate resources to implement the Housing Strategy.
5. Focus Area 5: Strengthen partnerships (new title)
 - a. Strategies:
 - i. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new partnerships across all sectors.
 - ii. Advocate to senior levels of government for additional tools and funding.
6. Focus Area 6: Build Awareness (new title)
 - a. Strategies
 - i. Build community awareness of housing needs, initiatives, and priorities.
 - ii. Implement new approaches to engagement.

COMMENTS FROM FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION ON DRAFT CHANGES TO FOCUS AREAS AND NEW DRAFT STRATEGIES

1. Focus Area 1: Increase affordable and supportive Housing:
General comments:
 - A regional response to homelessness is beyond the municipal purview to improve pathways to housing stability. Perhaps the District could actively facilitate housing solutions.
 - a. Increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing on institutional land. (new)
 - b. Prioritize the approval of projects that are waiting for approval or already progressing. (new)
 - c. Ensure people experiencing homelessness have access to dignified housing and supports. (new)
 - d. Increase resources in Saanich to address homelessness. (new)
- Focus Area 2: Promote and protect rental housing:
General comments:
 - A glossary should be considered for clarification.
 - a. Increase protection and security of renters in the secondary rental market. (new)
- Focus Area 3: Support housing diversity and supply
General comments:
 - The title should read “Support housing diversity and increase supply”

- Consideration could be given to housing opportunities beyond the Urban Containment Boundaries
- Focus Area 4: Reduce barriers to housing
General comments:
 - The title should read “Reduce barriers to increasing housing supply/or reduce barriers to housing development”
- Focus Area 5: Strengthen partnerships (new title)
 - Any affordable metrics should be tied to senior level of government funding. (new).
- Focus Area 6: Build Awareness
General comments:
 - The title sounds passive, perhaps consider “Public Education”.
 - a. Align Saanich policy and programs to Provincial DAPR report. (new)

DRAFT PRINCIPLES

- Diversity, inclusivity, and connection
- Equitable sustainability
- Well-being and security
- Resilience and innovation
- Responsiveness
- Partnerships

COMMENTS FROM FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION DRAFT PRINCIPLES

- Diversity, inclusivity, and connection
 - Dignified housing is possible for all, despite their ability to pay.
 - Consider future residents as strongly as current residents.
 - A readily available housing supply for everyone on the income spectrum.
- Equitable sustainability
 - Saanich is committed to removing discrimination from all planning documents.
 - Access to suitable and affordable housing should align with and support equitable access to jobs, education, and other economic prosperity opportunities for people of all ages, incomes, abilities, and backgrounds.
 - Equity and sustainability are two separate principles. Consider distinguishing these two separately.
- Well-being and security
 - Saanich is committed to protecting a home first before an investment.
- Resilience and innovation
- Responsiveness
- Partnerships
- General comments:
 - Consider creating a new principle, “Safeguarding the environment.” – Housing solutions must be directed toward development types that do not put us at further risk of environmental damage and also lead us toward more sustainable, ecology-friendly forms of construction. Lowering GHG emissions.
 - Consider simplification by removing the justification.
 - Bold the principle and reformat the explanation.

CONSOLIDATED ACTIONS

- Group similar actions into strategies.
 - Including revised ‘actions to consider’ and new actions from the Task Force.
 - Reflect on the Housing Needs Report, Housing Strategy engagement, equity, municipal housing role, best practices.
 - Revise actions to be action-oriented, well-defined, clear, and concise.

- Ensure actions sufficiently reflect Task Force input (consider conflicting comments).
- Include additional details where necessary.
- Next steps:
 - Based on Task Force recommendations, update consolidated list of actions.
 - Send actions to the prioritization process.

MOVED by K. Wiseman and Seconded by E. Dahli: “That the facilitators, Saanich staff and Council representatives collect the input from this meeting, organize and submit a summary to bring forward for consideration of the Task Force at the next meeting.”

The meeting adjourned at 8:01 pm.

CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

COMMITTEE SECRETARY