

1.0 Planning Context

Official Community Plan

Vernon's Official Community Plan (OCP) defines the vision of the community – how the community sees itself growing and developing in the future and ultimately what kind of place Vernon will be. This community driven vision is balanced with Vernon's expected population growth, opportunities for development and the availability of resources for infrastructure projects.

The community's vision is encapsulated in the Guiding Principles, which were identified by the community through consultation and subsequently endorsed by Council at its Regular Meeting of August 13, 2007. These Guiding Principles were subsequently amended by Council at its Regular Meeting of April 14, 2014 as part of a regular review of the Plan. The Guiding Principles guide the development of, and subsequent implementation and decision making arising from, the OCP.

Guiding Principles

- Foster prosperity for people, business and government
- Protect and preserve green spaces and sensitive areas
- Ensure housing meets the needs of the whole community
- Create a culture of sustainability
- Protect agricultural land
- Create strong, compact and complete neighbourhoods
- Provide alternative transportation
- Revitalize the Downtown
- Create a youth friendly city

The OCP also provides a path to achieving the community's vision. The policy direction contained herein provides the structure and direction for growth and development in the community, and all bylaws and policies must be consistent with the OCP. The OCP works in conjunction with other municipal bylaws which regulate that growth and development, such as the Zoning Bylaw and the Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw. Used together, the location, form and character of development is regulated, providing certainty to residents and property owners about the development of the community.

Regional Context

The City of Vernon is the second largest municipality in the Okanagan Valley and the major urban centre of the North Okanagan Regional District. Like much of the Okanagan Valley, Vernon has experienced rapid growth and development in the past, resulting in a community that has seen considerable changes in the last

few decades. However, since 2008, this growth has slowed, along with the growth of other communities in the region. Vernon has a diverse economic base, with employment being generated from the traditional resource sectors of forestry and agriculture, as well as from the tourism, administrative, manufacturing and service sectors.

The City of Vernon is bordered by the District of Coldstream to the southeast, the District of Lake Country to the south, and Electoral Areas B & C of the North Okanagan Regional District to the east, north and northeast. In addition, the Okanagan Indian Band has two reserves that border the municipal boundary of Vernon.

The Okanagan Indian Band is located at the head of Okanagan Lake with reserve lands totalling 11,282 hectares. Reserve No. 1 is adjacent the City's western boundary, and Reserve No. 6 is located on the valley bottom adjacent to the north eastern arm of Okanagan Lake. The City is committed to ongoing consultation with the Okanagan Indian Band on matters of mutual interest, including the development of lands within Vernon that are adjacent to reserve lands.



The entire Okanagan Valley continues to experience development pressure, with associated pressure to develop farmland, hillsides and other greenfield areas. If development is not coordinated and a common vision identified, the very qualities that make the Okanagan an attractive and desirable place to live, work and play could be undermined. Planning for the City of Vernon must recognize the effects of policy direction in adjacent jurisdictions. Planning is most effective when neighbouring jurisdictions work together and coordinate planning initiatives to ensure a compatible, not competitive, environment for growth and development.

In 2011, the Regional District of the North Okanagan adopted a Regional Growth Strategy, which coordinates the planning of all member municipalities and electoral areas. The Vision Statement for the Regional Growth Strategy was adopted on June 17, 2009.

The Regional District of North Okanagan is a unique region that will continue to be recognized for its diverse natural habitats, robust economies, outstanding recreational opportunities and the high quality of urban and rural lifestyles provided in established communities. As such, the Regional Board will strive to conserve and enhance the very reasons that make the North Okanagan so attractive by ensuring:

- *Growth is managed to reflect our social, environmental and economic values;*
- *The Region's natural constraints to growth are water availability, agricultural lands, and environmentally-sensitive areas;*

- *Rural and urban lifestyle choices are maintained through designated growth areas and urban boundary management;*
- *Agricultural lands are protected and a sustainable regional food system is supported and encouraged;*
- *A strong, sustainable, and diverse economy that reflects our values and the identities of our communities;*
- *Our natural systems, including air, land and water, are respected and protected; and*
- *Inclusive, accountable and effective governance based upon a foundation of regional cooperation.*

Section 878(1)(b) of the Local Government Act requires that an Official Community Plan include a regional context statement, consistent with the rest of the Official Community Plan, of how the plan conforms to the Regional Growth Strategy. This Regional Context Statement is found in Section 2.0.

Global Context

The citizens of Vernon are facing the ramifications of global phenomena on an unprecedented scale. Climate change is no longer an issue of casual debate or speculation; overwhelming scientific evidence indicates that the result of our collective global use of fossil fuels has fundamentally altered our climate pattern, with significant implications for our weather patterns, crop production, water shortages, sea levels and many other implications likely not fully understood at this time. No longer can we ignore the overwhelming evidence that our dependence on fossil fuels has seriously compromised the ability of the planet to maintain basic, fundamental ecosystem services.

In addition to these large scale impacts, rising energy costs are having significant implications on the cost of heating, cooling, transportation and food at the local level. The issue of peak oil, which defines that point at which global oil production has peaked and will decline thereafter, has significant ramifications for planning and land use. Vehicle reliant low density residential subdivisions will become obsolete in the post carbon era. These rising energy costs are coupled with the aging of infrastructure all over the world. Roads, bridges, water and sewer systems are aging rapidly, and the costs associated with replacing them are increasing. Maintaining, repairing and replacing this infrastructure, along with providing new infrastructure for growing communities, will be a major challenge in the coming decades.



The global economic crisis, which began in late 2008, has impacted communities worldwide. Rising unemployment and falling tax revenues have created a number of challenges for municipalities, making it difficult to provide services and infrastructure to their citizens. There will be many permanent and long standing impacts of this crisis, including the types of housing that people are able to afford, how they choose to get around and what sort of job opportunities will be available for them. There are many indications that recovery from this crisis will be slow and gradual, further impacting how communities grow and develop while making the construction of key infrastructure projects more challenging as governments struggle with balancing budgets.

These issues are not beyond our abilities to deal with and respond to. Every indication is that prompt attention can address these issues and ensure that our community is resilient in the face of change. They challenge us to fundamentally re-examine our traditional development patterns and to develop sustainable approaches to building communities.

Legislative Context

The primary purpose of an OCP, as mandated by the Local Government Act, is to provide for the expected growth of the community. The OCP must outline how housing will be provided for the anticipated population growth for a period of at least five years, including policies regarding affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing. The OCP must also address the community's expected needs with regard to commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses.

The OCP may also include policies respecting social needs, the natural environment or other matters of concern to local government.

This OCP has been prepared pursuant to the regulations of the *Local Government Act*.

As specified in Sections 875(1)(2) and 849(1)(2) of the *Local Government Act*, the OCP is intended to:

- (1) . . . to promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and that makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources.
- (2) Without limiting subsection (1), . . . it should work towards but not be limited to the following:
 - (a) avoiding urban sprawl and ensuring that development takes place where adequate facilities exist or can be provided in a timely, economic and efficient manner;
 - (b) settlement patterns that minimize the use of automobiles and encourage walking, bicycling and the efficient use of public transit;
 - (c) the efficient movement of goods and people while making effective use of transportation and utility corridors;
 - (d) protecting environmentally sensitive areas;
 - (e) maintaining the integrity of a secure and productive resource base, including the agricultural and forest land reserves;

- (f) economic development that supports the unique character of communities;*
- (g) reducing and preventing air, land and water pollution;*
- (h) adequate, affordable and appropriate housing;*
- (i) adequate inventories of suitable land and resources for future settlement;*
- (j) protecting the quality and quantity of ground water and surface water;*
- (k) settlement patterns that minimize the risks associated with health hazards;*
- (l) preserving, creating and linking urban and rural open space including parks and recreation areas;*
- (m) planning for energy supply and promoting efficient use, conservation and alternative forms of energy;*
- (n) good stewardship of land, sites and structures with cultural heritage value.*

The City has the legislative mandate to fundamentally address issues related to climate change, peak oil and rising energy costs. Compact, complete communities served by alternative transportation networks serve to protect farmland and green and open spaces, provide a range of housing options and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

The City of Vernon Official Community Plan uses the tools available to local government to realize these goals. The extensive community consultation conducted as part of the OCP's development in 2008 and the 2013 review indicates that there is strong support from the community to continue to pursue this direction.

Public Consultation

The creation of the Official Community Plan 2008 involved an extensive community consultation process that began in late 2006 and continued into early 2008. The consultation process included a series of surveys, workshops, open houses and staff displays to provide direction for the plan. Over 100 opportunities were provided for public input and comment in total.

Consultation and feedback provided early in the process focused mainly on overall visioning, the identification of important features in Vernon and the development of the Guiding Principles. As the consultation process continued and the vision became more refined, more detailed input was received on the land use plan, culminating in the Growth Choices Survey and the Making Choices Survey in 2007. Both provided for detailed feedback on land use issues, but the Making Choices Survey provided residents with a choice from three land use plan options: A "Modified Business as Usual" plan, which would see residential development continue to grow into the hillsides on the edges of Vernon, a "Neighbourhood Centres" plan, which focused on redevelopment in the City Centre and a network of smaller neighbourhood centres which would have a mix of commercial and multifamily residential development, and a "Hybrid" plan which proposed a mix of the business as usual and neighbourhood centres approach. A total of 890 Making Choices surveys were returned, with the following results:

Option #1: Modified Business as Usual 68 (8%)

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| Option #2: Hybrid | 222 (25%) |
| Option #3: Neighbourhood Centres | 600 (67%) |

The results of the consultation demonstrated some very clear and overarching themes. The community valued its small town character, and has a high regard for the hills and agricultural lands that frame and nestle this valley community. There are distinct concerns about the pace, location and nature of growth that has occurred over the last several years, and concerns that this growth is eroding the very elements that make Vernon special and unique. There are concerns about environmental management, urban sprawl and the need to provide transportation alternatives to the single occupant vehicle. There are also significant concerns about the cost and availability of housing for Vernon residents, and the need to revitalize the downtown area.

2013 Review

Consultation for the 2013 review of the Official Community Plan began in January 2013 and continued through to May. The purpose of the consultation was to determine what Vernon residents thought was working well and what areas needed further attention in the OCP.

A survey was sent out to Vernon residents and available online with questions about Vernon's quality of life, business retention and attraction, and priorities for public investment. A total of 718 completed surveys were returned online, by mail, by fax or dropped off in person.



A series of eight open houses were held between February and May 2013. Each month offered a specific set of topics related to the Official Community Plan, such as transportation, land use, environment and infrastructure, for detailed discussion and feedback from the public. Locations for the open houses were varied and selected to make it easy for people in all areas of the city to attend. While some were held in local schools, others were held in high traffic locations, such as the Village Green Centre and the Vernon Recreation Centre in an effort to get input from as many people as possible. Approximately 200 people attended these open houses.

A number of presentations were made to interested groups throughout the city to discuss the OCP. Presentations were followed by discussions of areas of the plan that were working well as well as ideas to improve the plan. Groups that participated varied greatly, and included the Senior's Action Network, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce, the Rise Community Association and the Early Childhood

Development Coalition. In addition, a session was held to discuss youth friendly policies with high school and elementary school students in March of 2013.

The results of this round of consultation were similar to the results provided during the development of the 2008 plan but with a few notable differences. Where there was a concern among residents that the pace of development was very fast leading up to 2008, there were fewer comments related to this in 2013. What has been a large theme in 2013 is the need to promote economic development, create permanent well paying jobs and the need to spur development. Residents expressed continued support for the overall growth strategy aim of promoting more compact development in the City Centre and Neighbourhood Centres, as well as the focus on Transportation Demand Management. Support for investments in transit, sidewalks, pathways and cycling infrastructure was high, but some concerns were raised about how some projects have been implemented, especially where on street parking has been removed. Other topics raised frequently included the protection of agricultural lands and support for farmers, investments in recreational facilities, providing a meeting place or places for youth and affordable housing challenges. Overall, the feedback was supportive of the direction provided in the 2008 OCP.

Master Transportation Plan

The Master Transportation Plan (MTP) is a supplementary document of the OCP and as such was included in the public consultation undertaken for its 2013 review. The MTP itself contains sub plans and strategies and in their development many public input and engagement opportunities took place as follows:

- Transit Strategy: three stakeholder meetings were held; a website was developed and online surveys were completed by the public, and thirteen public input sessions were held, eight of these held in the BC Transit Public Input Bus parked in various locations across Vernon. The input and feedback was used to develop the North Okanagan Transit Future Plan;
- Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan: stakeholder meetings were held with local community groups and thirteen public input sessions were held in various locations around Vernon and eight community based workshops;
- A final public engagement opportunity on the MTP was held at the June 20, 2015 Sunshine Festival attended by approximately 15,000 people. At this event information was presented on the MTP and its four sub plans and strategies: The Road Network Plan; the Transit Strategy; the Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan and the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategy. At the daylong event approximately 150 people directly engaged with staff to ask questions and a few provided written input. This final public engagement session was completely positive with overwhelming public support for the Master Transportation Plan.

Parks Master Plan

The Parks Master Plan is a supplementary document of the OCP. Its development involved a substantial public engagement component that included a community wide park questionnaire, various stakeholder workshops, consultation stations in parks and at special events, a park ambassador program and public open houses. *(Bylaw 5609)*