OLD CITY QUARTER ASSOCIATION AREA REPORT

2023

Abstract

A few humble requests to enhance the business, resident, and visitor experience within the OCQ

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Summary

The Old City Quarter Association (OCQA) is a merchants association that represents approximately 60 member businesses in the area spanning from Milton Street to Wallace Street and from Wentworth Street to Franklyn Street. The association has a volunteer board of directors consisting of 7 members who meet monthly on a variety of initiatives ranging from advocacy on behalf of member businesses to marketing and events for the area. The OCQA board voted in favour of presenting the items in this report to council on February 21, 2023 as a follow-up to many of the discussions with members following the AGM in November.

The association is funded primarily through a property tax levy on commercial properties, events grants and by selling memberships to area businesses. The total operating budget for the group is around $55,000 for 2023. The funds are used for events, print and digital marketing, banners and other miscellaneous beautification.

The main priorities of the organization are to develop and promote the Old City Quarter as a destination for shopping, dining, and the arts. The requests contained in this report are the result of significant work by the OCQA Board of Directors, area stakeholders and City staff to achieve the goals mandated by our membership. The OCQA will be registering a delegation to present to council in April and answer any further questions that council may have about any of these requests.

Parking Lot - 336 Prideaux

The Old City Quarter Association (OCQA) believes that the reallocation of parking spaces was done without adequate stakeholder consultation. We do not support this reallocation and argue that the parking lot in question is important for business patrons, employees, and visitors as it is well-lit and provides direct access to a pedestrian corridor. During the OCQA's 2022 flagship event, Sounds of Summer, patrons were ticketed due to unclear signage indicating that it was RCMP parking.

Figure 1: Parking at 336 Prideaux

A ground investigation at the site revealed that there are currently 28 spots occupied by construction crews at the Nanaimo RCMP station (see Figure 1). The OCQA is requesting that once construction is complete that 19 of the parking spaces at 336 Prideaux be reallocated for public use.

Preliminary discussions with City staff have indicated that the RCMP may be willing to allow evening and weekend parking in the lot to the public. As an interim measure, this solution is acceptable to the OCQA, though a traffic study is likely required in order to validate the long term investments required at this location and others in the area.

The OCQA also understands that a new RCMP station may be proposed at the site in the future. If this is the case, we would request that the new station provide adequate underground parking for all staff and that the lot at 336 Prideaux be fully reallocated to public use.

Parking Lot - 299 and 295 Selby Street

The City parking lot located at 299 and 295 Prideaux is currently in poor condition. The lot is poorly marked, overgrown with invasive vegetation and does not have a proper pedestrian letdown at the entrance. As the area prepares for imminent densification, parking availability is expected to become even more strained. To encourage higher utilization of the parking lot, the OCQA believes that improvements to its safety, functionality, and aesthetics are necessary.

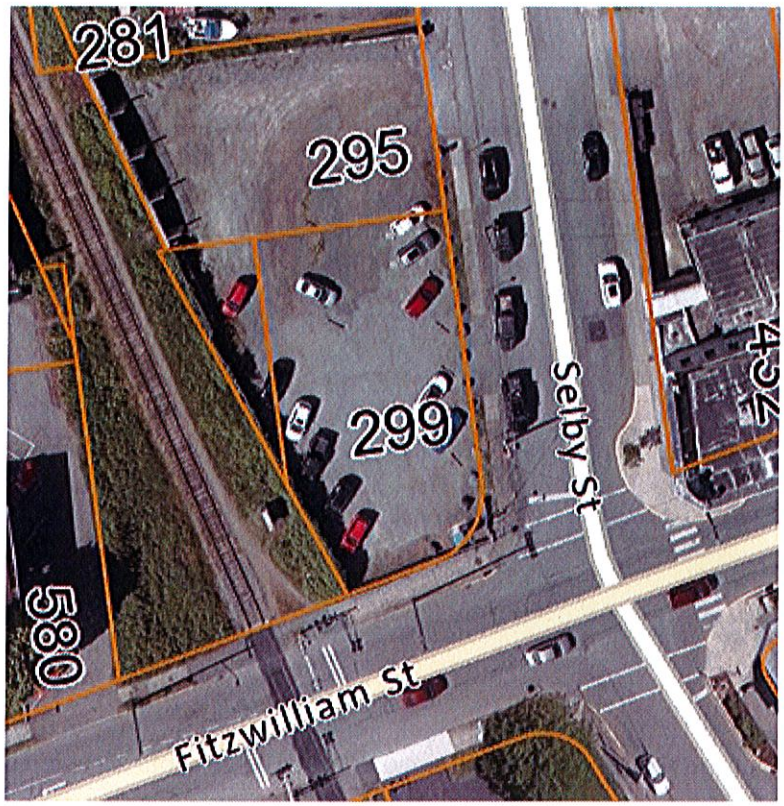

Figure 2: Parking Lot 299 and 295 Prideaux

The OCQA requests the following improvements be made to the lot:

- Review parking lot design considering Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.
- Hard surfacing complete with installation of a safe pedestrian letdown for local access
- Delineation of parking stalls with line paint
- Installation of adequate illumination for public safety
- Removal of invasive vegetation and installation of aesthetically appealing landscaping
- Improved signs on the approaches in both directions on Fitzwilliam Street indicating the lot as public parking

Sidewalk Connection to 250 Prideaux

The OCQA requests the construction of a sidewalk connection from Fitzwilliam Street to 250 Prideaux (see Figure 3). Residents and adjacent businesses would benefit from a safe pedestrian access from Fitzwilliam Street.

Figure 3: Sidewalk connection to 250 Prideaux

Preliminary discussions with City staff have indicated that the gap would be worthwhile to address. With the ongoing construction at 285 Prideaux the OCQA believes that this project should be a priority. The OCQA would like Council to consider using funds from the budget for unallocated pedestrian improvements passed on December 5, 2022 to fund this initiative.

Area Line Painting

The OCQA is requesting that the City of Nanaimo review the state of line painting and other road markings in the area in 2023. City Staff attempted to complete the work in 2022 but were unable to complete due to material shortages. The OCQA is hoping that the City of Nanaimo can prioritize this work in 2023 once the necessary materials become available.

Public Art Installations

The OCQA believes that public art plays an essential role in enhancing the vibrancy and cultural identity of a community. As such, we would like to request an additional art installation to be located at 256 Wallace Street, in order to further enrich the public space and provide a unique artistic experience for visitors and residents alike.

The addition of a public art piece would be a good step in working towards the development of an arts district by providing a corridor of public pieces starting at 256 Wallace going to 405 Wesley Street and ultimately ending at the new totem that is to be erected at the firehall at 666 Fitzwilliam Street. The OCQA would also be interested in having a representative on any selection committees for art to be placed in the area.

Seasonal Decor

The OCQA is requesting that the City take responsibility for the purchase and installation of seasonal décor in the area, repair damaged underground electrical infrastructure, and illuminate most of the trees on Wesley Street (as was done prior to pandemic), and add more lights in different parts of the Old City Quarter.

Illumination of Fitzwilliam Signs / Wesley Street Sidewalk Repairs

The OCQ and City staff worked from 2018-2021 on the design and installation of 2 wayfinding signs on Fitzwilliam Street. The signs were designed to be illuminated. The installation of conduit to power the illumination was anticipated to happen simultaneously with sidewalk repairs on Wesley Street and Fitzwilliam Street (which never happened due to the pandemic).

The OCQA would like to request that this work be finished, and the signs be illuminated per the original design intent. The OCQA understands that the work will be invasive and require excavation of some sidewalks (some of which are in poor condition already) so it would likely be beneficial to have it packaged with other area improvements.