

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY

SHORT STREET PROJECT, Saanich, B.C.



870 - 890 SHORT STREET

Figure 1—The residential portion of the Short Street project

Project data

Project name	Short Street Project
Developer	Short Street Ventures/Darrell Johnson Construction
Date completed	2006
Site area	4,584 m ² (1.1 acres)
Number, type, size of residential units	72 condominium units 70 to 100 m ² (750 to 1,050 sq. ft.)
Other land uses on the site	3 commercial retail units totalling 630 m ² (6,500 sq. ft.)
Gross residential density	157 uph (units per hectare)
Maximum height	5 storeys
Parking	82 underground parking spaces for residents, 38 commercial surface spaces (used by residents after business hours).
Unit selling prices, 2004	\$200,000 to \$300,000
Type of transit	Several conventional bus lines with planned rapid bus
Distance to transit station	100 m (328 ft.)
Pedestrian connectivity	Fair

PROJECT SUMMARY

Short Street Project

Short Street is a small residential enclave surrounded by arterial streets and commercial retail development in the heart of the growing municipality of the District of Saanich, a suburb of the Greater Victoria region in the Capital Regional District of B.C.

Building on an action plan developed by the municipality to target redevelopment of the blocks around Short Street, developer Darrell Johnson has created an innovative, mixed-use project that features 72 residential units and three commercial retail units. Its close proximity to several transit stops and a large commercial centre and the mid-rise form make the project one of the first transit-oriented developments in Saanich.

The project is notable for a number of innovative strategies aimed at increasing public transit ridership and reducing the amount of parking. The strategies include a co-op vehicle, free transit passes to residents for two years, shared parking with the commercial units and secure bicycle storage. These strategies were developed co-operatively by the developer, municipality and the transit authority.

TRANSIT SYSTEM AND REGIONAL PLANNING OVERVIEW

The District of Saanich is a large suburban municipality that is part of the growing Greater Victoria region, which has a population of more than 300,000. As the region's population is expected to grow to more than 400,000 over the next 10 years, the Capital Regional District and its 14 member municipalities have created a regional growth strategy. It aims to accommodate growth through a nodal development strategy that focuses growth in eight major centres that are walkable, compact and mixed-use and that can be effectively served by rapid bus transit. The Short Street project is within one of those major centres.

Other growth strategy goals include increasing the amount of detached and ground-access housing in the four core municipalities and locating a minimum of 90 per cent of the region's cumulative new dwelling units to 2026 within the regional urban containment and servicing area.¹

The growth strategy also promotes increased transportation choice through:

- greater coordination of land use and transportation systems; and
- a transportation strategy that increases the modal share of walking, cycling and transit use.

Specific targets by 2026 are:

- a minimum of 10 per cent share of trips by public transit for the p.m. peak period;

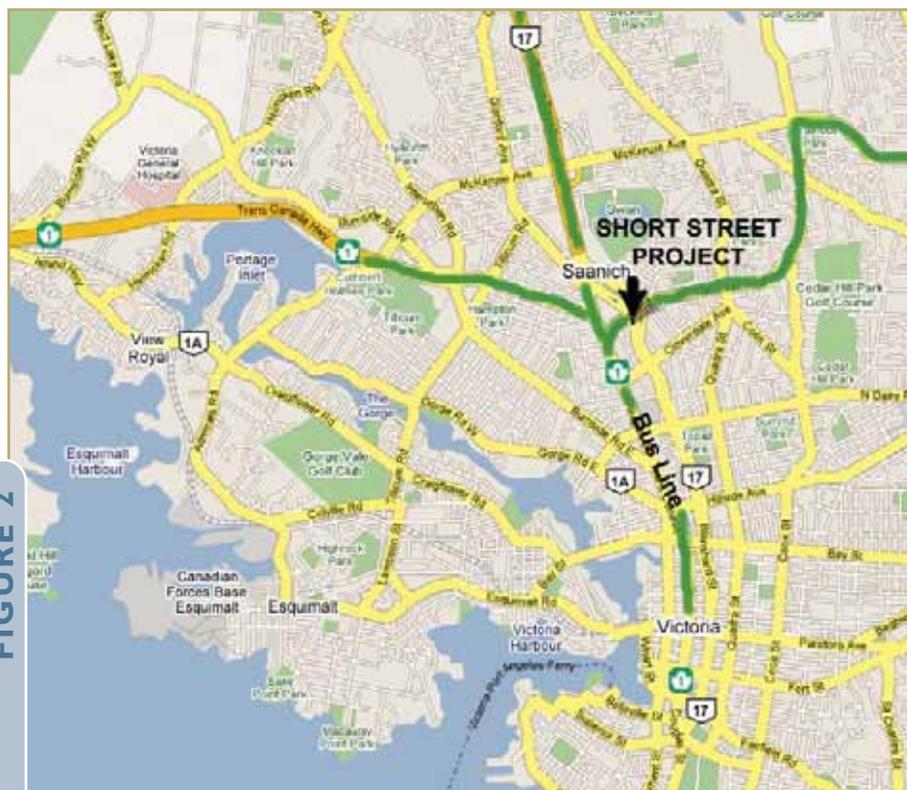


FIGURE 2

Regional context map

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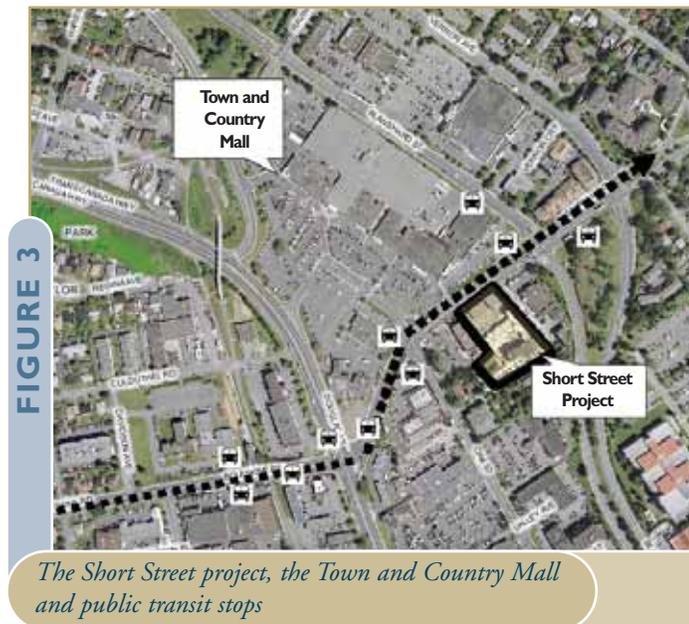
¹ Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy for the Capital Regional District, 2003

- a total non-auto share of 40 per cent; and
- an overall transit mode share of 15 per cent for trips to work.

As one of the Capital Regional District’s member municipalities, the District of Saanich is required to prepare a Regional Context Statement as part of its Official Community Plan that describes how it will accommodate growth in a way that is consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. Saanich’s statement is consistent with the regional strategy.

The regional transit system is operated by BC Transit, which provides funding to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission. The Victoria Regional Transit System five-year plan states that:

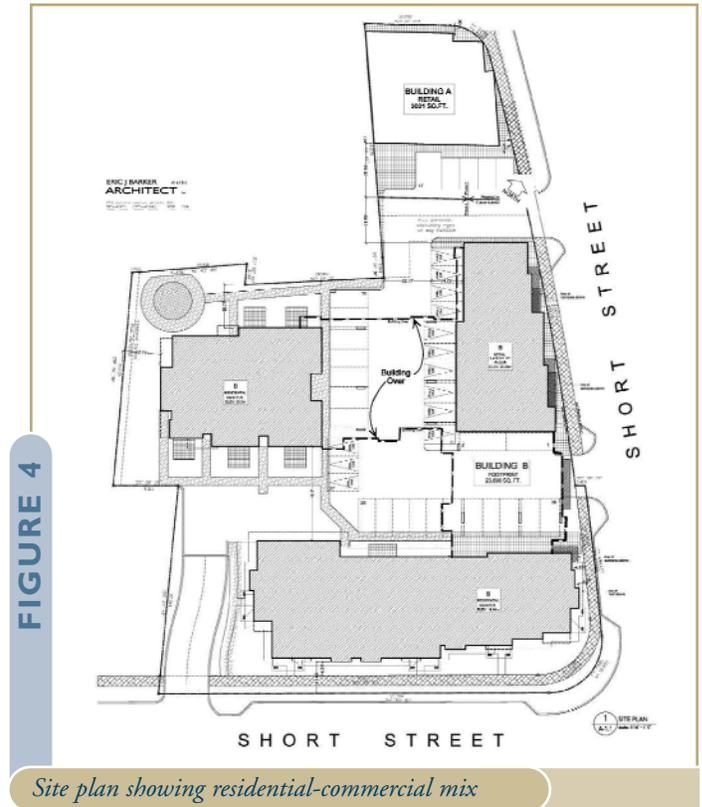
“Transit should support the development of the region as expressed through the Regional Growth Strategy, Official Community Plans and Regional Travel Choices Strategy.”



The Short Street project, the Town and Country Mall and public transit stops

The Short Street project is only steps away from a regional centre, the Town and Country Mall, and is well-served by transit with several bus stops (including an express bus route) within two blocks of the site. Several bus routes carry passengers downtown and to the University of Victoria every 12 to 20 minutes. The project is also close to the popular Galloping Goose regional trail, which is part of the Trans-

Canada Trail. The trail links to other regional trails, which makes the Short Street project very attractive to hikers and cyclists. A higher density project in this location fits well with the regional vision for focusing growth within major, transit-oriented centres.



Site plan showing residential-commercial mix

DEVELOPER’S PERSPECTIVE

Replacing seven older single-family dwellings and a small commercial unit, the Short Street project was completed in early 2006 by Darryl Johnson Construction/Short Street Ventures Ltd. The project includes 72 residential condominium units and three retail units of 325 m² (3,500 sq. ft.), 279 m² (3,000 sq. ft.) and 93 m² (1,000 sq. ft.). The project is within one of the eight major centres in the Capital Regional District that have been earmarked for accommodating the majority of growth in the region. It is a short distance (about 100 m) to the nearest rapid bus stop and a little further to the Town and Country Mall, which is also slated for redevelopment at higher densities with residential and retail uses. The Short Street project has about 750 m² (8,000 sq. ft.) of landscaped open space and all units have balconies or a small patio at grade.

Parking and bicycle storage

The parking for the project was reduced by 21 per cent to 82 spaces in an underground parking garage from the typical 108 (1.5 spaces per unit) requirement for this type of project. The rationale for the parking variance was developed by a consultant study (Boulevard Consultants 2004) paid for by the developer. This variance was granted to reflect the likely demographic of the occupants and acknowledge three key initiatives by the developer:

1—Bus passes

Each resident received a free bus pass for two years from the developer, who negotiated a pilot project with BC Transit. Residents have unlimited access to bus service, paid for by the developer. Each trip (card swipe) generates an electronic record, providing data to evaluate the uptake and effectiveness of the program. BC Transit then invoices the developer a discounted rate of \$1.75 per trip to a maximum of \$60 per month per occupant.

According to the electronic record generated by BC Transit, the number of trips per month averages 770 from 42 passes, an average of 18 trips per pass per month. For comparison, the per capita average transit ridership in 2003–04 in the Capital Regional District was five trips per person per month.²

2—Car share program

The developer purchased a vehicle, created a dedicated on-site parking space and purchased a one-time \$400 membership share in the Victoria Car Share Co-op, which administers use of the vehicle. The share is for each of the 72 units. Unusually, this membership runs with the title of the building so that suite owners are members of the car co-op program.

3—Shared parking

Residents share the commercial parking spaces after 6 p.m. As the commercial spaces are generally only used during the day, this allows the peak residential use to overflow into these unused spaces at night.

There are 72 indoor bicycle spaces in the underground parking garage and space for an additional 12 bikes at grade outside.



FIGURE 5

Secure bicycle storage is provided in Short Street's underground parking garage



FIGURE 6

Bicycle parking is also provided for visitors and commercial users

Transit-oriented design considerations

The project is close to a major shopping centre, local bus stops and an express bus route. Although transit considerations and design were not a major factor in the developer's original decision to develop this site, the developer quickly embraced the potential to make the project a showcase for transit-oriented design.

² Calculated from 58.6 trips/person/year, BC Transit Stats, CRD Planning, 2004.

In addition to the parking and bicycle strategies the project is also designed to present a friendly face to the street by positioning windows and doors at street level. High-quality landscaping around the building perimeter and on the street create a pedestrian-friendly feeling.

Despite the efforts to create a pedestrian-friendly project, the busy arterial streets of Blanshard, Saanich Road and the Trans-Canada Highway that surround the project separate and somewhat isolate the project from the Town and Country Mall and other destinations. The automobile focus of these streets presents a challenge for those wanting to use other modes of travel and the developer's preference would be to have better pedestrian crossings to increase safety.



FIGURE 7

Streetscaping around Short Street project

Project success and costs

All of the residential units have two bedrooms and two bathrooms. The units vary in size from 70 to 100 m² (750 to 1,050 sq. ft.). The developer estimates that almost all the buyers were first-time buyers, mostly under 40 (young married couples and some singles) with some seniors and some families with children. Prices ranged from \$200,000 to \$300,000 (2004). This compares to the average selling price for new mid-rise condos in Saanich of \$276,970.³

³ CMHC, B.C. Market Analysis Centre, Victoria

The project was considered very positive by the developer with nearly all units selling before completion. The project did not quite meet profit expectations, mainly because of construction price increases. The availability of transit did not allow the developer to sell the units for a premium but it did assist with marketing of the project and quicker sales. There were no unusual financial or liability issues and government financial assistance was not used.

TABLE I Summary of costs

Land	18 %
Construction	62 %
Soft costs	18 %
Infrastructure	2 %
Site clean-up	Nil
Total	100 %

Municipal support

The project required a zoning bylaw amendment and development permit that was approved by the District of Saanich. The developer worked closely with planners from the District of Saanich, who were very supportive of the project, which was considered appropriate for the location and innovative. The planners made several creative suggestions during the design phase regarding transit-oriented design at the building/street interface and parking requirements. These suggestions were largely embraced by the developer and the project is considered a win for the developer, the municipality and residents.

Barriers and obstacles

The project did not encounter opposition from local neighbours, mainly because it is predominantly a retail area with very few existing residences. The main challenge in developing the project was land assembly and holding costs during the two years that land assembly took to complete.

Key success factors and lessons learned

The developer attributes the success of the project to two key factors. First, because the project density was ideal for this neighbourhood and there was limited residential development surrounding it, there was no neighbourhood opposition. Second, the developer formed a good relationship with the municipality which has become increasingly supportive of innovative ideas surrounding transit-oriented development in recent years as it has recognized the pressures of growth in the region.

MUNICIPAL PLANNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Planning objectives

The Short Street Action Plan, a 1998 urban design study, found that the small residential enclave around Short Street was ideally suited for intensification. The location and proximity to transit, the Galloping Goose Trail and retail outlets provided an ideal opportunity for a small, medium-density, transit-oriented project. Development took longer than anticipated but the area eventually developed along the lines of the action plan. It included a number of recommendations that were generally supported by the developer, including:

- supporting mixed uses with commercial, incidental retail and residential above and behind businesses;
- preferring uses that generate low traffic volume and have modest parking requirements;
- providing pedestrian facilities with sidewalks and surfacing to delineate pedestrian areas;
- reducing front yard setbacks and requiring buildings to be built to the setback to present a uniform row of buildings close to the street;
- providing parking on street and below and/or behind buildings; and
- reducing parking requirements because of the core location of the area, its access to regional transit service and a multi-use trail, the provision of on-street parking and promotion of alternative forms of transportation.⁴

The action plan also recommended a number of development permit area guidelines to control the form and character of development.

Municipal process and support

The District of Saanich was very supportive of the project (granting a rezoning from single-detached residential to multi-family residential/commercial and a development permit) because it was in keeping with the vision for the area as set out in the official plan and the Short Street Action Plan. The developer embraced a number of initiatives to improve the transit- and pedestrian-oriented design of the project.

The municipality also worked closely with BC Transit to develop the innovative bus pass system for residents, which was the first of its kind in North America. This project is a pilot for the system that will likely be applied in other situations should it prove successful. The municipality supported the requested parking variance on the strength of this and the other initiatives aimed at increasing public transit use.

Public consultation

Public consultation was minimal. In addition to the required public hearing, the developer held an open house. There was very little opposition because there are so few residents in the area.

Challenges

The relationship between the buildings and the sidewalk is considered to be especially important when trying to create a transit- and pedestrian-oriented design. Although the municipality worked closely with the developer to negotiate a number of design improvements to the streetscape to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, it was felt that more could have been done in this regard if requests had come earlier in the design process.

There was also a challenge coordinating the various design initiatives of the streetscape with other municipal departments. Although this was eventually resolved successfully, the altering of engineering standards (narrower streets, parking bulges, wider sidewalks, additional landscaping and street furniture) did require considerable effort and time.

⁴ District of Saanich, Planning Department, April 26, 1999 (amended 2004). Short Street Action Plan (Schedule 2 to the Saanich Core Local Area Plan 1999).

Success factors

The success of the project is attributed to the carefully considered design and higher density that contributes to a mix of land uses around a transit hub. In addition, the municipal street cross-section and building design supports pedestrian-oriented development by presenting a friendly face. The combination of design elements, including minimal road widths, maximum sidewalk widths, landscaped bulbs, rumble strips,⁵ on-street parking and boulevard tree planting represent a substantial departure from typical suburban development.

The high level of co-operation between the developer, transit authority and municipality proved to be very effective in overcoming the challenges of designing a project that was transit-oriented and reduced automobile dependency.

RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Five residents from the project were interviewed in 2006.⁶ While the sample size is considered much too small to be statistically significant, the results give some indication of residents' transportation preferences and reasons for choosing this project.

Reason for choosing that location

Proximity to amenities and transit figured high in the list of three residents' main reasons for purchasing in this location. Four of five respondents said that proximity to transit had at least some influence on their purchasing decision. The most frequently cited main reason was the location's proximity to amenities.

Overall, respondents were very satisfied with the quality of the project. All reported being satisfied with the amount of parking provided for their personal use and four out of five were satisfied with the parking provided for visitor use. Three of five reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the character of the neighbourhood, that is, the style and type of housing, landscaping, shops and so on that contribute to the atmosphere of the area.

All were satisfied with the amenities in the neighbourhood, such as shopping, services, schools, and recreation.

Three of the five residents interviewed were very or somewhat satisfied with the overall cost of living in this location even though for three of five, the unit price was higher than that of their previous dwelling. This higher price was generally accepted because of the location near to transit, design features and because of the neighbourhood amenities. The design and appearance of the buildings and size of the units was very popular with residents, all of whom said they were very or somewhat satisfied with these aspects of the project.

Travel to work, shopping and school

Three of five respondents said they use transit daily and two walk to shopping. Those using transit frequently rated the trip to the bus stop as somewhat pleasant and very convenient. Since moving to this location, three of the five residents interviewed say that they now walk more to shop mainly because of increased convenience. None had made changes in their mode of travel to work, school or day care. The developer estimates that almost all the purchasers were first-time buyers, mostly under 40 years old (young married couples and some singles) with some seniors and some families with children.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Short Street Project is an excellent example of a small-scale, transit-oriented development in a growing suburban municipality. The project supports the regional growth strategy and District of Saanich official plan that calls for intensification in major, transit-oriented centres.

Furthermore, the municipality's Short Street Action Plan developed the impetus and planning support for the project, which resulted in a high degree of co-operation between the developer, municipality and transit authority. This was highlighted in the co-operative development of the highly innovative bus pass strategy, which allowed (in combination with other strategies) the developer to reduce the parking requirements, making the project more financially viable.

⁵ Rumble strips are raised or roughed strips of surface materials placed across the roadway, which slow cars down. Bulbs extend the sidewalk into the street at specific points, like intersections, and shorten the street crossing distance for pedestrians.

⁶ The low response rate is because most residents did not have listed phone numbers and were not reachable for the survey, which was conducted by phone. Given that most buyers were under 40, it is likely that the low rate of listed numbers is because most residents have cell phones or internet phones and not land lines.

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