



# Final Report

## Official Community Plan Advisory Committee

### INTRODUCTION

Advisory committees are established pursuant to the Community Charter (S.141-145) to assist Council in providing for public input on municipal matters. To quote from the October 21, 2019 staff report to Council:

“The primary role of the OCP Advisory Committee is to assist in the review of work produced in each project phase and provide broad guidance on policy implementation. Committee members are expected to proactively engage with the specific affiliations they are representing, if any, and broader community groups and individuals. The committee plays an integral role in project implementation from the first phase to the end, and reports to Council regularly throughout the process.”

More specific objectives from the same report were:

- “2.1 On matters referred to it, review and provide general guidance on background information, draft materials, draft vision statement, and draft plan sections;
- 2.2 Participate in the specified consultation activities as a way to provide guidance into the OCP review process;
- 2.3 Assist in identifying and connecting the City with key stakeholder groups through personal and/or professional contact networks as requested;
- 2.4 Assist in informing the community about the OCP review process and encourage participation by diverse members of the community;
- 2.5 Act in a strictly advisory role. Council may consider the advice and recommendations of the OCP-AC but is in no way bound by such recommendations;
- 2.6 Report to and communicate to Council through regular update reports prepared by Staff on the Committee’s behalf.”

This report contributes to that sixth objective. As the Advisory Committee has not reviewed this version of the OCP currently before Council, we are basing our statements on the overall process and the January 2022 draft report. Given the many improvements and clarifications we understand have been made to the document, we are confident with the conclusions and recommendations made herein.

In terms of composition, the members of the Advisory Committee were to represent the following communities:

- Environmental Stewardship Organizations,
- Development Industry,
- Business Community,
- Economic Development,
- Health and Social Services,
- Arts and Culture, and
- Youth and/or young adult and/or senior representation.



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The Mayor is also a voting member.

Based on these objectives and criteria, City Council established the OCP Advisory Committee with the following membership<sup>1</sup>:

- Sheena Campbell
- Derek Costantino
- Betty Donaldson (Deputy Chair)
- Tanis Gower
- Annelies Henckel
- Lindsay McGinn
- Garry Renkema
- Norman Carruthers (Chair)
- Tom Dishlevoy
- Don Ferguson
- Diane Hawkins
- Charlotte Kimmins
- Erin Nowak
- Mayor Bob Wells (ex officio)

### ACTIVITIES

Without detailing all the individual contributions, suffice it to say that throughout the process, Advisory Committee members actively participated throughout of the OCP development process, contributing extensively with content and process advice and guidance, linkages to stakeholder groups and the encouragement of public participation as per our mandate.

### OBSERVATIONS

#### 3.1 Purpose of the Revised OCP

From the outset in September 2019, the OCP process was designed to create a climate-friendly Official Community plan – the most innovative, green OCP the City of Courtenay had ever had.

#### 3.2. On the OCP Vision and the Cardinal Directions

An Official Community Plan, as the capstone City policy, must clearly set out the City's vision for the future. In our opinion, Courtenay's OCP vision with its four Cardinal Directions of Climate Action, Reconciliation, Equity and Community Well-Being provides that vital direction-setting. In particular, this OCP is developed so that the community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) target of zero net emissions by 2050<sup>2</sup> can be achieved – if aggressively pursued.

#### 3.3 On the Mandate and Composition of the OCP-AC

While its broad representation allowed the committee to undertake its four primary objectives, the key missing factor was 'lived experience'. We were only able to provide second-hand experience on the impact of City policies and programs on the more equity-challenged sectors of the community. With the

<sup>1</sup> Changing individual circumstances caused four members of the Committee (Costantino, Hawkins, Nowak, McGinn) to resign but all contributed extensively during the key input phases. As the review was in its final stages at the time of their resignations, they were not replaced.

<sup>2</sup> Council Minutes 2020-04-20, Official Community Plan (OCP) Update, File No. 6480-00.



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pandemic severely limiting community engagement opportunities, the lack of such lived experience input either through the Committee directly or through other participation opportunities was a process weakness.

Second, if Reconciliation is to truly be a community pillar going forward, First Nation representation on future Advisory Committees will be very important and should be a primary objective in their formation.

Third, while Committee members were able to contribute individually, the extended length of the process and the pandemic together with the infrequency of meetings (by design) significantly limited the opportunities for the Committee to meet both as a group, and with either technical experts or Council.<sup>3</sup> Several AC members commented that the absence of these opportunities limited our full understanding of the document and the rationale behind various policies. However, the size and breadth of the document demanded significant commitments of time even to be reasonably informed as individuals. The dilemma is that more meetings would have required even more of a time commitment.

### 3.4 On the OCP Within the City's Hierarchy of Plans

The proposed Official Community Plan cannot, and should not, be viewed in isolation. It is an update of an existing plan and incorporates the directions set in other City plans such as Affordable Housing, the Transportation Plan Update, the Comox Valley Regional Housing Needs Assessment, the Urban Forest Strategy and the Downtown Business Playbook, among others. It also builds on the clear mandate for the project set by Council. As such, the Advisory Committee sees this document as well reflecting Council priorities and directions.

### 3.5. On Complexity and Interconnectedness

A strength of this OCP is a recognition of the complexity of urban life and the inherent interconnectedness of all its dimensions and sectors. For example, Affordable Housing is one of the ten thematic policies, and initiatives to make housing more affordable are throughout the document, from building design guidelines to secondary suites zoning, town and neighbourhood centres, multi-modal transportation networks and food security. Less obvious is the impact of the changing underlying demographics of the city. Seniors are the fastest growing age cohort in our community, and this will have a significant impact on housing, transportation and service delivery needs, to name a few. While this impact is implicit in many of the proposed objectives and initiatives, its impact cannot be understated (and perhaps should have been flagged more explicitly). Overall, this draft does an admirable job of recognizing the various inherent complexities.

### 3.6 On Community Engagement and the Pandemic

The Ideas Fair in February 2020 gave about 350 community attendees an opportunity to explore alternatives for the future and provided the City with a rich array of ideas to investigate further. This

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<sup>3</sup> The opportunity to meet with Council March 11, 2022, was much appreciated. Such a gathering should be part of the workplan, if possible, for any Advisory Committee of Council.



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was an excellent start to the project's intended community engagement. The pandemic curtailed most of what was planned (as laid out in the *Engagement Playbook*), however project staff pivoted well with the neighbourhood 'walkshops', virtual stakeholder workshops and the on-line surveys providing vital community input. In addition, the array of public documents produced early in the process was impressive.

What was missing were opportunities to engage the community in open conversations – the planned pop-ups, road shows, open houses and public workshops. As a result, broader engagement spread by word-of-mouth did not happen after phase I. This was a key missed opportunity. We also note that the OCP newsletter, a key public communication device, was not published frequently after August 2020. This was unfortunate as it weakened what little community outreach was occurring. While important process documents were being produced, the public was generally unaware and thus unengaged.

Moreover, while engagement of the general public was unfortunately limited, as the report on the first (2020) on-line survey noted:

“The groups most clearly under-represented were youth, single parents, people of colour, and Indigenous peoples. It will be important to pay special attention to the input received by these groups in the survey, and to reach out to these voices in future engagement activities.”<sup>4</sup>.

Going forward, it is vital that the City continue to work to involve these frequently under-represented groups, especially as Equity is one of the four Cardinal Directions that drive this plan.

Finally, we note that the OCP staff were very responsive to engagement suggestions by AC members. Environmental mapping, the Downtown walkabout facilitated by the Comox Valley Art Gallery and meeting with the Comox Youth Climate Council are three such examples.

### 3.7 On Implementation

The January 2022 draft of the Official Community Plan was a massive document of over 300 pages and included 9 goals, 74 objectives, 290 policies and another 63 sub-region policies. It was very thorough and set aggressive targets on a wide spectrum of issues. Assuming the OCP before Council is a refinement of that draft, its size and complexity will make the OCP very challenging to read and will likely be its 'Achilles heel' as the City moves forward into its implementation phase. But this is just a document; there is a risk that without an effective implementation plan - and considerable sustained effort by both Council and City staff, it will be just a collection of good ideas. Five to ten years from now when the next OCP Update is considered, the value of this document will be judged on the tangible process made both by the City itself and by the community to achieve significant progress on its four Cardinal Directions.

We understand the City will be treating the OCP as a 'living document', updating it regularly as new information becomes available and new policies adopted. We also understand the City is shifting from a calendar based plan for review of the document to updates driven by measurable triggers such as

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<sup>4</sup> Online Survey Engagement Summary, Draft, September 2020, page 8



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population growth and greenhouse gas emissions. Circumstances can change rapidly – as the pandemic has shown – and so to be most relevant, City policies and actions must be keyed to underlying circumstances, not simply dates on a calendar. Further the City’s commitment to OCP impact analysis as part of every report to Council, and annual reviews of progress toward OCP objectives are critical mechanisms to ensure the OCP doesn’t become ‘just another report gathering dust on a shelf’.

### CONCLUSIONS DRAWN BY THE OCP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

#### 4.1 Strong Addition of City’s Set of Plans

In our opinion, the proposed OCP both complements and integrates existing plans and the City’s strategic priorities. As such, it is a strong platform from which to build future community change along all four Cardinal Directions.

#### 4.2 Community Engagement Reasonable Under the Circumstances

Community engagement in this project, understandably, was less than ideal but more than adequate given the constraints imposed by the pandemic. As in most communities, there are segments of the community who are under-engaged in the process of defining the direction of the community, and this under-engagement was even more pronounced in this process. Future efforts to implement and later update this plan as well as developing other City change processes must reach out to, engage with and respond to these critical community members.

#### 4.3 Full Cost Accounting

The City is to be complemented for requiring the financial, social and environmental implications (triple bottom line) of all reports brought to Council. However, the Advisory Committee believes it becoming increasingly vital that the City also recognize the cost of **NOT** doing something. For example, the financial costs to the City, the residents and the businesses associated with achieving its net zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050 might seem large in isolation. But the cost of not achieving this target would likely be far more for the world as a whole and our community.

#### 4.4 Implementation Critical

While an updated OCP provides a clear context for future change within the city of Courtenay, a plan is just words on paper if it is not effectively implemented. Moreover, this proposed OCP is ambitious and it must be to achieve objectives such as the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, the City has to aggressively work to realize the vision in this plan and ensure the necessary resources are available to do so.

#### 4.5 Community Education Will Be Critical

Achievement of the vision captured in this OCP (or even significant progress toward that realization) is a community-wide challenge. It requires engagement and action not only by the City of Courtenay, other levels of government, other local governments and the K’ómoks First Nation, but also by Courtenay residents and businesses! The City can only do so much on its own and in consultation with other



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governments. The biggest determinant of success will likely be the extent to which the local community actively works to achieve this vision. Therefore, outreach to create awareness and acceptance will be vital. The City must implement many of the interactions originally planned for this process as soon as possible. In particular, face-to-face opportunities will be critical for residents and businesses to understand what they are being asked to change, why they are being asked, and to actively adopt these changes. Moreover, people learn in different ways, so this education/engagement must take many forms.

#### 4.6 Potential for an OCP Implementation Advisory Committee

Given the importance of effective implementation of this OCP over its useful life, the City should avail itself of all opportunities to improve the likelihood of success. One such opportunity is to establish an OCP Implementation Advisory Committee. Its mandate could be similar to this committee's – namely:

- Provide general guidance on new policy proposals
- Assist in engaging key stakeholder groups
- Assist in informing the community about the OCP and its implementation and encourage participation
- Provide a citizen-based forum for monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation process.

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OCP-AC

5.1 The Advisory Committee **strongly supports the adoption** of the proposed Official Community Plan bylaw.

5.2 To make significant progress toward realizing the vision presented in the proposed OCP, the OCP-AC strongly recommends Council adopt an **aggressive implementation plan**.

5.3 With this new OCP, the City will have a clear focus for the future but community awareness of the City's plans developed through extensive community education and engagement will be critical. The Advisory Committee thus recommends the adoption of an **extensive community engagement strategy** with particular emphasis on engaging those most directly impacted by the plan.

5.4 The Advisory Committee also recommends the City begin to incorporate the associated **cost of not taking action** when considering adopting any new policy or plan.

5.5 While the proposed OCP includes a monitoring program with annual reports to Council, the Advisory Committee recommends that Council consider an on-going **Implementation Advisory Committee** to help with the community outreach and provide another avenue to ensure effective implementation.