



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council

File No.: 6480-00

From: Chief Administrative Officer

Date: September 21, 2020

Subject: Official Community Plan (OCP) – Neighbourhood Consultations in Phase 3

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with options for consideration regarding the neighbourhood consultation planned in phase 3 of the OCP update and obtain direction from Council.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

THAT based on the September 21st, 2020 staff report “Official Community Plan (OCP) – Neighbourhood Consultation in Phase 3”, Council approve OPTION 1 and direct staff to undertake neighbourhood consultation through a “hybrid” method – combination of neighbourhood walking tours and virtual workshops.

Respectfully submitted,

Trevor Kushner, BA, DLGM, CLGA
Interim Chief Administrative Officer

BACKGROUND:

The OCP project is at the stage of conducting neighbourhood consultation. This work was originally planned for early summer in the form of conventional public engagement (i.e. open houses, workshops and neighbourhood walking tours), however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan was revised in the spring and the consultation schedule was postponed to the fall. Neighbourhood consultation is an important milestone that will identify area specific challenges and opportunities in selected geographical areas; sharing long-range planning vision and goals with property owners and residents at the neighbourhood level; and developing detailed planning policies and design guidelines for each area. Public feedback collected through the neighbourhood consultation will also have significant impact on the tasks in the next phases of the OCP.

The project team is committed to being flexible to overcome challenges caused by the pandemic and creating methods to effectively deliver public engagement activities under the restricted circumstance. The health and safety of the community and staff is paramount and has been considered in the development of the options presented in this report.

The purpose of this report is to present Council two possible delivery options (i.e. ‘hybrid’ and ‘virtual only’) and seek support from Council on the recommended hybrid form of neighbourhood consultation that staff consider will provide the best level of engagement. Irrespective of the methodology, the engagement is planned to take place in October and November in order to keep the project on track for completion mid-2021.

DISCUSSION:

Overview of virtual consultation

All previously planned OCP public consultation events have shifted from conventional approaches to virtual meetings through ZOOM and digital communication tools such social media and online surveys due to the pandemic. Despite a number of challenges, the project team, community stakeholders, and the OCP-Advisory Committee members have quickly adapted and become capable of conducting meetings virtually without major obstacles. Staff conducted virtual stakeholder sessions during the last week of July with great success. The sessions were well received by participants and staff were able to collect valuable thoughts from the participants. The ability to create virtual breakout rooms to manage discussion in smaller groups followed by the breakout groups reporting back to the entire session worked very well at mimicking in person working sessions. Having undertaken this approach the project team feel confident with carrying out online public consultation without major issues.

There are also some lessons learned with respect to virtual meetings. For example, as Council is aware from the virtual council meetings over the last number of months a strong and stable internet connection is critical to participation and seamless communication. Staff have also learned that it is particularly important to share basic rules with participants prior to meeting. The shared rules and protocols ensure effective discussions and allow each individual to have sufficient time to contribute during the sessions. As virtual meetings will likely remain a primary form of public consultation for the foreseeable future, staff continue to look for ways to enhance our capabilities.

Merits of conventional public consultation

Although in-person consultation is the preferred form of public consultation and the Ideas Fair held in February, just prior to the pandemic was a great success, face to face consultation has been limited over the last 6 months. However, as economic and social activities have gradually reopened, staff see value in considering limited in person consultation events. In addition, considering neighbourhood consultation is a crucial milestone of the project staff is of the opinion that opportunities for the public to have personal dialogue with staff on the OCP is beneficial. Any in person activities would be conducted outdoors and follow current public health guidelines including use of appropriate personal protective equipment.

Two possible neighbourhood consultation approaches going forward

The project team have researched and evaluated alternative public consultation methods that have been practiced elsewhere and may be considered applicable in Courtenay. Two scenarios are possible. The first scenario assumes that some degree of in-person engagement is desirable and accommodated. The second assumes that no in-person engagement is desirable at this point. The table below presents a high level overview of the two scenarios that staff consider possible. Detailed plans will be finalized once staff receive directions from Council.

SCENARIO 1: WALKSHOP AND VIRTUAL WORKSHOP “Hybrid” Model example

“WALKSHOP” (outdoor) - facilitated by City staff

- A small group of participants (e.g. up to 10 people to ensure social distancing requirements and efficiency are achieved) walk along a pre-determined route through a neighbourhood / growth area with City staff.

- Someone from community co-leads and assists in building a better understanding of the neighbourhood.
- Participants are encouraged to identify unique assets of the neighbourhood, issues, and aspirations.
- “Walkshop” leaders will help inform the discussion by providing insights from planning work, what we have heard to date and different lived experiences.

VIRTUAL WORKSHOP – facilitated by consulting team

- The first online workshop will be tailored to individuals who could not participate in the “walkshop”. The same topics/questions will be covered that were covered in the “walkshop”. An interactive map with streetview capabilities will be provided, to mimic the experience of being “on the ground”.
- The second online workshop will be dedicated to exploring different potential form and character approaches for new growth within the neighbourhood / growth area. This will be tailored to everyone, including those who participated in the “walkshop”.
- The virtual workshops will be conducted through Zoom. Virtual break out rooms will be available to allow for focused discussion with small facilitated groups, if necessary.
- The workshops will be recorded for review.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

- Benefits
 - It provides space for generative in-person conversations.
 - It offers multiple streams of engagement, enabling residents to select how they want to participate.
 - More effectively facilitates community building than virtual engagement alone.
- Challenges
 - “Walkshop” may require additional staff to monitor COVID-19 health recommendations are kept in all times.
 - A record of the names and contact information of the people who attended the “walkshop” needs to be kept for contact tracing (participants must agree to provide the information at the time of registration).
 - Unpredictable future as it relates to COVID-19 and public health orders.

SCENARIO 2: “Virtual” Model - SOUNDING BOARDS AND VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

SOUNDING BOARDS – not facilitated

- Interactive boards are to be stationed in different locations within neighbourhoods / growth areas. Passersby will have the opportunity to explore the same topics as in the Scenario 1 “walkshop” by reviewing information and offering input through interactive materials (e.g. maps, images) and/or by submitting photos and commentary electronically.
- Interactive boards can be as small as QR codes to avoid vandalism.

VIRTUAL WORKSHOP – approx. 2 hours – facilitated by consulting team

- This will run as described in Scenario 1, though it is expected that all participants will join the full 2 hours session since the “walkshop” is not being offered here.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

- Benefits
 - Focusses efforts on virtual engagement methods, ensuring implementation regardless of COVID-19 health recommendations

- Challenges
 - Virtual engagement ultimately limits participation to only those that have access to, and knowledge of, online technology
 - Sounding boards will require some upfront financial and time investment from the City to design, install, and maintain

Staff and the consulting team have considered the scenarios and found both are operationally feasible. However, wherever practical, staff support in person engagement and neighbourhood walking tours to better understand the local perspective. Accordingly, staff recommend the Hybrid option at this time.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no significant administrative implications to both options other than further refinements of the work plan and resource allocations. The original scope of the project contemplated eight (8) “walkshops” and sufficient staff and consultant resources have been allocated for this. Staff also have the capacity to add additional sessions if necessary, however these would be led solely by City staff and not the consultants.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

All costs associated with neighbourhood consultation are included in the approved 2020 Community and Sustainability Planning department operation budget. The proposed options are considered and planned within the range of the approved budget.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

There are no direct asset management implications with respect to the neighbourhood consultation process. Long-term planning policies in specific neighbourhoods will be guided by asset management principles of sustainable service delivery and reducing infrastructure lifecycle costs.

2019 - 2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

November 2019 Strategic Priority Chart: Number 1 (NOW) Priority

- OCP – Consultation Process (public input/consult report)

Strategic Priorities 2019 - 2022

We continually invest in our key relationships

- Complete an update of the City’s OCP and Zoning Bylaw

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN REFERENCE:

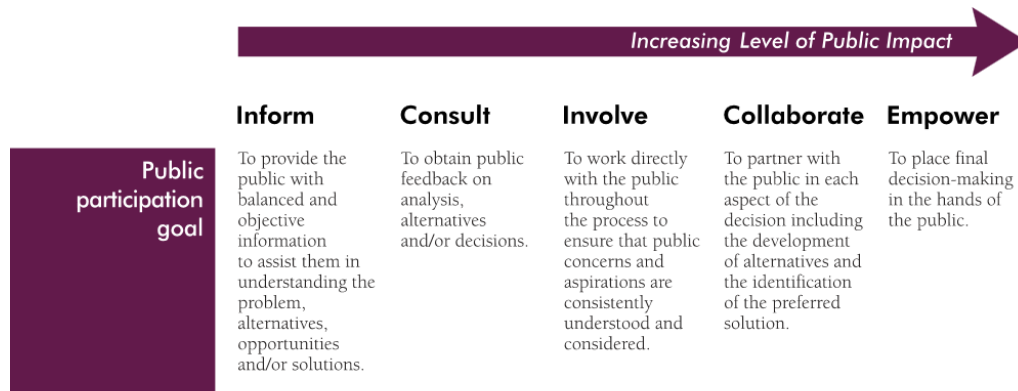
Neighbourhood consultation is part of the OCP update process. Therefore it is not referenced in the current OCP.

REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY REFERENCE:

Not referenced.

CITIZEN/PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff will “Collaborate” the community based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation during the development of the OCP.



Staff note that neighbourhood consultation in targeted areas is an essential part of the OCP update in order to better understand the form and character of the neighbourhoods; challenges and opportunities of the neighbourhoods; and to build strong consensus among property owners and residents on long-term planning vision, goals, and policies.

OPTIONS:

- OPTION 1: That Council direct staff to undertake neighbourhood consultation through a “hybrid” method – combination of neighbourhood walking tours and virtual workshops. **(Recommended)**
- OPTION 2: That Council direct staff to undertake the planned neighbourhood consultation through virtual workshops only.
- OPTION 3: That Council defer decisions and direct staff to consider other options.

Prepared by:

Tatsuyuki Setta, MCIP, RPP
Manager of Community and Sustainability Planning

Reviewed by:

Ian Buck, MCIP, RPP
Director of Development Services

Concurrence by:

Trevor Kushner, BA, DLGM, CLGA
Interim Chief Administrative Officer