

May 1, 2025

Mayor and Council  
City of Vernon  
3400 30th Street  
Vernon, BC V1T 5E6

CC: Mr. Peter Weeber, Chief Administrative Officer  
Mr. Terry Barton, Director, Planning and Community Services  
Mr. Matt Faucher, Acting Manager, Long Range Planning & Sustainability

Dear Mayor and Council,

On behalf of the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and our membership, we write to provide feedback to the City of Vernon on the Official Community Plan ("OCP").

We appreciate the City of Vernon for its continued commitment to shape a vibrant and sustainable community through the OCP. As a key stakeholder representing businesses, non-profits and entrepreneurs, we are grateful for the opportunity to provide input on the priorities that we believe will ensure Vernon remains a thriving and attractive community in which to live, work, and invest.

Enclosed is a non-exhaustive list summarizing key priority areas we would like the City of Vernon consider and incorporate in the OCP. The enclosed list stems from a survey of our membership conducted by us at the outset of the year to gain an understanding of their priorities for the new OCP. Our Advocacy Committee reviewed the 153 responses from our survey and identified key priority areas for consideration for Vernon's progressive growth and viability. We note that many of the concerns highlighted would benefit from further research and dialogue and we hope to explore these issues comprehensively in Council Committee workshops.

It is important to note that since we surveyed our members, our economic context has changed significantly due to the announcement by the Government of the United States of the imposition of tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico. The trade war has created economic uncertainty and while diplomatic discussions are ongoing a resolution has not yet been determined. This change in the economic climate has caused our members hardship as they face the need to rapidly adapt to remain competitive and viable.

In light of ongoing economic uncertainty and the reality that circumstances can shift rapidly, we encourage the adoption of the precautionary principle in planning. This approach would ensure that changes are implemented in phases guided by continuous data collection and evaluation to confirm that the plan delivers its intended benefits to the community.



Our organization is committed to working collaboratively with the City of Vernon to ensure the OCP reflects the aspirations of our vibrant business community. By addressing these key priority areas, we can build a sustainable and prosperous future that benefits businesses, residents and visitors alike.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss our recommendations and remain available to provide ongoing input as the OCP process progresses.

We also look forward to reviewing the draft Official Community Plan policies, development permit guidelines and land use designations. We request that all Committees of Council be convened to review the draft in detail and the opportunity to comment.

Thank you for your dedication to creating a thriving community, and we look forward to continuing our partnership in achieving this vision.

Sincerely,



Kirndeeep Nahal  
President  
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

Enclosure



## **1.0 Integrated Transportation and Land Use**

- 1.1** Adopt an incremental, rather than transformational, approach to land use regulation in the new Official Community Plan given the strain of new tariffs on the business community. Strive for balance between policies that promote new investment to Vernon and those that support the competitiveness of existing small and medium enterprises. Encourage sector-wide growth in Vernon through promoting collaboration between businesses of all sizes.
- 1.2** Consider decoupling the Official Community Planning process from the preparation of the Transportation Plan. While these plans depend on one another to be successful and require a high degree of alignment, they are different products that require different engagement and research processes. Most importantly, the Transportation Plan is in service of the Official Community Plan. It expresses an integrated vision of planning components, from Neighborhood Plan Areas to Commercial Hubs to Transit Oriented Areas.
- 1.3** Implement Bill 44 and 47 and related provincial regulatory requirements in this OCP planning cycle, but do not create additional Transit Oriented Development areas until there is evidence that there is sufficient transit demand or a regulatory requirement to do so.
- 1.4** Focus City investments and request for service upgrades to BC Transit based on community need for access to commercial areas for work and shopping. We have heard from our members that priority areas for new and enhanced transit services include connections from Downtown and Village Centre Mall to Coldstream and Okanagan College, the Foothills, and Silver Star Mountain Resort. We recommend the City conduct a fulsome study of community need for transit based on demographics and workforce participation to inform the new Transportation Plan.
- 1.5** Given the size, demographics and recreational pursuits of our community, vehicle transportation is likely to continue to predominate and must be prioritized in this OCP. We understand that Zoning Bylaw 6000, updated with Bill 44 and 47 regulatory requirements, has positioned the Downtown and Village Green Mall areas for higher density mixed commercial and residential development. Our members will need an adequate supply of parking spaces to serve new customers. Growth and density will also undoubtedly attract more vehicle traffic and congestion to these areas, which will need to be appropriately accommodated and managed. A model that has worked well in the City of Kelowna and other similarly sized cities is the development of above ground parkades on the perimeter of the growth area (e.g. a new parkade would be ideal in the vicinity of the library). The City and partners like the Greater Vernon Chamber can then promote and encourage a culture of perimeter parking and a short walk to commercial service areas. Parkades are important community benefit assets, and do not interfere with the City continuing to invest in and make the case for active transportation choices and new and enhanced transit service.
- 1.6** Seek community feedback on the municipal parking system and explore options for improvement. This may include incorporating technology-driven solutions and smart traffic management systems. Create a transparent mechanism for gathering ongoing feedback on cost and use and adapting system



investments as needed.

## **2.0 Commercial, Industrial and Residential Land Development**

- 2.1** Support mixed-use commercial and residential developments in key areas such as the City Centre Neighbourhood Plan area, Waterfront Neighborhood Plan area, the Village Green Mall area, and other commercial hubs to reduce commute times, traffic congestion, enhance sustainability, and increase local spending in our community.
- 2.2** Continue implementing the Development Approvals Process Review (DAPR) Report recommendations for the City of Vernon, which was undertaken on the basis of the September 2019 Province of BC Development Approvals Process Review (DAPR). These recommendations include calls to continue streamlining regulatory processes for permits, licensing, and development to reduce barriers for new and expanding businesses and for the creation of new units of housing needed for our community workforce.
- 2.3** Create a robust Redevelopment Policy that lays out a clear, transparent and principled process for how sites will be developed in key areas such as the City Centre Neighbourhood Plan area, Waterfront Neighborhood Plan area, the Village Green Mall area, and other commercial hubs. The policy may address displacement of current tenants to ensure they can safely transition to new housing; preservation and/or relocation of community assets such as heritage amenities, public art and murals and other public goods; streamlined construction processes that prioritize minimal disruptions to businesses; and a clear process for resolving issues and disputes.
- 2.4** Create a robust Community Amenity Contribution Policy that ensures that new development pays its fair share of implementing our existing and incoming Neighbourhood Plans and ensuring they reach their full expression in our community. We believe that this means balancing incentives to attract best-in-class developers with offering incentives to support those who take on the ownership and operation of new commercial and residential developments in the City Centre Neighbourhood Plan area, Waterfront Neighborhood Plan area, the Village Green Mall area, and other commercial hubs.
- 2.5** Ensure that the current Economic Impact Study findings are integrated into Zoning Bylaw 6000 and new OCP land designations, policies and development permit guidelines to ensure that there is sufficient commercial and industrial zoning to support Employment Lands for a variety of sectors, including retail, technology, and manufacturing.
- 2.6** Ensure that implementation of the Housing Action Plan and the joint contract with the Social Planning Council of the North Okanagan (SPCNO) is prioritized so that work with community non-profits, support groups, and RCMP continues to address challenges of homelessness and substance use. This helps ensure vulnerable residents are protected, while increasing safety in the City Centre Neighborhood Plan area and other commercial hubs to enhance the business environment for both locals and tourists.



- 2.7** Ensure that the Housing Action Plan is implemented to prioritize affordable and attainable housing projects to attract and retain a skilled workforce. Update and align the Housing Action Plan with the new Housing Needs Assessment Report, Transportation Plan and OCP land designations to prioritize and set aside land close to transit for affordable housing. Ensure that the next update to the Housing Action Plan contemplates support for temporary or rental housing options for seasonal workers.

### **3.0 City Support for Local Businesses**

- 3.1** Expand resources and funding to the City of Vernon's Economic Development Department to address the current economic context and attract new investment while also supporting local small and medium enterprises with incentives and programming.
- 3.2** Explore best practices for municipal programming to support "Buy Local initiatives". Some examples include [LOCO](#) in Vancouver, as well as programming in the Kootenays and on the West Coast of BC. Explore private and non-profit partnerships with the Greater Vernon Chamber and companies like [Glohaven Community Hub](#) to accelerate impact.
- 3.3** Ensure that the City of Vernon has a best-in-class sustainable and social procurement policy that is proactive in enhancing the competitiveness of local businesses and encouraging them to respond effectively to City contracts as well as other contracting opportunities arising from new investment and development initiatives. Among other things, this can involve providing more information online on the City of Vernon bid evaluation process and publicly available information on new developments. An example of the latter are the following websites for the City of Kelowna: (a) <https://www.kelowna.ca/homes-building/property-development/current-development-applications>, and (b) <https://developkelowna.ca/projects/under-construction>.
- 3.4** Demonstrate leadership in promoting ongoing dialogue and collaborative partnerships between the City (Mayor and Council, and Administration), businesses and non-profits to understand and address community challenges collaboratively. Support this through appropriate staffing, platforms for ongoing input from diverse stakeholders, inclusive planning processes and enriching programming such as Business Walks.
- 3.5** Partner with local educational institutions to address workforce skill gaps and provide training programs tailored to local business needs.

### **4.0 Tourism Development**

- 4.1** Ensure that the revised OCP, through its land designations, policies and development permit guidelines, values recreation, sustainability, and cultural heritage—all of which make Vernon a unique, world class destination. Prioritize investment in and implementation of the City Centre and Waterfront Neighbourhood Plan areas, which are important accelerators for tourism to Vernon and benefit the business community as a whole, including our Greater Vernon Chamber membership.



- 4.2** Continue support for tourism-related businesses by continued investment in Tourism Vernon's year-round destination marketing.
- 4.3** Reintroduce a permanent, year-round location for a Visitor Centre to enhance visitor experience and drive traffic to local businesses with an interest in the tourism industry.
- 4.4** Invest in a Conference Centre to attract business tourism to our community.
- 4.5** Enhance financial support for recreational facility user groups and provide incentives for the creation of more multi-use spaces for events, festivals, and markets that attract visitors and residents alike.
- 4.6** Work with the Greater Vernon Chamber, Destination SilverStar and other business support service providers to facilitate tourism training programs, such as SuperHost training, to ensure exceptional visitor experiences.

