
The Report on the Outcomes of the Community Workshop on the Future of the Malaspina Gardens Site



July 2017

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Executive summary

In spring of 2017, the Nanaimo Old City Association (NOCA) held workshops about the future of the Malaspina Gardens seniors home site when its owner and operator Chartwell moved residents to a new facility. These workshops looked at the history, heritage values and possible future redevelopment issues for the site. Approximately 60 participants worked through many issues with a facilitator and completed a survey workbook on their opinions of issues and opportunities. The results of these workshops include the following points:

- Respect for the heritage values of the site is very important, but that does not mean that the old building needs to be saved, as there is widespread understanding that saving the building will be challenging and expensive. Other options can include saving part of the building, saving and reusing artifacts or materials from the building, or providing interpretive information about the site.
- While there is a community plan in place (OCP / Neighbourhood plan) and some feel strongly that it should be followed, others are open to changes in the residential uses on the site and even the inclusion of other local, low-impacts uses that would benefit the neighbourhood. Other housing types that could be supported besides seniors housing include single family, town/row houses, condominiums. There is also some interest in a daycare, café, yoga studio and others.
- The architectural style of any new development was explored and the community gave nearly unanimous support for heritage inspired building designs. There was some support for modern Westcoast styles as well but little support for minimal urban modernism.
- New development needs to maintain a single family friendly face to the streets around the site, including approximately two-three story street walls with setbacks similar to the homes along the streets now. The massing should be varied and not present an large block unvaried wall to the street.
- There is some support for buildings up to six storeys but only if the design is excellent and if view corridors to the harbour are maintained from Machleary Street.
- Landscape design should support native species and bird/butterfly habitat. The older existing trees and some shrubs should be preserved wherever possible. Street furnishings including benches, garbage cans, and nice lighting would be appreciated.
- Parking should be located on the site, underground wherever possible, as there is significant concern about negative parking impacts from new development.
- The community is interested in any new development providing new amenities to the community including some affordable housing, a community meeting or gallery/yoga space, some public open space and public art. The adjacent park offers playground and community garden space so these are seen as less important for the site.
- The primary concerns residents have include the site becomes derelict and a crime magnet. New development needs to clearly respect and reflect the historic nature of the neighbourhood. There is fear of large high rises changing the character of the area and erasing the heritage values of the site.
- The character of the neighbourhood is seen as quiet, heritage, arts and crafts homes, mature green space and a strong sense of community.

The community is quite open to redevelopment so long as it is respectful of the neighbourhood and its history.

Introduction

This report outlines the results of several meetings and workshops undertaken by the Nanaimo Old City Association (NOCA) regarding community opinions and desires about the future of the buildings and site currently known as Malaspina Gardens, located on Machleary, Kennedy and Franklin Streets in the Old City Neighbourhood in Nanaimo.

In June 2017, Chartwell, the owner and the operator of the seniors' care home on the site, closed Malaspina Gardens and moved its residents to a new complex in south Nanaimo. In response to this change, NOCA began working with Nanaimo's culture and heritage planner, Chris Sholberg, and hosted a community meeting about the change and the history and heritage values of the main building on the site.

A strong desire was voiced by the community to not have the Malaspina Gardens site remain vacant for a long period, due to concerns about squatters, crime and the site becoming a neglected eyesore. Recognizing that Chartwell had planned to sell the site, NOCA is being proactive in working with the City and Chartwell, and providing clarity on the community's opinions and openness to various types of development on the site.

This report outlines the results of a workshop that directly addressed what character of development the community might support or oppose, as a means of increasing clarity, reducing risk and supporting a process to have the site move forward to active uses again – either through re-use of existing building or through redevelopment.

The workshop, held on May 15, 2017, was attended by approximately 60 residents who live adjacent or near the site. 45 detailed survey workbooks were completed and submitted from the workshop. This report outlines the results of the opinions submitted in the workbooks and plenary notes. The opinions voiced in the workshop and in this report do not represent the full scope of opinions in the neighbourhood, but they do represent the opinions of those who have a high level of interest and knowledge about the site and the neighbourhood – as represented by NOCA. There are various opinions on all the issues discussed in this report, but there are some clear preferences that are visible.

The range of questions explored in the workshop reached beyond the policies currently approved for the neighbourhood, in recognition of the probability of a new developer pursuing a rezoning and associated OCP amendment. Notwithstanding this exploration, the site is contained within an area has clear policies and plans in the City of Nanaimo.

It is hoped that this report will increase clarity and reduce risk for a future land owner, operator or developer for the Malaspina Gardens site, and aid in its moving forward to be a positive element in the Old City Neighbourhood.

Context

Physical location

The Malaspina Gardens site holds a prominent position in the Old City Neighbourhood – atop its highest point on a very large lot, bordered by three streets. It has commanding views over Nanaimo’s old city downtown and across the harbour and islands, and across the Salish Sea to the Coastal Range.

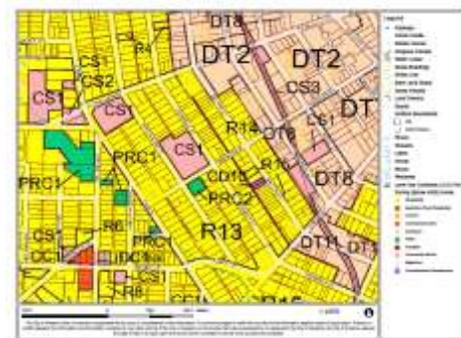
The physical size, location, history and heritage values of the site make this site a major land mark and location in the neighbourhood.

Official Community Plan

Adopted by City Council in 2008, the OCP, otherwise known as planNanaimo, acts as a guide for decision making on planning and land management issues by City Council. The OCP provides policy direction related to planning and land use management including elements such as the location and type of residential, commercial and industrial development; the availability of transportation choices and utility servicing; and also considers environmental, social and economic issues.

Neighbourhood Plan

Adopted by City Council in 1992, the Old City Neighbourhood Plan encompasses the needs and desires of the Old City Neighbourhood in the context of the city-wide Official Community Plan. Neighbourhood planning is critical to achieving the objectives of the OCP, and brings together the broader needs of the community with the local knowledge of the neighbourhood. Successful neighbourhood plans incorporate land use strategies that respond to the broader issues of the community in a way that contributes to creating more livable neighbourhoods.



Site heritage values

Architectural

Built between 1925 and 1928, with a later addition in 1942, the Nanaimo Hospital is a very good example of Classical Period Revival style architecture. Based on the architecture of Ancient Greece and Rome, Classical Revival was one of the most widespread styles in North America from the late 1880s to the early 1900s, especially for churches and public buildings. The building's Greek Cross form and minimal ornamentation are typical elements of this style. The building's overall austere and institutional appearance, appropriate for the serious nature of providing medical services, symbolizes tradition and authority.

The building is also significant for its association with Alexander Ernest Henderson, best known, in partnership with George W. Grant, for the design of the Vancouver City Hospital (now known as the Heather Pavilion) of Vancouver General Hospital in 1903. Locally, Henderson also designed the Freemason's Ashlar Lodge at 101 Commercial Street.

Cultural

The Nanaimo Hospital building represents the City's complex history of medical services and speaks to the on-going challenge of providing adequate facilities for an ever-expanding population. It was also the place of birth and death for many individuals and family members in the surrounding community and as such, is a site that is knit into the lives of the neighbourhood.

Context

The Hospital building is prominently located as the brow of a long, gentle slope that rises from the waterfront. Its height and mass, especially in relation to the much smaller buildings adjacent to it, make the building a highly visible landmark.



Community workshop overview

A workshop was held on May 15, 2017 close to the Malaspina Gardens site, and approximately 60 residents attended for two hours of exploring issues, opportunities and ideas. The workshop was organized by the NOCA executive and volunteers, and facilitated by Chris Sholberg (City of Nanaimo) and Mark Holland (Planning consultant and neighbour of the site).

The goal of the workshop was to explore issues and options for the site's future uses, including heritage preservation, to provide a measure of clarity to the community itself, as well as to the City and to Chartwell, regarding the spread of opinions the community holds on key issues that will arise in the near future when a new land owner or developer considers the site.

The rationale behind this approach included several observations:

- Chartwell wants to sell it to another developer or seniors housing operator and thus change is likely;
- The existing buildings are not in good shape and are likely to be demolished;
- The site has significant heritage values but no legal protection;
- The re-use of any part of the main older building would be very expensive, requiring many extensive upgrades;
- The size of the site combined with the expense of demolishing or reusing some of the existing buildings will likely push a new developer toward a rezoning that would likely increase density and the range of uses allowed on the site;
- Uncertainty for Chartwell, the City or a new developer about how the community feels about various options increases uncertainty and reticence to pay a full market price for the site; and
- Chartwell may not be willing to sell at a discount and as such, might hold onto the land, expecting it to increase in value, but that this approach would result in the site remaining undeveloped, decaying and vacant for potentially many years.

In order to gain internal clarity within the community and to convey it to the landowner and future developers, this workshop was undertaken, and addressed issues of heritage preservation, future land uses, the height and character of new development, amenities the community would like to see included, and others.

The presentation educated the participants on a number of key issues including:

- The history and heritage values of the site;
- The process a developer would go through to rezone and develop the site;
- The way a developer will view a site like this (including basic financial proforma considerations); and
- How a purchase negotiation would likely proceed.

The rationale for this approach was in recognition of the lack of reality that can pervade visioning work in a community when it does not consider the realities of what a developer would be able or want to do on a site. This means that the input in this report is coming from a relatively informed group of individuals on the issues that should be considered for the future of the site.

Workshop results

Participants in the workshop were given a 4-page workbook with questions and areas for comments. The workshop leaders led the community through the process with PowerPoint slides explaining the workbook issues and questions step by step, providing the participants with time to think, discuss issues at small tables and provide written comments. At the end of the workshop, a plenary was held for discussion amongst all participants.

Forty-five workbooks were submitted and the following outlines the results.

The results were both numerical (the number of people who voted yes, no, etc...) and qualitative (written comments). This report provides a summary of both types of feedback.

The original workbooks can be made available for review if desired.

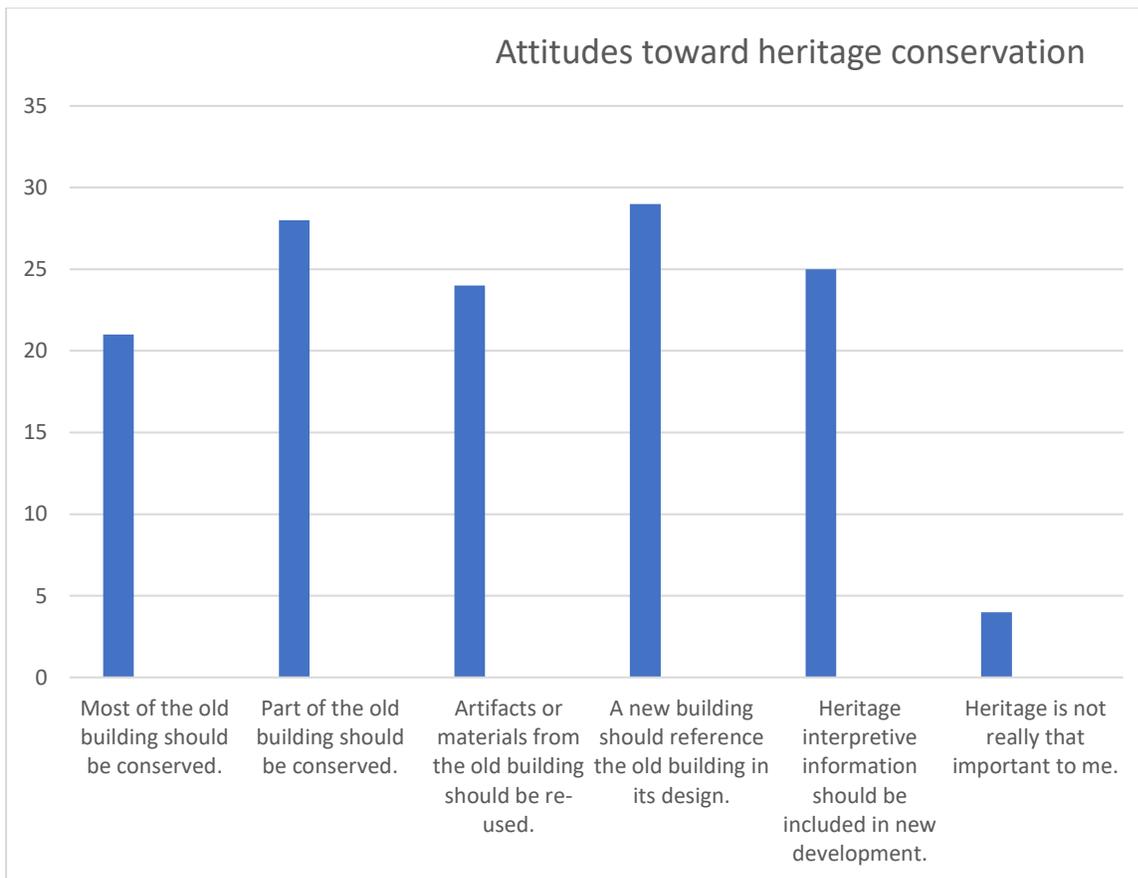


Heritage preservation

The first issue addressed was heritage preservation. Nanaimo planner Chris Sholberg presented on the heritage values of the site including images from various eras of the main buildings past.

Chris had also led a site review with key members of city staff and others knowledgeable in older buildings and reported back on the general belief that the main building would require extensive upgrades (seismic, asbestos, piping, wiring, etc...) to be made habitable as new development.

Participants were first asked what approach they thought would be appropriate with respect to addressing the heritage values of the old building (participants could choose as many as they wanted).



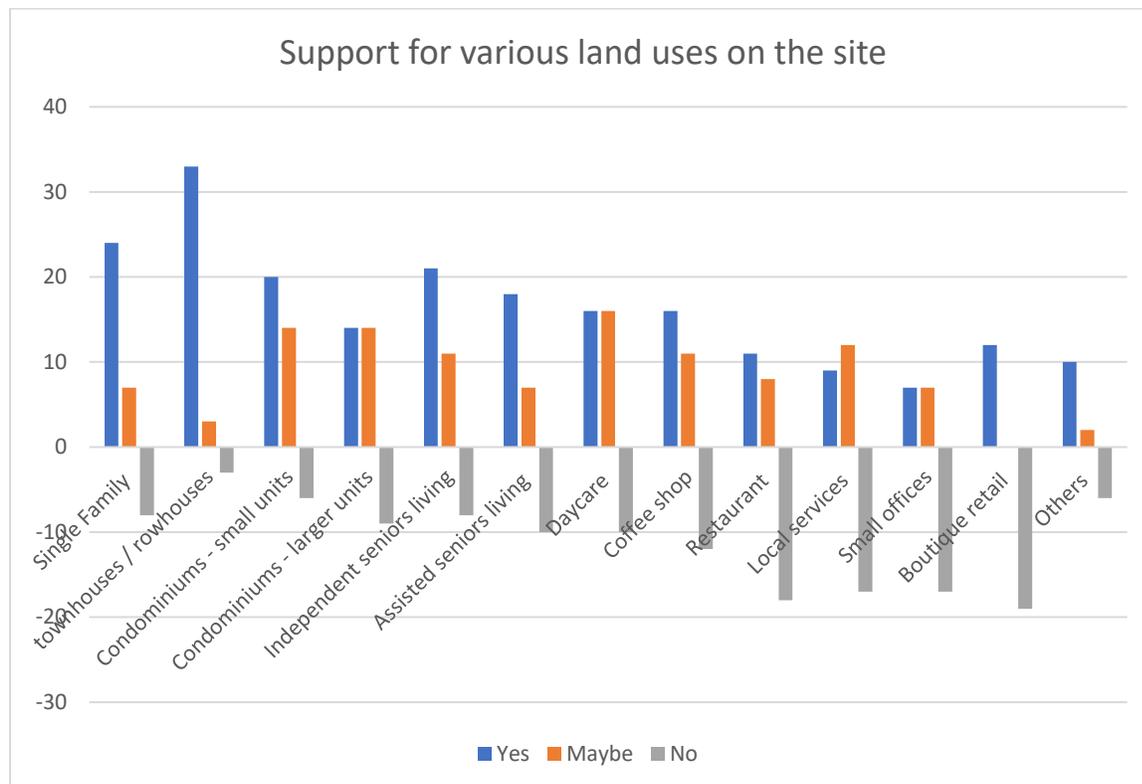
The comments from the community regarding heritage conservation ranged widely, including the following general points being made by many:

- The history of the building and site should be considered and addressed because this building is very important in the history of Nanaimo and we need to halt the loss of all our older buildings;
- The building has too many problems to be conserved as is, although it could with enough money;
- Any new design should be sympathetic / referential to the importance of this iconic building even if it can't be saved; and
- Materials should also be saved and re-used if possible if preservation of the building is not possible.

Future land uses

The next discussion centred around what land uses the community would consider supporting in a new master-planned development. Currently the site is zoned for seniors' home and other institutional uses, and the surrounding area is old city residential neighbourhood zoning.

Participants were asked what range of uses they would accept or like to see in a new development – selecting as many as they wanted.



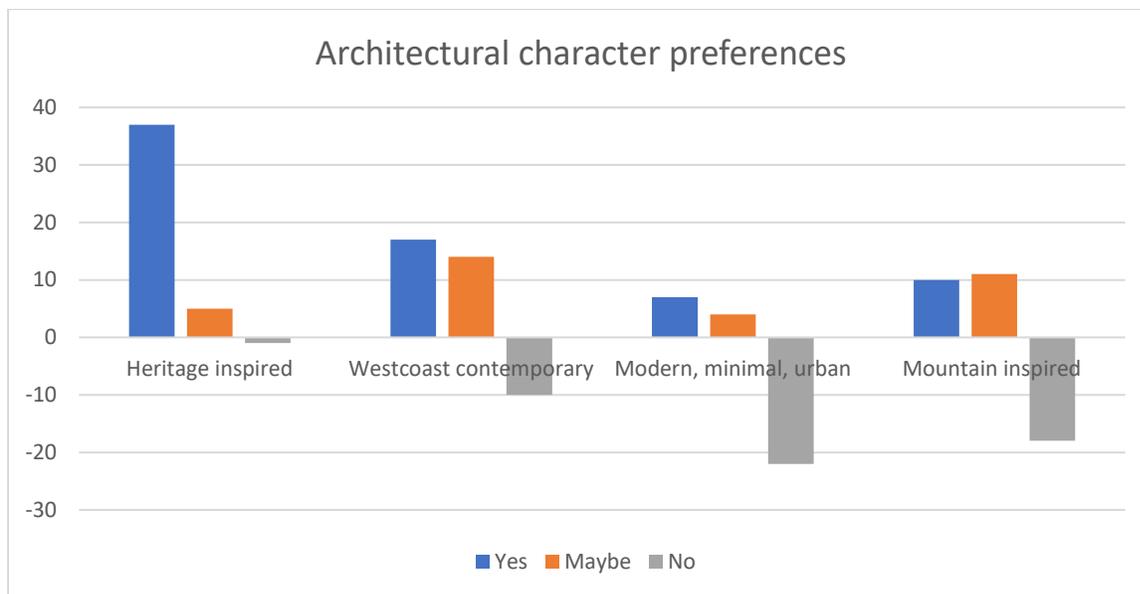
The participants had differing opinions about this issue, generally falling into two camps – those who were generally open to a more urban, mixed use project, and those who wanted less change. Additional thoughts from the participants included:

- Some wanted to have a new mix of uses and densities on the site, while others wanted it to remain residential and in keeping with the scale of the surrounding single family residential.
- A number supported a range of residential units. Other housing types suggested included: high-rises, cohousing, housing co-ops, eco-housing with gardens, low-income housing– with some going so far as to suggest housing for the homeless. There was general support for seniors housing in the comments.
- Other uses suggested included: religious institutions, a cemetery, community centres, fitness centre, Sprott-Shaw business college, and academic uses.
- Some suggested that any mixed uses should be accessed off Kennedy street and Machleary should remain residential.

Architectural character

The next issue explored was architectural character. The facilitators noted that many people have less fear of change and development than they fear that an ugly building will be built in their neighbourhood – especially if it is likely to be a large building. They then explored briefly the four main styles of development that dominate new development today, and participants were asked their preferences and opinions about what they would be open to, based on a series of images presented on the following styles.

- **Heritage inspired** – heritage patterns, materials, detailing from arts and crafts era.
- **Westcoast contemporary** – natural materials, shed roofs, extensive glass, large eaves.
- **Modern, urban** – minimalism, flat roofs, glass, concrete, steel, urban sensibility.
- **Mountain inspired** – steeper roofs, large wood posts + beams, stone foundations.



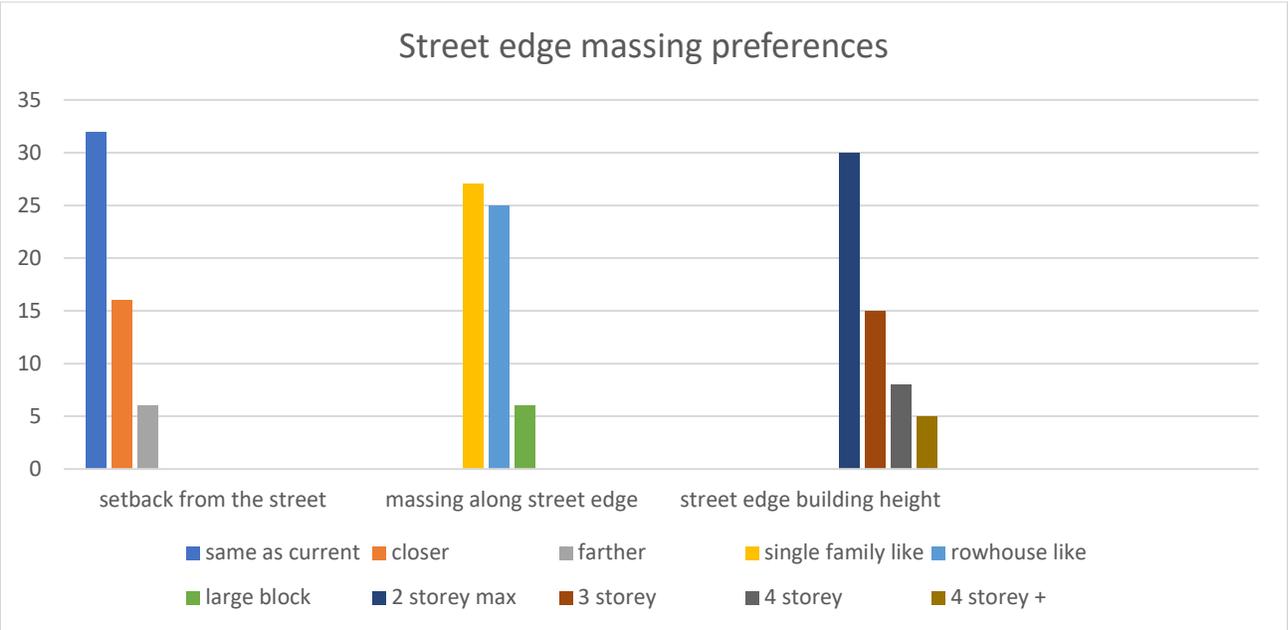
The community nearly unanimously preferred a heritage-inspired character to fit in with the existing community. Other opinions included:

- Some were open to mixing heritage and modern or westcoast styles, so long as it was heritage at the street edge.
- A number of participants also emphasized the need to have green and sustainable design and construction.



Density and massing

The next issue discussed was how new development should be massed on the site – looking at the street edge condition, as well as that in the middle of the site. Visual examples of various options of how massing can be done were presented and participants responded with their preferences. The options for setback from the street were that it could be similar to current single-family setbacks, closer or farther away from the street. The street edge massing was also discussed as to whether it had a single family, rowhouse or large massive block form, as well as how high it should be. Finally, the maximum height of buildings was explored. The preference that emerged was for a similar setback, height and massing pattern to the current single-family forms, with strong acceptance for a rowhouse/townhouse pattern.



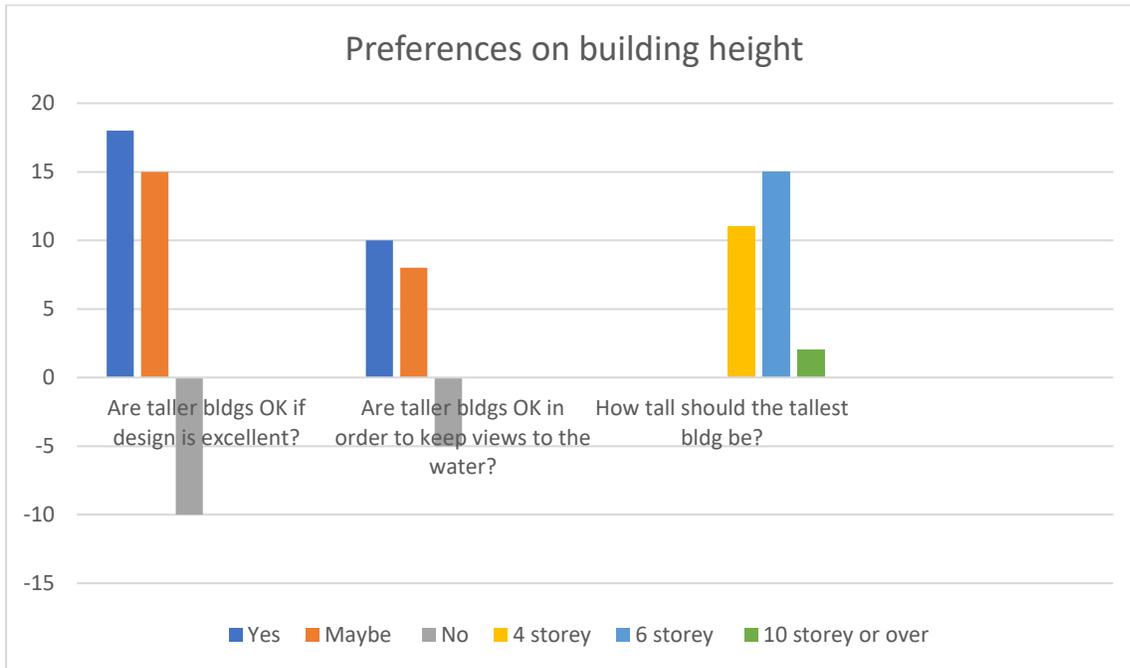
Additional thoughts from the community included:

- The existing street character needs to be maintained;
- Front yards with attractive landscaping and porches on the fronts would be supported;
- Breaks between buildings to allow access through the site as well as light and views in keeping with the current street edge feel is desired;
- Setbacks in height from the street edge into the center is OK; and
- Higher street edge buildings along Kennedy would be OK, given the current building has a 4-storey frontage on that street.



Building height

The next issue explored was overall building height and massing across the entire site. A discussion of high quality design and the interaction of height and perceived “ugliness or beauty” of a building was discussed, with images of highly attractive buildings that were taller than their surrounding areas. The issue of increasing height in some areas in order to preserve ground level views through a site was also discussed.



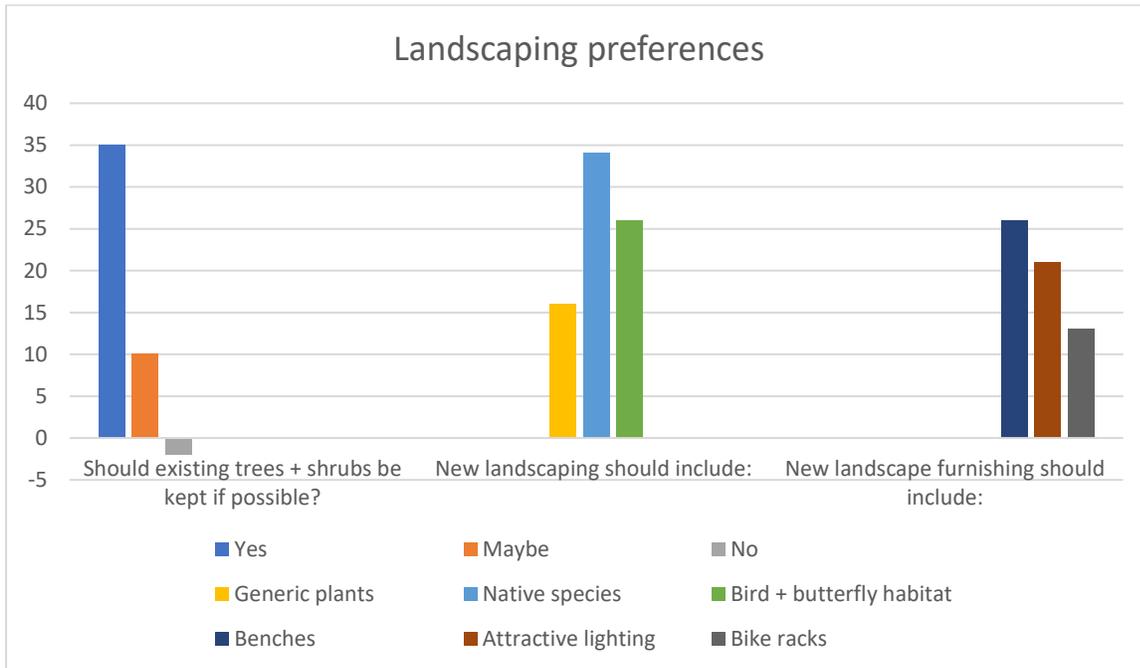
The community had mixed opinions on this issue and offered the following general thoughts:

- No highrises – as it will change the character of the neighbourhood and create a precedent for broader change or rezonings in the area;
- The community plan and current zoning has a limit at 4 storeys and that should be respected;
- Make use of the slope to lower the impact of height from Machleary St;
- It is important to step down to the streets;
- The views of the existing homes should be respected and enhanced if possible as the current building blocks a lot of the views from Machleary St; and
- Height should not create a shading problem on the surrounding areas.



Landscape design

The next topic explored was the issue of the existing and new landscapes that would come with new development. There are a few older trees and shrubs on the site and the participants were asked how important preservation of those were. In addition, preferences regarding the general character of new landscape design and furnishings were explored.



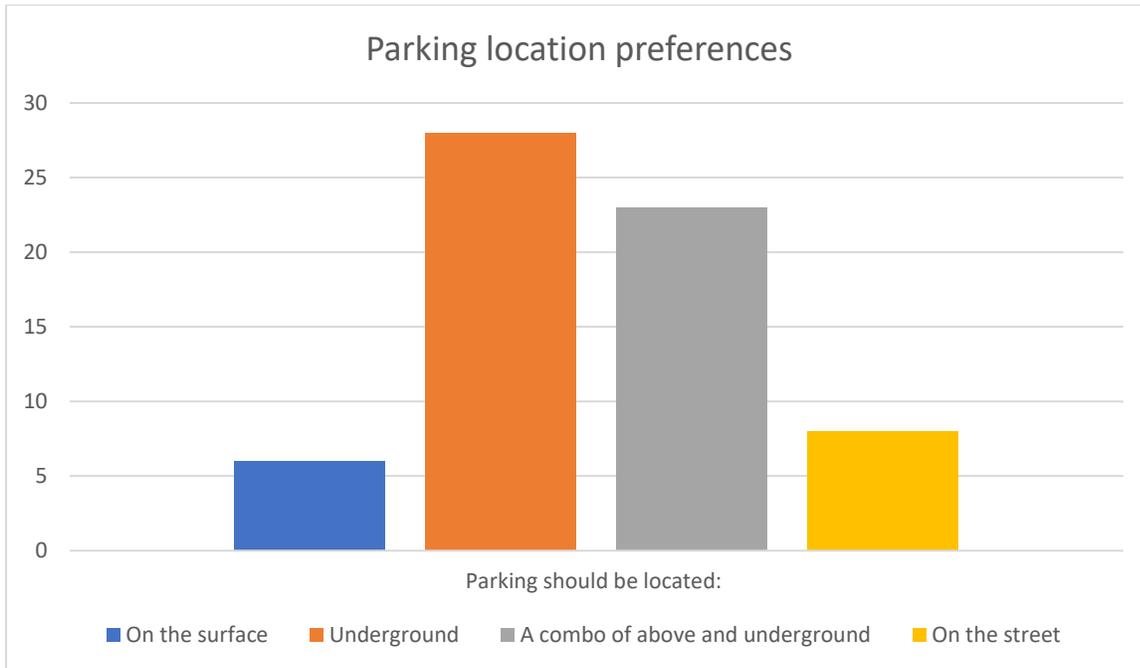
Additional thoughts from the community included:

- Select plants that are unique to Nanaimo ecology, including no invasive species;
- Waterwise plantings would be desirable;
- Keeping mature plants is important, but professional pruning and trimming will be required – and maybe not all have to be kept;
- Street furnishings should not attract vagrants / binners;
- Telephone wires should be buried underground;
- Attractive lighting is nice, but it shouldn't contribute to light pollution; and
- Art and sculpture would be a nice addition.



Parking

A brief discussion was held around the important issue of parking. Options of on street, on surface and underground parking were explored and participants noted their preferences.



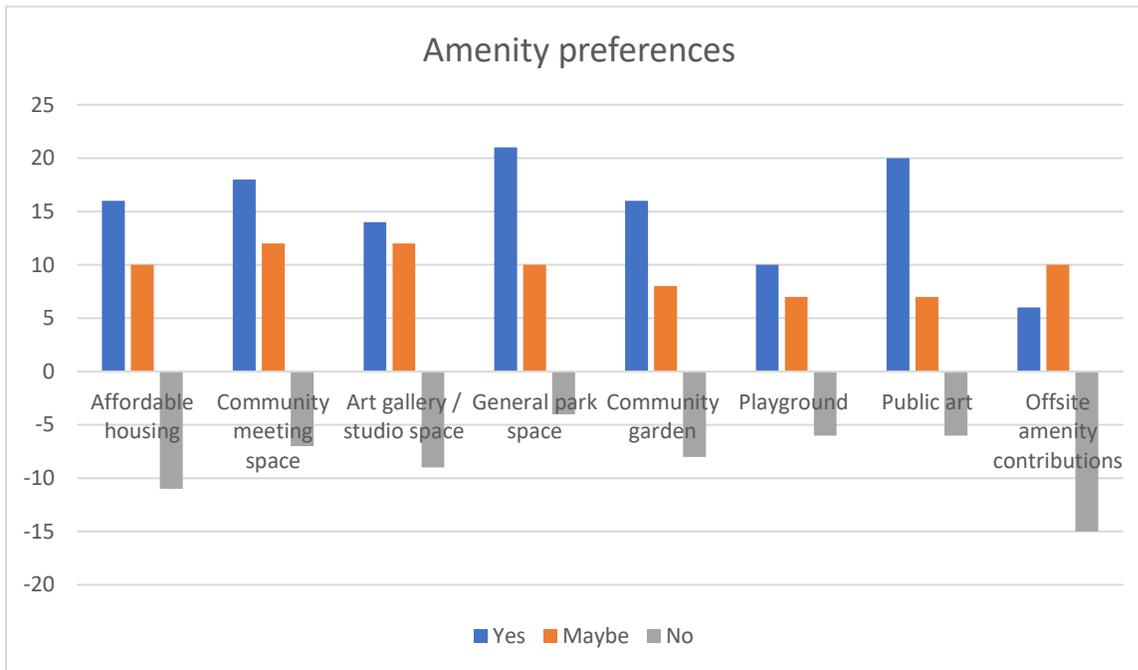
Additional thoughts from the participants included:

- No street parking should be allowed – we don't want the streets packed with parked cars;
- Parking should be hidden where possible;
- Parking for electric cars and car-shares should be provided; and
- Driveways and parking areas should not become "junk collectors."



Community amenities

The participants then explored the types of amenities that they would like to see new development bring to the neighbourhood, including indoor amenities, outdoor amenities and those off-site entirely. Various common options for the kinds of amenities that new development can offer were discussed.



Additional thoughts offered by the participants included:

- The park adjacent to the site offers a playground and community garden so others aren't needed;
- Keeping a public laneway between (parallel to) Machleary / Kennedy is desirable;
- A viewing area with benches, where residents can watch sunrises or the annual fireworks in the harbour would be great – a publicly accessible viewing platform to see out over the harbour;
- A yoga studio or performance space would be desirable;
- Additional monies for street beautification or community gardens in the area would be desirable;
- Contributions to other public parks would be welcome;
- Efforts to increase maintenance and reduce vagrancy in the area would be welcome;
- A neighbourhood space, dog park or BBQ area in the park areas would be desirable; and
- Affordable housing would be valuable.



Community concerns

The participants were invited to identify their greatest concerns about the site, and they offered the following opinions:

- Some are concerned that the loss of the old building will be a permanent loss of an important heritage asset in the community;
- Many are concerned that no development will occur and the site will become derelict and a crime problem / eyesore;
- Many are concerned about the quality of the development and its character – that it must be high quality and fit in the neighbourhood – no ugly buildings or generic square box highrises;
- Some do not want more lower income housing or services as they feel the area needs gentrification;
- Some are concerned about the increase in traffic and parking problems from a new large development; and
- Some are concerned about the loss of facilities for seniors in the neighbourhood.



Old City character

The participants were asked to articulate what they felt was the essence of the character of the Old City area, and they offered the following thoughts:

- A quiet, primarily single-family heritage oriented community;
- A friendly, strong neighbourhood feel where neighbours meet each other out for walks or in their gardens;
- The current neighbourhood plan clearly articulates what the community likes and wants;
- Long developed arts and crafts homes with older trees;
- Views over the downtown into the harbour; and
- Tranquility with a mix of middle and lower-class people, with unimposing homes.



Desirable precedents

Participants were asked if they had other places or buildings in mind that they liked and thought would be a good example of what desirable development might look like on this site, and they offered the following thoughts:

- The new townhouse cluster in the 400 block of Milton St;
- Brownstone, old Victorian / Empress style buildings;
- PEI / Charlottetown heritage buildings;
- Pocket neighbourhoods (by Ross Chapin) in California;
- General older European style live/work buildings with sidewalk amenities;
- Waterstone Way on Hammond Bay Rd;
- The waterfront condominiums along Nanaimo's waterfront;
- The best examples of new rowhouses in Vancouver; and
- The older homes surrounding the site.

Conclusion

NOCA led these workshops and many neighbours participated from a position of wanting to be proactive in exploring options and articulating their preferences for the future of the Malaspina Gardens site. The workshops were designed and facilitated by individuals who are knowledgeable in city planning and real estate development, as well as those who have investment and quality of life issues at stake based on what occurs now and in the future on the site.

The outcomes of the workshops and surveys demonstrate a number of clear themes:

- The community value the heritage and historical importance of the site and its building, but they recognize the difficulties of saving the building intact and therefore are open to many other options in the redevelopment of the site.
- Variety across development and architecture character was also desired, so long as heritage values are respected.
- The community are open to increased density and uses on the site, but they want the spirit of the neighbourhood plan respected.
- New development must have a strong element of heritage/historical character to it, although other design styles could be integrated into it;
- Buildings can achieve a reasonable height in the middle of the site, but only if the quality of design is excellent and massing preserves or opens up views for the community into the harbour;
- Any development must step down to the street and meet the street edge in a manner that is similar to the surrounding height, massing and character of the heritage homes.
- Parking must be adequate and managed in an attractive / hidden manner on the site; and
- The community would like additional amenities to be provided that meet community needs.

The comments on the additional opinions under each topic area were summarized and combined from many various and similar comments in the workbooks to provide a concise summary of the general themes of opinions.

The results of this workshop do not represent the opinions or views of all residents in the neighbourhood, but they do represent the perspectives of a good number of active and engaged residents.

This site has been an important part of Nanaimo's history and played many significant roles in the development of the city over the past century.

The NOCA and the neighbourhood residents look forward to a productive and positive working relationship with the existing or future owners of the Malaspina Gardens site as this important piece of the neighbourhood is reinvented for the next century.

