

NORTH PARK PLANNING GUIDE

Planning language can be hard to understand, and there are so many policies that apply to North Park that it can be hard to know what is allowed, what isn't, and how it all fits together. We've put together this guide to help you understand planning in North Park.

PLANNING POLICIES IN NORTH PARK

There are several policies that affect the growth and development of the North Park neighbourhood: the Official Community Plan (OCP); the North Park Local Area Plan (LAP); the Downtown Core Area Plan (DCAP); and an upcoming LAP for Villages and Corridors, which will affect the North Park Village and Cook Street.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN (OCP)

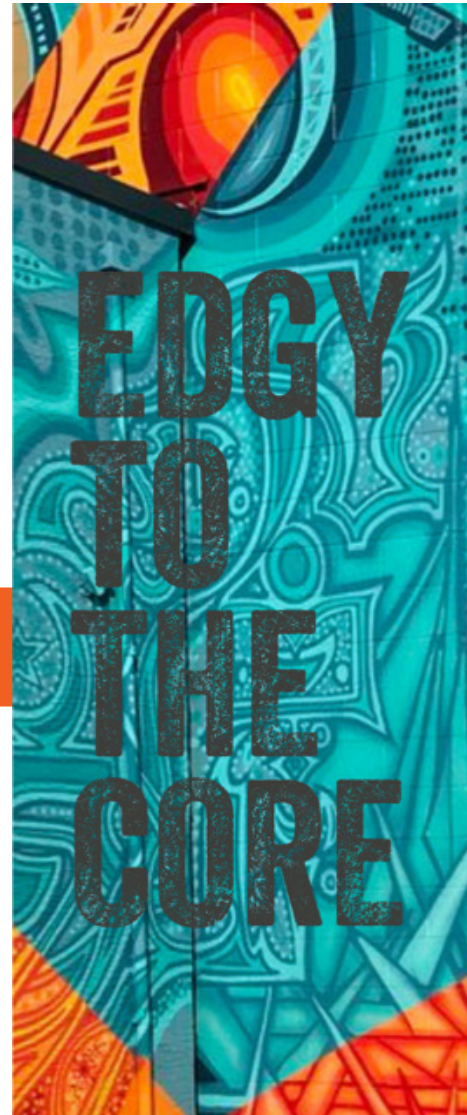
An OCP is a document that municipalities are required by law to write. They are the guiding policy document for a city over the next 20+ years. They are not meant to be overly prescriptive, but rather guide the direction of development and growth. For example, an OCP may set out broad goals such as "support the development of affordable rental housing". Then, the municipality would write more specific/prescriptive policies and strategies specific to housing.

An OCP is written over the span of 1-2 years, and usually involves rigorous engagement and consultation with the residents of the municipality. The OCP is meant to represent the vision of how the residents want their community to look as it moves into the future.

A city's OCP and bylaws must align. Any development that happens within the municipality must also conform to the goals/policies set out in the OCP. If a proposal does not align, the Council may vote against the proposal, or may vote to amend the OCP to accommodate the proposal in question. For example, there may be a proposal for a mixed-use development on a property that the OCP has designated as "residential", which would not support any commercial use. However, perhaps the proposal

meets other OCP goals, such as affordable housing provisions or building complete neighbourhoods. In that case, Council could vote to amend the OCP so that the property in question is designated as "mixed use" or similar.

Victoria's OCP was adopted by Council in 2012; you can find it online [here](#). The focus of the OCP is to maintain the downtown core as the heart of the region, while developing neighbourhoods into vibrant, walkable villages. There is an emphasis on sustainable transportation and recognizes that each neighbourhood has a unique character.



NORTH PARK LOCAL AREA PLAN



Local area plans are more specific than OCPs, which provide broad guidance. LAPs indicate where new housing, amenities, and services can go. The goal of LAPs is to lay out how each neighbourhood or area will contribute to achieving the city-wide vision laid out in the OCP.

The Local Plan for North Park was adopted by Council in 1996, and last revised in 2012. The LAP lays out the history and context of the area, including demographics (which are now very outdated). It then lays out goals related to housing, heritage and traditional landmarks, commercial and institutional uses, industrial and service commercial uses, public works and transportation, parks and recreation, and urban design. Education and social planning are also briefly addressed.

The City is currently (as of 2020) undergoing an LAP update process. North Park is part of the first phase of their "Villages and Corridors" LAP planning. Look for opportunities to provide input on what you would like North Park Village, Cook St, Pandora Ave, and the rest of the neighbourhood should look like as we move into the future.

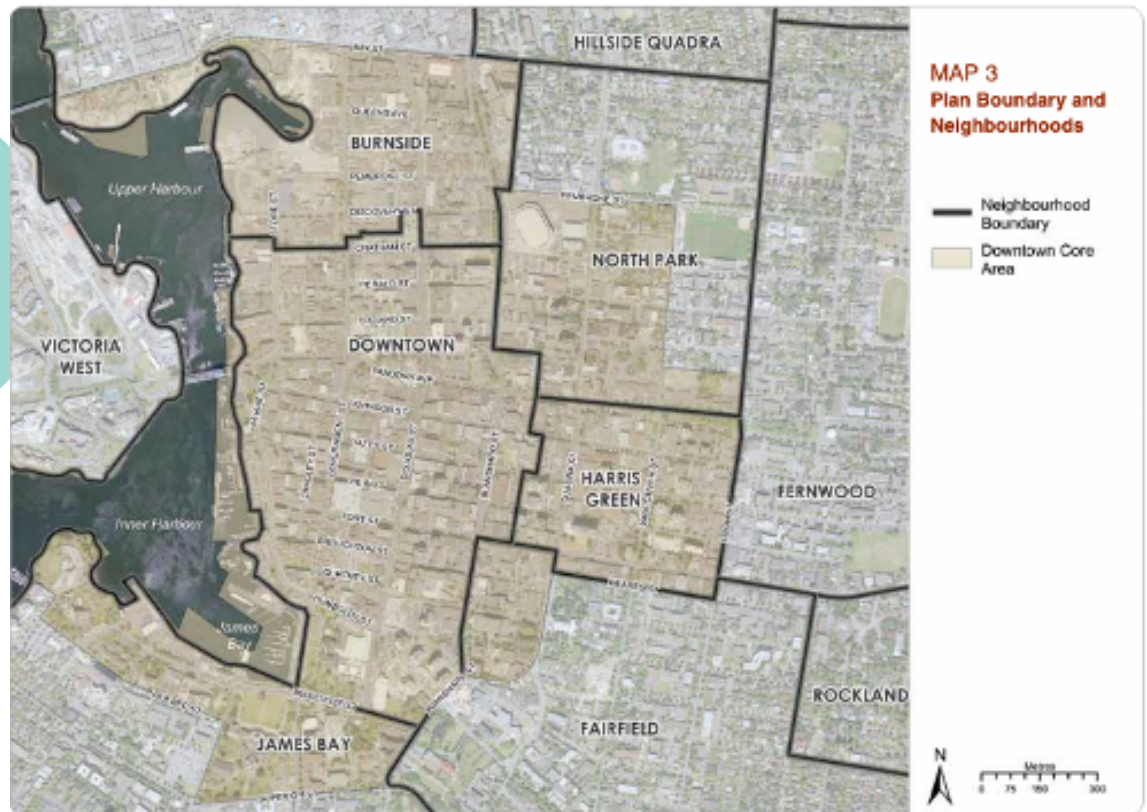
DOWNTOWN CORE AREA PLAN (DCAP)

The Downtown Core Area Plan (DCAP) is essentially a local area plan for the downtown area. However, it overlaps with several neighbourhoods adjacent to downtown. The City envisions downtown Victoria remaining the "heart of the region", and as such developed a plan specifically for the downtown area.

The DCAP encompasses an area covering all of downtown and Harris Green, and parts of James Bay, Burnside, and North Park. It primarily provides guidance on urban design, land use, and transportation, as well as parks and green space.

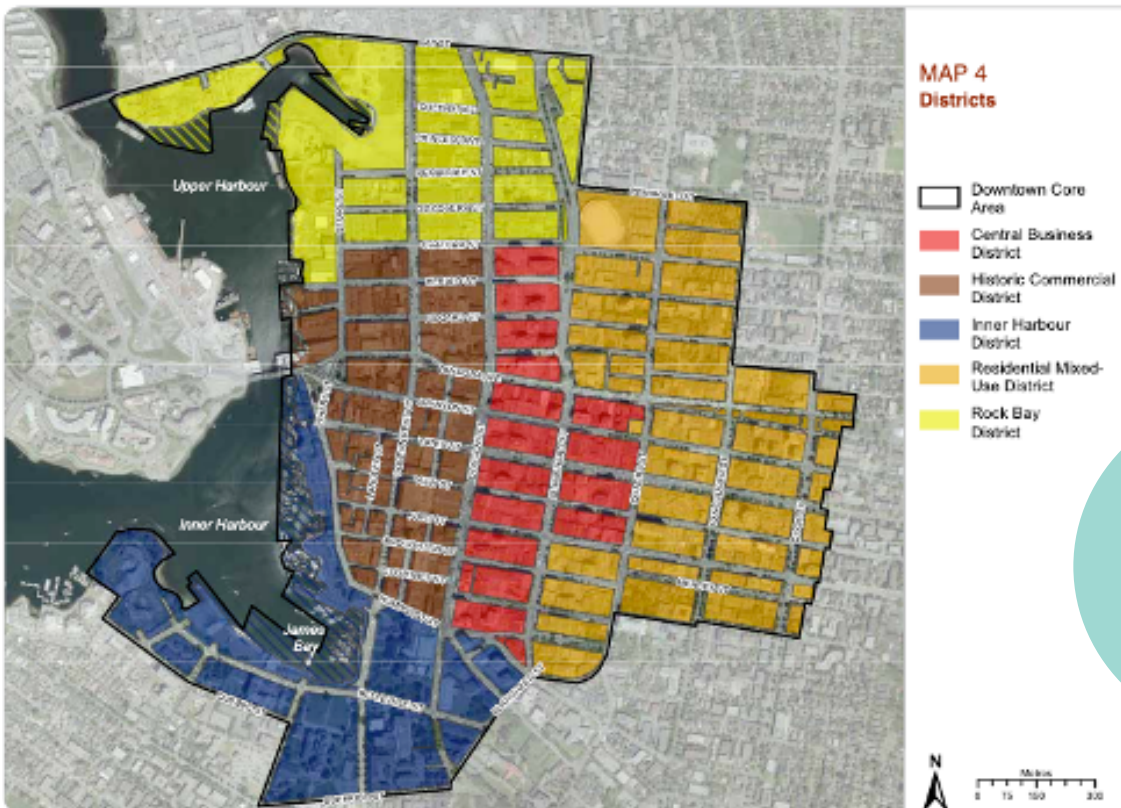


This map shows the boundaries of the Downtown Core Area. About half of North Park is included.



Map Source: City of Victoria (2011) Downtown Core Area Plan

Within the DCAP, it sets out different districts, each with its own policies and guidelines. The portion of North Park that is affected by the DCAP is designated as “Residential Mixed-Use District”, which is seen as the majority of the residential land base for the area. One of the primary goals for this District is to “develop new zoning for RMD that includes density levels to accommodate mid-rise to high-rise residential, commercial and office development as described in this plan”



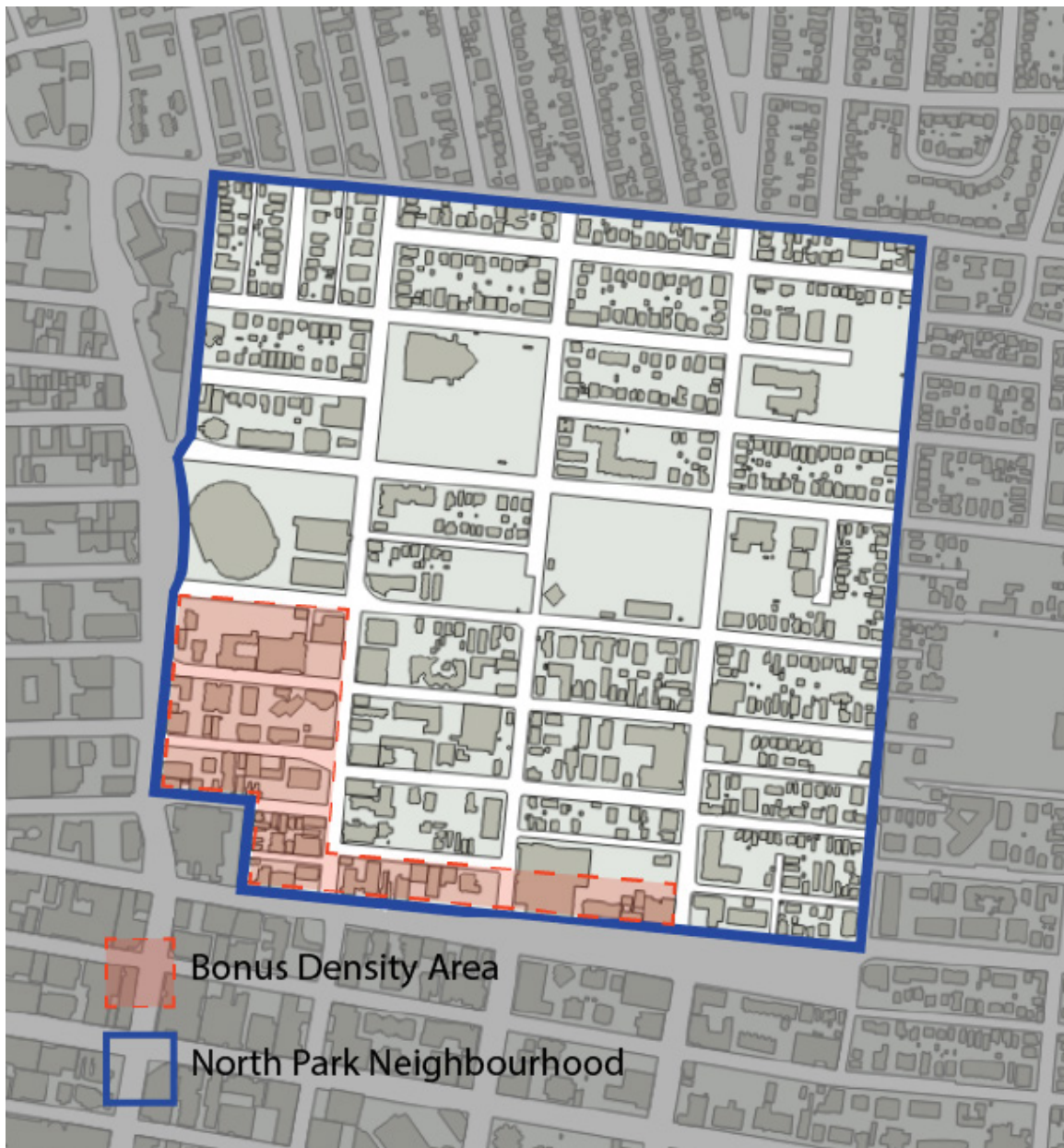
This map shows the Districts set out in the DCAP. North Park is considered “Residential Mixed Use”

Map Source: City of Victoria (2011) Downtown Core Area Plan

Bonus Density and FSR

The main impact that DCAP might have on North Park is the density and height of buildings. North Park is already a mixed-use neighbourhood and is generally open to mixed-use developments. However, some sections of the neighbourhood are within a “Density Bonus Area”, as set out in the DCAP.

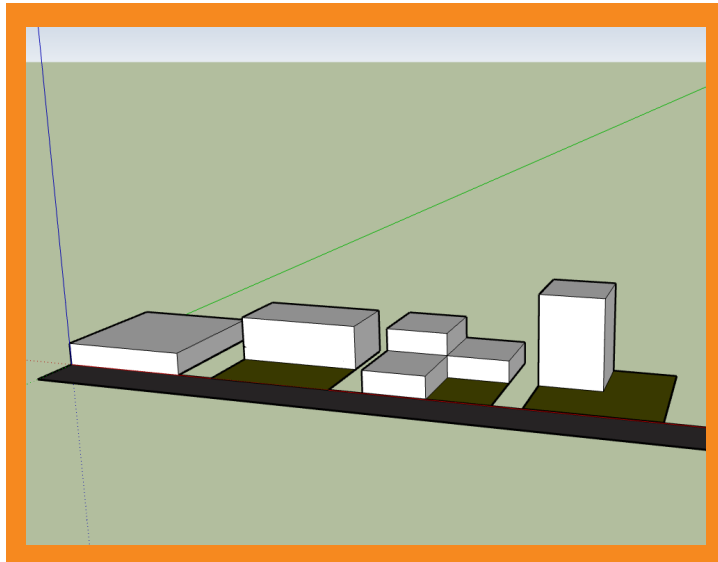
In this area, developers can ask the City for extra density (generally extra storeys) in exchange for some kind of community amenity – such as public plazas, greenspace, or public realm (street and sidewalk) improvements. Community amenities will generally be identified from neighbourhood plans and should be of a public nature with secured public access/control. Affordable housing is an amenity often used in exchange for bonus density.



What is FSR (Floor Space Ratio)?

FSR, also known as Floor Area Ratio (FAR), is a term used in city planning to describe density as being the relationship between a building's total floor area and the site/property on which it is located.

FAR is represented by two numbers separated by a colon like this #:#. The first number references proportion the floor area of the building, while the second number represents the proportion of the total site area.



All of the buildings here have a FSR of 3:1. The buildings range from 3 storeys with 100% site coverage to 12 storeys with 25% site coverage. There are many more configurations possible

**3:1
FSR**

A FSR of 1:1 means that the floor area of the building can be equal to the total area of the site. A FSR of 3:1 means that the floor area of the building can be 3x more than the total area of the site.

The same FAR can look very different, depending on how much of the property the building covers. For example, a building built to the property lines with 3:1 FAR would be 3 storeys high. If the building took up 50% of the property, it would be 6 storeys.

The City often requires setbacks from the property lines to accommodate wider sidewalks, boulevards, and green space as well as greater separation between adjoining buildings for privacy and access, and to allow light and views between buildings. This means that buildings rarely take up 100% of the site.

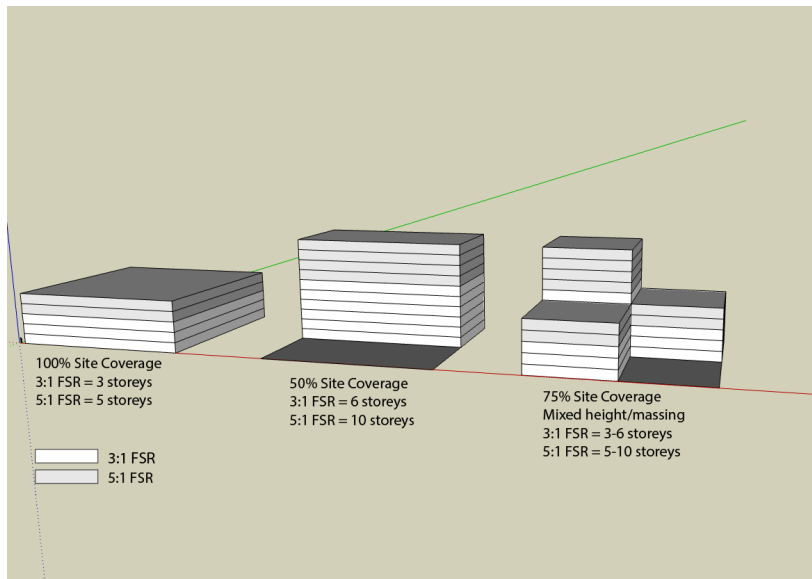
How does DCAP impact FSR?

The south and south-west sides of North Park are subject to the Density Bonus System:

- Approximately 4 blocks, bordered by Blanshard, Pandora, Quadra, and Caledonia have a base density of 3:1. Under the Bonus Density policy, those blocks could increase to a density of 4.5:1.
- The properties bordering Blanshard can go up to a density of 5:1.
- The properties bordering Pandora between Quadra and Cook have a base density of 3:1 and can go to a density of 5.5:1 if they are residential or mixed-use. For commercial-only, the current density is 1:1, and can go up to 3:1 through a Bonus Density.

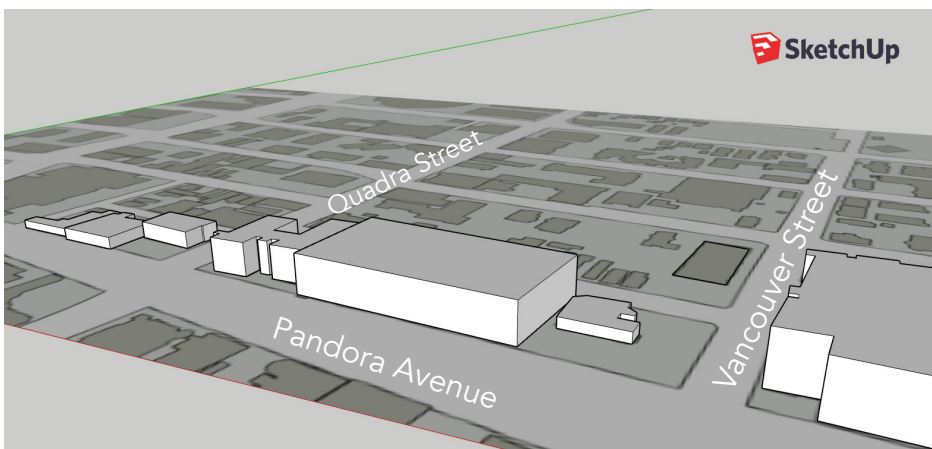
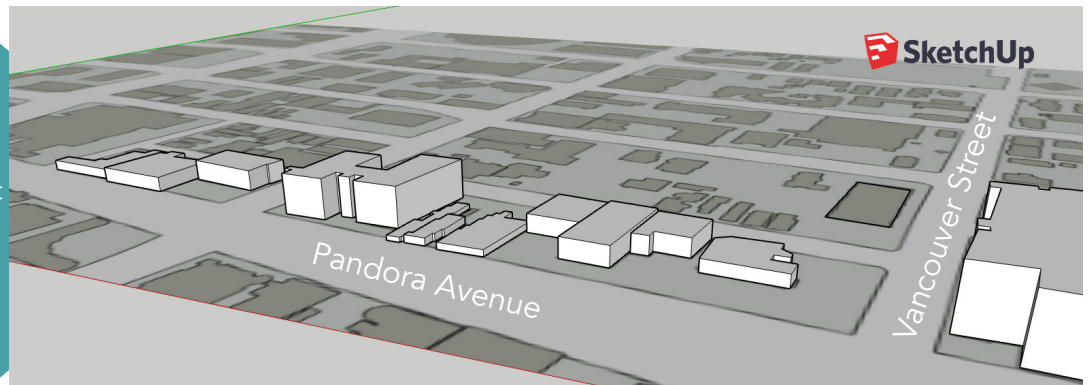
Bonus Density and North Park

Below are some illustrations of how Bonus Density could change the look and feel of North Park:



This illustration demonstrates how the DCAP might affect developments in North Park. Under the base density, a new building could range from 3-6 storeys, depending on site coverage (potentially higher, depending on a range of factors). The same building could grow to 5-10+ storeys with a Bonus Density.

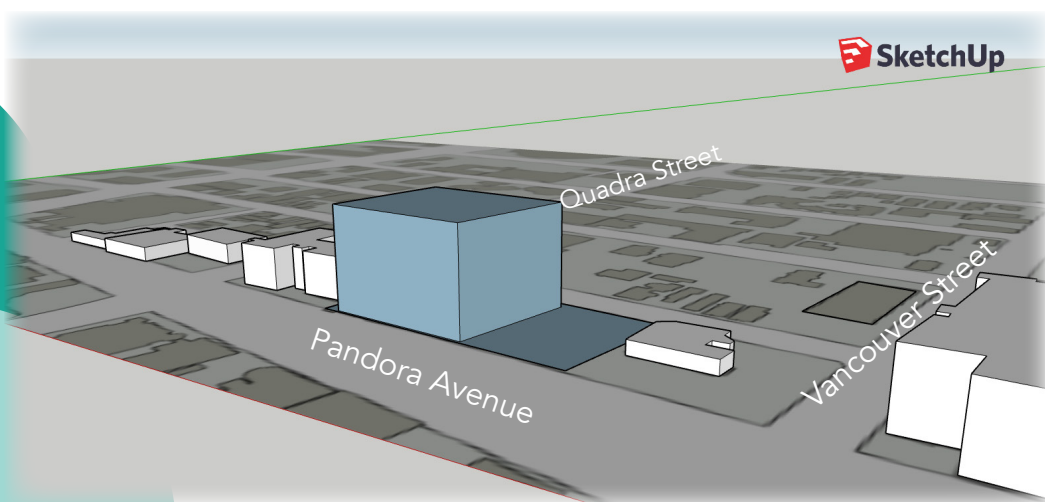
Here is a rough sketch of what the North Park side of Pandora looks like right now. This south-west corner of North Park can have a density of up to 5.5:1 FSR for mixed-use buildings under the Bonus Density System



This is what the same block could look like if redeveloped using bonus density at 100% site coverage.

With 100% site coverage, the building could be 5.5 storeys – taller even than the building on the corner of Quadra and Pandora. 100% site coverage is essentially impossible to develop, however, as the City has requirements for setbacks.

Here is just one example of what the street could look like with 50% site coverage



It is important to remember that even the sketch above is only a rough idea of what a 5.5 FSR might look like. In reality, the building would likely not be one large rectangle but have more setbacks and have upper floors stepped back so it does not impose on the street too much. However, regardless of the actual design, the building that could be developed at this site would likely be significantly taller/larger than the rest of the block, including the new Bosa building.

Planning Dictionary

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| Bonus Density | Additional density beyond what is allowed under the current or proposed zoning, which is allowed in exchange for contributions to support public amenities. Bonus density may be granted in exchange for a monetary contribution, the provision of affordable housing, or other the provision of a public amenity such as a public plaza. |
| Development Permit | A development permit is required prior to construction for developments that are in an area within a Development Permit Area. These areas are set out in the OCP and may have requirements relating to environmental protection, urban design, or heritage, among others. |
| Infill | A form of development in urban areas where there is little undeveloped land remaining. Infill can take the form of adding laneway or granny suites, redeveloping smaller buildings into larger developments, redeveloping parking lots or other empty lots, etc. |
| Rezoning | A process to change the zoning of a property. This is generally triggered when a landowner wants to develop something not allowed under current zoning. There are legal requirements to complete a rezoning (as set out in the Local Government Act which include Council having 4 readings of the application and an opportunity for the public to voice their opinions at a Public Hearing. Most municipalities often have other public engagement requirements, such as the City of Victoria's Community Association Land Use Committee (CALUC) meetings. |
| Setbacks | How far a building needs to be set back from the property line. These are important to ensure adequate light and access between buildings, and municipalities have requirements for how big the setbacks must to be. |

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| Variance | Some proposed developments may meet the requirements of a zone or Development Permit with some minor exceptions. A developer can request a variance (for example, to reduce setback requirements), which will either be decided by Council or if very minor, delegated to staff to decide. |
| Zoning | Zoning is a form of regulation that municipalities use to regulate land use. All properties within a municipality have a zone, which sets out the allowable uses, setbacks, height, and density of buildings. |

Further Information and Reading

Interested in learning more about planning in North Park and the City of Victoria? See below for links to the policies mentioned in this guide and other relevant policies in North Park.

City of Victoria OCP: <https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/community-planning/official-community-plan.html>

North Park LAP: <https://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Planning~Development/Development~Services/Documents/neighbourhoods-north-park-plan.pdf>

Downtown Core Area Plan: https://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Planning~Development/Community~Planning/Local~Area~Planning/Downtown~Core~Area~Plan/DTCP_book_web.pdf

City of Victoria Housing Strategy: <https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/housing-strategy.html>

All planning documents can be found at: <https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/planning-development/documents-publications.html>

Still have more questions? Please reach out to our Land Use Planning Advisor at landuse@npna.ca

