

Report

Date September 9, 2025
Subject Letter of Support: University of Victoria (UVic) Planning Program

File:

PURPOSE

To provide a letter of support for a potential new Masters in Community Planning Program at UVic for Council's consideration and endorsement.

BACKGROUND

On June 3, 2025, it was announced that as part of its cost-cutting efforts in the face of significant debt, Vancouver Island University (VIU) would be cancelling most of its graduate programs, including the Masters in Community Planning (MCP) Program that was initiated in 2015 at the Nanaimo campus. In response to this unfortunate decision, the program director, Dr. Pam Shaw, has been working with UVic to investigate the creation of a new MCP program on Vancouver Island. Through the Planning Institute of BC, UVic has issued a call for letters of support to assist in assessing whether to proceed with a new program (Attachment 2).

DISCUSSION

The VIU MCP program has been of great value in providing an educational opportunity on Vancouver Island. The program is accredited by the Professional Standards Board, conferring eligibility for graduates to go on to acquire Registered Professional Planner (RPP) status, and full membership of the Canadian Institute of Planners and the Planning Institute of BC. The program is also known for its practical focus and its links with planning practice locally. Many professional planners within municipalities, private-sector firms, and non-profit organizations across Vancouver Island have links to the program, acting in various capacities as faculty, guest lecturers, mentors, and thesis supervisors.

In turn, the program has provided a locally-based pool of students and graduates to apply for junior and entry-level positions across Vancouver Island and beyond. Having this local resource is particularly valuable given the difficulties in recruiting planning staff, where accommodation availability and affordability present a particular challenge to those applying from off-island. In recent times, North Cowichan has hired three graduates of the program into junior planning positions, in addition to three summer students.

The demise of the VIU MCP program is therefore a significant loss to the planning profession and to employers - public and private - across Vancouver Island. Resurrecting the program at UVic will benefit North Cowichan by retaining a pool of potential employees and summer students within commuting distance of the municipality. It will also provide ongoing opportunities for more senior planning staff to be involved with the program to gain professional development and mentorship experience, all of which can count towards acquiring mandatory annual Continuous Professional Learning credits.

While a number of individual professional planners have, and will, respond to the call for expressions of support, having a letter provided by Mayor & Council on behalf of North Cowichan may carry even more weight with UVic decision-makers in evaluating whether to create a new program. Council is therefore invited to endorse the attached letter of support for a new MCP program at UVic.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole endorses the attached draft Letter of Support addressed to the University of Victoria for the Proposed Master of Community Planning Program to be signed by the Mayor on behalf of Council.
 - Support issued in the name of Mayor & Council may carry more significant weight with UVic decision-makers.
2. THAT the Committee of the Whole declines to endorse the attached Letter of Support.
 - Council is under no obligation to support this initiative; however, staff members may still express their personal support.

IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant implications or obligations arising from issuing a letter of support.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole endorses the attached Letter of Support addressed to the University of Victoria for the Proposed Master of Community Planning Program to be signed by the Mayor on behalf of Council.

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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
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Attachments:

- (1) North Cowichan Letter of Support: University of Victoria Potential MCP Program
- (2) Call for Letters of Support