

Summary Report:
October 9th 2008 Open House
HESPERIA LANDS

Submitted to:
Hesperia Development Corporation

by:
CONTEXT RESEARCH LTD.



October 2008

The involvement of the public in the planning for the Hesperia Lands in Vernon continues to be a defining principle of the Hesperia Development Corporation (HDC). Building upon the valuable feedback received at the May 2008 open house, as well as a broad program of technical analyses, the HDC hosted a second public open house on October 9th. This community event allowed interested individuals to learn more about the evolution of the planning concepts for the Hesperia Land, and to share any questions, concerns or ideas they may have.

The event at the Paddlewheel Hall was publicized through advertisements in the Vernon Morning Star and the mailing of a notice to area residents. The open house was very well attended, with over 100 people dropping by throughout the evening. Many of the participants indicated they lived in neighbourhoods close to the Hesperia Lands.

The open house featured fifteen full-colour display boards, describing and illustrating concept plan for the Hesperia Lands, as well as providing background on the HDC and the planning process. Members of the Board of Directors of the HDC and members of the Hesperia Lands planning team were on hand to discuss the planning concepts and challenges with attendees.

A two-page fact sheet on the planning for the Hesperia Lands was provided to all participants. As well, each person who arrived at an open house was provided with a feedback form, on which they could write their comments, and either deposit the form in a box at the open house, or subsequently fax or mail it to the HDC.

Public Input Received

As with the input received at the May open house, the community feedback received at the October 9th open house provided very valuable information for consideration in the planning process for the Hesperia Lands. The input received from the public through completed feedback forms is summarized on the following pages.

On the feedback form, open house participants were asked four questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the draft concept plan presented today?
2. Do you think the draft concept plan responded appropriately to the community feedback shared at the May open house? Please explain your answer.
3. What elements do you think are most important for creating a great neighbourhood on the Hesperia Lands?
4. Do you have any other ideas, concerns or suggestions?

The feedback summary that follows is presented by broad category of issue, to facilitate the consideration of the input by the HDC and its planning team. Interested readers are strongly encouraged, however, to read the complete transcripts in Appendix A, in order to gain a full appreciation of all the points raised by the participating members of the community.

The general response

Perhaps the most notable theme to emerge from the evening's conversations between the public and the HDC representatives was that many open house participants were appreciative of the extent to which the HDC and its planning team had tried to address the concerns and ideas shared by the community at the May open house. Many members of the public seemed surprised that the public involvement process seemed so meaningful and productive, and that the overall planning process was dynamic and generally responsive to community issues.

Traffic, parking and transit

As at the first open house in May, issues related to traffic, parking and transit were significant concerns for some of the October open house participants. There were renewed calls for a direct connection with Okanagan Avenue at the east end of the site, with a suggestion that the Agricultural Land Commission be asked to exclude land to allow for the direct access. Specific traffic safety concerns were cited regarding the proposed access via Longacre.

The provision of transit services to the site was recommended as a way to reduce traffic to and through the site, and to effectively minimize parking requirements.

Parks and open space

As could have been expected, parks and open spaces were of interest to many open house participants. While the proposed green spaces presented in the draft concept plan were generally very well received, specific suggestions included an off-leash area for dogs, active recreational facilities such as tennis courts, several playgrounds for young children, and common BBQ/picnic areas. Natural landscaping and xeriscaping were mentioned as important features, as was the need for informal gathering places that would encourage spontaneous community interaction (particularly intergenerational connections between seniors and young families)

Housing types

There was not a great deal of feedback on the housing types presented in the draft concept plan. Specific comments included a request that the HDC commit to a specific number of rental housing units; the need to design the project to be family friendly, balancing privacy and security with neighbourliness and a sense of community; and the appeal of the townhouses clustered around small courtyards. As well, the absence of co-op housing was questioned.

Project rationale and objectives

Several open house participants questioned the need for attainable housing in Vernon, given emerging market conditions and some of the relatively-affordable housing options available closer to the city centre.

Location

There was some feedback from open house participants concerning the development of this type of housing on the Hesperia Lands. It was suggested that the development will contribute to urban sprawl; that it is inconsistent with Vernon's OCP; that it is inappropriate to put so much housing so far and uphill from shopping and services; and that the development would be better suited to a brownfield site.

Density

While there was some suggestion that the concept plan should include some single-family dwellings, generally the densities presented seemed acceptable to most open house participants. It was noted that density needs to be planned with lots of well-designed shared greenspaces.

Loss of wildlife habitat

Several open house participants asserted that the wildlife value of the Hesperia Lands has not been appropriately considered.

Public consultation process

Specific comments regarding the public consultation process included observations that old aerial mapping had been used on the display boards, that the technical studies should be available online, and that the open house should have included a group presentation and question-and-answer session.

Other issues

Other issues that were raised by open house participants included:

- the composition of the HDC Board of Directors;
- the importance of green, sustainable design and construction, particularly regarding energy supply, heating and cooling, drinking water and wastewater;
- ownership requirements;
- tenure options, and
- covenant controls.

APPENDIX A

Transcribed Input from Open House Feedback Forms

The following is a direct transcription of the feedback form input received at or following the October 9th 2008 open house, in response to the questions that were posed on the forms.

1. What are your thoughts on the draft concept plan presented today??

- You must provide the major access to Okanagan Avenue at the east end of the development. It makes no sense to come down to Longacre then on to Okanagan Landing. The hill is too steep and joined Okanagan Avenue on the middle of the S-curve is inviting accidents. A three-way stop is not an option.
- I think that the plan contributes to urban sprawl. I also feel that the City which bought the Lands for the expansion of spray irrigation is taking the first step to using the whole of the “commonage” for building purposes.
- Okay.
- Looks good at this early stage.
- This neighbourhood should be designated in MOCP -2008. Mix of housing styles – mix should be complimentary to each other and reflect the industries of North Okanagan (timbers, stone, etc.) and the needs of the climate. Density should be at least 24 units per acre with a mix of multi-family and single-family. The head of the Lake offers one of the nicest places to live and should be maximized. Thank you for no hard surfaces on walking trails.
- The Board does not appear to have a representative of social concern and an environmental background on it. I like the principles. Like the essential layout – like the community garden and the community space.
- Was pleased, expected much more congested areas. You are on the right path!!! Great to have received a meeting info letter. Good work.
- Well planned.
- I like the greenspace, trails and bike paths. Use of courtyards surrounded by a small number of townhouses is very appealing.
- Plan is premature, is there truly a need for attainable housing in Vernon, especially considering today’s market realities? Multi-story buildings are not appropriate for this area – how about relocating downtown, or developing brownfield? Habitat is becoming more important with all of the development happening, in fact it is a CRITICAL VALUE.
- I’m glad you are providing for mortgage helper rental suites and have thought to avoid past problems by insisting they be owner occupied. I think that should be a requirement

for all the units built regardless of whether or not they have a rental suite. Also, people should be full time residents especially in the more upscale units. The last thing we want is to have people scooping them up for seasonal usage or as investment properties or buying several with the intent to flip them for a profit.

- I think you really need to look at having the city retain ownership of the land and just lease it out for say 25 years. This is the single best step you could take to keep prices down. Also, it is the single best step to maintain control over what happens to this land in future. If someone does not abide by the rules then the city could act to terminate the land lease provided prudent safeguards were incorporated into the land lease in the first place. As well, it provides a future city council with an opportunity to revisit the whole question of what is the best usage for these lands a generation hence. That is why the lease should be a generational one of 25 years ... long enough for some security but short enough to give speculators pause for concern.

2. Do you think the draft concept plan responded appropriately to the community feedback shared in the spring? Please explain your answer.

- The plan is OK; it's unfortunate that I feel that it should never have been allowed.
- Yes, however, it would be nice to have access (via website?) to the studies referred to. For example, the environmental study that describes the site as a "disturbed site with limited habitat value"- as a resident, I see that this "disturbed site" has great habitat value.
- I think wildlife use the area more than it is stated on your board.
- Did not attend.
- Appears to be responsive
- Yes, lots of greenspace.
- Yes.
- Found response to wildlife concerns to be vague and uninformative. Looks like greenspace has been well maintained. Methods of energy conservation not discussed. To what extent will sustainable designs and building methods be given when selecting builders? This was not clear.
- No, do we need "attainable" housing when there are less expensive houses available in town? No, you are developing on habitat lands that should be preserved, not developed.

3. What elements do you think are most important for creating a great neighbourhood on the Hesperia Lands?

- Greenspace, buffer zones, xeriscaping and natural landscaping. And I am glad that single family homes don't work here. We need more high density land use, so thank you for not caving to that demand.
- Develop slowly so as not to have a lot of unsold housing.
- O.C.P.; Traffic.
- Community space – place to gather or “bump.” Open space. Flow of traffic and fast traffic.
- Convinced that transit will have to be key and in place. Will have to prove that even though this development is 2km+ away from nearest shopping, people will be able to keep a one car family with one car for rental and a parking place for one visitor.
- A family friendly community based plan that allows for privacy, security (secure spaces for small children and pets).
- Transportation. Wastes. Okanagan Basin Waste Board said in 1990 that no one would have sufficient waste until 2015.
- Variety of housing forms and architecture. Concerned that townhouses will be overpriced. If I could buy a 10-20 year old house for the same price as a new townhome, I'd go for the detached house. Walking and bike paths. A nice off-leash area (for dogs).
- Access to Kelowna Airport – current access is dangerous, why not include an upgrade to ensure safe access, PLUS save a whole bunch of time driving into town etc? Already takes ten minutes or more to get into town, now there are more lights (and more planned), which means more stopping and starting, and more GHG emissions? Transportation by bus is not an option for most employed people.
- More attention needs to be paid to young families with children living here. There is a need for several tot lot playgrounds within easy walking distance to clusters of housing so that they are convenient for parents with toddlers, strollers, diaper bags et al to access on foot. Perhaps making them accessible by walking paths is preferable to having to use roads and sidewalks. Remember, you are making the lots small to keep density up so opportunities for backyard play will be virtually nonexistent. It's important to keep in mind too that many seniors living in the development probably will enjoy watching youngsters at play and may function as potential babysitters...what better way to connect than on a tot lot? Some benches and a picnic table or two plus some shade trees for hot summer day would encourage intergenerational interactions too. What is needed is a community, not an old fart ghetto separated from a young family enclave.

4. Do you have any other ideas or concerns??

- No questions about the planning. But have concerns about the make-up of the Board of Directors. Surely we do not have to use the services of people from other Municipalities. And the choice of Councillor on the board is the wrong choice in my opinion. What does this person bring to the table?

- With the current state of the economy, I urge the City and the Corporation not to proceed with development (including installing City services) until a clear need is demonstrated once again. I like what I see here today, but demand may have changed. We need to wait a bit for the dust to settle. (And if you disagree, please explain why the project must proceed now.) I would like to see the business case for this development.
- Please have a presentation and question and answer session at the next meeting so that everyone is getting the same information.
- Road network intersections do not make sense but are not really shown. Apollo and Okanagan Road, Apollo and Okanagan Avenue, Longacre and Okanagan Avenue, and Eastside Road are indicated to replace new trail behind Longacre. This is not on OCP. Architecture in displays is ugly. Old satellite photo has been used. No actual pictures of the site are on the display.
- Didn't see any commitment to maintain some level of rental accommodation. No mention of this.
- Approach ALC for an extension access that would come off Okanagan Avenue up along existing plan and enter phase I.
- Would like to see a dog park, recreational facilities (tennis courts), bicycle/stroller paths, playgrounds, common BBQ/picnic areas. Built using green design principles and building materials, high efficiency/low cost.
- I wonder what kind of consideration has been given to heating and cooling homes. This significantly impacts sustainability. Ensure excellent building envelopes and appropriate building siting. Please consider district heating/cooling with geothermal. Look at Manitoba for community examples (Waverly, I believe). Is greywater in apartments a possibility? Okatoks, Alberta for solar. Can incentives be provided to builders who choose these routes? Ya know, I may buy the overpriced townhouse if it has been well thought out and efficiently designed.
- Lake access will see increased pressure due to this development, how will you address lake access? There is no visible shopping option anywhere near this development. Pedestrian access to neighbourhood centre via 600m steep trail is unrealistic – even if there was something to shop for in that centre who would be willing to haul it up the hill??
- I did not see any provisions for co-op housing. I hope you have given this type of housing due diligence and not just glossed over it. Seems conspicuous by its absence to me. As a minimum you should state why it is not included.
- I missed seeing any rules or eligibility criteria for living here. They need input from the public too. Showing street plans and architectural contexts is all well and good but this is not an ordinary development open to all and the restrictions need to be well thought out and enforceable. The development is much more than just housing, it is or should be, of tightly controlled entry to buyers. As a taxpayer with shallow pockets I want to know that my subsidy of this city land for attainable housing will generate good for the community as a whole.