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GTCA Directors Annual Report (2020-2021)

We, the GTCA Board of Directors for the period 2020-2021, are pleased to offer you this report addressing the activities we have been involved in since our Annual General Meeting in October 2020 as well as a brief look at what might be forthcoming.

GTCA Board activities over the past 6 months

As necessitated by COVID-safe practices, the Board has been conducting nearly all its activities through email and phone conversations and through Zoom-based meetings. It's still not as desirable a format as sitting and talking around a table but we're finding that we're still able to work this way and to get a lot done.

Organizationally, we have a strong model defined by our constitution (purpose), bylaws, vision, objectives, and operating principles. Our financial practices are well defined, transparent and effective. And, on the communication front, our neighbourhood newsletter continues to be distributed by hand throughout the community (as well as we can), our new website is steadily being improved upon, and our Facebook page has a growing and active following.

We have for some years now operated under a model whereby annual GTCA memberships start when fees are received and expire (about) a year later. This has made the recording, tracking and renewal process cumbersome and confusing. We anticipate that the upcoming AGM will approve the transition to a simpler model based on memberships expiring at the end of each calendar year.

Our six Working Groups are at various stages of development -- each needing a director serving as its chair and each with its pro-active task of generating ideas for new projects and subsequently (subject to Board approval) helping them come to life. Two of the groups (Buildings; Mobility & Transportation) have strong levels of participation, drawn from the pool of directors and from the wider community; two other (Arts, Culture & Celebration; Natural Areas [formerly Green & Blue]) have small dedicated groups of participants; and two others (Community Connections; Local Economy) are looking forward to launching in the not-too-distant future.

Inspired by the currently existing first draft of the GTCA Community Design Guidelines -- a document setting out our vision for building development in the neighbourhood -- the Board is now working on the creation of similar vision documents for each of the other aspects of our neighbourhood. The various working groups will create these draft documents for consideration and approval by the Board. These vision documents would be easily updated and would serve as guides for use by the Board, the community, Saanich, developers and others as we work towards "enhancing community amenities of one kind or another" (as per our constitution).

Arts Culture, Celebration

The big news here, in our current COVID-limited climate, is the work the GTCA is doing towards the creation of a mural at 100 Burnside Road West, on the Wascana Avenue side of the building. In addition to contributing to this project

ourselves, we have applied for grants and are seeking donations from businesses and the general public. (To donate, please visit https://www.gofundme.com/f/art-in-our-neighbourhood-burnside-mural-campaign?fbclid=IwAR1_IPFDszFZ_ReMixz57ltvuuXa1QkksaA-qc3lBKcXVKzyeQHdoRdertU.)

While the Gorge Canada Day Picnic and Music in the Park will not be occurring this year, thanks to the efforts of some enthusiastic volunteers, we were able to host our annual Lights on the Gorge winter celebration digitally. With all of us doing our part in combatting this virus, we hope to be celebrating outdoors again in the not-too-distant future.

Natural Areas

The GTCA is participating in a new project designed to promote the protection, enhancement and connection of pollinator habitat throughout our neighbourhood. Through the efforts of the Natural Areas Working Group, the GTCA has partnered with students in a University of Victoria Geography class on the creation of a map of the area that allows the wider public not only to identify existing habitat but to supplement the information on the map as well. Please keep an eye out for more information about (a) access to the map and (b) further features of the pollinator project through our newsletter and Facebook page.

Walter Park, the newest park in our neighbourhood, has been officially named and designated as a P4N park -- i.e. a natural park, similar to Cuthbert Holmes Park, that focusses on passive enjoyment rather active recreation (such as Meadow Park). The park now has two stewards -- part of the Saanich Pulling Together program -- who work with Saanich maintaining and enhancing the park through removing invasive species and planting desirable species instead. (Once COVID restrictions have been lifted, the stewards will be calling for volunteers to assist in this work.)

The volunteers forming the Boulevard Brigades are, as this is written, preparing to attend to the needs of the plants in and along various public boulevard beds between Tillicum and Admirals Roads.

While not the work of the GTCA itself, we'd like to acknowledge the work done in our parks by the Friends of Cuthbert Holmes, Salmon in the City, and Saanich Parks -- our parks would not be what they are without them.

Mobility & Transportation

A considerable amount of time and effort has gone into the early stages of promoting changes to Tillicum Road between Burnside and the Gorge Bridge. The Board sees this stretch of road as unsafe (particularly for pedestrians, cyclists and people in mobility scooters), unsightly and neglected -- as a road that is not living up to its full potential as a safe multimodal transportation corridor with numerous vibrant commercial and social opportunities. We have begun engaging with Saanich council and staff regarding desirable changes -- notably through a recent presentation to the Saanich Active Transportation Committee -- and will be speaking more about this with the wider community as well. Saanich has, in the meantime, taken part of the south-bound traffic lane over Gorge Bridge to install a wider sidewalk and painted bike lanes.

For its part, Saanich has engaged with us regarding their plans to start work this year on changes to Gorge Road West between Admirals and Tillicum Roads and has announced plans to address long-standing traffic safety issues on streets immediately adjacent to Tillicum Elementary School. Saanich has also informed us of their intent to start a conversation with the City of Victoria about Gorge Road East and the section of Gorge Road West between Tillicum and Harriet. Based on these conversations, Saanich will design changes to the latter strip of roadway with the intention of starting work on it in 2023 (hopefully). (Note that these projects, designed by the Engineering Department and falling within the

domain of the council-approved Active Transportation Plan, do not call for formal responses from the Board the way building developments do. That being said, the Board still engages with staff about their intentions, sharing with them our perceptions and suggestions.)

Buildings

During the past 6 months:

- Construction has continued or started on two development projects -- the Saanich Neighbourhood Place daycare in Tillicum Park and a rental building on Qu'Appelle Street
- Four projects have been approved or seem to be close to approval -- Obed & Harriet, Gorge Road W & Tillicum, the former bingo hall site, and 630 Gorge Road West
- One proposal is under review by the developer -- 992 Gorge Road W
- One project is dormant -- Earl Grey St. & Gorge Road W
- And three new projects have come to our attention -- the micro unit project on Tillicum Rd. and two new daycare facilities (one an expansion at 2969 Earl Grey Street & a new project on the Tillicum School grounds)

With the exception of the daycare at Tillicum School, the above projects have all been (or will still be) considered by the Board, with responses offered to Saanich staff and council for their consideration.

Also, within the last few weeks, the Province (through BC Housing) has announced the building of housing along Albina Street for people who are currently unhoused. The Board does not get to review and provide input on such a project in the way that we do with developments brought to us by private developers; our only role in this process is one of facilitating communication between the project proponents (BC Housing, in this case) and the wider community, in a manner similar to what we do with developer-initiated proposals.

Gorge Park Community Gardens

The Gorge Park Community Gardens, a project of the GTCA since its inception, is currently engaged in the process of separating from the GTCA by the end of 2021. As Saanich requires that all community gardens in its jurisdiction operate under the umbrella of a registered not-for-profit society, the Gardens is seeking to establish such a society within the next few months -- one that will host the Gardens as a project and, possibly, host other food-related projects as well.

And, last but not least

Thanks for your membership and your support, whether you're a renewing member or joining us for the first time. We look forward to working with you over the years and to shared participation in projects that enhance our neighbourhood, as Board directors, and/or as participants in the working groups. The Board can't do much of anything towards our vision of "a diverse, responsive, proactive, collaborative, and robust Board and Association" without you and others.

On behalf of all the directors,



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