



North Park Neighbourhood Association  
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[www.npna.ca](http://www.npna.ca)

December 7, 2021

Re: Open Letter: NPNA response to new direction for community space at 926/930 Pandora

Attention: Mayor and Council, Jeff Brehaut, Trish Piwowar, Derrick Newman, Bill Eisenhauer  
CC: Jocelyn Jenkins, Susanne Thompson, Karen Hoese, Thomas Soulliere, Peter Rantucci, Michael Hill, NPNA board, DRA president, Mark Mortimer

Dear Mayor and Council,

We would like to respond to your email from December 2, 2021 updating us about Council's direction for the community use space at 926/930 Pandora Ave. We understand that Council has given "direction to staff to bring back for Council's consideration plans for the ground floor of 930 Pandora that makes room for some or all of: community use space, a gymnasium, a community kitchen, childcare, and space to achieve some of the aims in the Create Victoria Arts and Culture Master Plan" and that this direction is being pursued to ensure that the 220 units of housing to be built by BC Housing will proceed.

We support Council's direction to make use of this space for a use other than a neighbourhood community centre and child care for North Park and Downtown. The NPNA board does not feel that a "community use space, a gymnasium, a community kitchen, childcare" - which normally constitute a community centre - is suited to this location given the confluence of issues that has been caused by a concentration of support and services in this area.

**The NPNA has made repeated requests to treat the 900 Block of Pandora as a special improvement area, and to undertake the thorough, long term planning process necessary to both support the individuals who spend time on the Pandora, and to transform it from a place of last resort to a dignified space.**

We do want to applaud the provincial government's ambitious leadership to address the housing crisis. However, we also believe that there is an overconcentration of supportive housing in this area, and we're not alone in this belief. As we requested in a [letter to BC Housing \(via MLA Lore's office\)](#) in July 2021, we would like the province and BC Housing to acknowledge that the 930 Pandora, 938 Mason Street, and 953/959 Balmoral property are all located in a compact three

block area, and that these developments need to be discussed together, with an understanding of how they relate to each other. We also request that BC Housing - together with the City - develop a density metric that they feel is acceptable for each neighbourhood, and the proportion of supportive housing and associated supports and services - and share this with the public.

We are happy to support this new direction and hope that the City, BC Housing, VIHA, and provincial partners take into consideration the only long term planning that has been done for the Pandora corridor, which was [presented to Council by the Coalition in 2019](#). The short, medium, and long term recommendations from this report are listed below:

- Short Term recommendations:
  - 1) Develop pilot program “Victoria On Call” modeled after the Downtown on Call program in Kelowna. Pilot is designed in collaboration with peer leaders.
  - 2) Installation of Water Bottle Refill Station.
  - 3) 24-hour accessible restrooms are installed on the 900 block maintained by street community members as a social enterprise.
  - 4) Collaborative Space Making is undertaken on the 900 block.
- Mid term recommendations:
  - 1) Declare the 900 block of Pandora Avenue a ‘Special Area’ in alignment with the Motion carried by Victoria City Council, June 13, 2019, re: Application of Equity and Affordability Policies, which “Council direct the City Manager to imbed these four principles for the city’s emerging equity policies.”
  - 2) Embed social enterprise into future development on the block by partnering with the business sector, e.g., GT Hiring Solutions, and service providers to develop a sustainable employment initiative.
- Long term recommendations:
  - Using the learnings from this community consultation process, implement a coordinated response in areas with a high demographic of community members who are underserved within the City of Victoria, and have a high number of calls to police and bylaw.

We also hope that the recommendations from the April 2021 [VIHA + GVCEH Health & Housing Think Tank 2021 Summary Report A Vision for Greater Victoria](#) are implemented as well. Some of the recommendations from this report that stood out to us are as follows:

- Pg. 6: Develop a distributed model of Service Hubs (on-site or community) as best practice with wraparound services that occur collaboratively.
- Pg. 9: Locate house sites so they are: a. Dispersed throughout the capital region to create mixed communities that have diversity.
- Pg. 46: Create a collaborative partnership that integrates health and housing because housing is one of the fundamental factors contributing to the social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of populations.
- Pg. 51: Create a hub model of care (either onsite or community) that includes access to as many wrap around supports as possible, such as health, social, educational, etc.).

Decades of inequitable land use choices and uncoordinated decisions by VIHA, BC Housing, the City, and the Province have resulted in what we see today on the 900 Block of Pandora.

These uncoordinated decisions have led to a disproportionate concentration of social support organizations and services targeted at the region's most marginalized and vulnerable community members into a very dense area.

The NPNA has made repeated requests to treat the 900 Block of Pandora as a special improvement area, and to undertake the thorough, long term planning process necessary to both support the individuals who spend time on the Pandora, and to transform it from a place of last resort to a dignified space.

[As we stated in our September 2021 letter](#), over the past several years, the NPNA has advocated 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

These City owned properties in North Park are more central to the neighbourhood, have nearby access to existing green spaces, and are by all considerations better suited to a community centre and child care than the 900 block of Pandora.

The NPNA has demonstrated through our community building activities and advocacy that we are working hard to ensure that North Park is a community where individual and community wellbeing is supported. According to a presentation by the [City's EDI team](#), "equity is when everyone in the community has time for themselves and a sense of ease." We share this vision for North Park and will continue to work hard to balance regional burdens that threaten to cement and institutionalize impoverishment, with the neighbourhood benefits required to support those who spend time in North Park.

The North Park Neighbourhood Association looks forward to continuing to work with the City on determining a location for a neighbourhood community centre and child care that meets the needs of our diverse community. We look forward to a completed Facilities Master Plan, a re-envisioning process for use of the municipal green space at Royal Athletic Park, and an updated Local Area Plan. The NPNA is also in the process of completing a community wide Needs Assessment with a University of Victoria researcher which aims to identify what is working well, what is missing, and what is desired in North Park, and will inform our future program delivery, grant applications, and a community centre. Together, these projects, in addition to a robust community consultation will inform the site selection, design, and programming of a North Park community centre.

Our ideal community centre is one that is safe, accessible, and inviting to children, youth, families, and seniors. Our extensive research and community consultation identifies that an appropriate site for a community centre is one that is centrally located, in close proximity to green space, transit, and North Park Village centre, and includes a wide range of programming to support the diverse residents of North Park. Healthy communities need community hubs, and places where all community members feel welcome, safe, and included.

In the coming months, the NPNA will be advocating for a neighbourhood wide community benefit agreement (CBA) between the City, BC Housing, and the neighbourhood that works to restore a balance between regional burdens and neighbourhood benefits. The sheer number of supports and services that have been placed in North Park have resulted in an over concentration of these without corresponding benefit (green space, community gathering spaces, accessible regional facilities, etc). In 2020, the NPNA worked with Masters of Urban Planning Students from Queen's University to research the ways Community Benefit Agreements could be implemented in North Park; we request that this serve as the starting point to begin this process. [Recommendations and guidelines for undertaking a CBA begin on page 34 of this report.](#)

Sincerely,  
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