

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PROCESS PROPOSAL

by OBW

If Oak Bay is to maintain its livability, desirability and character, clearly a new process of community involvement must be introduced. This is particularly true as the new Official Community Plan is full of pro-development objectives. Many of these, if implemented, will have serious implications for our Community's predominantly single-family neighbourhoods, tax structure, infrastructure and service levels.

Oak Bay is currently an ideal community in which to live. Therefore any significant change that will impact the Community must be **carefully considered** and must be **evidence-based**, proven and tested. Change must not be belief-driven, unsubstantiated or just speculative. Simply tagging inherent problems and impacts, that are complex and expensive to resolve, as "challenges" is not good policy or planning. Residents have a right to know exactly how any given Bylaw change or modification will fit exactly into the real expectations of the community, including how such changes will provide direct benefits.

Change proposed by Council must prioritize the interests of existing residents over the profit of developers, speculative investment or the interests of would-be residents.

When adopting a true community collaborative process, the Municipal Council must **avoid using the following techniques** employed by some municipal councils and city staff, all of which frustrate the objective of real community involvement:

- Treat public meetings as a legislated formality - with little intention of making changes.
- Merely listen to speakers instead of respecting the intended purpose of providing residents with a forum that can lead to a consensual outcome.
- Label those who speak in opposition as "dissenters" or "NIMBYs" and residents who do not attend meetings as "supporters".
- Ignore any opposition or community concerns, not considering valid objections brought about by residents with supporting evidence.

- Council members, notwithstanding their having pledged to act in the best interest of all residents, provide their personal rationale, points of view or belief with limited understanding of what a particular constituency needs.
- Council overriding bylaws previously approved and enacted, without appropriate public hearing and consultation (e.g. spot rezoning and variance approvals, both accepted hallmarks of poor governance, become the rule rather than the exception).

This same dysfunctional public consultation practice in Vancouver has recently resulted in 30 neighbourhood groups (NSV) organizing themselves to oppose Council development changes. In the past three years these problematic practices in Vancouver have led to public discontent and an unprecedented 13 community-led lawsuits against the City in the past three-year term.

In Oak Bay a significant number of neighbourhood associations and groups have been formed to oppose inappropriate development, also during the past Council three-year term. **These groups have also been ready and available to engage in a positive and mutually constructive relationship with council, with no avail.**

Obviously a much better process than the one currently employed is needed in Oak Bay to involve and inform residents. Oak Bay Watch proposes the following process be adopted to provide and ensure, not just consultation - which can be a one-way street, but public cooperation and support.

Collaborative defined as: "To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort to agree on an objective, plan or course of action" and, "The process of achieving desired objectives in a self-similar way".

Council has committed to "engaging the public" in land use changes during their election campaigns. Council (see <sup>1</sup>\*note) has also publicly committed to, and assured residents they can, "assume key issues such as traffic, parking, noise, tree protection and neighbourhood character would be **addressed** before suggested land use changes <sup>1</sup>are allowed". Address defined as: "To deal with; skillful and expeditious management".

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<sup>1</sup> \*note: See the Official Community Plan, Resident Survey Questionnaire preamble on every land use section.

## PUBLIC COLLABORATION PROCESS PROPOSAL

True public participation is not easy to achieve - there must be levels of participation beyond consulting and informing. The Community was founded and developed based on a specific set of zoning rules and objectives: however if these are changed, residents have every right to expect to be protected from any new impacts and/or abuse arising from political agendas and personal preferences. Council has the responsibility and obligation to protect the rights and interests of the residents who elected them.

However, private interests operating under new potentially expanded zoning, can influence municipal councils in a variety of ways - including providing campaign funding. Developers, speculative investors often push their densification agenda by lobbying legislators to adopt policies that have outstanding emotional appeal, but are extremely misleading in terms of the outcomes they produce: "affordable housing" is a clear example of such strategy.

Also municipal staff do not work directly with the community they serve. Often times, they only interact with "applicants" who are ultimately individuals who represent these particular private interests. These factors and influences can lead to "framing" the information that is provided to the public. This information can be biased and misleading. At times this information presents unrealistic, speculative goals and ideal scenarios that are unachievable. The public is rarely given all the facts that include adequate and accurate information on the impacts they can expect. They are then asked to fill out surveys, attend public meetings and engage in "public participation events", poorly advertised and short-handed, with a one-sided perspective.

The collaborative process and the following practices will correct this inequity and provide residents with sufficient resources and information to make informed decisions about changes that may or may not be in their and the Community's best interests.

OBW is of the opinion that if these 10 items are adopted they will not only provide extensive public input into decision-making but, ensure public support and endorsement and, by doing so, prevent unintended consequences while building ongoing mutual trust.

## PROPOSED COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PROCESS PRACTICES

1. Ensure that the public has all the information they need in a timely manner to develop an “informed opinion” about what is being proposed.
2. Ensure the public has all the help and resources necessary to explore and determine the full range of community benefits, disadvantages and impacts, and that a staff member or staff time is assigned to work with and be informed by a range of community representatives.
3. Ensure that all credible research findings and input including advantages and disadvantages are recorded and made available on the municipal website.
4. Ensure the public is aware of proposal, applications and other initiatives by making them public and by educating the community and actively engaging residents in major discussions.
5. Ensure that public meetings, surveys and questionnaires etc concerning community impact proposals and bylaw changes are not conducted until clearly written information is provided to the public in a timely manner. This means allowing time for the public to understand, question, research and respond.
6. If the change or proposal involves or will involve land use changes - identify how any increased population will:
  - (a) impact resources and amenities
  - (b) impact the living standards of existing residents.
  - (c) require (through a comprehensive cost benefit analysis) any necessary incremental tax revenue or development cost charges in order to sustain the present high level of amenities and services.
7. Identify just how key issues such as traffic, infrastructure, parking, regulation, trees, noise will be addressed in each proposed change.
8. Define and make available to residents the policy and locations that will be applied to land use changes before they are approved.
9. Hold round table discussions with representatives of the Community, Councillors and Staff allowing three-way dialogue prior to Public meetings.
10. Make sure that decisions about the municipality operating costs, including HR, are carefully measured against their tax implications, redundancy, duplication of efforts and sustainability.