



December 8, 2021

Attention: Mayor and Council

CC: Jeff Brehaut, Trish Piwowar, Derrick Newman, Bill Eisenhauer, Jocelyn Jenkyns, Susanne Thompson, Karen Hoese, Thomas Soulliere, Peter Rantucci, Michael Hill, NPNA Board, NPNA Executive Director, Mark Mortimer

Dear Mayor Helps and Council,

Re: New direction for property development at 926/930 Pandora Avenue

We are writing in response to the email received from Mayor Helps on December 2, 2021, outlining Council's new direction for the development of the property at 926/930 Pandora Avenue.

We support North Park Neighbourhood Association's ("NPNA") letter in response to that email and NPNA's analysis that the 900 block of Pandora is not a suitable location for a community centre and did not meet the needs of North Park residents. We add our voice to that letter and agree that, for similar reasons, the location did not meet the needs of Downtown residents. Like NPNA we maintain that a community centre, located and developed to meet the needs of our residents, should remain a priority for Council.

Despite Council's direction that we are no longer to be involved in the development of the 926/930 Pandora site, the critical need for a Downtown community centre, and the corresponding financial resources, remains the same as before that change of direction.

By initially proposing the 930 Pandora project as a recreation and meeting space for Downtown residents, Council clearly recognized and acknowledged the significant gap faced by Downtown-Harris Green residents in terms of access to public recreation and program facilities. Indeed, a Downtown community centre is, by any equity measure, long overdue. This gap will continue to widen as the thousands of units currently under development in our neighbourhood are completed and occupied, with no City-sponsored space for those residents to be welcomed or engage with others and build a sense of community – all this despite contributing significant new dollars to the City's assessment and tax base. Our neighbourhood is absorbing the majority of Victoria's new residential development, and providing the assessment dollars that goes with that, yet we are not being provided with any of the community amenities that should go with that development.

Without a community centre our association struggles to provide a visible and physical presence in our neighbourhood and to build a strong and resilient community. Additionally, we lack the appropriate financial resources to adequately support staff and programming to meet those needs. In its preliminary proposal for an increase to our funding for 2022, Council has recognized the equity gap experienced by neighbourhood associations like the DRA that do not have community centres. Continuing to operate without dedicated meeting and program space continues to present a significant barrier to our ability to build a strong and resilient neighbourhood or to welcome the expected new residents.

We strongly urge Council to approve the proposed increase in funding to the DRA in the 2022 budget to enable us to build capacity, strengthen our organization and reach out more effectively to Downtown-Harris Green residents. Providing funding at the same or similar level as associations with community centres will enable us to rent administrative and program space, engage in community consultation and assist in identifying real estate appropriate for a community centre in our neighbourhood.

We look forward to on-going conversations with Council and City staff.

Yours truly,

Sandra Severs,
President,
Victoria Downtown Residents Association