

July 30, 2025

Saanich Planning – Alanna McDonagh, Cameron Scott, Lindsay Chase
Mayor Murdock & Saanich Council

Re: GTCA initial comments on Tillicum Burnside Planning Process

The Gorge Tillicum Community Association (GTCA) supported the idea of a streamlined CCV process in place of a Local Area Plan, as we were eager to see a faster, simpler, and less costly approach. Unfortunately, our experience to date has been the opposite: a needlessly complicated and expensive process that we fear will lead to unmet expectations and community backlash once the draft plan is released.

Various members of our Board and committees participated fully in all sessions, and we feel we have sufficient context to offer this feedback at this early stage.

Our Observations:

- **Walking Tours:** While staff appeared to listen, the tours did not cover critical areas of concern. This activity was well intentioned and, though poorly attended, at least ensured that some staff had 'walked the ground' prior to making a plan. The most striking takeaway was that even staff and consultants felt unsafe walking on the Saanich side of Harriet Road.
- **Workshops:** The exercises (e.g., lego, magazines, stickers) were unnecessarily convoluted, and the segmentation of topics meant that participants attending a single session could not see how their input fit into the broader vision. For example, asking participants to select preferred building forms in isolation from their locations caused considerable confusion. The poor turnout for these events forced the consulting team to try to draw conclusions from an unrepresentative sample of community participants. Moreover, though the process leading to the 2005 Tillicum Burnside Action Plan included developers, realtors, business owners, engineers, architects and staff, this consultation exercise included only residents.
- **Village, Corridor, and Centre Boundaries:** The fundamental and likely most controversial question of where these boundaries should be was largely unaddressed. This omission will almost certainly become a major issue once a draft plan is published. *For example: asking people to place legos on a map is not the same as asking people how far into the neighbourhood a six-storey building should be allowed. The process avoided the most important issue.*
- **Familiarity with the Neighbourhood:** Some consultants and newer planners were unfamiliar with the area and could not answer basic questions, such as the location of the Saanich/Victoria border at Harriet and Burnside. This confusion was compounded by discussions about a Burnside Village incorporating areas that belong to the

Uptown Douglas Plan.

- **Expectation Management:** While we understand that it is impossible to please everyone, asking participants what they want without explaining trade-offs, financial constraints, or unintended consequences sets the plan up for failure. For example, if amenities are to be funded by developers, development must be feasible and permitted for this to occur. So far, the process has not openly considered costs, time or other impediments, a weakness that opens a door to unrealistic expectations resulting from 'blue sky' thinking.
- **Engagement:** Despite efforts by Planning and the GTCA to publicize the sessions, participation was very low. We believe this was due to three primary factors:
 - a) Disillusionment stemming from past planning processes that yielded only aspirations.
 - b) Poor seasonal timing, as many community members were occupied with organizing the Gorge Canada Day Picnic throughout May and June.
 - c) A process that did not begin with analysis of why the last plan did not generate the desired result.
- **Implementation:** While this is a 20–30-year plan, we have already witnessed 20 years (2005–2025) pass with little tangible implementation from previous initiatives. Without a funded timeline for at least some key actions, this plan risks becoming nothing more than another set of rules and aspirations.

What the GTCA Board Would Like to See in the Plan:

- **Boundary Changes:** Adjust Gorge Village boundaries to remove the eastern portion of Gorge Road West and Arnot Avenue. This area is not suited to redevelopment. Gorge Road West, with its historic and diverse homes, is central to neighbourhood character and should be preserved. Arnot Avenue, a short dead-end street, cannot safely accommodate additional traffic, as demonstrated during Canada Day events. (Note: the GTCA did support the development of 630 Gorge Road West, which was already an aging multi-family dwelling, and the redevelopment of the Il Greco corner which added housing and commercial space to a site that was an aging commercial space.)
- **Tall Buildings in Appropriate Locations:** Higher buildings (up to 18 storeys, consistent with the OCP) should be concentrated on the Tillicum Mall site (Anthem Property) and the adjacent triangle lot across from the mall.
- **Mixed-Use Development:** All new buildings along Tillicum and Burnside should include retail, restaurant, and commercial space at street level.
- **Public Spaces:** Patios and public gathering spaces should be prioritized, and the permitting process streamlined and stripped of unnecessary requirements.
- **Waterfront Access:** Over the long term, we would like Saanich to consider reacquiring the Cedar Shores Condos site once the buildings reach end of life, to improve public access to the waterfront and Curtis Point. In the interim, Saanich should explore the possibility of extending the Gorge Waterway Pathway to Harriet Avenue.
- **Trees and Sidewalks:** A consistent theme from participants was a strong desire for more trees. As Saanich has direct control over tree planting, we look forward to hearing when and where this will occur.

Plan vs. Reality – Our Lived Experience:

Throughout this process, planners have likely heard the same refrain: *“We’ve done this before, and nothing happened.”* While it may seem unfair to those optimistically approaching this as a fresh start, our skepticism is grounded in our daily reality.

Examples of the Disconnect:

Trees: Despite commitments to plant 10,000 trees, Gorge Road’s recent reconstruction included trees only after community complaints. Even then, individual homeowners were allowed to block boulevard planting on public land. Other trees that were planted during previous projects have been poorly maintained and have either not survived or not thrived



- **Patios:** Community members consistently express a desire for patios, but obtaining approvals remains unnecessarily difficult compared to neighbouring communities.



- **Placemaking Elements:** While banners, lighting, and trees are promoted in plans, in reality, many installations are not maintained. Empty banner brackets remain throughout the neighbourhood as evidence of abandoned initiatives.



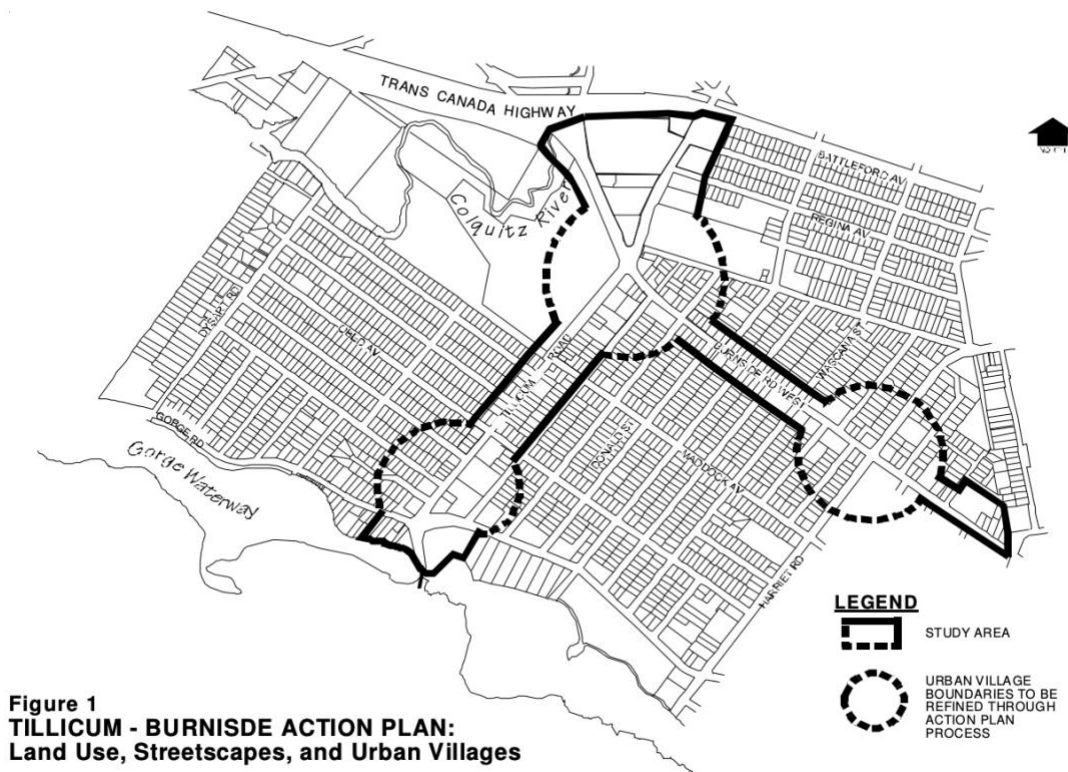
- **Murals:** Although we are pleased to have been awarded a mural grant for 50 Burnside Road West, a site first identified in the 2005 Action Plan, the process remains slow and bureaucratic compared to other municipalities that have embraced public art and encouraged it more readily. The program really seems to be more about regulating versus encouraging public art. Perhaps this helps explain why we have so few murals?



Sidewalks: Asking residents if they want sidewalks when there is no budget or realistic timeline to build them is disingenuous. Our neighbourhood has unsafe stretches of sidewalk, yet budget allocations remain inadequate. If only a few kilometres can be built in our neighbourhood over the next 20 years, please be transparent and ask us to prioritize those limited resources accordingly.

- **Burnside Village:** This issue is perhaps the most egregious of all. Asking the community whether we want a Burnside Village, when it was clearly identified in previous plans and then arbitrarily removed, with part of the

neighbourhood shifted into the Uptown Douglas Plan, without any consultation - feels like a complete disregard for our input and priorities. This is not merely symbolic: it has had real-world consequences. For example, we have heard directly from developers who were informed by Planning staff that the Burnside Village area was no longer considered appropriate for a village, undermining both investment and confidence in the process.



Source: Tillikum – Burnside Action Plan, Endorsed by Council June 21, 2005

Process considerations: What is the value of a process that generates a plan that cannot be implemented? This one shows every sign of paying more attention to process than to results. There is something fundamentally flawed about a process that does not explain or examine its own assumptions, is not grounded on analysis of obstacles and impediments to achievement and fails to consider history. Each workshop, for example, began with a presentation urging participants to embrace changes that our community has been asking for the past 20 years. This illustrated clearly just how little homework had been done to understand the history of our community's efforts to get the housing density, complete streets and walkable, livable design that the new process suggests we should want. The process itself is flawed to the extent that it will likely create a slightly altered and nicer design without a viable accompanying plan to realize it.

Implementation:

We've heard 20 years of promises with almost nothing to show for it. Another 20–30 years of "aspirations" isn't good enough. The community needs a real, funded, time-stamped action plan—now. Saanich controls trees, sidewalks, roads, and public spaces today; those should be visible wins in the next few years, not left to chance. Too often, the lofty visions in new plans don't align with existing policies, zoning, or bylaws, which end up blocking the very projects these plans claim to support. Without concrete progress and policy alignment, this plan will be just another glossy document collecting dust. Given the empty outcome of the last plan, our community is unimpressed with a process that seems very likely to have no substantive result. Action, not process, is the only way to regain our trust.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Vera Wynn-Williams', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Vera Wynn-Williams
GTCA President on behalf of the GTCA Board
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