To:CouncilFile No.: 6520-20From:Chief Administrative OfficerDate: April 25, 2016

Subject: Downtown Design Charrette Summary

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council a summary of the City of Courtenay Downtown Design Charrette process and to obtain feedback from Council on the core action plan items and the next steps in Downtown Revitalization.

CAO RECOMMENDATIONS:

THAT based on the April 25, 2016 staff report "Downtown Design Charrette Summary", Council receive the report for information and direct staff to continue with the proposed next steps.

Respectfully submitted,

David Allen, BES, CLGEM, SCLGM Chief Administrative Officer

BACKGROUND:

The Courtenay Downtown Design Charrette was held between March 7th and March 10th at Native Sons Hall as part of the Downtown Revitalization visioning exercises commenced in late 2015. The Charrette was led by Michael von Hausen, the president of MVH Urban Planning and Design Inc. who directed the Downtown Forum last October and his team of urban designers.

Based on Council endorsement, the Charrette was designed to articulate a long-term revitalization vision in the form of graphics. The goal was to help Council and members of the community visualize options for the ideas that were expressed during the Downtown Forum last fall, in addition to refining the ideas into a set of goals and next steps.

The event was advertised throughout the community prior to the event. Over the course of four days, a total of 240 people attended. Interestingly, nearly a half the participants who came to the first evening session were new to this visioning exercise. In addition to City staff, planners from neighbouring local governments joined to assist the facilitation process. All participants spent a considerable amount of time during the four days exploring revitalization ideas that would maximize the potential of the downtown and visualize redevelopment concepts. The Charrette was completed as planned without exceeding budget or being delayed. As a result, the Development Services Department has received a number of positive

responses from the participants. The Charrette has been proven to be the most effective consultation method for this particular purpose.

Although some of the big ideas resulting from the Charrette were very well supported by the participants, the ideas are still in concept and need to be further investigated to determine whether additional refinement and or investment should be made. One of the goals of this report and the associated presentation will be to gauge Council support for the concepts prior to staff proceeding any further. For example, Council may support the concept of a heart of downtown in the form of Duncan Commons, in addition to a redesigned streetscape along Duncan to create "convertible" event space. However, converting all or part of the parking lot on 4th and Duncan to event space may be less desirable.

Staff believes that the vision exercises which began last fall have been successful. Members of the public, including the downtown business community, had a number of opportunities to participate in the process and the charrette outcomes are tangible, provide clear direction and support Council's strategic priority to revitalize downtown.

DISCUSSION:

The following summary recaps the events and major outcomes.

Downtown Forum October 2015

The primary goals of the Forum were to identify challenges, opportunities, and develop potential strategies through a series of public consultation. Participation in the Forum included more than 30 local business leaders including Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association, 50 local residents who attended and shared information with staff at the drop-in session, and 80 members of the public who attended the Community Discovery Workshop. During the Downtown Forum, it became clear that there is a strong community interest in downtown revitalization with support from the business community.

Throughout the public consultation process, the consultant and staff conducted a survey with community business leaders as well as members of the public asking specific questions about Downtown. While many individuals provided answers in different expressions, the summary shows that keywords are similar or interconnected, and often refer to the same objectives. The following summarizes the questions asked and the common responses.

1. What is special about Downtown Courtenay?

- Speciality shops
- Small town feeling/character
- Walkable
- Central and cultural amenities
- History

2. What is missing in the Downtown?

- Public open spaces
- Residential uses
- Balance between commercial and residential activities
- Access to parks and greenway

3. Describe your vision for Downtown Courtenay 2025.

- Be a vibrant place
- Capitalize on natural beauty
- Be a cultural hub
- Be inclusive and diverse
- Be more walkable

4. What Strategies can we use to unlock the full potential of Downtown?

- Partnership, inclusion, & coordination
- Densification (more mixed-use type of development)
- Development Incentives
- 5th Street Improvement
- Better connection with Courtenay River or the parks/green ways
- Wayfinding

Post Downtown Forum Plan Process

The Forum was about identifying challenges and opportunities for revitalization. However, downtown revitalization would not be possible without a clear vision and community consensus. Building on the Forum feedback, the next step involved refining the information to a set of goals and visualising options that express what the goals and desires of the community might look like. To do this staff conducted a Design Charrette which was an intense four day process of engagement, affirmation of community vision, and design.

The following is a summary of the Charrette process.

Charrette

A total of 240 people attended throughout the Charrette process. On March 7th 117 members of the public came to Native Sons Hall to participate in group discussion on:

- 1) Street Improvements for enhancing pedestrian experience;
- 2) Gathering Places including Duncan Commons;
- 3) Redevelopment Opportunities and Program;
- 4) Park and Trail Connections including Bridge Crossing;
- 5) Riverlands Development Opportunity; and
- 6) Neighbourhood Residential Intensification around the Core.

Based on the result of the discussion, the design team analyzed all the information and assisted in developing visual images of revitalization concepts. On March 8th, 42 members of the public attended a drop-in session at Native Sons Hall to see the work in-progress. This was followed by the final presentation on March 10th which was attended by 81 members of the public. At the final presentation the design team presented the visual images of revitalization concepts for each theme. Overall the responses were positive with the proposed concepts well received by local business and land owners. Some individuals express

concern over the cost of funding the upgrades that were presented. It is important to remember that the purpose of the Charrette was to develop a vision and not limit thinking and options.

The next steps in the process will involve working with the pubic and business community to work through detailed design of the projects and explore opportunities for partnerships and funding sources. While some strategies can be immediately considered for implementation, this is an ongoing process and it is critical to have a vision that informs future decision making. It is essential for the City to maintain the momentum of this visioning process in order to achieve Council's strategic priorities in the coming years.

A summary of the charrette process was developed by MVH Urban Planning & Design Inc. the lead consultant for the project and is attached as Attachment No.1. It describes the importance of visioning, the vision statement and goals that came out of the process and the core actions that will implement the vision over time. When reviewing the document staff recommends that Council keep the following questions in mind:

- 1. Do you support the Vision?
- 2. Do you support the Goals?
- 3. Do you support the Core Action Plan concepts?
- 4. Are there specific elements of the concepts that are not supported?
- 5. What Core Action Plan concept is the first priority?

Staff will use this information to prioritize actions and inform the more detailed design processes.

Next Steps

The ideas and potential actions developed during the visioning exercises are still conceptual and must be further investigated and developed into a formalized plan to make more informed decisions given available resources. Staff will use the feedback received from Council at the Committee of the Whole meeting to continue to work on downtown revitalization options based on the following tasks.

Proposed Tasks

The Downtown Revitalization projects have been productive in building community consensus toward future revitalization. Although some of the results of the Charrette show details of redevelopment potential, they still need to be carefully analysed. Below is a list of proposed action items. Staff will present details of these action items to Council in the near future.

- Downtown Playbook (a critical piece of this Action-Oriented Plan that indicates roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, possible funding sources, and schedule)
- Public Realm Toolkit (sidewalk, furnishings, planting, lighting);
- Wayfinding Strategies
- Downtown Parks and Greenways Connector Plan;
- Core Area Intensification Plan
- Building Guidelines (including facade, building form and massing, and materials)
- Policy and regulatory review to implement the vision for downtown (zoning changes, incentive program and new policy development)
- Seek grant opportunities

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Charrette project has completed without exceeding the approved budget. To date, the City has paid \$33,587 to MVH Urban Design Inc. As well, the total of \$20,000 has been paid to Rollo Associates for a Market Demand and Opportunity Study as background research.

The City has been awarded a \$20,000 grant by the Real Estate Foundation, BC. The grant will be spent exclusively toward the proposed downtown public consultation tasks, which include the Charrette and the Study.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

The Manager of Planning leads the Downtown Revitalization projects under the Director's supervision. In addition, the Environmental Planner and technical staff as well as staff from other departments provide assistance. A total of 400 hours of staff time has been spent to date to complete the project. An additional 60 hours are estimated for subsequent meetings, developing the "playbook", and to report out to the Real Estate Foundation, which is due by the middle of May 2016. As previously noted, downtown revitalization is an evolving process that will continue to be a core element of the Planning Division work program.

STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCE:

Downtown revitalization aligns with one of the Council's Strategic Priorities for 2016-2018. Under one of the six priorities, Council recognises that "Revitalizing our downtown is critical to our economic future." This is an area of control, which is Council's jurisdictional authority to act.







Area of Control

The policy, works and programming matters that fall within Council's jurisdictional authority to act.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN REFERENCE:

Downtown is one of the defined land use designations within the jurisdiction. Section 4.1 of the Official Community Plan constitutes goals and policies of land use for downtown:

The City of Courtenay is committed to a healthy vibrant downtown, and will continue to ensure this area remains viable.

REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY REFERENCE:

A policy under GOAL 3: LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT of Regional Growth Strategy encourages downtown to be a town centre-based employment area.

3-D: Promote designated Town Centres as regional employment centres.

Mixed-use, compact and accessible employment centres (i.e. accessible by foot, transit, bike and car) tend to retain, attract and encourage new business development better than a more dispersed and scattered local job base, single use downtowns, or office parks. Town centre-based employment areas also tend to be less expensive to service and maintain.

CITIZEN/PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff would involve and collaborate with the community based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/imported/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf

5.		Increasii	ng Level of Public	Impact
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
public with balanced and objective	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Since the establishment of the Downtown Revitalization Project website on the City's homepage (www.courtenay.ca/downtown), the site has been well utilized. The City's social media (Facebook and Twitter) have also been effective communication tools to interact with members of the public.

The Charrette event was advertised Newspapers, public spaces, as well as City Hall and Facilities. Key stakeholders such as the DCBIA and other interest groups have been involved in the consultation process. All households within the Greater Downtown area were notified about the event by mail.

OPTIONS:

- 1) That Council direct staff to pursue the tasks outlined in the report.
- 2) That Council direct staff not to pursue the tasks outlined in the report.

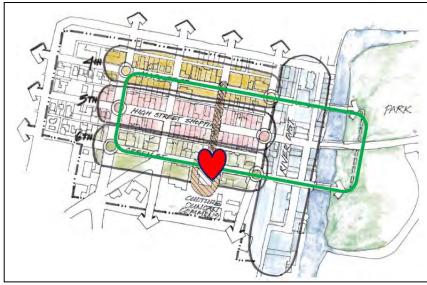
Prepared by:

Tatsuyuki Setta, MCIP, RPP Manager of Planning lan Buck, MCIP, RPP Director of Development Services

Attachment No. 1: FINAL Courtenay Dtn Charrette Summary April 12, 2016 by MVH Urban Planning and Design Inc.

City of Courtenay DOWNTOWN CHARRETTE SUMMARY





MVH URBAN PLANNING & Design Inc. 4/15/2016

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1. Summary and Next Steps

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the more prominent ideas and supported potential actions that emerged from the Downtown Design Charrette. It also provides the draft vision statement and goals for the downtown that were developed and refined through the process.

This report provides further details about the three principal ideas that emerged from the design charrette: Create the heart of downtown; improve the core streets of 4th, 5th, and 6th; and make better connections, especially to the Courtenay River. It also summarizes the physical development potential of five redevelopment sites. Its intention is not to determine exact priorities or even feasibility but to present the breadth of the principal ideas that were suggested, explored and refined at the Charrette.

a. Importance of a Visioning Process

Exploring the full breath of ideas is important in determining the potential of Courtenay's Downtown. Visioning explores many possible options for the future and reflects the merits long-term thinking. The power of an illustrated vision can generate the excitement to embrace an idea even though it was thought of earlier as not feasible or supportable. Further, visioning illustrations allow us to see how public or private investments could relate to one another, reinforce one another or leverage the value of one another.

The visioning process is not an end but a beginning. It is a tool for on-going dialogue on how policies and proposals could be executed and it also allows different options to be tested.

The following three strategies place the vision process in the context of commitment, financial performance and readiness:

- **Exploring Full Potential without Commitment:** The Downtown Design Charrette explored potential ideas for the Downtown while not committing to any one idea until it is further reviewed and determined to be supported and feasible.
- Financial Performance and Results: These planning and design concepts are not simply
 about beautification or cosmetic improvements. These concepts explore fundamental
 downtown programming, form, and character with the intent to improve financial
 performance and a greater downtown sense of community and vibrancy for property
 owners, businesses, and the City of Courtenay community.
- Development Ready Strategy: The selection, feasibility, and timing of these ideas are
 important to set the stage for development and financing initiatives when they come.
 Courtenay's readiness, pending further provincial, federal, and/or development financial
 and other contributions, will set the Downtown in a position to realize its vision in
 shorter time.

b. Principal Themes and Site Opportunities

During the Downtown Design Charrette that took place from March 7 - 10, 2016, a number of design, planning, and development opportunities were identified, building on the ideas and concepts generated in the earlier Downtown Forum in the fall of 2015. Three principal themes came forward strong and clear:

- 1. Create the heart to Downtown;
- 2. Improve the core streets of 4th, 5th and 6th; and
- 3. Make better connections to the Rivers.

In addition, there were a number of **site redevelopment opportunities** that were examined that included the Riverfront lands, the Palace Theatre site, the Thrifty's site, the lands behind the Old Safeway site, and the Kilpatrick site. These sites may not all have immediate redevelopment potential but they represent a number of short, medium or longer term opportunities to create a more diverse residential and mixed use land base in the greater downtown area. These are not the only sites with redevelopment potential but were selected as representative options. In the end, the intention is to create a more compact and vibrant downtown that permits aging in place and a diverse choice of housing from singles to young families and mature adults.

These themes further reinforced the earlier three bigger ideas from the Downtown Forum:

- 1. **Create a Greater Downtown:** Expand the core area of the Downtown to provide more development opportunities and bring more people downtown;
- 2. **Better Connect:** Create pedestrian and bicycle linkages to other parts of the City and Region through the further development of the Riverway, the Rotary Trail, and other pathways as part of a larger "greenway" system.
- 3. **Create a Complete Downtown:** Develop the downtown as a place where residents can live, work, and play within walking or biking distance of their home. In other words, the Downtown is a self-sufficient area that satisfies resident needs largely in one place.

c. Next Steps

The Downtown Design Charrette ideas and potential actions should be further developed into a formalized "Downtown Playbook" or similar action-oriented document that outlines the next steps, potential partners, responsibilities, sources of funding, exact timing, and priorities.

This action-oriented document should also specifically connect the Downtown Vision, Goals, and Strategies, developed during the course of this project, to specific actions.

2. Vision Statement and Goals

The following draft vision statement was developed during the earlier Downtown Forum and the Downtown Design Charrette. Together with the five goals that follow, the vision sets the future framework for realizing a vibrant and diverse downtown that is unique and exciting.

VISION DOWNTOWN COURTENAY

Downtown Courtenay is the commercial, cultural, social, and culinary hub of the beautiful Comox Valley.

Nestled between the Comox Glacier, the Courtenay, Puntledge, and Tsolum Rivers, the Courtenay Estuary and the Salish Sea, Downtown Courtenay is unique and vibrant. It is the heart of our community, and a natural fit for special events and gatherings for both local residents and visitors. Welcoming a range of housing and lifestyle options will foster vitality and diversity, both day and night.

We will nurture and invest in our downtown through continuous improvement in the downtown core as well as the surrounding area.

The following 5 goals will underpin our approach:

GOAL 1: Organize for Success

Partnerships and integrated City work-programs will be the foundation for vitalization efforts and be structured to promote successful working relationships.

GOAL 2: Establish Downtown as the Community's Heart

With an explicit emphasis on public gathering places, beauty, views, practical wayfinding, and pedestrian scale, downtown will feel like it is designed with people's comfort and enjoyment first.

GOAL 3: Encourage More Downtown Residents

A diverse mix of housing and associated services shall be increased throughout the greater downtown area with higher density concentrated near the core.

GOAL 4: Make It Easier to Stav Downtown

All modes of transportation shall conveniently access, circulate, and park within the downtown.

GOAL 5: Celebrate and Connect to the Rivers

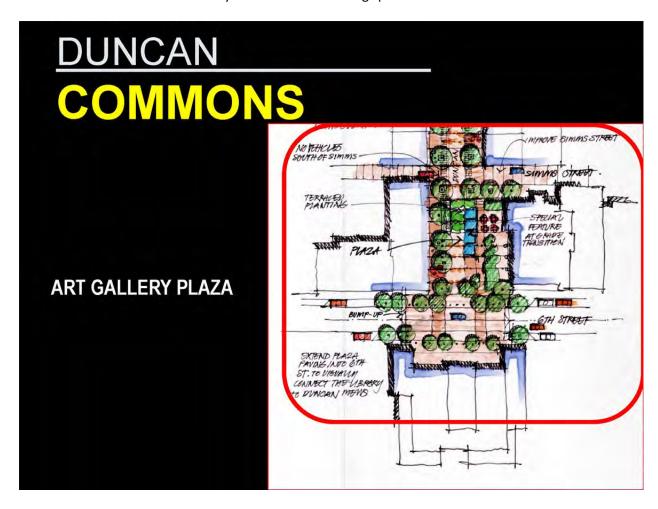
Connections to, along and across the rivers will be improved to ensure that nature and recreation are integrated into the downtown complete experience.

3. Core Action Plan

a. Create the Heart: Duncan Commons

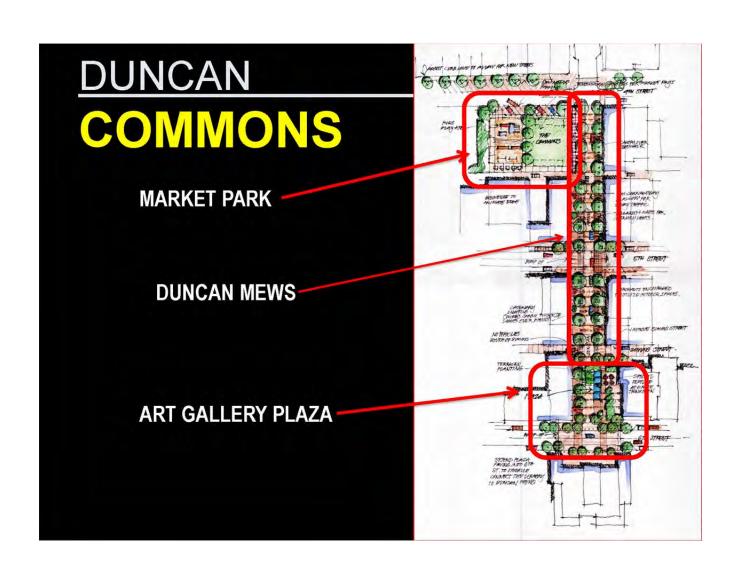
Duncan Commons First

- Prioritizes "Duncan Commons" as one of the social and cultural "hearts" of the Downtown
- Takes advantage of the strategic central location in the heart of the downtown framed by the Library and Art Gallery
- Includes a green lawn flex-use area and kids play that is tiered with the topography and closed to traffic and still provides a ramp for physically challenged individuals
- Develops a plaza at the south end that spills out into 6th Street and up to the edge of the library
- Provides the staging area for special events
- Considers the provision of a water feature for animation and white sound
- Uses topography changes to create interesting sub-zones
- Extends special treatment into Sims Lane and encourage further unique activities
- Anchors the downtown for social and cultural events with the balance of the block between 6th and 5th Streets easily closed to traffic during special events



Potential Duncan Mews: The extension of Duncan Commons

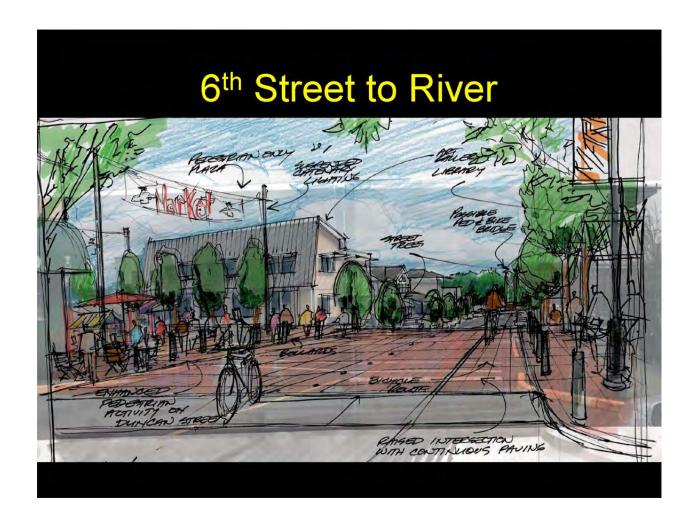
- Develops a "Woonerf" (living street) design (pedestrian priority)
- Limits vehicular movement to a 6.0 metre carriageway with one narrow lane each way
- Designs the mews with no curbs or "canted curbs" to define car area
- Adds bollards to define pedestrian and vehicle zones
- Introduces catenary lighting overhead
- Creates pedestrian scale features and furniture
- Adds special low impact lighting and special paving
- Encourages businesses to spill out and use the edges
- Provides spaces for activities programmed and spontaneous at different times of the day, month and year
- Introduces extended curbs at crossing intersections
- Adds potential for a "Market Park" at the north end adjoining 4th Street, but due to the
 priority of parking downtown, this space can remain a parking lot but may be a "flex lot" for
 use during special events downtown like a large outdoor farmer's market and food fair



b. Improve the Core Streets

• 6th Street: The Green Street

- o Connects the at west end with the 5th "Complete Street" pilot project (proposed relocation of bike lane from 5th to 6th Street at Harmston Avenue) and the Riverway pathway system at the east end near the Courtenay River
- Connects community services and public spaces (Library and Art Gallery at Duncan Avenue)
- o Adds more trees and planting to truly green the street
- o Creates a bicycle and walking friendly street with bicycle lanes and bicycle parking
- o Adds plenty of seating
- Develops as one of the "Festival" streets with community art etc. at the Duncan Commons intersection (see below)



• 5th Street: The Shopping Street

- Creates additional space provided for outdoor dining and product display (see image at bottom of page of potential "parking patios"
- o Adds unique seating groups for meetings and casual encounters
- o Encourages special signage enhancements
- o Increases street trees in flush grates-(no raised planters)
- o Introduces continuous special paving between sidewalk and parking aisle
- o Expands sidewalk space (no curb or rolled curb)
- o Removes mid-block crossings





• 4th Street: The Market Street

- o Encourages small food retailers
- o Creates wider sidewalks for product display
- o Encourages adjustable awnings for weather protection
- o Provides option to be closed off for food festivals
- Celebrates the Comox Valley's food focus (banners etc.)



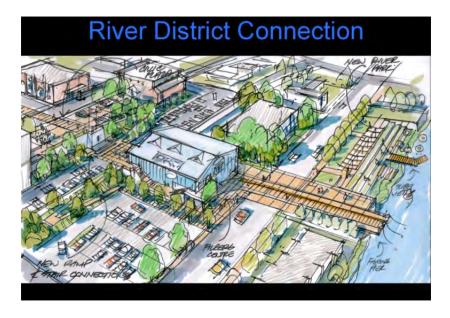
c. Connect to, along, and across the Rivers

• Riverway Completion

- o Helps complete the Riverway pathway system north of the 5th Street Bridge
- Uses and connects to an underutilized park and street section
- Provides an option for another river crossing directly to Lewis Park (medium to long term)

• The 4th Street Connector

- o Strengthens link between the downtown and the river
- Strengthens the core concept of 4th 5th and 6th core network of streets combined with Duncan Mews - as the heart of the downtown
- Optimizes (not maximizes) parking by maintaining important parking but improving the setting through good urban design interventions that will likely require reorganization of surface parking spaces
- Softens the negative impacts of the current walls through the introduction of stairs,
 ramps and planting
- o Improves the primary circulations routes to the river connecting 4th Street to the waterfront park and across the river
- o Identifies the connector through special paving, lighting and public realm features
- Encourages pedestrians to move to the edges where views from lookouts are currently obscured by hedges and planting
- o Provides 5% sloped ramps (where practical) to traverse through the steep areas
- Reorganizes the waterfront park to better achieve water contact through better manipulation and design of the water edge (water tubing dock and water stairs)
- Improves the edges and relationship to the Filberg Centre through landscape design improvements







4. Site Redevelopment Opportunities

a. Riverfront Site (6th Street and Anderton Avenue)

Concept:

- Provides a destination riverfront district with a eco-tourism theme (biking, hiking, kayaking, adventure, and tubing) connected to the 6th Street Riverway)
- Adds modest scale stepped building massing along river
- Provides for a public riverfront edge (public river promenade dedication)
- Creates an incremental 'ad-hoc' artisan/industrial character
- Improves bike network connectivity along Riverway (6th Street to Anderton Ave. and under bridge)
- Capitalizes on sloped bank for public parking parkade
- Transforms Anderton Avenue into a distinct industrial character street (pavers, no curbs, and pedestrian oriented)

Proposed Uses: Restaurants, bars, hospitality, boutique hotel, live-work lofts, and commercial

Height: 3-4 storeys (stepped)

Parking: Remote parkade (uphill) street parking on 6th and uphill laneway

Density: 1.5-2.0 FSR



b. Palace Theatre Site (5th Street and England Avenue)

Concept:

- Preserves the 1 storey commercial character/massing of 5th Street by maintaining 1 storey massing 'shoulder' at the street level
- Develops modest scale stepped massing (3-4 storey)
- Optimizes prime corner site for public (Arts Council/gallery?) or prime commercial uses
- Introduces new housing typologies to core (live-work, small affordable rental) to attract young people
- Improves 5th Street sidewalk frontage (street trees, street parking, 'parking porches' etc)

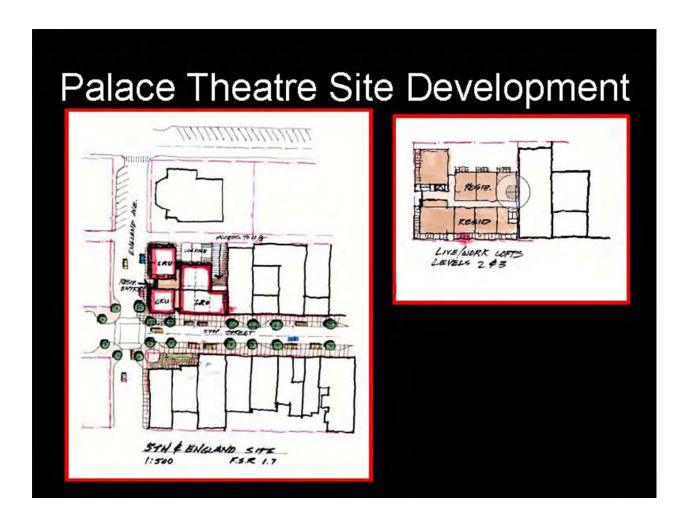
Proposed Uses: Live-work lofts, affordable rental units, commercial or public use at grade

No. of Units: 16 Residential units over 3-5 commercial retail units

Height: 3 storeys (stepped above level 1)

Parking: 1-1.5 layers of underground parking (suggest parking relaxations for small sites in

downtown core) **Density**: 1.7 FSR



c. Thrifty's Site (6th Street and England Avenue)

Concept:

- Preserves the potential for a large food store anchor to be incorporated into the new mixed-use development
- Enhances 6th Street as 'green street' (bike lane, wider sidewalk, street trees etc)
- Introduces 'mid-block pedestrian connector' along current on-site laneway
- Breaks down 'super-block' into smaller mixed-use wings separated by courtyards
- Creates a commercial 'street wall' defining the edges of 6th Street, 8th Street, and England Avenue
- Reinforces Duncan Commons and Library forecourt with pocket plaza (on 6th Street) for entry to food store
- Steps massing between 1st and 2nd level, and at top floor of residential wings

Proposed Uses: Major food store, affordable rental housing or small strata units, commercial

retail along streets

Height: 4-5 storeys (stepped)

Parking: 1.5-2 levels of commercial/residential parking. Maintain curbside street parking

Density: 2.0-2.5 FSR



d. Old Safeway Site (14th Street and Cliffe Avenue behind Old Safeway)

Concept:

- Explores an 'aging-in-place' seniors housing complex for the site
- Offers a variety of independent to assisted living options to seniors
- Incorporates a small leisure park for seniors, children and surrounding residents
- Maintains a strong pedestrian connector between seniors complex and adjacent commercial village
- Strengthens Cliffe Avenue with commercial uses and street wall frontage (or seniors amenity spaces)
- Breaks down the large bulk massing of seniors building into smaller stepped wings
- Uses ground-oriented independent seniors duplexes to transition scale between existing single-family development and senior's housing

Proposed Uses: Independent living duplexes, assisted living seniors units, variety of seniors

amenity spaces, leisure park, commercial uses along Cliffe Ave.

Height: 4 storeys (stepped)

Parking: 1 level of underground parking.

Density: 2.0-2.25 FSR



e. Kilpatrick Site (5th Street and Kilpatrick Avenue)

Concept:

- Explores small detached 'cluster courtyard housing' typology to broaden housing choice
- Emphasizes on small ground oriented homes to relate to existing scale of neighbourhood
- Introduces small laneway rental homes to enliven and pedestrianize the lane
- Preserves the large mature trees within the site
- Provides for a more social housing typology through shared courtyards, auto-court, and lane homes
- Enhances streets and lane with patios, landscaping, street trees, sidewalks etc

Proposed Uses: detached cluster homes, laneway rental homes (studio & 1 bedroom)

Height: 2 storeys

Parking: 1 car per home surface parking carports off lane and street

Density: 0.6-0.7 FSR

