

## **Downtown Action Plan: Comments from August 8, 2017 Public Hearing and Administration Responses**

This document lists the issues, questions and comments raised at the August 8, 2017 public hearing related to the Downtown Action Plan and supporting Land Use Bylaw amendments. Each issue is presented separately and is a combination of the minutes from the Public Hearing and notes taken by the Project Team. A response from Administration and/or additional information about each issue is then provided.

### **Issue #1**

We need wide streets for large vehicles, rural and farm vehicles; they will not fit on narrower streets. Don't want wide sidewalks or bump outs; they take up too much of the street and people don't walk. This is not a tourist town, it's a farming community; we need wide streets and not sidewalks.

### **Administration Response #1**

The streetscape design that is proposed uses 12 ft. (3.66 m) wide travel lanes. This is more than sufficient to accommodate large vehicles, delivery trucks, firefighting apparatus and recreation vehicles (maximum width of 8.5 ft.) at the design speed of 50 km/h and less.

The bump outs at the intersections also allow a 12 ft. wide travel lane through all parts of the intersection and the radius of the curve for the curb line is intended to allow large vehicle turning movements. The exact dimensions of the bump outs will need to be confirmed when detailed construction drawings are prepared. In addition, mountable curbs which allow larger vehicles some extra space to make the turn, can be considered as part of the detailed construction design.

People do walk. The minute you park your vehicle at or near your destination you then become a pedestrian. The wider sidewalks (at 6 ft. of clear unobstructed distance and 4 ft. for street furniture, art, light poles and trees) are a good balance between allowing two individuals to comfortably walk past one another and accommodating vehicle travel lanes and parking lanes.

Downtown Ponoka will not survive by catering solely to the farming community of yesteryear. All customers are more mobile and have many more options than were available to them in the 1970s. Tourists and day visitors will be an important customer base for the future success of Downtown.

### **Issue #2**

The existing street trees need maintenance. In many areas there are low hanging branches and you can't walk on the sidewalks without being hit in the face by branches.

### **Administration Response #2**

All street trees require some attention. This includes periodic watering and pruning. Responsibility for and maintenance of boulevard trees (meaning those on Town land and road rights of way) is the Town's. Trees on private property, which may overhang the sidewalk, are the responsibility of the property owner/owner of the tree.

Watering and pruning of the street trees proposed for Downtown will be the responsibility of the Town of Ponoka.

### **Issue #3**

Will outdoor patios be incorporated into the wider sidewalks? These would be an asset to the community.

### **Administrative Response #3**

Yes, the use of seasonal patios is one of the activities the Downtown Action Plan supports. This can take the form of a couple of chairs and a small table on the sidewalk or it could be a temporary patio with a pedestrian diversion into the parking lane. Similar things that are encouraged include the placement of privately owned benches and flower pots. Regardless of what is being placed, pedestrian flow along the sidewalk would still need to be possible. The wider sidewalks will help in this regard.

### **Issue #4**

Tree grates along Chipman Avenue are not safe and need to be removed; they are a tripping hazard and make it difficult to remove snow in the winter. They are not maintained; no one weeds around the trees or replaces the trees that were removed.

### **Administrative Response #4**

This item is an example of the maintenance responsibility of the Town once streetscape improvements are put in place. All public forms of infrastructure, whether it is street lights or street trees, require a degree of maintenance to create attractive community spaces. The proposed streetscape design does not use tree grates.

Note: Since the public hearing on August 8, Town Public Works staff have removed the tree grates causing the concern and filled in the depressions with sand.

### **Issue #5**

The streetscape improvements did not work on Chipman Avenue and they should not be replicated elsewhere.

### **Administrative Response #5**

There are some similar items between the proposed streetscape design and the design of Chipman Avenue and there are some items that set them apart. The idea of mid-block crossings for pedestrians will be used on some blocks like on Chipman Avenue. Wider sidewalks with street trees and furniture are similar. The largest difference is the continued use of parallel parking on both sides of the street in the proposed design rather than putting in angled parking on one side of the street only.

### **Issue #6**

The Town needs to use tax incentives to revitalize downtown not beautification.

### **Administrative Response #6**

There is no single solution that will revitalize Downtown. Beautification alone and tax incentives alone will not work; nor is it necessary to only pick one approach. A combination of approaches is required.

The Downtown Action Plan supports a multi-prong approach and a variety of ways to make use of public investment. This includes the creation of a civic plaza, creating a façade improvement program, tax forgiveness for brownfield/derelict sites or creation of a business incubator space. Direct transfer of tax dollars to a potential business is not expressly stated in the plan.

#### **Issue #7**

Narrow sidewalks encourage conversation, not wider sidewalks.

#### **Administrative Response #7**

The proposed streetscape design has a 6 ft. wide clear space for pedestrian movements and a 4 ft. wide space for street trees, furniture, etc. The combined distance is 10 feet. This distance does not discourage conversation by people who pass each other on the sidewalk.

#### **Issue #8**

Benches are unnecessary, no one uses them.

#### **Administrative Response #8**

Many of the benches in the Downtown were put in as part of the Town's earlier initiative to become a more senior friendly community. This involved providing walking route options for seniors with places where they could rest along the way or sit and enjoy a conversation. The benches proposed in the streetscape design for Downtown will do the same. They also act as a common feature that gives the entire area a sense of unity and place (e.g. benches on streets in a consistent manner suggest to users that one street is different than another).

#### **Issue #9**

There is a lack of parking on Chipman Avenue.

#### **Administrative Response #9**

The 24 parking stalls on Chipman Avenue are well used; especially between 11:30am and 12:30pm when 96% of the available stalls were found to be in use. The average length of stay appears to be just over one hour which suggests there is good turnover for customer use.

Chipman Avenue has many business locations and not everyone can park in front of their destination. Within easy walking distance of Chipman Avenue are two Town owned parking lots that appear to have available capacity for short and long term parking.

#### **Issue #10**

Need to restrict some parking; some businesses create too much traffic and take up all the parking. It does not create a senior friendly downtown area when people have to walk 2-3 blocks to reach their destination.

#### **Administrative Response #10**

The Downtown Action Plan places emphasis on sharing parking as much as possible rather than building more than is necessary. Currently there are very few limitations on the available public parking stalls to

encourage sharing opportunities between the customers of various businesses (e.g. time limits). It may be necessary to gradually introduce limits on individual blocks to achieve the desired effect of sharing available parking for short and long term stays.

#### **Issue #11**

Fences around private parking make it unavailable to patrons; it's not used.

#### **Administrative Response #11**

The Town cannot force the owners of private parking lots to make their parking stalls available to the broad public. The requirement for on-site parking required under the Land Use Bylaw is to serve the parking needs of the expected customers and employees of the business/facility. The proposed Downtown Action Plan does encourage the sharing of private parking areas between businesses/landowners as much as possible.

#### **Issue #12**

Business owners will have to clear more snow from wider sidewalks, where will it be stored?

#### **Administrative Responses #12**

The snow from the wider sidewalks in the Downtown area on commercial streets can be pushed into the parking lane as an exception to the Traffic Bylaw. This is then removed by the Town when the streets in the Downtown area are plowed. If possible, some snow can be piled on the landscape beds on the corners and at mid-block crossing locations. Some can also be piled under the street trees. Snow piles still have to allow for pedestrian movement on the side walk and for people to exit vehicles using the parking lane. Melt and thaw during the winter days may contribute to icing of the sidewalk making the complete clearing of the sidewalk the better option. The Operations Department will review the priority and timing for snow removal to ensure that snow is removed from the downtown area as soon as possible after a snowfall.

#### **Issue #13**

Have tickets been given to people making U-turns on Chipman Avenue to find a parking spot? No enforcement of traffic laws downtown, parking across cross walks etc.?

#### **Administrative Response #13**

The number of traffic violation tickets given out is not available. Enforcement of traffic laws in Downtown occurs through routine patrolling by the RCMP. Enforcement can also occur in response to complaints received by the RCMP.

There is one angled parking stall on the east side of 50 Street just north of Chipman Avenue where the vehicle would have to back over the marked crosswalk of the intersection to be able to leave the parking stall. While the proposed streetscape design will address this once that portion of 50 Street is constructed, it could be many years down the road. The Town will review the site conditions and take appropriate actions to correct any safety issue in the short term.

**Issue #14**

Have controlled pedestrian cross walks been considered for the design for downtown?

**Administrative Response #14**

Outside of the existing intersections that have traffic signals, the proposed streetscape design does not add any controlled pedestrian crosswalks. All crosswalks are intended to start with appropriate markings on the street. If there is a need to add more traffic control it should be introduced gradually. For example, the crossing on 50 Street near IGA and the trail coming out of the river valley may start with a mid-block choker, road markings and a pedestrian crossing sign. If safe crossing becomes more of an issue, a set of pedestrian activated flashing lights may be added.