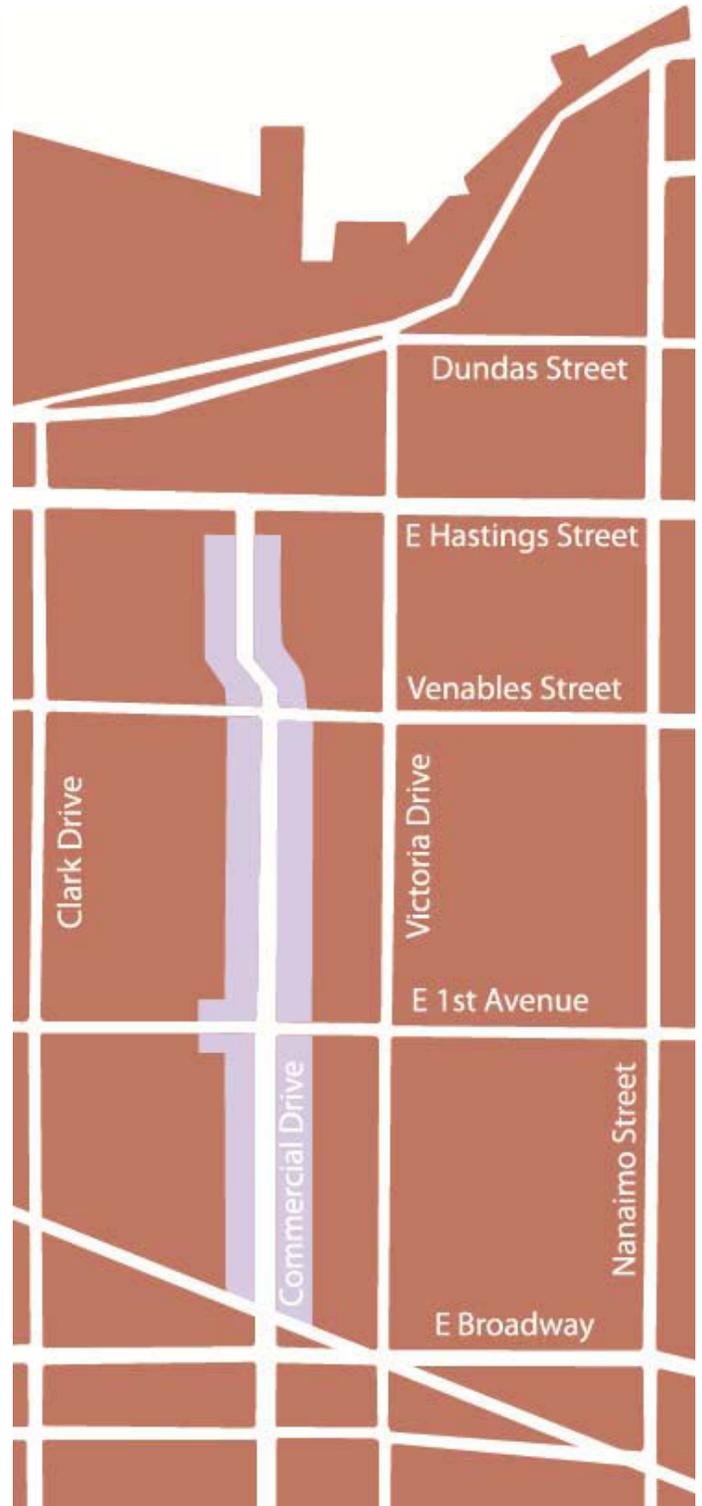


Commercial Drive

Synopsis of Sub-Area Workshop



May 2015

Introduction

The following document provides a synopsis of the ideas that were generated in the Commercial Drive sub area workshop (March 7, 2015). This event was among several sub-area events held between November 2014 and March 2015 as part of the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan process.

The document contains a short overview of the workshop, a discussion of sub-area character, and an overview of the key areas of focus identified by workshop participants. These areas of focus are then explored in greater detail under the following headings:

- Public realm & transportation
- Housing & built form
- Local economy
- Services, amenities and other planning themes

In each of these four areas, Planning staff have identified the *general* areas of convergence and divergence amongst workshop and focus group participants. This material was distilled from small-group discussion table notes and maps that were produced by participants, as well as from the ‘report out’ sessions that occurred throughout the day.

It is important to note that this document provides an *overview* of the dialogue. Given that each of the small-group tables discussed a wide variety of items (and often in a very lively and free-flowing manner), creating a summary that incorporates every idea discussed is impossible. Instead, the Planning team has taken every effort to present the material in a fashion that does justice to the spirit of the conversation. Those wishing to review the complete set of notes from the events are invited to download them from the vancouver.ca/gw webpage.

A draft version of this summary was published in April 2015. Workshop participants were also encouraged to submit any corrections or clarifications to the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan team. A total of one piece of correspondence was received. Subsequently, minor edits to the synopsis document were made. The present document is now finalized as of June 1, 2015.

Workshop Details

The Commercial Drive sub-area workshop was held on Saturday, March 7, 2015, at the Croatian Cultural Centre.

Workshop participants undertook four key activities:

1. Creating neighbourhood character statements - reflecting both present day and future (aspirational) character for the sub-area;
2. Reviewing proposed policy from the *Emerging Directions*, as well as the community feedback that was received;
3. Assessing possible areas of change or no-change in the sub-area (policy geography);
4. Generating ideas around possible built-form typologies and conditions connected with sub-area geography.

A total of 93 individuals registered to attend. On event day 82 individuals participated in the session.

At the conclusion of the workshop, 64 participants completed an evaluation form (78% response rate). The following table provides an overview of the demographic profile of those participants that completed the evaluation form.

Of the 64 workshop respondents:

AGE	#	%	SEX	#	%	TENURE	
> 20	0	0	Male	26	40.6	Renter	9
20-24	0	0	Female	38	59.4	Owner	38
25-34	2	3.1				Co-op	2
35-44	9	14.1				School	1
45-54	9	14.1				Work in CD	8
55-64	24	37.5					
65-74	15	23.4					
75+	2	3.1					

On average, workshop participants had lived in Grandview-Woodland 15.0 years ($n=58$) and in Vancouver for 25.3 years ($n=53$).

Context and Character

The Commercial Drive sub-area runs for roughly two kilometers between Hastings Street and the Grandview Cut. While most readily identified as a retail high street, the 'Drive, as it is affectionately known, also traverses residential and industrial areas.

In 2012, Commercial Drive was identified as one of the top-ten public spaces in Canada, and is a popular and eclectic place to stroll, shop and meet friends. The street is known as a site of diverse, independent businesses - and a retail character that is characterized by numerous small shops, and an eclectic architectural tradition. Many of the buildings on the Drive date to the early history of the neighbourhood, and have gone through a variety of tenants and changing exterior features. In addition, changing regulations have led to the uneven set-backs and varied building heights.

The Drive sub-area has a number of topographic or urban design elements that mark moments of transition. At Venables, a notable jog in the street marks the spot where the street grid was shifted and realigned in the early years of the neighbourhood. At First Avenue the Drive reaches a highpoint - coincidentally the spot where the street shifts from a more intimate four-lane width to a wider six lanes. Carrying further south, the sub-area ends at the prominent Grandview Cut.

In addition to its lively pedestrian realm, Commercial Drive sees a large number of cyclists and transit users, and its role as a local high street and regional destination means that it also sees a sizeable number of visitors arriving by car, as well as a wide array of goods being transported to and from its many shops and services.

The Drive is home to key community facilities. The Britannia Community Centre has been described by many participants in the planning process as "the heart of the neighbourhood." The complex includes elementary and secondary school (including an older heritage building), gymnasium, ice rink, pool, library, youth drop-in, childcare, and, most recently, a carving pavilion. Britannia is located adjacent to the popular Grandview Park.

Other key community services on the street include the Kettle Friendship Centre, REACH Community Health and MOSAIC (Settlement Services). Further north, at Hastings, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre and Urban Native Youth Association.

The Drive is also home to a number of cultural facilities, including the recently restored York Theatre, and a number of smaller theatres, galleries and performance spaces.

Most prominent in discussions about Commercial Drive are references to the way it embodies the spirit of the larger neighbourhood - through a public life that speaks to social inclusion and the acceptance of differing cultures and communities, via a pronounced social and political engagement with the issues of the day, and through the colour of creative expression that is reflected along the length of the street.

Present Day Character - Wordcloud

Participants at the March 7 workshop were asked to identify short (1-3 word) statements about both the character of Commercial Drive. This was a slight variation on the exercise used in earlier sub-area workshops, in that it asked participants to think only in terms of their present-day sense of the street.

At the conclusion of the exercise, statements were typed up and, using Wordle software, assembled into a word cloud. The resulting image resizes the top words or phrases depending on their frequency of use. (The larger the word or phrase, the more often it was used).

Word cloud: Key statements about the character of Commercial Drive



Key areas of Focus

Public Realm & Transportation

Key ideas

Workshop participants discussed opportunities to expand sidewalks and improve the pedestrian realm along Commercial Drive. Additional focus was given to the potential for a separated bike lane along the street, enhanced public gathering areas, and transit improvements.

Areas of general convergence at workshop

Participants were in *general* agreement about the following:

- a) Strong support for pedestrian/public realm improvements along Commercial Drive, with a particular focus on the creation of wider sidewalks. Recognition that improvements would be easier to achieve in the portion of the Drive south of 1st Ave (given the wider street width). Support noted for an array of streetscape improvements: street furniture, pedestrian bulges, street trees, flowers and greenery, weather protection, lighting, public art.
- b) Related concerns noted regarding sandwich board signs and other features that reduce pedestrian flow. Participants suggested that the location and number of these should be reduced.
- c) Some discussion regarding the possibility of reducing the number of bus stops on the Drive (to every 3-4 blocks), and better aligning them with traffic lights for safer pedestrian crossings.
- d) There is general support for cyclists and cycling improvements on the Drive, though there are some points of divergence on the question of bike lanes (see below). In general, there is strong support for bike parking (side streets, corners given as preferred location).
- e) Workshop participants expressed general support for a separated bike lane between E 10th and Graveley, provided that there is no or minimal loss of on-street parking, or negative impacts on area businesses. Particular questions and concerns were noted regarding impact transit service and bus stops.
- f) Additional support for the creation of more pocket parks and parklets along the Drive and/or on flanking streets.
- g) Strong desire to see improved connections between Broadway-Commercial Station, and Commercial Drive. Particular interest in exploring ways to connect areas north/south of Grandview Cut.
- h) Napier Square identified as a key asset, and was commended for its lighting, street furniture, cleanliness, programming and public art. There is interest in initiatives that could further strengthen the connection between Britannia CC and the Drive.
- i) Suggestion noted about the opportunity to create a park/gathering space/market at Adanac and Commercial.

Areas of general divergence at workshop

Particular points of discussion and divergence focussed on bike lanes, a B-line bus, and car-free possibilities.

- a) Conditional support was noted for extending the proposed bike lane north (to Adanac), if a way can be found to make a bike lane fit in on the narrower part of the Drive. More general support regarding a southerly extension to Trout Lake.
- b) Some difference of opinion regarding the merits of future B-line on Commercial. Participants requested more details needed on how this transit service would impact: (a) existing #20 service, and (b) the public realm/streetscape.
- c) There was some interest in the idea of a pedestrian-only (or car-free) Commercial Drive; however, it was noted that this would raise a number of other transportation related considerations (related to bus and car traffic, goods movement).

Housing

Key Ideas

In general, participants focussed their attention on the various ways and means to protect the unique character of Commercial Drive. There were many divergent opinions on how best to do this - and discussions explored mechanisms to limit redevelopment and/or ensure development at key selected sites is not too tall. Affordability remains a key concern for both the sub-area and the neighbourhood as a whole.

Areas of general convergence at workshop

Participants were in *general* agreement about the following:

- a) Strong support for protecting Commercial Drive's saw-tooth built form pattern, with varied setbacks and heights, limited store frontage widths, to create visual interest, allow sunshine to reach the sidewalks, and prevent a 'tunnel effect'. Suggestion that lot assembly should be limited to "2 or 3 parcels" to ensure the fine-grained retail environment is retained.
- b) Suggestion that design guidelines are needed for the Drive, and that they should look at things like building materials, facades, etc. to ensure that new development fits with the existing character for the Drive. (Examples: minimize glass, encourage bricks, etc.)
- c) Concerns were noted about the potential loss of rental (located above businesses on the Drive) if buildings are upgraded or replaced. In general, participants felt that more purpose-built rental is needed - both in the sub-area, and across Grandview-Woodland.
- d) Priority need was identified for housing suitable for families and seniors. Desire for more diversity in housing tenures (home ownership, rental, and co-op) and built form.

- e) Affordability remains a key issue, particularly with protecting existing affordable housing stock, and ensuring that new development doesn't drive up rents nearby.
- f) Concerns that new, higher development will block mountain views from Commercial Drive.

Areas of general divergence at workshop

In general, the areas of divergence were related to acceptable heights for new development on Commercial Drive - particularly as it related to key sites noted in the *Emerging Directions*. There was particular focus on the Kettle/Astorino's site at the NW corner of Commercial and Venables, as well as discussion about E 1st and Commercial, and key sites at the south end of the sub-area.

- a) Kettle/Astorino's site: General concerns were noted regarding the proposed 14-storey height; however, participants registered divergent opinions on alternative heights.
 - i. There was general support for a 4-6 storey range, some support for "up to 8 storeys" or "8 to 10 storeys," and very minimal support for anything above this height. There was a general sentiment that there was more support for allowable height if social objectives or greater public amenities can be achieved in the redevelopment.
 - ii. Some participants suggested 'spreading the development' across multiple sites along the Drive north of Venables, rather than concentrating it in a single, higher development.
- b) In general, there is support for a 4-storey limit for new development along the Drive (i.e. current zoning). There is also some support for 'down-zoning' Commercial Drive to a 1-2 storey limit as a way to protect the existing eclectic mix of buildings, and to ensure future 4 storeys development doesn't negatively impact the character of Commercial Drive.
- c) There is mixed support level for buildings up 6 storeys at the key locations specified in *Emerging Directions*. Preferences for lower heights were also noted as follows:
 - i. SW corner of Venables and Commercial: Strong support for 4 storey limit. Some support for "up to 6" if upper floors are setback.
 - ii. SW corner of 1st Ave and Commercial: mixed levels of support for "up to 6 storeys". General comfort with 4 storeys.
 - iii. Sites identified south of 1st Ave: higher levels of support noted for "up to 6 storeys" at south end of sub-area. Many still noted preference for 4, or 6 if upper floors setback. The Marquis was given as a positive example of a redevelopment where additional height was given, with upper floors set back to minimize a 'streetwall effect.'
- d) North of Venables: Various opinions on housing in this multifamily (RM zoned) area. Some participants suggested no-change in this area, while others supported the idea of new housing - potentially with ground-level retail, to create new commercial areas and rejuvenate this part of the Drive. Additional suggestions were made regarding new rental, new housing for seniors, and new social housing. General comfort with "up to 4-storeys" with some discussion of "4-6". No consensus in this regard.

Local Economy

Key ideas

A key area of focus for participants was the desire to support and enhance the local, independent businesses that characterize the Drive, and to ensure that any changes in the neighbourhood don't displace smaller businesses (and/or replace them with chain stores). Additional discussion focused on the expansion of the retail area (north and south, onto flanking streets, and onto lanes), as well as the creation of additional office space.

Areas of general convergence at workshop

Participants were in *general* agreement about the following:

- a) There is strong support for strengthening/protecting the small, independent commercial nature of the Drive.
- b) A number of participants expressed concern that new development on (or nearby the Drive) will be expensive and that only national chains would be able to afford to rent/lease commercial space. There is particular concern about the displacement of long-time independent businesses.
- c) There was strong support for extending the core retail area of the Drive north of Venables to Hastings. There was related support for improved retail (and public realm connections) to better connect the Drive with Broadway Station (and beyond).
- d) Participants were supportive of enlivening commercial laneways with 'double-fronting' businesses (i.e. laneway facing businesses).
- e) Additional support was expressed for businesses that 'wrap around' street corners, or extend commercial space onto flanking streets.
- f) There is some interest in exploring policy that would restrict lot assembly (e.g. to 2 or 3 lots) in order to prevent large-scale commercial businesses from changing the fine-grained form seen today. Related to this, there was related discussion around limiting commercial (ground-floor) frontages to 25'.
- g) Participants expressed interest in seeing additional office space on upper floors of buildings (rather than just residential).

Areas of general divergence at workshop

The following areas - Venables and Il Mercado - were the source of a variety of ideas - and no clear consensus around best directions.

- a) General support for improvements to Venables (including public realm, or "greenway" treatment); however, some differing opinions on whether the street should remain primarily industrial or office related job-space, or further develop into a commercial or mixed-use (commercial + residential) shopping street.
- b) General agreement that the Il Mercado site is a candidate for future redevelopment; there were various opinions around architectural response, building form, etc.

Services, amenities, other planning themes

Key ideas

Workshop participants referenced a number of social and cultural matters in their discussions. The following represents a general summary of the main ideas - which related to renewal and programming at Britannia Community Centre, neighbourhood social housing, Aboriginal programs, heritage and affordability.

Areas of general convergence at workshop

Participants were in *general* agreement about the following:

- a) There is strong support for the renewal and expansion of Britannia Community Centre. There is particular interest in improving and expanding the social and cultural programming on site.
- b) Participants referenced the need for tools and policy that would better support the protection of heritage buildings and other resources. There is also broad interest in expanding the definition of heritage so that it encompasses the various cultural, social, landscape features that make the neighbourhood unique.
- c) Affordability was frequently referenced as a key issue that affects everyone in the neighbourhood.
- d) Participants noted strong support for the social housing that is found in the Commercial Drive area. More non-market housing is needed to serve the present and future neighbourhood population. Participants also noted particular interest in additional seniors housing (and services).
- e) Additional support was noted for more housing and services to the local urban Aboriginal population. (Note: there was some discussion about the possibility of a longhouse in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood, which could act as a cultural hub for Aboriginal community members).
- f) Participants suggested introduction of additional public art along the Drive.

Areas of general divergence at workshop

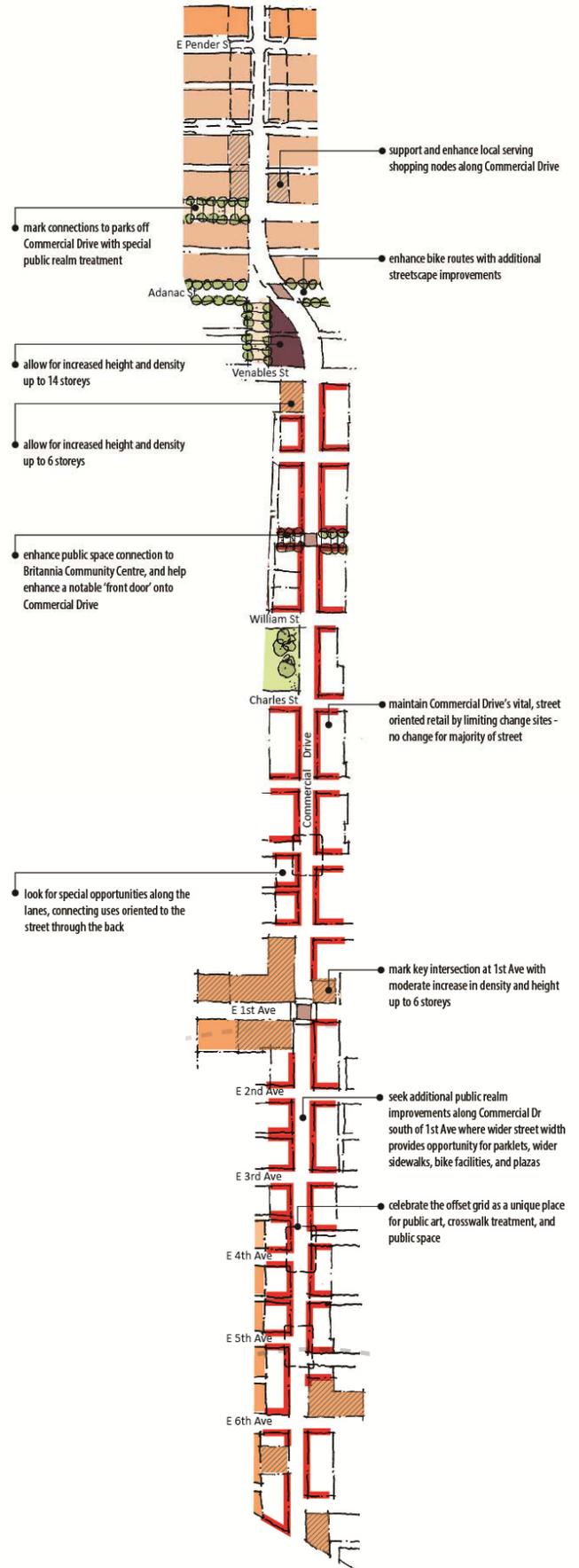
There were no particular areas of divergence among group members.

Appendix: Commercial Drive Sub-area - *Emerging Directions* Policy Ideas Map (June 2013)

LEGEND

-  schools
-  park
-  Britannia
-  commercial required at grade
-  apartment (up to 12 storeys)
-  apartment (up to 8 storeys)
-  apartment (up to 6 storeys)
-  apartment (up to 4 storeys) stacked townhouse
-  townhouse/rowhouse (3-4 storeys)
-  mixed-use (12-15 storeys)
-  mixed-use (up to 12 storeys)
-  mixed-use (up to 10 storeys)
-  mixed-use (up to 8 storeys)
-  mixed-use (up to 6 storeys)
-  mixed-use (up to 4 storeys)
-  industrial / mixed employment
-  **Commercial Drive where no change is expected**

The legend identifies all land use types located within Grandview-Woodlands. Not all types are found in the individual sub-areas.



Draft Policies *Emerging Directions* (pg. 28)

- CD-1: Maintain existing zoning for most of Commercial Drive and encourage gradual build-out over time.
- CD-2: Allow additional height and mixed-use development (as noted on the drawings) at selected locations along the street:
 - Astorino's/Kettle - NW corner of Commercial and Venables (up to 14-stores);
 - SW corner of Commercial and Venables (up to 6-stores);
 - NW corner of Commercial & E 1st (up to 6-stores);
 - NE corner of Commercial and E 1st (up to 6-stores);
 - SW corner of Commercial & E 1st (up to 6-stores);
 - Key sites south of E 5th (key sites) (up to 6-stores)
- CD-3: Ensure that new development respects the existing built-form character of the 'Drive (including heritage features, fine-grained retail environment, eclectic mix of architectural styles).
- CD-4: Encourage conservation of designated heritage resources along the Drive.
- CD-5: Where possible, expand sidewalks and improve existing public realm features (street furniture, street trees, public art).
- CD-6: Introduce bike lanes between e 10th and Graveley. Minimize impacts to parking, and explore using parking as a buffer between motor vehicle and moving traffic.
- CD-7: Support expansion of key social, health and community services (Britannia, Kettle, REACH).

Additional *Emerging Directions* Policy Ideas - Land Use Map

- Enhance public space connection to Britannia Community Centre, and help enhance a notable 'front door' onto Commercial Drive
- Celebrate the offset grid as a unique place for public art, crosswalk treatment, and public space
- Mark connections to parks (e.g. Woodland, Salsbury) off Commercial Drive with special public realm treatment
- Enhance bike routes with additional streetscape improvements
- Seek additional public realm improvements along Commercial Drive south of 1st Ave where wider street width provides opportunity for parklets, wider sidewalks, bike facilities, and plazas
- [North of Adanac] support and enhance local serving shopping nodes along Commercial Drive
- Maintain Commercial Drive's vital, street-oriented retail by limiting change sites - no change for majority of street
- Look for special opportunities along the lanes, connecting uses oriented to the street through the back