

## McKinley Beach Proposal – A Trojan Horse?

Climate change and the protection of the natural environment are key pillars of the City of Kelowna 2040 Official Community Plan (OCP): these issues that have been brought into even sharper focus by this summer's wildfires and today's release of the United Nations IPCC Working Group 1 Report that classifies the situation as a Code Red for humanity.

The City of Troy discovered too late that the gift of the Trojan Horse had unforeseen consequences that some additional caution, when received, might have prevented. The McKinley Beach expansion proposal as presented to Council on July 26<sup>th</sup> 2021, presents real threats to the integrity of the OCP that were not clearly identified: the Okanagan Sustainability Leadership Council (OSLC) believes these need serious consideration by Council and Staff prior to any decision to proceed.

### OCP Chapter 12 – Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation states...

“...The scientific community warns that global warming needs to be halted within the next few decades to reduce the risks of extreme and irreversible climate change...***In Kelowna, transportation is the biggest source of GHG emissions, so effective land use planning that minimizes or eliminates car-dependence... will go a long way... creating a healthier, more livable city.***”

The OSLC fully endorses these principles and the policies flowing from them, specifically...

**Policy 12.1.2...Land use planning.** Design the community to mitigate community GHG emissions through:

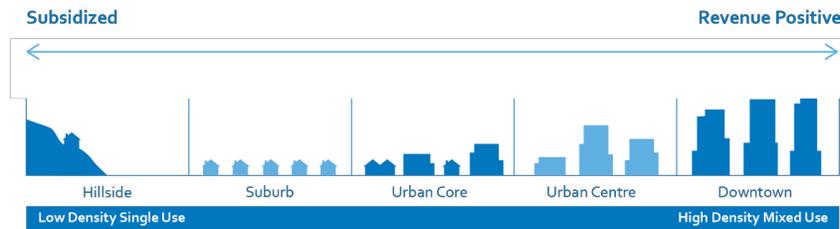
- Focusing growth in connected, walkable, Urban Centers and Core Area;
- Providing diverse transportation options to shift away from car-centric culture; and
- Reducing energy consumption by constructing energy efficient buildings and neighbourhoods.

### *OSLC Concerns & Recommendations...*

**OSLC is concerned that the additional vehicles generated by the expansion will only add to the City's GHG emissions and jeopardize its ability to meet its target of a 25% reduction by 2033.** The proposed McKinley Beach expansion plan is for some 815 single-family low-density housing units: this is in contradiction with a fundamental premise of the OCP which is to reduce suburban sprawl and its associated GHG emissions by concentrating growth in the Urban and Core areas of Kelowna: this was one of the primary reason Council rejected the Thomson Flats ASP.

**OSLC is concerned that the expansion's long-term infrastructure costs have not been fully evaluated and will place an additional financial burden on the City at a time when even more resources will be required for the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.** The Staff Report to Council on Thomson Flats (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021) also pointed out that providing infrastructure to remote suburban areas is not financially sustainable: their analysis clearly indicated that...“suburban hillside development provides substantially less long-term revenue than is needed to support its infrastructure demands. Conversely, denser, mixed-use urban development performs better in the long-run...”

Figure 1: Development Revenue Scale



Source: City of Kelowna Staff Report to Council, Thomson Flats ADP March 1<sup>st</sup> 2021

... results indicate that the proposed development will hinder the City's objective of addressing the infrastructure deficit, and would, in fact, contribute to making it worse. **Essentially, with each new suburban hillside development, the City is increasing the size of the infrastructure deficit while eroding financial capacity to address it moving forward.**

**OSLC Recommendation 1:** that the City undertake an independent Environmental Assessment of the GHG emissions from the additional vehicles, and the traffic patterns they will generate, to evaluate its impact on the City's GHG reduction goals.

**OSLC Recommendation 2:** that the City undertake an assessment of the long-term infrastructure costs generated by the expansion using the same analysis used for the Thomson Flats ASP.

#### OCP Chapter 14 – Natural Environment states...

**“...Kelowna’s natural environment is a cornerstone of Kelowna’s identity, supporting the community’s health, economy, and livability...**These areas provide clean air and water, healthy soils, and a host of other ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, rainwater interception, soil stability and temperature regulation, as well as outstanding recreational opportunities...Kelowna’s natural environment has been significantly modified by human activity and urbanization over the past century. **Protecting our remaining ecosystems is a priority as they are at risk for loss and further fragmentation due to development pressure and climate change...**To ensure our natural environment continues to provide benefits for future generations, **the City must protect and enhance our natural habitats, water and air resources and local biodiversity.** As our community grows, **a comprehensive approach must be taken, integrating environmental considerations into planning and development decisions to avoid impacts on our sensitive ecosystems. Extraordinary vigilance is required to maintain the aesthetic, cultural, and functional value of our natural environment.**”

The OSLC fully endorses these principles and the policies flowing from them, specifically...

**Policy 14.4.1...Ecosystem level planning.** Use an ecosystem level approach to ecological planning and management to ensure the ongoing function of environmentally sensitive areas (ESA), establishment and/or retention of ecosystem connectivity corridors and the preservation of threatened and endangered species.

**Policy 14.4.2...Preserve ecosystem connectivity corridors.** Maintain and improve biodiversity through the establishment and preservation of ecosystem connectivity corridors for habitat connectivity, migration, and the continuation of viable populations.

**Implementation Plan Action 6:** Identify and implement tools to protect ecosystem connectivity corridors.

**Policy 14.4.3...Prioritize protection of Kelowna’s environmentally sensitive areas.** Ensure the protection of sensitive ecosystems and unique environmental features... takes precedence over other uses during development and within the city’s parks and open spaces.

*OSLC Concerns & Recommendations...*

**OSLC is concerned that the proposed McKinley Beach expansion plan comes at a significant negative cost to the Kelowna’s diverse ecosystems and the existing habitat connectivity.** The ecosystems and habitats within the proposed development include high and very high environmental sensitivity (ESA -1 and ESA-2): they support many unique rare and endangered species such as Lewis’ Woodpecker, Flammulated Owl, Western Rattlesnake, Gopher Snake, Spotted Bat, Pallid Bat, Canyon Wren, and Peregrine Falcon.

The City of Kelowna OCP already has policies and guidelines to protecting the natural environment yet continues to destroy important ecosystems. The following table show the current ecosystems amounts and loss from 2006 to 2019 even though there is an OCP requirement for no net loss.

Ecosystem	2006 Area (ha)	2019 Area (ha)	Area loss since 2006 (ha)	% loss from 2006 to 2019
Grasslands	1453	1196	257	18%
Wetlands	196	190	6	3%
Riparian	446	434	12	2.7%
Old forest	81	78	3	4%
Broadleaf woodlands	47	38	9	19%
Coniferous forests	3225	2904	321	10%
Sparsely vegetated	277	259	18	6.5%

Source: Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program – Staff research

**It should be noted that the 357 acres in proposed development is 5% of City’s remaining natural woodlands.**

**OSLC Recommendation 3:** that the City undertake an independent Environmental Assessment to establish the risks to the ecosystem, habitat connectivity and endangered species in the proposed development.

**OSLC Recommendation 4:** that the City undertake an independent assessment of the ecosystem services provided by this area using the natural asset management approach already underway.

## OCP Chapter 15 – Natural Hazard Areas states...

...Kelowna is already experiencing the impacts of climate change, and as global temperatures continue to rise, the risk associated with some hazards will be heightened. **Increased precipitation and more intense storms will increase the risk of flooding and slope instability**, particularly during the spring. Further, **with the projected increasingly dry conditions and hotter days, the likelihood of being impacted by wildfire events is expected to increase**...Development in areas prone to natural hazards requires special consideration. Focusing on risk reduction at the interface between communities and the natural environment is necessary to **minimize threats to personal safety and property while ensuring protection of our sensitive ecosystems**.

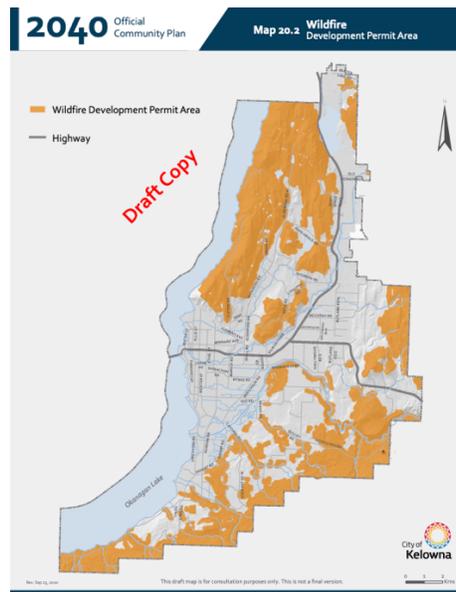
**Objective 15.1...Reduce wildfire risk to health and safety of the public, property and infrastructure.**

**Implementation Plan Action 32:** Implement the Wildfire Protection Plan

**Policy 15.1.6...Wildfire Fuel Modification.** For properties to be transferred to the City that are located within a Wildfire Hazard Area, require wildfire fuel modification to be completed prior to the transfer to a level deemed acceptable by a qualified professional in a wildfire hazard assessment.

*OSLC Concerns & Recommendations...*

**OSLC is concerned that the wildfire hazards presented by the McKinley Beach expansion have not been fully evaluated.**



The wildfire crisis unfolding across BC and the Western United States makes it all too evident that the impact of climate change is upon us. Locally, the White Rock Creek fire is now over 55,000 hectares, is classified as 'Out of Control', has consumed the community of Monte Lake and is threatening significant

areas of the City of Vernon. The McKinley Beach area is identified in the OCP as within the Wildfire Development Permit Area, one that has the potential to spread fire well into the Glenmore and Downtown areas of Kelowna.

**OSLC Recommendation 5:** that the City undertake an independent Wildfire Hazard Assessment to establish the hazards presented by the development, with particular reference to the wildfire fuel modification to be completed prior to any transfer of land to the City.

## Closing comments

During the review of the Thomson Flats ASP on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, Council were passionate about the need to protect the integrity of the OCP, which is a thoughtful approach to the future of Kelowna and one that was developed with the support of the community through the Imagine Kelowna engagement. Council felt that were they to put aside the OCP in approving the Thomson Flats ASP, it would be a signal that the principles and objectives were all too malleable to influence.

Unlike the City of Troy, we urge Council to take a cautious and studied review of the McKinley Beach expansion to avoid unintended consequences that will adversely impact the City's GHG emissions, destroy the environmental integrity of a sensitive ecosystem, and that may add to the wildfire hazard to the community at large.

Respectfully submitted,

David Jenkins  
Board Member – Healthy Ecosystems Co-Lead  
Okanagan Sustainability Leadership Council  
c/o 5086 South Ridge Drive  
Kelowna BC V1W 4Y5

*The **Okanagan Sustainability Leadership Council** is a not-for-profit BC Society whose mission is to be a source of inspiration and thought leadership for initiatives and public policies that support a resilient, sustainable, regenerative Okanagan Valley. Our vision is that by leveraging our individual talents, collective stewardship, and traditional ecological knowledge we can help to restore a balance between human development and natural ecosystems to create a more prosperous, inclusive society, one that is innovative and agile in dealing with the very real challenges of global climate change.*

Website: <https://okslc.ca>