



North Park Neighbourhood Association
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Victoria Downtown Residents Association
c/o 1715 Government Street
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September 21, 2021

Re: NPNA and DRA Concerns regarding project plan for 926/930 Pandora Community Centre

Attention: Jocelyn Jenkins, Susanne Thompson, Karen Hoese, Thomas Soulliere, Bill Eisenhauer, Peter Rantucci, Mandi Sandhu

CC: Jeff Brehaut, Trish Piwowar, Derrick Newman, Michael Hill, NPNA board, DRA board, Mayor and Council

The North Park Neighbourhood Association and the Downtown Residents Association would like to take this opportunity to express our concerns about the schematic design phase for the proposed community centre at 926/930 Pandora Ave.

Long before this project was announced the NPNA and the DRA had been sounding the alarm on the distressing state of the 900 block of Pandora Ave. This area has seen a decades-long concentration of services and support for our City's most marginalized and vulnerable community members. Despite the recent 900 Pandora block charrette and [recommendations moved by council in November 2019](#), this has not translated into a plan at the municipal or provincial level to make any meaningful improvements to the block itself or for the individuals using services on this block.

When this project was announced in June 2021, the NPNA addressed the news by saying that if the City and BC Housing can commit to taking this opportunity to revitalize the entire Pandora corridor, then this project will be a very welcome addition to the neighbourhood. At the time, the NPNA was in support of this development provided it became one part of a larger, comprehensive plan to revitalize and uplift the Pandora corridor. The DRA also expressed support, seeing this as

an important opportunity to provide a much needed hub where a stronger sense of neighbourhood engagement could be created.

The purpose of this letter is to express our concern for the direction this project is taking. We write this letter now, in the early stages of the schematic design phase, in the hopes that communication between City staff and our neighbourhoods can be improved so that we can work together on a project which will meet the needs of our two neighbourhoods.

We would like to request that the executive administration of the City return to the Mayor and Council for explicit direction on the project plan and direction of the 926/930 Pandora project, and provide us with the detailed direction and authority given to the Parks and Facilities Departments. In the following, we highlight our concerns about this project.

No plan for addressing the 900 Block of Pandora

The plan laid out by the project team, at this point, does not contain a comprehensive plan to address the challenges of the 900 block of Pandora. Neither the City nor BC Housing are demonstrating a willingness to acknowledge that what happens on the 900 Block of Pandora will impact the operation of this community centre. The vision for this project needs to extend beyond the property lines of 926/930 Pandora. Without this, we do not feel confident that this project will meet community needs.

The NPNA has been advocating for a community centre and childcare space in the North Park neighbourhood, and we have made several suggestions for possible locations: the new Crystal Pool, the Save on Foods Memorial Arena parking lot, Royal Athletic Park, the city-owned parking lot at 940 Caledonia, and the Curling Club to name a few. These City owned properties in North Park are more central to the neighbourhood and arguably better suited to a community centre and daycare. Instead of working with the NPNA on these potential locations, the City has taken our requests to mean that, without prior consultation or any community engagement whatsoever, the North Park neighbourhood will accept a community centre and childcare on the most dangerous, and least welcoming block in the entire Capital Regional District - while not including a comprehensive uplift of this block in the project plans.

The Pandora boulevard is at the worst it has been in a long time. Our Place closed its doors temporarily on September 16, citing an increase in violence in the community and to its employees. If a drop in centre staffed by trained professionals is not able to safely serve the community on Pandora, what hope does a community centre have for being a welcoming space for all and attracting and retaining staff, especially Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) who are in high demand at childcare facilities throughout the province?

We believe that it is possible to build and operate a community centre that is both welcoming and safe for all residents of North Park and Downtown-Harris Green, housed and unhoused. To do that, however, requires careful consideration of how the programming and the built form interact with and improve the existing streetscape. Conversation about this particular location needs to be

part of the discussion in the schematic design phase. From the list of resources that we have been promised - many of which have not received - we do not see any signs of recognition of the challenges of this location.

Inadequate consultation and engagement

Based on the most recent project plan laid out by the project team, the NPNA and the DRA will be given the opportunity to participate in five meetings (including one workshop and one site tour) between early October and late November. When asked, BC Housing and other relevant stakeholders will not be participating in these meetings.

The City's project team have indicated that there will be no community consultation, and limited - if any - support for the NPNA or the DRA to engage with the community ourselves before the late-November 2021 deadline for the completion of the community centre design. The project team also indicated that there would be no consultation with stakeholders or community groups relevant to this project.

The lack of consultation and engagement with the neighbourhoods is also reflected in the paucity of information we have received about this project. We have made requests for specific documents to help us prepare adequately for this process and we have not received responses to our requests. Documentation promised at the July 30th meeting was not sent. Adequate notice of meeting dates promised in the summer has not been forthcoming. Requests to honour staff holidays by scheduling meetings outside of those dates have been ignored. We are now in a process whose timeline has been determined by BC Housing and we have - just yesterday - received some of the documents and meeting dates promised to us ten days ago. Before September 20, 2021 we received the slide deck from a July 30, 2021 meeting - and nothing else.

Use of the 2017 Crystal Pool consultation

The project team has told us that the consultation conducted in 2017 in relation to the Crystal Pool project will be the basis for this community centre design and planning. And that once again, no further consultation will be completed.

The NPNA and the DRA have many concerns about using the consultation from the Crystal Pool project to inform the community centre design and planning.

To begin with, the Crystal Pool engagement did not include any targeted engagement of North Park or Downtown residents. Instead, the City engaged with existing pool users inside of the facility (primarily swim clubs). There was also an online survey that was live for several weeks during the summer. And after considerable pressure, there were two workshops held at Crystal Gardens located downtown. The NPNA has confirmed that there was no engagement with the Masjid Al-Iman Mosque, the ICA, VIRCS, The Greater Victoria Housing Authority, Pacifica, Philippine Bayanihan Community Centre, or George Jay. During this time, the NPNA was frequently reminded that Crystal Pool was not to be a neighbourhood or even City centre, but a

regional facility, even though construction plans would be very damaging to Central Park and its use by North Park residents.

The engagement from the Crystal Pool project is even more irrelevant when considering that it was engaging about a completely different type of facility. Crystal Pool is a regional facility - as we were often reminded - which serves the entire Capital Regional District. As a pool and recreation centre it has little overlap to a community centre focused on accessible all ages programming, childcare, and community development and support for two specific neighbourhoods.

The project at 926/930 Pandora is proposed to become a community centre, jointly operated by the NPNA and the DRA complete with childcare, space for a multitude of community programs and events, and - hopefully - a commercial kitchen and community garden, with 220 units of supportive and affordable housing located directly on top. By all accounts, this is the first project of this kind in Victoria. The City has never consulted with City residents on a project like this.

Using consultation that was completed in 2017, about a different type of facility, in a completely different location, without consulting with a long list of relevant community partners does not provide the basis for adequate consultation on the proposed community centre at 926/930 Pandora.

Where is the inclusion of the City's Equity Team and Interim Equity Tool?

Furthermore, after repeated requests, the involvement of the City's newly established Equity Team and the application of the newly adopted [interim equity tool](#) are still not confirmed to be incorporated into this project. A project of this size, in this location, requires a robust equity analysis and involvement of relevant stakeholders and community groups. **We do not want to participate in a project that does not forefront equity and the involvement of the community, and we do not want marginalized groups to be left behind.**

On its current trajectory, this project will either result in a space that will not be a safe, welcoming centre for the North Park and Downtown residents. Or, it will quickly and abruptly gentrify the 900 block of Pandora displacing the community on this street, and pushing them into the surrounding neighbourhood where supports and services are not located. Both are unacceptable outcomes, but we feel they are inevitable based on the project plan.

Appropriate resource allocation

Current operating funding for community centres includes a direct award grant for staffing (\$75,000) plus funding for janitorial, utilities, maintenance, and recycling/garbage as determined through an operating agreement.

We are not aware of the City providing funding for security which this facility will require given its location.

Day care centres operated out of community centres benefit from the low to no cost access to a facility provided by the City. Given that ECEs are already in short supply, we predict difficulties recruiting and retaining ECE's to work in a daycare on the 900 block of Pandora. What support will the City provide in terms of funding, and how are these difficult realities being taken into account during the schematic design phase?

Furthermore, regular outreach and coordination with adjacent businesses, residents, nonprofits, housing providers, and BC Housing will also be required to address valid health and safety concerns of visitors, parents and employees to the daycare and the community centre. What additional ongoing operating funding will be included for security, higher than usual demands for janitorial and building maintenance, and ongoing communications and outreach of tenants, landlords, businesses, and non-profits in the building and in the immediately surrounding ecosystem that is the 900 block of Pandora?

Based on the non-existent opportunities for community consultation, the exclusion of the existing realities of Pandora Ave into the project design, and the lack of an equity focus on this project, we foresee issues staffing, operating, and facilitating a community centre on the 900 block of Pandora. We believe it is more than possible to create a vibrant and healthy community centre in this location but only if the challenges are addressed from the beginning of the process.

Once again, the purpose of this letter is to express our concern for the direction this project is taking. While we appreciate the intent of the Mayor and Council, we feel that given the very significant challenges of this project not enough has been done to address these risks. Unless significant progress is made to address these issues we cannot reasonably expect it to succeed. Unless there is a reasonable chance of success, we cannot justify our participation in the project.

We would therefore like to request that the executive administration of the City return to the Mayor and Council for explicit direction on the project plan and direction of the 926/930 Pandora project based on the concerns highlighted in this letter.

Sincerely,

North Park Neighbourhood Association Board
npna@npna.ca

Downtown Residents Association Board
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