

**Victoria West Visions Project**  
**Sponsored by the Victoria West Community Association,**  
**Victoria West Visions -- creating the community we want**

Victoria West is an amazing neighborhood full of diverse people and places. It is also Victoria's fastest growing and changing neighborhood. The fundamental questions that the Vision Project wanted to answer were: how will it change? and, what do people want to see happen in their neighborhood? Many people say that the future is built on learning from the past and doing an inventory of the present. So, in order to envision our future and to develop the foundation for a less reactive approach to the rapid development around us we thought it best to take a step back and to ask: what do I value most about my community and what is my vision for the future? What are our community's historical and current assets? And, what priority projects should our neighborhood undertake together?

Our overall goal for the Project was to develop a stronger sense of community, and to encourage more people to become involved in community activities. Our "Visionaire" team met many times throughout 2003 to plan the project and to organize community events, mapping and survey processes. We believe we succeeded in igniting community pride and energy and in developing positive action plans for neighborhood improvement. From supporting food coops and community gardens, to creating heritage walking tours, to identifying neighborhood greenways and new businesses, local residents contributed great visions and have offered their energy to realize those visions.

The following sections summarize the process and main outcomes of the Visions project.

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The Visions project set out to engage the neighbors of Victoria West to express how they felt about their home place, what they wanted to see happen and what they were prepared to do to make it even better! The project took a holistic approach to community planning and explored the community from an historical, ecological and socio-economic perspective. The belief was that without knowing our history, our imagination and future visions are limited. Moreover, without literally walking the neighborhood and reaching out to neighbours who don't normally go to meetings we believed we could not generate new ideas and stimulate positive action.

The Vision team worked with GroundWorks Learning Centre and their Common Ground community mapping project to develop the outreach tools and activities. The idea behind the activities was to combine participatory learning, mapping and design as the basis for community-based planning and action. The people-centered methodology behind this approach to development is known as asset-based development. It is distinguished from needs-based and expert-led community development and planning processes. Asset-based development provides a creative process through which communities can rediscover their local assets and combine and mobilize their strengths to build more sustainable communities. Asset based development is defined by three characteristics: 1) It starts with what is present, not absent; 2) it is internally-focused to stress the importance of local definitions, visions, means and ownership of development; 3) it is relationship-driven.

Community mapping, a survey personally delivered door to door by volunteers, and interactive workshops were the key tools used to capture assets, visions and the sense of place. Adults and children talked about the key sites and routes for change and action. Perhaps the children's pictures of our neighborhood's treasures/assets and their visions for the future capture the magic that happens when we ask people what they each see in their everyday life and what their visions are for the future.

## **Process**

**Theme:** Cherish the Past, Value the Present, Envision the Future

**Invitation:** Meet Your Neighbors, Bring Your Stories, Share Your Visions

The Vision Project Steering Committee (Visionnaires) developed a community survey (110 of which were completed and returned), produced a poster and organized five community events to reach out and invite local residents.

The Committee invited the school, local volunteers and businesses to take part in whatever way they could and promoted their events and project through local newsletters and city media.

GroundWorks Learning Centre provided staff and volunteer time for this effort. In total they and the Visionaire Team had about 20 planning meetings and gave approximately 1000 hours of volunteer time.

### **1. Re-Enchanting Eden**

This illuminating presentation by University of Victoria History Department's Dr. John Lutz featured maps, drawings, slides and story-telling. The focus was the local Lekwungen people's relationship to what is now Victoria West and their experience with early European settlers. Participants realized Victoria West has extensive and largely hidden First Nations history and sites to acknowledge and celebrate as part of our future development and heritage action projects.

## **2. Walking Through History**

This evening walkabout and presentation with historian John Adams attracted 64 people complete with baby buggies ready to venture through the neighborhood. John highlighted the colonial heritage of the region and the colourful people, homes and stories that are major asset of Victoria West. These features inspired local residents to create home-grown walking tours and information for the website.

## **3. Community Treasure Mapping and Action Day**

This all-day activity at the Vic West Elementary School involved a total of 68 people mapping and sharing their assets and visions, drinking Spiral Café coffee, walking about the neighborhood, visiting community group displays, hearing about the school's marine mapping project, and listening and dancing to the Children of Celebrities local band. This information and the surveys were blended into a database and an action priorities list for the next event.

## **4. Design and Action Workshop**

A composite map and lists of priorities were developed and discussed in this energy-filled evening involving 45 local residents. These results were compiled and seeded the beginning of some initiatives. (i.e., the website, community map, food security group, and community garden project). Primary theme areas for action were: environmental enhancement, greenways, social and cultural support and mixing.

**5. School Visioning Workshop:** 31 children aged 9 and 10 from Vic West Elementary School offered their views on the assets and visions of the neighborhood. Their assets included parks, the school, the Vic West Y, the skate park, ice cream, friends, trees, blue sky, and the Trackside Gallery, and their visions included speed bumps, more parks, more friends, a 7-11 for slushies, more benches and flowers, pot-bellied pigs, chickens, climbing trees, walkways, some cheaper, normal but not-too-bad houses, and food and warm clothes for the poor. They and the school remain eager to be involved for the future.

## **Visions to Actions**

The wonderful Victoria West Visions Map was created by resident artist, Jane Baigent, incorporating many of the identified community assets and future ideas for the neighbourhood.

The reverse side of the map details the community projects that were initiated through the Visions Project. The Victoria West Community Association supports and provides an umbrella organization for these activities.

This map was delivered free to all current residents of Victoria West, and is provided to all new residents as they become known through the Victoria West Community Association.

## **Follow-Up**

A year after the Visions project was completed, a final exercise to “proof” the results of the project was conducted at the Annual General Meeting of the Victoria West Community Association. This exercise confirmed the priorities of the Visions project, which now direct the work of the Association's various committees. However, what the Victoria West community began with the Visions project was a process, not a plan. Plans may emerge from this process, but they will continue to evolve as the community evolves, and future “re-visioning” projects are undertaken from time to time.

Diane Carr, Chair, Victoria West Visions Project