



Photo by Joan Pisto

Town of Comox Downtown Vitalization

BACKGROUND

Comox Downtown Vitalization was specified as one of the priorities in the 2012-2014 Strategic Plan. A range of incentive tools were chosen, and in June 2014 Council adopted several bylaws, including Downtown Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw No. 1784, to encourage Downtown Vitalization. The deadline for submission of complete rezoning or development permit applications within the Vitalization Area has been extended to July 1st, 2018.

Increasing residential density in the Downtown was identified as a key element of the Downtown Vitalization Program. The incentives encourage mixed-use commercial and residential development to support and increase not only Downtown businesses but also the area's social and environmental vitality.

The Downtown Vitalization Area is shown shaded on the map below.



DOWNTOWN VITALIZATION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Available incentives:

- Priority processing
- Revitalization Tax Exemption for residential component of the development
- Building Permit fee reduction
- Planning Applications fees rebate
- Optimized parking requirements and design standards
- No affordable housing contribution for residential projects featuring at least 50% of adaptable units
- Sound attenuation guidelines provided by the Town

The objectives of the Downtown Vitalization Program are to increase the Town's economic, social and environmental vitality by:

- retaining and supporting existing businesses
- attracting new community investments in the form of multi-family residential development
- concentrating residential development within established areas with full municipal services, and
- encouraging high quality residential development, suitable for citizens "aging in place"

The **Revitalization Tax Exemption**¹ is a key component of the Downtown Vitalization Program; the amount of the tax exemption varies according to the ability of a development to meet economic, social and environmental targets. Developments achieving BUILT GREEN® Silver² and Adaptable Housing standards³ will receive higher and longer-term exemptions in comparison with other developments, as outlined further. Similarly, as the residential component of the development increases, so does the tax exemption, i.e. 4 storey buildings will receive greater and longer-term exemption, than 3 storey buildings.

¹ For details, please refer to Comox Downtown Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw No.1784.

² An alternative program, providing comparable level of sustainability performance, will also be considered, if proposed by a developer. Built Green Canada is a national, industry-driven organization committed to working with builders interested in responsible sustainability practices in the residential building sector. The organization offers programs for single family, high density and renovation projects.

³ As per Zoning Bylaw 1850, Section 5.20, which provides adaptable housing design standards to ensure units can be readily and inexpensively modified to accommodate the needs of those with physical impairments, such as wheelchair and walker users. The units are designed to meet changing needs of owners, or visitors. For example, required minimum hallway widths allow easy wheelchair access and manoeuvrability and a required modular kitchen cabinet section allows the lowering of the counter, should the need arise.



The Downtown Vitalization Program does not rezone land and does not amend the Official Community Plan Bylaw. Rezoning, public notification and public hearing will be required for developments over 3 storeys.⁴

TAX EXEMPTION IS AVAILABLE ONLY FOR RESIDENTIAL PART OF DEVELOPMENT

- For projects that are 3 storeys in height that meet the Tax Exemption Bylaw criteria, but do not meet BUILT GREEN® Silver requirements: exemption equal to the amount of 50% of the Assessed Value of the residential improvements on the parcel. This Tax Exemption is for a maximum term of 3 years.
- For projects that are 3 storeys in height that meet the Tax Exemption Bylaw criteria, and meet BUILT GREEN® Silver requirements: exemption equal to the amount of 50% of the Assessed Value of the residential improvements on the parcel. This Tax Exemption is for a maximum term of 6 years.
- For projects that are 4 storeys in height or more that meet the Tax Exemption Bylaw criteria, but do not meet BUILT GREEN® Silver requirements: exemption equal to the amount of 100% of the Assessed Value of the residential improvements on the parcel. This Tax Exemption is for a maximum term of 5 years.
- For projects that are 4 storeys in height or more that meet the Tax Exemption Bylaw criteria, and meet BUILT GREEN® Silver requirements: exemption equal to the amount of 100% of the Assessed Value of the residential improvements on the parcel. This Tax Exemption is for a maximum term of 8 years.

THE TAX EXEMPTION DOES NOT APPLY TO:

- municipal taxes imposed on the assessed value of land or commercial improvements
- taxes, or charges levied for local area services, specified areas, local improvement districts, or business improvement areas.
- municipal fees; or
- taxes imposed by a regional district, board of school trustees or other authority.

⁴ Currently, the building height in the Downtown Vitalization Program Area is limited to 9 – 10 metres under the Comox Zoning Bylaw, except for CD4.1, CD6.1, CD7, CD20, RM4.1, and PA1.1.

Official Community Plan (Section 2.1.3.3, Downtown Comox Policies) supports a maximum of four stories in height, except in the case of sites with significant changes in grade. In addition, a higher height may be considered for the following: redevelopment of the mall site, the north-west corner of Comox Avenue and Port Augusta Street (former Lorne Hotel), and the south-west corner of Comox Avenue and Church Street (Comox Legion).



TAX EXEMPTION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

In order to qualify for the Tax Exemption, a development has to:

- Be located within the Downtown Vitalization Program Area (as shown on the map above)
- Clearly meet or exceed all applicable development regulations, including Town building design standards⁵, and program criteria
- Be a new construction
- Minimum building height is 3 storeys
- Minimum building coverage is 50% (does not apply if underground parking is provided)
- Minimum 50% of the total proposed floor area is residential use
- Minimum 50% of residential units are adaptable (to qualify for tax exemption component of the program and to defer affordable housing contribution)
- Provide additional road dedication where required, and
- Provide adequate sound attenuation

FINANCIAL COSTS OF THE DOWNTOWN VITALIZATION PROGRAM

The following aspects of the Downtown Vitalization Program are designed to reduce the financial exposure of the Town:

- \$50,000.00⁶ budget for combined Building Permit and Development application fee reduction;
- \$50,000.00⁶ budget for residential component tax reduction in comparison to predevelopment tax revenue
- “Limited time offer” and “first come-first served” approach
- Limitation of the tax exemption to the residential component of the development excluding land: i.e. taxes will be payable on the land value and commercial building component of the property
- Requirement to clearly meet or exceed all applicable regulations and the Vitalization Program requirements reduces application processing costs and time

⁵ For example, of Official Community Plan, Development Permit Area #1 Downtown.

⁶ Council has reserved the right to either terminate or extend the Program when these amounts are reached.



DOWNTOWN VITALIZATION PROGRAM TIMELINE

- Program start: July 2014
- Extended: until July 1st, 2018
- Review and re-evaluation every 6 months, including possibility to extend the Program

- Submission of complete development applications on or before July 1st, 2018
- Commencement of the construction within 1 year of the development permit issuance
- To qualify for the tax exemption, the development must obtain an occupancy permit and exemption certificate before October 31, 2022.

For more information on the Downtown Vitalization Program, please contact the Town of Comox Planning Department at 250-339-1118, planning@comox.ca or in person at 1809 Beaufort Avenue, Comox BC.

