

April 30, 2018

Bill Brown, MCIP
Director of Development Services
Township of Esquimalt
1229 Esquimalt Road
Esquimalt, BC V9A 3P1

Re: Review – Township of Esquimalt Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 2922

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Township of Esquimalt Official Community Plan. The past few years have seen significant advances in linking urban planning with a variety of health outcomes; such as, the encouragement of physical activity and healthy eating to reduce obesity, greater safety as part of an injury prevention strategy, cleaner air and healthier living environments, access to health services, age friendly spaces to encourage health equity, restoration of natural environments to promote ecosystem functioning, and improved social interactions amongst other potential health criteria.

How communities are planned and built, and the services and resources provided within them, directly impacts people's physical, mental, and social health. These impacts are reflected in levels of social cohesion, mental, and physical fitness, chronic disease, obesity, and injury.¹ In the next 25 years BC's population will grow 31% while the population over 65 will increase more than 100%. As the population ages, the prevalence rates of chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and obesity will also increase.²

All of these health effects arise in part from our interaction with the built environment, e.g. the buildings, parks, schools, road systems, and other infrastructure that we encounter in our daily lives. Research indicates that we can improve health and reduce illness through different approaches to planning our communities. According to the World Health Organization, 80% of some chronic diseases can be prevented through moderate exercise, and improved nutrition; as well as, having well designed homes, sidewalks, transportation systems, and playgrounds to help promote activity for all ages.

Overall the Official Community Plan (OCP) takes into consideration many neighbourhood design aspects that lend it to healthy community outcomes. Island Health (VIHA) appreciates the opportunity to provide evidence-based comments for this OCP. Highlights, considerations and recommendations from the healthy built environment as well as the regulatory perspective are itemized below:

Healthy Built Environment Highlights

Healthy Neighborhood Design

Objective 4.2.1 (page 19) strives for infill development that improves the livability of neighbourhoods and the overall community. This is one way to encourage densification, using vacant or underutilized land

in a neighbourhood that can help prevent the negative effects of sprawl (e.g. conversion of natural spaces to urban environments). Numerous studies identify distance as a barrier to engaging in active transportation. Densification can increase proximity to work, school, and recreational opportunities, therefore increasing engagement in walking, cycling, and physical activity.

Objective 5.2.1 (page 25) is aimed at encouraging growth through revitalization and redevelopment. This is achieved through the related policies speaking to streetscapes improvements, provision of amenities, and bicycle parking. These policies can enable mobility for all ages. Evidence shows us that improving streetscape aesthetics and making streets more usable (providing sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, and benches) are factors associated with an increase in physical activity especially among older adults. Along the same line, providing sheltered bike racks at bus stations has been shown to increase public transit use.

Healthy Transportation

Section 9 (page 40 - 43) this section overall illustrates policies to support a healthy transportation network. One that is safe, affordable, accessible to all levels of mobility, and prioritizes active transportation options like walking, cycling, and public transit at the forefront. When transportation networks are designed to place active transportation mobility for all residents first, this leads to improved health outcomes: better physical and mental well-being, as well as greater opportunities for social connectedness.

Many positive healthy transportation related policies can be found throughout the OCP. A few additional examples we would like to highlight and see come to fruition are:

In Objective 7.3.1 (page 34) the creation of senior-friendly community environments supports equity. By providing older adults as well as children, students, and people with disabilities with access to public transit enables them to connect with health and social services, recreation, and be more involved in community life.

Objective 5.3.1 (page 26) a pedestrian oriented Esquimalt Town Centre enhances connectivity encouraging people to walk or cycle for recreational and transportation purposes results in increasing total physical activity levels.

Objective 11.3.3 (page 50 & 51) under the heading Low Carbon Transportation this objective is laudable and simple in its aim to increase the number of trips made by walking, cycling or transit; essentially putting people before vehicular traffic. Prioritizing safety, such as implementing traffic calming, decreases traffic collisions and injuries among all road users.

Healthy Natural Environment

Section 8 (page 36 – 38) – throughout the Parks, Recreation and Trail section active living, expansion of open spaces and connectivity is front and centre. Initiatives such as reducing barriers and increasing recreational opportunities for people of all ages, enhancing the urban forest, creating multi-functional greenways, providing community connections (via park design and trail infrastructure) supports positive health. Research indicates a strong relationship between exposure to nature and reduced levels of stress, chronic disease, depression, and anxiety, as well as improved concentration and cognitive functioning. Even a brief interaction with nature, such as a ten-minute walk or a view of green space, can have restorative effects. Accessing parks and green space increases social well-being by providing places for

residents to make new connections and build relationships with friends and family. Access to natural outdoor spaces makes it more likely that people will be physically active.

Healthy Food Systems

Sections 12.1 and 12.2 (page 53) These objectives and related policies on Agricultural Land Use and Urban Food Production support food security through preservation of the ALR, establishment of allotment gardens, community gardens, edible landscapes, and fruit bearing trees. Agricultural land use decisions and food system infrastructure affect the quality, accessibility, and variety of food available. Research suggests that small-scale urban agriculture activities such as community gardens have the potential to build community and influence food knowledge and preferences, in addition to contributing to the local food supply³. Further to this, greater availability of locally produced fruits and vegetables may increase their consumption.

Objective 12.2.2 (page 54) speaks to policies that support farmers markets and the development of commissary kitchens. These amenities can indeed support food resiliency. Local farmers markets can encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables. Community kitchens participants, for example, can increase enjoyment of food; overall confidence; positive interactions with social services; healthy living behaviours; social and coping skills; budgeting, shopping and cooking skills³.

Healthy Housing

Section 4.4 (page 21) under Affordable Housing the OCP encourages a range of housing by type, tenure, and price so that people of all ages, household types, abilities and incomes have a diversity of housing choices in Esquimalt. This health related planning goal helps people to stay in their communities longer and improves their ability to afford other basic needs such as health care and nutritious food, while decreasing stress.

Section 4.5 (page 22) in line with the last objective, expanding and protecting seniors housing, creating child-friendly developments, encouraging adaptable design, more accessible Age-Friendly and mobility friendly housing provides options to support the needs of everyone. How we design our homes is critically important to our health and well-being. Living in a stable and affordable home provides a warm, safe, and healthy environment that can promote good nutrition, healthy behaviours, and healthy relationships. Healthy housing can foster good mental and physical health, and ultimately improve overall quality of life. For instance, research suggests that implementing policies and upgrading or retrofitting housing to increase accessibility enables people to continue living independently and “age in place”.

Regulatory Considerations

In the OCP Commercial & Commercial Mixed Use Land Use designation, retail stores (e.g. food premises), recreational facilities (e.g. swimming pools), personal service establishments (e.g. tanning or tattooing facilities), and community care facilities (e.g. complex care or daycare facilities) are possible uses. We would like to simply mention that both the Health Protection and Environmental Services (HPES) and the Community Care and Facilities Licensing (CCFL) departments within Island Health have a regulatory role in these facilities, from construction to operation. For more information, please refer to our website at www.viha.ca/mho, or do not hesitate to contact us.

Under Policy 10.2.1 (Page 45) there is a provision to support rain water collection systems on private

property. Island Health's HPES department would like to bring your attention to this proviso for private collection only, preferably irrigation, and not for public consumption, such as a drinking water source or rental accommodation supply. Additionally, if permitted for non-potable use, it is advised the Township require cross connection infrastructure to protect the municipal drinking water system (as mentioned in the related objective).

Recommendations under Island Health's Healthy Built Environment Initiative

On page 49 in the Waste Reduction section there is a policy regarding onsite composting. While Island Health is supportive of this environmental contribution (reducing green waste in our waste stream) our HPES department would like to caution on pest control related to this activity. There are helpful resources that could be incorporated into bylaw as your webpage on composting suggests.

In Section 5 under Commercial & Commercial Mixed-Use Land Use there are policies conducive to developments outside of the designation (on page 23). We would like to mention the “three C’s” of healthy neighbourhoods (complete, compact, and connected) which in turn has a variety of benefits. These neighbourhoods encourage “active transportation” (primarily walking, cycling, and if available the use of public transit)³. With this in mind, this allowance may wish to be included in the Industrial Land Use designation (where appropriate) to facilitate safe and connected routes to schools as well as areas with limited amenities (i.e. in school zones).

In addition, in Section 5 density bonuses through community amenity contribution may allow for a reduction in floor-space and/or increases to building height (page 24 & 25). Research suggests that social isolation may be associated with living in tall buildings especially when living on a high floor. Therefore it is especially important to design spaces that foster social interaction as part of this housing type³.

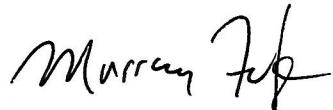
In Section 4 (page 16) there are many health related pros included in this section. One noteworthy item that appears missing from the Plan is reference to housing quality. While we appreciate the Township has limited control over this, it may be of interest to include some language around, when possible, improving housing quality. This could be achieved through title transfers, redevelopment, or energy efficiency initiatives. From a health perspective, access to good quality housing is correlated with an increased sense of safety, decreased crime, greater social well-being, and improved quality of life. Ensuring suitable ventilation, particularly for older homes, will also promote good indoor air quality to maintain good general and respiratory health, especially for children with asthma³.

Section 12 (page 53) touches on many health interventions increasing food production and supporting food resiliency. However, there is an absence of discussion on increasing equitable access to healthy food options. The availability of and accessibility to food retail outlets that sell a variety of fresh produce and whole foods at affordable prices (e.g. supermarkets) is linked to decreased obesity rates. Conversely, higher levels of obesity are linked to abundance of unhealthy food retail outlets that sell many processed and packaged foods (e.g. convenience stores). The Township may want to include policies supportive of increasing access to healthy foods, especially close to schools, and where there are no healthy food options available.

In Objective 13.2.2 (page 57) Esquimalt respects the Townships proud history and intends to work with local First Nations through meaningful dialogue about shared heritage values. In this era of Truth and Reconciliation it has become apparent that there is much to learn from the past and much for all of us to learn as we go forward. Island Health respectfully recommends that an additional bullet be added in that states that the Township will enter into a dialogue and understanding of cultural safety.

If you have any questions, comments or would like more information on our *Healthy Built Environment* program please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Dr. Murray Fyfe, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer

c.c.: Jade Yehia, Regional Built Environment Consultant, Island Health

¹ Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) (2008). *Introduction to Land Use Planning for Health Professionals*. Retrieved April 15, 2018 from: <http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/introductiontolanduseplanningforhealthprofessional.pdf>

² PlanH. (2014). *How do Local Governments Improve Health and Community Well-being? A Resource Guide for Local Governments*. Retrieved April 15, 2018 from: http://planh.ca/sites/default/files/planh_local_government_guide-web_0.pdf

³ Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) (2014). *Healthy Built Environment Linkages – A Toolkit for Design, Planning and Health*. Retrieved April 20, 2018 from: http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/linkagestoolkitrevisedoct16_2014_full.pdf