

Report

Date April 1, 2026
Subject University Village Local Area Plan (UVLAP)

File:

PURPOSE

To provide Council with a report regarding the current status of the University Village Local Area Plan (UVLAP) and outlining a potential process for update.

BACKGROUND

On October 15, 2025, Council passed the following motion:

THAT in order to support a long-term vision of transforming the area currently referred to as 'University Village' into a vibrant, connected, and attractive town centre for the south end of North Cowichan and - side by side with the City of Duncan - creating a shared regional economic hub and unified centre for commerce and community in the broader region, Council directs Staff to provide, by the 1st Quarter of 2026, a report that includes:

1. *A summary of progress to date on the implementation of the current University Village Local Area Plan (UVLAP);*
2. *An overview of key barriers to further or faster progress, such as:*
 - *Servicing limitations*
 - *Infrastructure bottlenecks*
 - *Other regulatory, economic, or logistical constraints*
3. *A proposed process - including a community design charrette - to build on and expand the UVLAP with the goal of developing a comprehensive, long-term vision and plan for a vibrant town centre and regional economic hub. This process should also support Council goals to:*
 - *Enhance the livability, vibrancy, and the aesthetic appeal of the area*
 - *Unlock the area's development potential by creating a clear vision - with reduced barriers and streamlined processes - that attracts private investment and stimulates new construction.*
 - *Boost the area's economic vitality by encouraging diverse businesses, supporting local jobs, and creating a thriving environment for investment and day-to-day commercial activity.*
 - *Optimize/maximise opportunities for higher residential density by promoting mixed-use developments with active ground-floor commercial space.*
 - *Generate tax-positive development that delivers a high return on investment by generating more revenue than the long-term costs of infrastructure, amenities, and services.*
 - *Support a diverse range of attainable housing options that meet the needs of all ages - from young families to seniors - aligned with the "8 to 80" concept of age-friendly communities.*
 - *Create public spaces that are intentionally designed to promote safety, inclusivity, and a sense of psychological well-being.*
 - *Enable transit-oriented development, including potential use of the Island Rail Corridor*

- *Enhance connections across the highway by making it easier, safer, and more inviting for people to move between both sides—physically and visually—helping the area feel like one connected community.*
- *Establish a welcoming town square that strengthens community connection, fosters civic pride, and serves as a gathering place for public events and celebrations.*
- *Explore the development of a new civic complex (e.g., potential new municipal hall)*
- *Foster synergistic collaboration with the City of Duncan on shared regional priorities”*

DISCUSSION

UVLAP & Progress to Date

The UVLAP was a collaborative effort between North Cowichan and City of Duncan given that the plan area transcends the boundary and was adopted by both local governments in July 2015. While the larger portion is within North Cowichan, the areas south of the old high school site and east of the E&N corridor fall within Duncan’s jurisdiction.

The plan itself is a standard local area vision and primarily aimed at providing additional direction to steer development within the area. It is less prescriptive than the Bell McKinnon LAP (BMLAP) in terms of defining road standards and cross sections, street furniture and landscaping. Unlike the BMLAP which is more of a “blank canvas” the plan speaks to the redevelopment of an urban area where the road network and general urban grain are already largely fixed. The largest development by far within the UVLAP has been the construction of the new high school which has now concluded, in accordance with what was envisioned in the plan.

Since the plan’s adoption, North Cowichan has approved a number of developments within the plan area. The table below summarizes the non-trivial applications that have been approved:

File	Site	Description	Approved	Developed?
ZB000050	2533 Lewis St	Create CD 14 zone 35 unit 5 storey apt	July 2017	No
ZB000052	2511 Dingwall St	Rezone to CD 14: 10 townhouse units	Aug 2017	No
ZB000071	2591 Beverly St	Create CD19 zone (see DP000302)	Nov 2017	Underway
ZB000082	2456 Heather St	Detached ADU	Aug 2015	Yes
ZB000160	2431 Beverly St	Create A6 zone (Cowichan Green hub)	Oct 2021	Yes
ZB000236	2731 Vian St	Rezone to CD14 (see DP000385)	Sep 2025	No
DP000058	2723 Vian St	Convert duplex to fourplex	Sep 2015	Yes
DP000143	5950 York Rd	New assisted living facility (143 units)	Feb 2019	Yes
DP000240	2003 Univ. Way	New secondary school	Oct 2021	Yes
DP000250	Rail Corridor	Parking lot (City of Duncan)	Jul 2021	Yes
DP000200	5382 TCH	Commercial fast food outlets	Jul 2021	Yes
DP000268	1996 Univ. Way	New daycare facility	May 2022	No
DP000302	2591 Beverly St	Commercial + 210 apartment units	Apr 2024	Underway
DP000330	2557 Alexander	46 apartment units	Jun 2025	Underway
DP000385	2731 Vian St	5 storey 28 apartment units	Oct 2025	No

The development summarized above shows a healthy degree of development progress within the plan area, with two highly significant developments at 2591 Beverly (210 units + commercial) and 2557 Alexander (46 units) currently subject to Building Permit applications, although the latter is a preliminary application for road access and does not represent full construction. In the case of DP000330 (2557 Alexander) staff negotiated a change in site layout in order to preserve the possibility of completing the Bundock Road connector as shown in the UVLAP.

These development approvals qualitatively and quantitatively work towards realizing the plan vision, albeit to different degrees. For example, application DP000200 (5382 Trans-Canada Highway) did not meet the plan's vision, in that it authorized single storey fast food restaurants in an area where the plan seeks multistorey mixed-use buildings (and explicitly states that single storey buildings are not supported). However, this site already had zoning in place and the LAP was not part of the Official Community Plan (OCP) at that time, meaning there were insufficient grounds to deny the development permit which otherwise generally accorded with the OCP's design guidelines. This indicates the risk of "pre-zoning" or at least, not maintaining sufficiently stringent zoning requirements in pre-zoned land to give effect to a policy vision. Had a rezoning been necessary, North Cowichan would have been in a position to require significant design changes to accord better with the plan vision and to impose zoning requirements such as minimum height or density, rather than setting a maximum on the assumption that development will always want to build to the maximum allowable in the zone.

In addition to these files above, staff are dealing with a number of preapplication discussions and early-stage development permit applications for further development projects within the plan area, indicating development interest remains sustained. There are a number of vacant or under-developed sites in the area, some of which are pre-zoned for higher densities (e.g. CD14 zoned sites).

UVLAP Metrics

The plan contains some key performance indicators within its Implementation section (table 6, page 74). Re-measuring these periodically provides some insight into how much progress has been made; however, the plan does not state clearly how all such metrics were measured, what datasets were used or what assumptions were made, and staff have to date been unable to replicate them. The following information was able to be established by GIS analysis and by interrogating the BC Assessment 2025 Building Information Report (BIR) for North Cowichan. It has not been possible to measure metrics such as GHG emissions or energy consumption, but a comprehensive examination of all performance indicators and development of new ones would form an important part of an LAP update process.

Approximately 146 residential units were added within the North Cowichan part of the plan area between 2015 and 2025, all but three of which are represented in one development: "The Hamlets" assisted living facility. Assisted living units are not included as "multifamily housing" for the purposes of the "increased density" metric. Only one site (2723 Vian) is within 400m of the centrepoint, adding two units. Another 256 units are represented within two current Building Permit applications, neither of which are within 400m of the centrepoint. None of the new developments, including the new school, are known to be LEED buildings or similar, from an energy performance perspective.

Tree canopy change within 4m of road edges is shown below:

Date	Tree coverage in plan area including City of Duncan	Change	Tree coverage in MNC part of plan area only	Change
2010	3.93 ha	*	2.27 ha	*
2017	2.87 ha	-1.06 ha / -26%	1.63 ha	-0.64 ha / -28%
2024	3.35 ha	+0.48 ha / +16%	1.92 ha	+0.29 ha / +18%

The 2010 data is not considered to be reliable, due to poorer quality and uncertain digitization, therefore 2017 must be used as the best reference point closest in time to plan adoption. Since that time canopy cover has grown by 16% (18% in North Cowichan). Staff were unable to identify significant new tree planting that can account for this, therefore most of this canopy increase is attributed simply to all existing trees maturing and becoming larger over a period of 7 years. It is not clear why the LAP metric references only trees "within 4m of road edge" (nor exactly how "road edge" is defined).

Total tree canopy cover (vegetation above 2m) including on private property within the entire LAP area (including Duncan) increased by +20% from 19.3 ha to 23.2 ha between 2017 and 2024. Again, this is mostly attributable to growth and maturation of existing trees rather than significant new areas of tree planting, but is an encouraging increase nonetheless.

Key Barriers to Faster or Further Progress

The inadequacy of appropriate zoning control has been identified above as a contributor to development that is not aligned with the UVLAP and in this sense might be seen as a qualitative barrier to progress. This can be addressed as part of a zoning bylaw update and would necessarily be expected to follow on from any LAP revision. However, its success would also hinge on Council's willingness to "downzone" sites that may be at risk of inadequate or inappropriate development by reason of their current zoning provisions.

Servicing Constraints

Comprehensive modeling of water and sanitary systems has revealed significant system constraints that are not easily – or cheaply – resolved. Of greatest significance is North Cowichan's water licence limit. Once current encumbrances are accounted for, there remains approximately 295 ERU (Equivalent Residential Units) of development approval remaining within the entirety of the South End and Crofton.

While staff are working to de-encumber ERUS that need not be encumbered any longer, while also bringing forward a Servicing Allocation Policy to manage residual capacity, it is likely that there will be very little capacity remaining for new development. To date, servicing work has focused primarily on unlocking the Bell McKinnon area which is the outermost catchment of the South End sanitary system, although this necessarily includes consideration of the UVLAP catchment.

Until greater certainty is reached on the water license issue along with further development of funded pathways towards realizing the significant infrastructure upgrade projects necessary to unlock development, North Cowichan should be cautious about stimulating more growth.

Development Economics

Staff are not able to provide an in-house analysis of economic conditions and the extent to which they may have hindered progress; however, the [Mulholland Parker analysis presented to Committee of the](#)

[Whole on December 12 2023](#) provides a baseline. That report paints a picture of marginal development economics and vanishing profit margins for multifamily development. In this environment, greenfield development such as those projects seen in Bell McKinnon west may be the only viable ones. There do remain some undeveloped sites within UVLAP with pre-zoning (e.g. R7 and CD14 zones) and beyond the general considerations in the Mulholland & Parker analysis, it is not clear why these sites have not been developed yet, although there is and has been pre-application interest on some.

Limited Local Government Active Participation

When acting solely as a regulator, North Cowichan's ability to see a development vision realized is limited to creating benign conditions such as pre-zoning or expedited development approvals, but this alone cannot necessarily bridge affordability gaps or guarantee a market response. North Cowichan can also carry out street upgrade (capital works) projects to realize streetscape, infrastructure and public space parts of the plan, which can sometimes catalyze private sector development on adjacent sites. However, such projects are expensive and since 2015 there have been no municipally-initiated capital works projects in the UVLAP area that resulted in either increased infrastructure servicing capacity or in public street standard upgrades.

The most powerful way in which a local government can influence on-the-ground outcomes is by active participation in land transactions and development, under its "natural person" powers given by section 8 of the *Community Charter*. This allows a local government to participate as a direct actor in an area's regeneration, but this also generally involves significant financial expenditure and the assumption of some level of risk and entering into partnerships with a range of market actors. Often, public sector owners are willing to provide some kind of subsidy or other "derisking" actions to stimulate private sector development and interest, although occasionally such activities become financially profitable for the public body.

Merely acting as a regulator deploying zoning powers to affect change is a much more passive role and does not enable the local government to distinguish between different users within a use class. When a local government owns land it is able to seek out or "pick and choose" tenants or developments that represent the best possible fit for the area, in addition to leveraging value or developing a revenue stream that may eventually recoup or defray acquisition and borrowing costs. The Council resolution recognizes this in its reference to "*the development of a new civic complex (e.g., potential new municipal hall)*" which is an example of the type of "anchor" or catalyst development a public body might initiate.

Moving Forward

City of Duncan

This issue has not been formally referred to the City of Duncan, however, Council's motion was shared with staff and the following comment was provided on behalf of the City of Duncan planning department:

"The UVLAP is intended to guide planning and land use management decisions in the plan area over a 30-year timeframe, including capital infrastructure investments and private development. The City has received moderate interest in developing in the plan area and we continue to use the plan to help inform development reviews and the design of new streets. While it is possible that there are a few minor areas of the plan that may need to be updated, most of the planning principles and policies appear to still be relevant. Updating the UVLAP is not a priority identified in Council's strategic plan.

Our view is that the UVLAP is not the problem and not the reason why more redevelopment is not occurring in the plan area. We think that greenfield development is still more appealing than infill or core area redevelopment and that revisiting the tools to incentive the latter over the former, including significant public investments in infrastructure renewal, is probably a better approach than updating planning documents."

OCP and LAP Priorities

OCP section 3.4.3 provides policy regarding LAPs, although it is relatively non-prescriptive. The BMLAP is the only plan called out for specific revision (policies 3.4.3 (e) & (f)); otherwise, policy 3.4.3 (a) states that: *"[The municipality will strive to] create and update local area plans as needed."*

The table below shows the status of North Cowichan's various LAPs (existing and proposed):

LAP Name or Proposed Area	Date Adopted	Comments
Chemainus Town Centre	Fall 2011	
University Village LAP	July 2015	
Crofton LAP	August 2015	
Bell McKinnon LAP	Sept 2018	Revision as part of implementation
Berkey's Corner LAP	n/a	Recommended since designation as growth area
Maple Bay LAP	n/a	Proposed by residents, date unknown
Khenipsen Gore Langton LAP	n/a	Proposed by residents, May 2022

Given that Berkey's Corner is one of the significant growth areas but lacking an LAP altogether, staff suggest that this should be the priority among LAPs (aside from the in-progress update of the BMLAP), with Chemainus being the next most outdated LAP as a candidate for update. While implementation of the UVLAP may be perceived to be slow and piecemeal, staff have not identified any fundamental issues with the plan in need of imminent correction. That said, the Council resolution seeks to "build on and expand" the current LAP in the hopes of stimulating further action and achieving a number of broader goals. It is difficult to see how the LAP area might be physically expanded within North Cowichan to incorporate additional sites, but there is always scope to expand the scale and ambition of policy and

development outcomes, although generally this would betoken a corresponding need for more proactive and resource-intensive implementation actions by North Cowichan.

Potential Process

The process below outlines a typical – but thorough – LAP revision process that might apply to an update and expansion of the UVLAP, noting that collaboration with the City of Duncan would be necessary unless the LAP revision served to sever the Duncan components and produce a revised document focused solely on the plan area within North Cowichan’s jurisdiction. Given the response from City of Duncan staff, it appears unlikely that budgetary contribution would be forthcoming from them, thus North Cowichan may need to be the sole financial driver of an update process, although City of Duncan staff and councillors may be willing to participate in public engagement and document review, if invited.

Fulfilling the direction that the plan should: *“Generate tax-positive development that delivers a high return on investment by generating more revenue than the long-term costs of infrastructure, amenities, and services.”* requires deeper analysis. Across many jurisdictions, it is frequently an *a priori* assumption that new development will pay its way and even be financially net-positive, yet this assumption is nullified in all but the highest density development scenarios by low taxation ideology. When residents and businesses are taxed (including user fees) at a rate less than the cost to provide and replace infrastructure services, (not to mention the incremental expansion of other services such as bylaw enforcement, land use management, recreation programs, fire coverage, etc.), then new development only deepens the issue and creates a faster-growing infrastructure liability rather than alleviating it.

To avoid this scenario - as the above Council direction seeks to do - new development scenarios must be modelled in both physical infrastructure terms and financial terms. The provincial government hosts a resource on its website to combine these analysis ([Community Lifecycle Infrastructure Costing tool](#)) and help determine whether a given development scenario will be net-positive for the local government (and by extension, the taxpayers), or contribute to a growing infrastructure deficit.

The LAP revision process would entail an updated version of the Mulholland Parker market conditions financial analysis, focused solely on the plan area to identify current and projected conditions and construction costs, viable building typologies and financial barriers to construction. The infrastructure servicing demands would then need to be quantified (including, crucially, the cost of replacing infrastructure at the end of its life), including things such as road and intersection upgrades, any new civic facilities (e.g. parks, firehalls, community centres, etc.), new/upsized trunk mains, drainage works, pump station upgrades, etc. This requires transportation modeling to determine what road network changes and upgrades need to happen, along with identifying parking needs and options.

Significant effort has already been put into infrastructure modeling the impacts of build-out (and various stages on the way thereto) on water and sanitary systems and identifying upgrades, along with transportation modeling as part of the Master Transportation Plan and BMLAP. While some focused work on the UVLAP would be needed, this will be building on a strong baseline already established, and likely achievable without necessarily incurring significant expense.

Finally, the area's tax and user fee revenue at various stages of buildout would need to be estimated, based on assumptions about the mix of uses, densities, unit size/value, etc., along with future tax rate scenarios. Given that the UVLAP area is already developed and higher density development here represents additional loads on existing infrastructure, the threshold for "tax positive development" might be relatively low compared to greenfield or suburban sites, and achievable without drastic changes to the densities in the LAP or the taxes and user fees in place.

In terms of engagement during the plan's development, a wide range of stakeholders and rightsholders would be identified and actively contacted. This would include local businesses and business organizations, developers, social and environmental non-profits and large institutional organizations (such as the School District and Vancouver Island University). A key component would be early and ongoing First Nations involvement to ensure the plan adequately responds to and includes First Nations interests. Direct engagement with Quw'utsun Nation would ensure the plan upholds Indigenous rights and reflects local First Nation history, culture and knowledge within its placemaking and community-building objectives.

LAP Comprehensive Revision Process			
Action	Duration (months)	Comments	Cumulative time
Council provides direction and budget to embark on LAP update	0		0
Staff prepare RfPs, internal project planning and recommendations on steering committee appointments	3	An external steering committee of citizens and businesses is not essential but good practise.	3
RfPs issued for economic & traffic analyses, infrastructure costing, and urban design work, consultants selected, steering committee appointed by Council.	2	Economic conditions analysis and infrastructure lifecycle costing would each likely require a separate specialist	5
Traffic modeling, infrastructure costing & economic analyses and reports.	6	Economic analysis may follow a similar format/process to the previous Mullholland & Parker financial analysis.	11
First Nations engagement	8	Early and ongoing work is needed to involve Cowichan Tribes and ensure indigenous rights and interests are fully reflected in the plan.	11
Public engagement including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of issues, interested parties & questions • Preparation of materials • Website/survey work 	6	Fulsome public engagement is a multi-faceted and resource-intensive process.	11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Charette event • Public open house • Committee engagement 			
Staff & consultants prepare consultation summary, economic report, issues and options for CoW deliberations	2	Synthesis of public feedback and professional analyses into policy options	13
Draft revised plan, including implementation plan and development of reproducible progress metrics. Additional round of public review/comment on draft plan	3	The Council resolution's focus on implementation would require a significantly enhanced implementation plan for the LAP	16
Council adoption process including Public Hearing	3	May entail further revisions as directed by Council	19
Implementation	Ongoing	A plan's value is largely determined by the attention and resources devoted to post-adoption implementation	Ongoing

Based on previous experience a budget of approximately \$150,000-\$200,000 would likely be necessary to achieve the above process in full. A more focused update with slimmer public consultation process may be achievable with less budget, but it is not clear what the deliverables could or should be in that case.

Additionally, budget and staff time would be required for implementation, where Municipal actions to achieve the goals set out in the Council resolution might include any number of the following (depending on Council's preferences and willingness to fund):

- Land acquisition strategy and purchases
- Demolition/construction, development, site management and commercial landlord activities
- Development processes review and adjustment, including bylaw enforcement
- Identification of new capital works projects and prioritization
- Infrastructure upgrades and potential DCC bylaw additions
- Development and adoption of an ACC bylaw and CAC policy
- Zoning & parking bylaw amendments/creation
- Business licence bylaw amendments and related policies
- Development Permit Area design guidelines update
- Local Area Service bylaw
- Public Art policy/bylaw
- Revitalization tax incentive program
- Other actions and ideas generated from a best practice review and public engagement

Staff Capacity

Internal capacity is a significant constraint in terms of the number of Council projects that can be worked on concurrently. An LAP revision would be led by the Community Planning department in concert with an appropriate consulting team. While consultants provide temporary additional capacity and expertise beyond the permanent staff complement, there is still a significant time implication for staff in overseeing, managing, directing and participating with consultant activities, in addition to reporting through to Council and senior leadership.

The following major projects are currently being managed by the Community Planning department:

Major Project	Started	Expected End	Comment
BMLAP Implementation	2023	ongoing	Re-incorporate north area and adjust infrastructure, parks and roads planning, along with phasing plan. Work with developers preparing rezoning applications. Fine-tune LAP.
Strategic Agricultural Plan	Q4 2025	Q3 2027	Newly commenced project at behest of Council and AgAC
Urban Forest Plan grant applications	Q1 2025	Q1 2026	DNC's pre-application was accepted, currently working with an FCM coach to complete a full application.
Urban Forest Plan (depends on grant funding success)	Q2/Q3 2026 if successful	Q2 2028	Staff are optimistic that DNC has a good likelihood of success. If not, the absence of this project will release some capacity.
Zoning Bylaw update	2023	2028	Significant ongoing work, subject to several setbacks
Building Bylaw update	2023	Q4 2026	Significant comprehensive bylaw revision and redrafting
Bill 44 & Infrastructure	2024	ongoing	Includes servicing allocation policy and various bylaw updates

In addition to these projects, staff capacity must be reserved to address ad-hoc Council directions or respond to emerging issues and provincial directives. The following table provides a point-in-time snapshot of other tasks currently being worked on:

Minor Project or Task	Start	Expected End	Origin
Noise Bylaw	Q4 2023	Unknown	Council resolution
UVLAP status report	Q4 2025	ongoing	Council resolution
ICF rail corridor request	Q4 2025	Q3 2027	Council resolution
Temporary Trailer Permit sites rezoning	Q3 2025	Q1 2026	Council resolution

Backyard Hens	Q4 2025	Q1 2027	Council resolution
HTO reporting	Q3 2025	Q3 2029	Provincial direction
DCC bylaw review/input	Q3 2024	Ongoing	DNC staff
Building Fees update	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	Council resolution
Agricultural water servicing	Q4 2025	Q2 2027	Council resolution
View Royal legal view/JR	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	Council resolution

Unless another significant project is deprioritized, it would not be possible to embark on a major LAP update process until Q3 2027 at the earliest. In the event that North Cowichan is unsuccessful in its funding bid for development of an Urban Forest Strategy, there *may* be scope for LAP work to be commenced sooner if there are no other higher Council priorities at that time. However, Council would still need to identify budget. Staff recommends that Council waits until at least one of the larger projects on the workplan has been completed and significant progress has been made towards the remaining items, before adding new projects of this magnitude.

OPTIONS

1) (RECOMMENDED OPTION)

THAT Council direct staff not to add the University Village Local Area Plan update project to the workplan at this time.

- Staff have not identified a pressing need to initiate a project at this time, given other projects being worked on.

2) THAT Council provides direction to staff to [... *Council to identify*]

- Council may direct staff accordingly if it requires further information or wishes to initiate a course of action.

IMPLICATIONS

None identified with receipt of this report. Any direction to proceed with an LAP update will require a further discussion regarding deliverables, budget, timing, capacity and prioritization.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff not to add the University Village Local Area Plan update project to the workplan at this time.

Report prepared by:



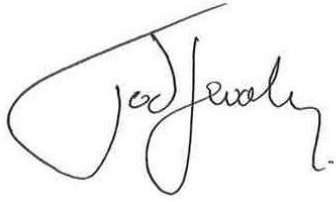
Chris Osborne MCIP, RPP
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Report reviewed by:



Amanda J. Young MCIP, RPP
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Approved to be forwarded to Council:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Swabey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "S".

Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer