

## Creating the Future We Want

Comments to the City of Richmond Planning Committee  
Concerning the Draft City Centre Area Plan  
From the Richmond School Board  
January 16, 2007

### Purpose (Slide 1)

As the only other level of elected government in Richmond, the Board feels that it is much more than just another stakeholder, but rather a partner, in the process of planning for the future of Richmond and creating a vibrant, livable city. The School Board provides a vital service that is a primary determinant of the quality of life for citizens of all ages - PUBLIC EDUCATION.

The Board is eager to continue working with you, in partnership, because we believe that is the right thing to do and the best way to achieve our goals. We note, however, that we are also legally obligated under section 881 of the Local Government Act<sup>1</sup> to consult with one another, not only at the staff level but also at the political level. Therefore, we feel a duty to share information with you that we feel is relevant to your deliberations in this planning stage for the City Centre Area Plan.

### Timeline to Date

#### *June 2006 City Staff Presentation to Trustee Representatives (Slide 2)*

On June 30, 2006 the board was invited to hear a presentation on the draft City Centre Area Plan from city staff. Realizing the small window of opportunity for input into this phase of the public consultation we did opt for a presentation to district staff and trustees that were available despite the summer recess. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, Trustees Sargent, Tsang and myself, as well as school district staff, did have an informative meeting. We were invited to give suggestions and comments and it was indicated by city staff that the Board's concerns would be reported to Council. The comments that trustees and staff had at that time were:

- As noted in our presentation to Council on January 8th, in our opinion the time frame for feedback regarding the proposed changes to the City Centre Area Plan was too short to allow for meaningful and carefully considered input.
- After careful reading of the outline provided, trustees uppermost concern was that the word "school" appeared only once in the entire report, page 8 where it is commented that "Some of the villages may provide... Community School."<sup>2</sup> **We believe that public schools should be an integral part of the plan from the outset.**

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<sup>1</sup> See Attachment #1 – Local Government Act, Section 881

<sup>2</sup> The report did not define what it meant by a "community school." However, as that term is commonly understood we do not currently have any community schools in Richmond.

- The report did not provide any information about the rate of development or the projected demographics of the people who would be living in the City Center that would allow the Board of School Trustees to determine the need for public schools in the area. Detailed information is also needed in order for the Board to make the necessary representations to the Ministry of Education to acquire funds for site acquisition and school construction. Timelines for such funding are long and we face strong competition from other districts.
- Another concern that was raised at the meeting was that the amount of park space that would be required by the City as the City Centre becomes higher in density. It is our understanding that you intend to reduce the traditional allocation for parks in the City Centre by over 50% compared to other areas of Richmond. As you are aware, the City of Richmond and the Richmond School district have previously had an enviable record of working together collaboratively to acquire contiguous joint school/park sites. The acquisition of parkland in the West Cambie sub-area across the street from Tomsett Elementary School rather than contiguous to the school site breaks this pattern and we wonder if the large open spaces that residents of Richmond have come to expect will no longer be available.

We have advised City staff that School Boards do not have a statutory mandate to provide parkland and to count school sites in the inventory of parkland is, in our opinion, misleading to the public. Counting school sites, which can subsequently be sold if demographics change, could result in the further erosion of the park standards that Richmond residents have enjoyed and we believe the proposed reduction of parkland detracts from the livability of the City Centre.

In summary, the Board has previously asked for more time to consider the draft City Centre Area Plan, access to complete demographic data and timelines for the densification of the City Centre Area and a copy of the final City Centre Area plan, when complete, as it is difficult to comment on a draft report when there is missing information and substantive changes to be made.

*November 2006 City Staff Presentation to Public Board Meeting (Slide 3)*

The next opportunity, and the first for the Board as a corporate body, to make comment on the City Centre Area Plan came when City Staff came and made a presentation to the whole Board at the November 6<sup>th</sup> Public meeting. We requested this presentation because we felt that not only the Board but also our stakeholders were uninformed about a plan that was of vital interest to them. Comments and concerns raised in response to that updated draft of the plan, many of which echoed those at the June meeting, were:

- There was still very little consideration of schools in the plan, input from the Board was available and would be important when considering the demographic study, the timelines for reporting back and adopting the plan concept (January 2007) were very short, various growth scenarios were suggested without resolution, the capacity of schools identified in the area plan was limited, the amount of designated park space was too little and school-board owned land was still included in the calculations, and there were no guarantees or controls in place to ensure adherence to the conceptual plan as it moved forward to actual construction.

The Board also had questions about contributors to school park space, relocation of industries displaced by the Richmond Oval, open space provisions in the neighbourhood village concept, and increasing green space in the northern part of the City. They once again stated serious concerns about their ability to fulfill the Board's mandate to provide an educational program for children in the City Center without sufficient notice and information to allow them to plan for school site acquisition and/or construction, reminding City staff that it usually takes years to get funding for site acquisition and then more years to get funding for construction, often 6 years or more from initial request to school completion.

In recent conversations the Ministry of Education has indicated that before it would consider providing any funds it would require the Board to sell other school board owned lands within Richmond which it considers to be in excess of requirements for public schooling and use those funds for schools in the City Centre.<sup>3</sup>

The Board directed district staff to move up the date of the planned City Centre Area Plan presentation to Ministry of Education staff by City staff. This meeting took place on December 1st. In a wide-ranging discussion following the presentation, information was provided about how the school district is provided capital funding, alternative methods of financing and the capital planning process for school districts.

#### **Concerns (Slide 4)**

- 1) City staff has proposed the establishment of 10 or 11 “mini villages” within the city center boundaries. They have also suggested in a presentation to the School Board that schools could be established within these “villages.”

Trustees would suggest that the concept of establishing schools in several or most of these villages is not realistic or practicable given:

- the provincial funding mechanisms for new school space and sites;
- the provincial funding for yearly ongoing operational expenses on a per pupil basis, not on a per school site basis, which creates a financial preference for larger, more “efficient” schools;
- the long-term projections for declining enrollment in general (55 of the 60 schools district in the province are declining, Richmond being one, with the decline projected until 2018);
- the current location of school sites within the city center; and
- the fact that most current city center schools are full (although there are empty rooms in schools outside the city center but within the Ministry of Education walk limits<sup>4</sup> for city center children).

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<sup>3</sup> In the last few years the Board has closed Sidaway, Garrett, Kilgour, Rideau and the Shell Road site. The Shell Road site was sold, the City bought Garrett, Kilgour is currently rented by the Francophone Authority, Rideau in use by our Continuing Education Department and Sidaway is currently offered for sale. Also, with the amalgamation of Steveston and London Secondary schools on the London site, Steveston Secondary is currently offered for sale.

<sup>4</sup> The province will not provide funding to bus children deemed to be within walking distance of a school. For Kindergarten children the walk limit is 4.2 km and for others it is 4.8 km.

Because of these factors the trend is to fewer, larger schools, not more small schools. If the City is interested in community schools within mini-villages that will require detailed discussions about the economics of such facilities and would probably require a contribution from the City to both capital and operating expenses in order to create a joint use facility.

- 2) It is often suggested that public schools could serve as joint facilities for schooling K to 12, daycare, preschool and adult schooling, shared libraries, community centers, health and other public community services, etc. To the extent that we have space available and are financially able, Trustees have always been willing to entertain the use of our facilities for diverse community purposes. We currently provide space for community sports and youth groups in exchange for the city maintaining our grounds (approximately 30,000 booked hours), and we rent space very economically to numerous language schools, churches, daycare providers and others. It is generally not known that 38 daycares operate in 31 of our 50 elementary schools – the highest ratio in the province. As well, our Continuing Education program provides many affordable programs for adults and children, from high school completion to computer training to wine tasting, and many of these courses are offered in Chinese. We will continue to explore with the broader community and the City the possibility of increasing the use of our school buildings and grounds - both because our sense of what's best for the community directs us to do so and because we may be mandated to do by the provincial government - so long as that does not compromise our core mandate for the provision of educational programs.
- 3) City staff and Councillors have both suggested that the form of school buildings might be very different in the future. Trustees are interested in exploring this idea - indeed we have suggested this possibility for a number of years. However, the main consideration for us is what form of building is best for the well being of students, contributes best to engaging them in their learning and their community, provides space for exercise and connects them to the natural world through opportunities to meet and be in the out-of-doors. Our main consideration is not what form of school building best serves a building/planning exercise to accommodate a desired population density. The size (enrolment) of the school would also have to be sufficient to permit its economical operation under the funding formula established by the Ministry of Education.
- 4) What the Board finds most problematic about the proposed City Centre Area Plan, however, is that it strongly suggests the need for more school sites but has not provided us with the necessary information to determine those needs and has not involved us in a manner that provides sufficient lead time to acquire sites economically or to successfully garner funds through the provincial capital planning process.<sup>5</sup> As previously mentioned, we will have to do a lot of work with the Ministry of Education to convince them that this is necessary – if, indeed, it is – and then to acquire the funds through a complex and competitive provincial process for capital funding.

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<sup>5</sup> See Attachment #2 – Richmond School District Five Year Capital Plan

### **Ability to Provide School Sites (Slide 5)**

It is often noted that services within the City and District are paid for by the same taxpayer, but this does not imply common ownership. The Board owns all of the schools and all of the school sites, which have been carefully acquired over the years for the provision of public education. This Ministry of Education, however, oversees the Board's stewardship of its sites and facilities. If the Board wants or needs to build new sites or add on to old schools, the provincial government has every right to demand that it sell sites no longer needed for public Education in order to pay for it. The province sees the district as a whole and expects the Board to use its facilities in a cost-effective manner. It does not distinguish between areas of the city.<sup>6</sup>

Approximately half of the schools in or adjacent to the City Centre have some space available to accommodate the increase in enrollment projected from the West Cambie Area Plan and the Pinnacle Project (Talmey, Tomsett, MacNeill). For the reasons noted earlier, it is highly unlikely we could persuade the provincial government to fund the acquisition of a new site in the city center. Rather, they would expect us to add on to the existing schools.

Selling any of the Board's sites would further reduce open space in the City Center unless the City were willing and able to acquire them at the fair market value at the time of sale. Therefore, school sites should not be considered as parks because the Board may in the future decide to sell such lands due to shifting demographics. Including school sites in the 'park calculation' misleads the public into believing there is more park space than there actually is.

In calculating the reduced park space for the City Center Plan, city staff has included current school sites (43 of 189 acres identified as park area are actually school sites that are owned by the Board). This is problematic because the Board cannot guarantee that this space will continue to be available for public use.<sup>7</sup>

The City has suggested that if in the future the Board wishes to sell a school site in the City Centre that the City would purchase the land. Currently the Board is selling land – 7 lots totalling 3.06 acres in the South McLennan area - which is within the City Centre Area Plan. The proceeds will go to replace Whiteside Elementary School and put an addition to Anderson Elementary School. City staff has indicated that they are not interested in purchasing the land.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion (Slide 6)**

As was noted at the January 8th Council meeting and mentioned in the letter the Board received from the Mayor on December 21st, the City Center Area Plan will be open for further discussion. We welcome the opportunity for further input to the draft plan and would ask what the specific process for consultation would be and what the specific timelines are. In our opinion, given the magnitude and pace of the proposed changes to the City Centre Area the Board believes it would be inappropriate for Council to approve a conceptual City Centre Area Plan.

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<sup>6</sup> See Attachment #3 – City Centre Area Plan Update Study, B. Open Spaces and Amenity, Nov./06, pg. 13

<sup>7</sup> See Attachment #4 - City Centre Area Plan Update Study, B. Open Space & amenity, Nov./06, page 11

<sup>8</sup> See Attachment #5 – SD 38 lots for sale in South McLennan

We would recommend that City staff be directed to complete a final version of the City Centre Area Plan and the Board of School Trustees (Richmond) be provided a copy of the final version with adequate time to provide Richmond City Council with its full and complete comments. Otherwise, we fear that we will be unable to analyze the implications of the plan for public education with sufficient detail and accuracy to provide the advice that we believe is critical to the City Center being the vibrant community we both want. Moreover, if the conceptual plan then changes as it becomes more concrete we fear that the original concept may be modified significantly in practice and unforeseen implications may creep up on us both.

Although we have a very successful history of collaboration with the City that has provided demonstrable benefit to the citizens of Richmond in the form of generous open recreational space and hidden benefits in terms of mutual efficiencies for the City and the Board, we are very concerned that our consultative and collaborative processes are not adequate to the scope and pace of the City Center Area Plan. We need new and improved mechanisms to ensure adequate consultation and collaboration at both the staff and political levels at this critical juncture in the life of Richmond. Hopefully, this presentation has been helpful in explaining our concerns, and also our excitement about what is possible, and will mark the beginning of a period of enhanced communication between the only two locally elected bodies representing the citizens of Richmond.

That is the end of the presentation on behalf of the Board. I now would like to make a personal comment on behalf of Trustees, as citizens of Richmond:

Creating new city plans and dreaming of new possibilities can be invigorating and exciting. Our collective and individual experience is that such planning processes take much time and energy and unfortunately, once plans are agreed upon they are often changed significantly by other development pressures and subsequent amendments which historically seem to occur outside of local government control, and population projections set for many decades in the future seem to constantly be superseded by higher than anticipated growth.

It does not seem to us that the quality of life will improve by creating an environment where those people most densely gathered have the least open space. Youth in particular, but also all citizens in general, need open spaces close by in which to meet, lounge, play and recreate. They will need an outlet from the confines of smaller living, learning and working spaces. Adequate park space, we believe, contributes to a healthier population and a safer, more connected society. I attach for your consideration a report from the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy on “Neighbourhood Parks and Health Outcomes.”<sup>9</sup>

Thank you

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<sup>9</sup> See Attachment # 6, Neighbourhood Parks and Health Outcomes

EXCERPT

**Local Government Act**  
**[RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 323**

**Part 26 — Planning and Land Use Management**

**Division 1 — General**

**Planning of school facilities**

**881** (1) If a local government has adopted or proposes to adopt or amend an official community plan for an area that includes the whole or any part of one or more school districts, the local government must consult with the school boards for those school districts

(a) at the time of preparing or amending the community plan, and

(b) in any event, at least once in each calendar year.

(2) For consultation under subsection (1), the local government must seek the input of the school boards as to the following:

(a) the actual and anticipated needs for school facilities and support services in the school districts;

(b) the size, number and location of the sites anticipated to be required for the school facilities referred to in paragraph (a);

(c) the type of school anticipated to be required on the sites referred to in paragraph (b);

(d) when the school facilities and support services referred to in paragraph (a) are anticipated to be required;

(e) how the existing and proposed school facilities relate to existing or proposed community facilities in the area.

## 5 YEAR CAPITAL PLAN SUMMARY

## PROPOSED 2007/08 CAPITAL PLAN

Project Priority	Project Title	Description			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	TOTAL
1	WHITESIDE ELEMENTARY - Replacement	Replace existing school					4,846,260			4,846,260
2	DOVER CROSSING ELEMENTARY - Site	Site and completion funding for new 2K + 300 elementary school. Partially purchased with Local Capital funds, to be reimbursed by Metro/Albion for School Site Acquisition.					1,858,252		6,518,304	8,376,556
3	ANDERSON ELEMENTARY - Addition	Four classroom addition to accommodate increased enrolment					1,000,000			1,000,000
4	TALMEY ELEMENTARY	Addition to accommodate increased enrolment.							2,000,000	2,000,000
5	TOMSETT ELEMENTARY - Site and addition	Addition to accommodate increased enrolment.							2,400,000	2,400,000
										18,622,816

## RECENTLY APPROVED PROJECTS

Project Priority	Project Title	Description			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	TOTAL
	STEVESTON SECONDARY - Replace	Approved for 2005/06. To be replaced with a 500 capacity addition to London Secondary.	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/2011	2011/12	
	MacNEILL SECONDARY - Site Completion	Included in Capital Plan as eligible for School Site Acquisition Charges	Approved							
	BUS - 84 Passenger	Replace bus in accordance with Ministry of Education's criteria for age and mileage	Approved							
	BUS - Wheelchair	Replace bus in accordance with Ministry of Education's criteria for age and mileage	Approved							
	BUS - 84 Passenger	Replace bus in accordance with Ministry of Education's criteria for age and mileage		Approved						
	BUS - Wheelchair	Replace bus in accordance with Ministry of Education's criteria for age and mileage		Approved						
	BRIGHOUSE ELEMENTARY - Seismic upgrading	High priority sections of the school identified in 2004 seismic assessment	feasibility study approved	2,098,660						
	GARDEN CITY ELEMENTARY - Seismic upgrading	High priority sections of the school identified in 2004 seismic assessment	feasibility study approved	1,492,700						

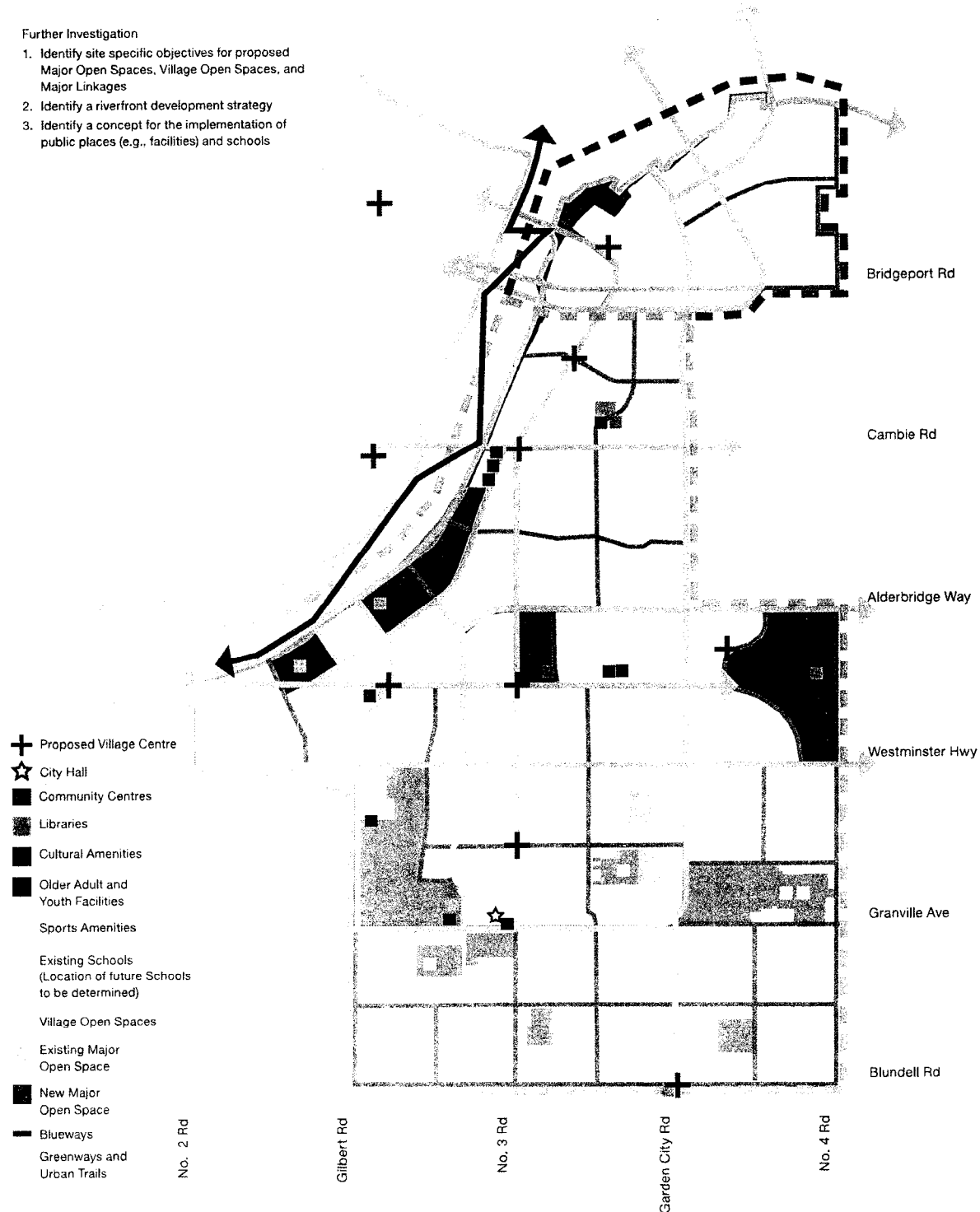


## B. Open Space & Amenity

The framework provides for a combination of City and School District owned open spaces, facilities, and linkages designed to support both the downtown's villages and its broader role as a centre for Richmond.

### Further Investigation

1. Identify site specific objectives for proposed Major Open Spaces, Village Open Spaces, and Major Linkages
2. Identify a riverfront development strategy
3. Identify a concept for the implementation of public places (e.g., facilities) and schools



## B. Open Space & Amenity

**Objective:** Provide a framework of well-connected spaces and services that support community building, sustainability and wellness.

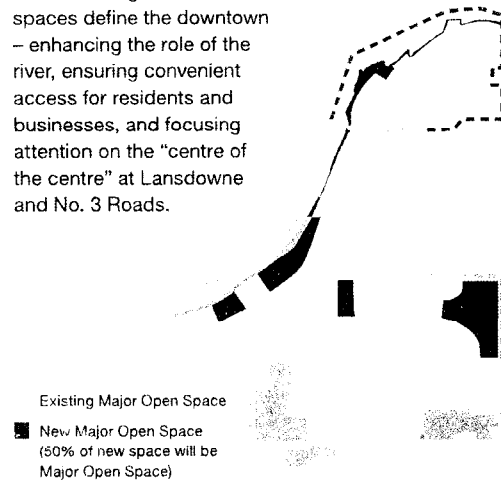
Current policy requires that City and School District open space serve City Centre residents at a ratio of 7.66 acres/1,000 people, of which 3.25 acres/1,000 people must be situated within the downtown.

Assuming 120,000 City Centre residents, 390 acres of open space is required (189 acres existing + 201 acres new) and it is proposed that:

1. New school sites will be provided in addition to this land.
2. Building encroachment will be limited by co-locating libraries and other facilities on non-park land where possible

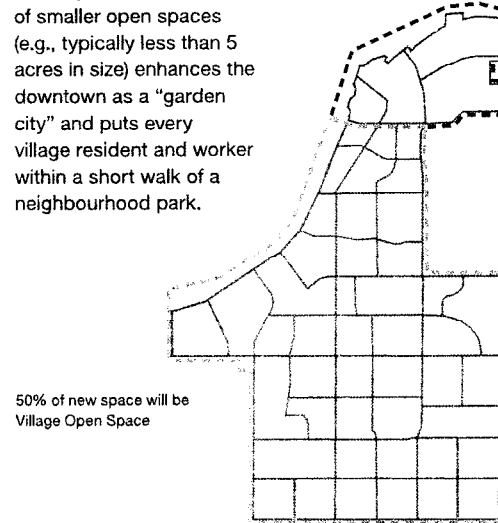
### Major Open Spaces

A series of significant spaces define the downtown – enhancing the role of the river, ensuring convenient access for residents and businesses, and focusing attention on the “centre of the centre” at Lansdowne and No. 3 Roads.



### Village Open Spaces

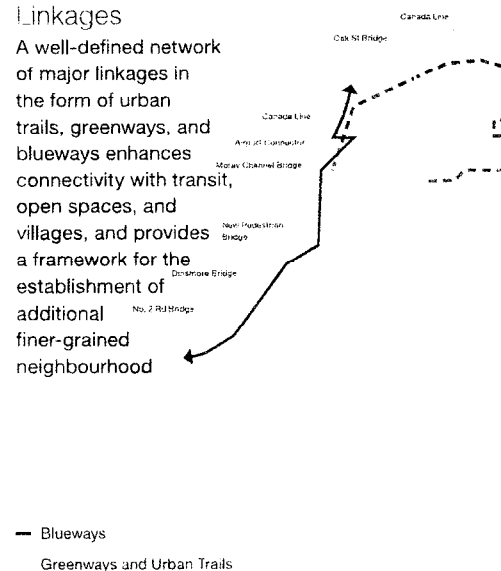
A fine-grained pattern of smaller open spaces (e.g., typically less than 5 acres in size) enhances the downtown as a “garden city” and puts every village resident and worker within a short walk of a neighbourhood park.



In addition to City and School District owned open space, City policies promote the provision of a network of pedestrian linkages and public places designed to enhance connectivity and access to services across the downtown.

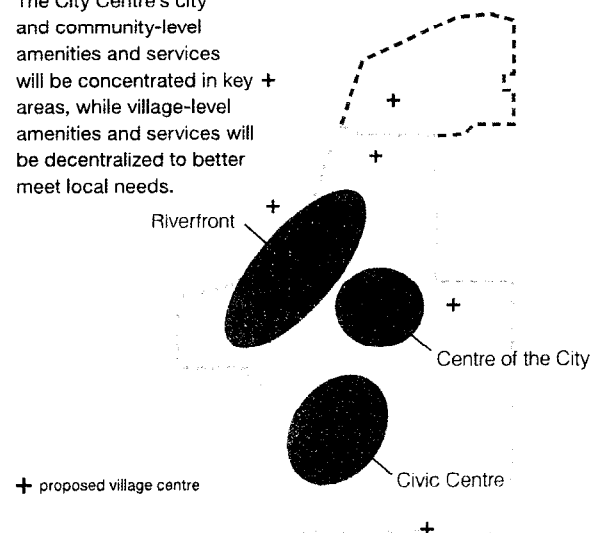
### Linkages

A well-defined network of major linkages in the form of urban trails, greenways, and blueways enhances connectivity with transit, open spaces, and villages, and provides a framework for the establishment of additional finer-grained neighbourhood



### Amenities

The City Centre's city and community-level amenities and services will be concentrated in key + areas, while village-level amenities and services will be decentralized to better meet local needs.



# SOUTH McLENNAN LANDS

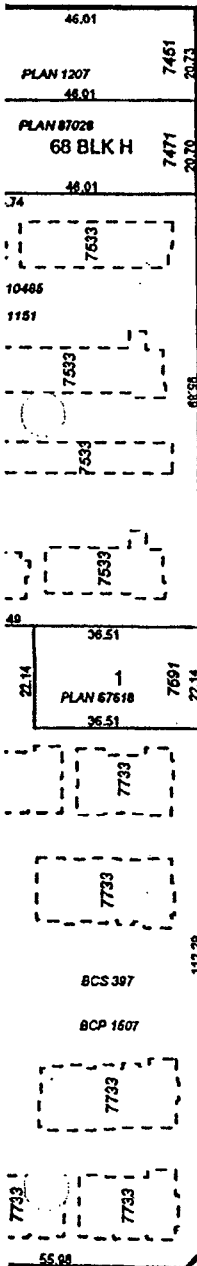
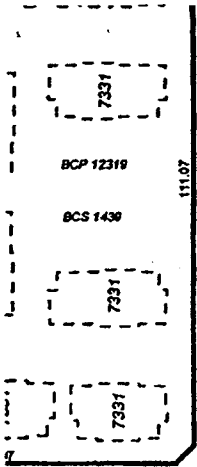
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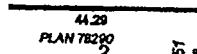
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CANADIAN RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE *for* SOCIAL POLICY

RAISING AND LEVELLING THE BAR FOR CHILDREN &amp; YOUTH

## Neighbourhood Parks and Health Outcomes

Recent research from geography, epidemiology, and public health suggests that "where you are" affects your health outcomes as much as "who you are". Researchers are now studying everyday health-relevant features within the immediate neighbourhood context, such as stores to purchase nutritious food, and facilities for exercise.

Green space has been linked with better measures of self-discipline and ability to concentrate among children, and stronger social ties in adults. Parks provide important opportunities for children's outdoor play in the urban environment particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Results of a recent study of neighbourhood parks and contrasting health outcomes in Montreal by Cohen and Ross suggest that park quality varies by neighbourhood-level health status and is generally lower among poor health neighbourhoods and higher as health status improves. Parks in poorer health neighbourhoods have limited provision of facilities for physical exercise, and location drawbacks due to nearby industrial sites and multilane highways. Parks in the healthiest neighbourhoods contain more high-quality features, specifically facilities for recreation and physical activity.

Poor park quality in poor health neighbourhoods may be an example of what MacIntyre (2000) identifies as deprivation amplification – in places where people are poorer, more ill, and have fewer personal resources such as money or private transport, local facilities that may encourage people to lead healthier lives are also poorer.



The ways in which these parks vary may have serious implications for the utility of facilities and the promotion of healthy behaviours. These consequences could be mediated by community social norms guiding park use or individual mobility in terms of accessing facilities further from home.

This CRISPfact is a summary of Stephanie Cohen and Nancy Ross' 2006 article Exploring the material basis for health: Characteristics of parks in Montreal neighbourhoods with contrasting health outcomes. *Health & Place* 12, 361-371.; See also: MacIntyre, S. & Ellaway, A. (2003). Neighbourhoods and health: An overview. In Kawachi, I. & Berkman, L.F. (Eds.). *People Places*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.; MacIntyre, S. (2000). The social patterning of exercise behaviours: The role of personal and local resources. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 34, 1, 6.; Kuo, F.E., et al., (1998). Fertile ground for community: Inner-city neighbourhood common spaces. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26, 6, 823-851.; Taylor, A.F., et al., (2002). Views of nature and self-discipline: Evidence from inner-city children. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 22, 1-2, 49-63.

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