

CADBORO BAY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Response to UVic Request for Community Feedback Post September 8, 2011 UVic Open House

This is the response of the Cadboro Bay Residents Association (CBRA) to UVic's September 8, 2011 request for community input with respect to the proposed Centre for Athletics, Recreation and Special Abilities (CARSA) and seven storey concrete parkade structure which UVic proposes to build adjacent to McKenzie Avenue.

Summary:

The community is surprised and dismayed UVic is, in effect, taking control of a public, vital arterial **municipal** road. Conversations with UVic representatives confirmed UVic takes the perspective there is university development on either side of McKenzie Avenue; therefore, from UVic's perspective, the seven storey concrete parkade with a 10 metre setback from McKenzie Avenue is consistent with university development.

With its current CARSA proposal, UVic is solving its development, parking and transportation challenges by inappropriately transferring social and environmental costs to the surrounding communities.

CBRA requests UVic present a new proposal that respects the social and environmental values and local area plans of the neighboring communities. We recognize and respect any new proposals are the responsibility and prerogative of UVic. We enumerate some options in the body of this report in the hope it will be viewed by UVic as a positive contribution and our willingness to work with UVic to find a solution.

Report:

CBRA's key concerns are threefold:

- 1) the highly negative visual impact of siting a tall concrete parking garage so close to McKenzie Avenue, the principal access and egress to our surrounding communities;
- 2) the implications for traffic; and
- 3) UVic's consultative process. Rather than allaying our concerns, the community's fears were significantly reinforced by the presentations made at the Open House UVic hosted on September 8, 2011.

1) Highly Negative Visual Impact:

Our concerns about the siting and form and character of the parkade echo the comments of Saanich's Advisory Design Panel which described the structure as "massive and unrelenting" and expressed its concerns about the "parkade in its prominent location".

The siting of a seven storey concrete parking garage at the entrance to the university on McKenzie Avenue places an extraordinary emphasis on a "car-centric" vision for UVic, our neighbourhood and the greater community which we suggest is totally out of keeping with UVic's desire to present itself as a green and sustainable institution. The proposed parkade will do enormous damage to the Cadboro Bay Local Area Plan's goal of preserving the semi-rural nature of our community. We suggest that the proposed structure is also in contradiction with Saanich's goal of promoting sustainability and quality of life for residents.

The university has in the past received variances for the construction of buildings which go well beyond the permitted heights. However, up to now, the university has not sought to impose these structures on the community by building them immediately adjacent to public roads. As an example, when permission was sought and granted for the height variances necessary for the construction of the recently completed seven storey South Tower residence it was situated over 100 meters from Sinclair Road and is barely visible as Cadboro Bay residents enter or leave our neighbourhood. Now the university is proposing to construct a series of complexes with a much less attractive seven storey concrete parkade with a minimum 10 meters setback from the main entrance to our community.

CBRA is dismayed by the "options" which UVic put forward at its September 8, 2011 Open House. The only options upon which the community was invited to consider and comment were strictly cosmetic. It is simply not possible to resolve through cosmetic means the highly negative visual impact which the proposed parkade at its proposed site will cause for Cadboro Bay, nearby communities, and indeed for all students, staff and visitors who will use or pass by the McKenzie Avenue entrance to UVic.

The proposed seven storey parkade will be totally out of keeping with the character of McKenzie Avenue. The road which leads from Cadboro Bay beach up Sinclair Road becoming McKenzie Avenue is a main access and egress route for our community. Existing height restrictions of 10 meters help preserve the semi-rural character of our neighbourhood.

The university buildings closest to the proposed site, the Technology Enterprise Facility and the Saunders Annex, are one and two storey buildings. Paragraph 7.3 of the Gordon Head Local Area Plan requires "that site design, building scale, and landscaping for institutions respect neighbourhood character and the natural environment." CARSA and the proposed parkade does not meet this criteria.

UVic's August 8, 2011 presentation to Saanich Council indicated that the proposed structures were being designed to last 100 years. The long term "car-centric" vision of our communities should not be imposed on us by siting this parking structure at the proposed location.

UVic is seeking to build four separate complexes in a very restricted space. The existing proposal represents 17,685 sq. m. for a performance gym, a field house, offices for CanAssist and the parkade. In addition UVic has indicated that in the future it hopes to build a new aquatic centre in the middle of these structures. As a result the proposed parkade is extremely narrow for a seven storey structure, allowing only 70 car stalls per floor.

The construction of a seven storey parkade adjacent to McKenzie Avenue would set a most unsettling precedent. In the future UVic could seek permission to construct similar structures in parking lot 2 and parking lot 5, also along McKenzie. This is the principal access to our neighbourhood.

Even without the parkade structure, the proposed performance gym and field house would be only 30 meters from McKenzie Avenue. The CARSA complex will be totally out of proportion with the nearby buildings.

2) Traffic:

The present proposal for a 505 stall parkade and new intersection with traffic light on McKenzie Avenue between McGill Road and Gabriola Road will cause significant traffic issues for our community. This is a major concern for residents.

There are existing intersections at Finnerty, Gabriola, and an access point at McGill. These intersections already cause significant delays for commuters due to high volume vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Adding a new intersection with a traffic light for the parkade would mean that there would be three intersections (Finnerty, the parkade, Gabriola) within a one block radius. The proposed new intersection for the parkade along with Gabriola and Finnerty are so close together that high volume ingress/egress will backup lines of vehicles on McKenzie and block flow to or from the other exits. This short stretch of road already provides four busy pedestrian crossings. An inevitable result of the proposal is that traffic would seek to divert through other neighbourhood streets causing traffic and safety concerns.

While Saanich has plans to upgrade McKenzie Avenue it would remain a two lane road. The proposed upgrade only covers the public road fronting UVic from McGill to Haro. What happens after Haro or McGill? Approaching Cadboro Bay the traffic has to continue down Sinclair Road which is a narrow two lane hill without bike lanes. The university has confirmed that the new gym and parking structure will result in increased traffic, yet all the plans to address increased

traffic are limited to McKenzie without any plans for Sinclair. The university's plans for Queenswood will also result in increased traffic on Sinclair. Aside from creating further bottlenecks, increasing traffic volumes on Sinclair Hill will compound the existing real safety dangers for bicyclists and pedestrians.

On March 30, 2011 UVic submitted a rezoning application to develop the nearby Queenswood property. This proposal will add significant new additional traffic to both Finnerty and Sinclair/McKenzie and other neighbourhood streets such as Hobbs and Rowley. Given the proximity and interconnectedness of the road network and the schools in the vicinity, these implications must necessarily be included in considering the CARSA variance request. UVic has indicated that it will take additional time to "refine" its application for a rezoning of Queenswood. A piecemeal approach to road and traffic management issues does not serve our community.

3) UVic Consultative Processes:

CBRA would like to express its concerns about UVic's consultative processes.

CBRA is disappointed that UVic brought forward this proposal to Saanich Council on August 8, 2011 (in the middle of the summer) without consultation with the community. UVic's press release of June 30, 2011 announcing it was seeking to proceed with the CARSA complex, made no mention of the proposed seven storey parkade on McKenzie. The Open House held on September 8, 2011 took place during the "back to school week", the busiest week of the year for many families. While the university's notices of the September 8, 2011 Open House did mention the parkade, it failed to refer to the fact that what was being proposed was a seven storey concrete structure immediately adjacent to McKenzie.

The presentational materials which UVic now provides for public consideration do not accurately represent the visual impact. The renderings provided with the proposed options make use of "perspective" to provide the illusion that the existing buffer trees are much higher than they truly are. The renderings show the existing trees as being almost as tall as the proposed seven storey parkade, when in fact they are less than half this height.

The two minute video of driving routes along McKenzie and Gabriola is equally misleading. It does not show the new proposed intersection on McKenzie. By zooming in on street level trees as it approaches the massive parkade, the video misrepresents the visual impact which the structure will impose on commuters, pedestrians and bicyclists along McKenzie. The video clip fails to show any cyclists on McKenzie and when it does show a few bicyclists in the proposed entrance plaza towards the end of the clip they are flaunting local laws by not wearing helmets. This only serves to reinforce our concerns that the design of

this project was undertaken by a team which is unaware of our community and its values.

The presentation materials at the Open House did not place the CARSA buildings and parkade in comparison to current UVic buildings for proper scale and reference. Had this been done, it would have been obvious how out of proportion CARSA and the parkade will be compared to the closest UVic buildings. The closest UVic buildings to the proposed site are the one and two storey Technology Enterprise Facility and the Saunders Annex across McKenzie Avenue. On the same side of McKenzie Avenue as the proposed complex, the buildings closest to McKenzie are one storey structures, E Hut and the Campus Security Building. None of the other nearby buildings is higher than four storeys. The CARSA complex will be totally out of proportion to the existing buildings.

CBRA is disappointed that at both the 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm presentations during the Open House, UVic cut off public questioning of UVic representatives, proposing that individuals with questions address them one-on-one. There was a deliberate effort to cut off public questioning of the CARSA project. The residents and others who attended clearly wanted to hear the comments and concerns of others.

Following the Open House on Thursday, September 8, 2011 UVic indicated that it would appreciate comments only up to 4:30 pm on Monday, September 12, 2011. This affords extremely limited opportunity (two working days) for residents and community associations to develop comments on variance requests which will have dramatic negative impacts on our neighbourhood -- and indeed all of Victoria. Saanich's community associations are volunteer organizations which require time to consider, inform members and develop responses.

UVic has indicated the intention in the future to build an aquatics centre between the proposed field house and performance gym, yet no plans are provided. Residents who have reviewed the information UVic provided and discussed the matter with representatives of the Athletics and Recreation Department question whether the proposed site is sufficiently large to accommodate an olympic-sized swimming pool with its attendant facilities, offices and viewing spaces. It is impossible for the community, or the municipality, or indeed the university, to access accurately the visual, traffic or other implications of the current proposal without such plans. An aquatics facility would be a desirable element of the proposed recreation facility. The lack of plans for the future aquatics facility reinforces the conclusions that the proposed site is simply too small for everything UVic is seeking to accomplish with this project. Should the university feel it is necessary to keep these various projects grouped together, it may wish to consider moving the entire project to another venue on campus.

Effective consultation means listening to the concerns of others and attempting to understand and respond to them. UVic has indicated that the proposed

structures are meant to last for a hundred years. CBRA hopes that upon consideration UVic will appreciate the concerns of your neighbours and significantly alter the proposed project. A "massive and unrelenting" concrete parkade immediately adjacent to the entrance to our community -- and the university -- will forever alter the quality of our neighbourhood. UVic should not seek to solve its parking and transportation challenges at the expense of its neighbours.

The proposals put forward at the Open House on September 8, 2011 are identical to the proposal that was discussed by Saanich Council on August 8, 2011. At the August 8, 2011 meeting the UVic representative spoke to the cosmetic suggestions (vines, "fins", and imprinted designs). We do not recall that he mentioned the possibility that the centre concrete panel of the end wall could "feature banners that are related to special events or announcements". All three "options" are strictly superficial. They are not new and they do not address CBRA's concerns. CBRA would like to register its opposition to the suggestion that UVic should begin using large advertising banners fronting public roads. We do not think that upon entering or leaving our community we should have to endure commercial-type messages. Such a suggestion is inconsistent with the rural nature of Cadboro Bay.

Nor has UVic addressed any of the suggestions put forward by Saanich Council at the August 8 meeting, including moving the proposed project and parkade to parking lot 4 or parking lot 8.

Options:

The residents believe UVic has a responsibility to present a proposal which is consistent with the Local Area Plan and which satisfies the community that its rural nature and amenities will not be violated. In that spirit, we enumerate some options:

1. UVic has other options for its parking challenges. The first option might be to set far more aggressive criteria and objectives for its Traffic Demand Management initiative. In its strategic plan "A Vision for the Future -- Building on Strength", UVic has committed itself to "promoting the development of a sustainable society". Building a "massive and unrelenting" concrete parkade at a main entrance to the university can hardly be seen as being supportive of this objective of the strategic plan.

According to UVic's website at UVic "Paved surface parking lots cover almost 15.2 ha (40 acres). Only the University Centre has an underground parkade." (<http://web.uvic.ca/vpfin/campusplan/4.html>). The inventory of parking spaces is currently 4163 for the entire campus. UVic could commit to live without the 505 stalls which the proposed parkade would provide.

2. While CBRA is opposed to the construction of the CARSA complex and parkade at the proposed location, should it proceed without the parkade, the immediately adjacent parking lot 2 would provide parking for those users of CARSA who arrive by car and are unable to walk the few minutes from other large parking lots. Not placing a parking structure on McKenzie would provide a more reasonable, though still inadequate, setback for the proposed new performance gym and field house which UVic representatives describe as two large boxes. Under Saanich by-laws 10 meters is the minimum setback for the existing 10 meter height restriction. It would be reasonable to have a larger setback if permission was given for a variance of 25 meters as is being requested. This was the case with the South Tower residence where the setback is over 100 meters.

3. If UVic insists on building additional car parking on campus it could obtain far more spaces by building a parkade on parking lot 4. Parking lot 4 is immediately adjacent to the 5000 seat Centennial Stadium and is closer than the proposed parkade to the University Centre with its 1200 seat auditorium. The university has cited parking demand for these venues in its justification for the proposed parkade. Parking lot 4 would afford smoother access and egress via McGill Road and the Ring Road, rather than dumping all traffic immediately onto McKenzie.

4. UVic could put some or all of the parking underneath the proposed new complex. UVic representatives stated their consultant report advised against placing parking underground. Why did UVic choose a site that does not facilitate underground parking? UVic representatives also stated UVic has not completed an economic feasibility study of this option. Should UVic insist on the proposed location, CBRA requests UVic undertake a professional economic feasibility study and share it with the community before rejecting this possibility.

5. There are other existing parking lots and sites which could be considered should the university insist on attempting to resolve its transportation and parking issues through a high-rise parkade.

6. There are other sites which offer the university more space in which to achieve its multiple building objectives.

Conclusion:

CBRA is pleased UVic is seeking to invest in a new Athletics and Recreation Centre. We applaud the university for the CanAssist program and understand the need for new facilities for this program. The laudable objective of inclusiveness for the CanAssist program can be achieved by providing CanAssist space in other high volume UVic venues.

However CBRA is opposed to this project being situated immediately adjacent to McKenzie Avenue and requests UVic bring forward other alternatives.

We understand that as an institution UVic is not legally bound by the need for a "Form and Character" permit. As a publicly-created and publicly-funded institution with many ties to our community we hope UVic understands the need to live up to the highest possible standards as it develops and to respect and abide by the values of the neighborhoods in which it is situated.

By seeking to squeeze a performance gym, field house, offices and work space for CanAssist, a seven storey parking garage, and a future aquatics centre into the proposed location UVic is attempting to build too much in the available space with the result it is transferring material and unacceptable social and environmental costs to the surrounding neighborhoods.

We trust that UVic will consider the feedback it received from the community at the August 8, 2011 meeting of Saanich's Committee of the Whole and its September 8, 2011 Open House and significantly modify its development variance permit application.