

MINUTES
NATURAL AREAS, PARKS & TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Via Microsoft Teams
June 8, 2023, at 5:03 pm

Present: Councillor Judy Brownoff, Pamela Carroll, Catherine Du Bois, Christine Harbord, Dave Marecek, Evan Papps, Don Sutton, Darrell Wick.

Staff: Suzanne Samborski, Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services; Eva Riccius, Senior Manager of Parks; Megan Squires, Senior Transportation Planner; Paul de Greef, Parks Manager; Cameron Scott, Manager of Community Planning; Kirsten Brazier, Senior Committee Clerk; Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Clerk.

Regrets: David Little

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair welcomed the committee members, and the following was noted:

- Presenter's will be given 30 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion.
- The presentations are to fulfill staffs process of public engagement.
- The People, Pets, and Parks (PPP) Strategy will be considered by Saanich Council on June 26, 2023.
- The Strategic Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Active Transportation Plan (ATP) do not have a date to come before Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by D. Sutton and Seconded by C. Du Bois: "That the Minutes of the Natural Areas, Parks & Trails Advisory Committee meeting dated May 11, 2023, be adopted."

CARRIED

PEOPLE, PETS, AND PARKS STRATEGY

The Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services gave an overview of the project, and the following was noted:

- The consultant was tasked with creating a balanced strategy where wildlife and natural areas are protected, and people and pets can enjoy Saanich parks.
- The parks system in Saanich is complex and is used by approximately 120,000 residents.
- The task given to the consultant was not easy and Saanich staff offer thanks and appreciation for their hard work.

Megan Turnock, Consultant, Lees & Associates gave a presentation on the People, Pets, and Parks Strategy (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- The population of people and pets (primarily dogs) in Saanich has increased which has led to conflicts between park users and environmental impacts.
- The draft strategy is to ensure a balanced approach where parks and natural areas can be enjoyed by everyone.
- The project phases include:
 - exploration and analysis
 - consultation and validation
 - Council consideration
- Reviews of neighboring communities, analysis of the current parks systems and public engagement has provided data.
- A solution created specifically for Saanich is required.
- The current bylaws and restrictions are confusing and complicated.
- The feedback gathered from surveys, open houses, and questionnaires have provided guiding principles and goals for the vision statement. This vision will ensure that Saanich's parks are safe and accessible and offers a balance to people and pets and protects environmental integrity while promoting stewardship.
- The key elements of the draft strategy fall into two groups:
 - planning, enforcement, & education
 - Leash-Optional areas".
- The strategy does not detail design on how the leash-optional areas will be structured.
- It is recommended that the definition of "under control" in the *Animals Bylaw, 2004, No. 8556* be updated to match the Capital Regional District (CRD) definition, to align with the federal "Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations", and to include all pets in parks, not just dogs.
- Three types of leash-optional areas are proposed:
 - leash-optional areas with no/limited fencing (includes beach access)
 - leash-optional areas with full fencing
 - leash-optional trails
- Saanich will coordinate with the CRD to develop educational resources about licensing and bylaws.
- Establishing a commercial dog walkers permit is recommended.
- 57 parks and trail locations will have leash-optional areas and 12 locations will have fenced leash-optional areas.
- Saanich will explore options for:
 - enhanced enforcement and progressive fines for repeat offenses
 - increase licensing rates
 - improve tracking of animal bylaw enforcement
- The Park Ambassador pilot program will support the development of stewardship groups.
- "Take a bag – leave a bag" stations would be installed at all the Saanich parks.
- Resources will be made available to manage maintenance of the leash-optional areas, focusing on sports fields and fenced areas.
- Leash-optional areas will have benches, trees, and paths.
- Separate areas for large and small dogs will be considered.
- A monitoring and evaluating program will be developed.

The committee made the following comments:

- The draft strategy is not a balanced approach.
- Cordova Bay beach is not an ideal space for off leash dogs.
- Concerns about the consultation process were raised.
- The number of leashes in the parks is a safety concern.
- The 1.5 km area of PKOLS is an appropriate area for dogs to use all year.
- A more accurate number of off leash parks would be helpful.
- The area designated for dogs on PKOLS should be reconsidered and made larger.
- The options for different exercise and experiences in Saanich is limited for dogs.

STRATEGIC OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN

The Manager of Community Planning gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- The OCP is a legally binding document that provides a long-term vision to guide growth and change in the Municipality of Saanich. The main goal is to obtain a livable community, based on shared values and sustainability.
- The OCP is consistent with the Capitol Regional Districts' (CRD) Regional Growth Strategy.
- A strategic update will allow for an effective use of resources and establish priorities in a short time frame. This update will highlight the work that has been completed by Council and integrate the new demographic data.
- The analysis and policy development phase is complete and is currently in the validation and refinement phase. The plan is scheduled to be adopted in the fall/winter of 2023.
- "Three Pillars" (Environmental Integrity, Social Well-being, and Economic Vibrancy), "One Planet Living" and the "15-minute Community" are the three main sustainable foundation frameworks that complement and guide the policy direction.
- One key element to the "One Planet Living" is the ecological ceiling.
- Climate change response is incorporated as a plan foundation that recognizes achievable targets and implements adaptation strategies.
- The four strategic land use directions look to maintain the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB), accommodate most new development in the primary growth areas, expand housing diversity in the local neighborhoods and establish a 15-minute community.
- The housing section's main goal is to improve the housing strategies and outcomes.
- Urban plazas and small urban parks will provide accessible green spaces and walkable parks.
- The 3-30-300 rule (3 trees for every home, 30 percent tree canopy in every neighborhood and 300 meters from the nearest public park or green space) is the guiding principle that focuses on the crucial contributions of the urban forest and other urban nature to our health and well-being, as well as climate change adaptation.
- An active transportation network will provide access to amenities.
- The OCP reinforces sustainable transportation modes to achieve the Climate Plan and Active Transportation Plan (ATP) targets.
- Our history with the First Nations Peoples is acknowledged in the OCP, focusing on Reconciliation, revised history, Indigenous Relations, and policies woven throughout the document. A consultation is planned for spring 2023.
- The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) draft Principles and Goals for the Environmental Policy Framework are included in the OCP.

- Saanich is a leader in providing park and recreational amenities to the community.
- The OCP values the natural assets and ecosystems.
- The public is encouraged to participate and provide input via various platforms such as webinars, open houses, and digital workshops. A survey is available online and in printed form.

The Chair made the following comments:

- Natural areas and housing development needs balance.
- Garden suites will assist with intergenerational housing.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

The Senior Transportation Planner gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- This presentation will focus on the trails in Saanich.
- The Active Transportation Plan (ATP) update will reflect the current policy documents and planning initiatives.
- The ATP project began in April 2022 and will go before Council in the fall.
- In addition to the ATP, a Road Safety Action Plan is being developed.
- The ATP focuses on:
 - Walking
 - Cycling
 - Public Transit
- The Speed Limit Establishment Policy program was adopted in 2022.
- The vision is to create an equitable, safe, and accessible walking and cycling network for all.
- A shift to sustainable transportation will enhance well-being and climate goals.
- By 2050, the target is to have half of all trips in Saanich be taken by active modes. This target aligns with the provincial mode share and climate change plan.
- The overarching themes are:
 - Connections
 - Convenience
 - Culture
- This strategy includes many actions but the focus for this committee is to “Expand and enhance the trail network”.
- The key changes are:
 - Trail definitions and updated mapping
 - Traffic calming framework that will inform future policy
 - The B.C. Active Transportation Design Guide will assist in designs
 - Incorporated equity analysis which will prioritize improvements
 - Updates to the policy references for a new provincial plan for Saanich’s Electric Mobility Strategy and the Climate Plan
 - Monitor pedestrian and cyclist collision hot spots and improve safety
 - Prioritize the implementation of the Speed Limit Establishment Policy
- The updated and revised trail act include:
 - Enhance and increase the trail connections to reduce travel distances
 - Investigate opportunities to develop new trails and protect ecosystem values

- Develop a policy to prioritize the acquisition of new rights-of-way for construction of future trail connections
- Enhance wayfinding for trails
- Provide safe routes for equestrians where they must use roads to access trail networks
- Some of the priority trail projects are determined based on the following criteria:
 - Addressing network gaps
 - Opportunities to undertake trail improvements with other park planning capital improvement projects
 - Access to transit
 - Proximity to an equity deserving area
- 14 km of new trails, 51 km of new sidewalks and 73 km of new cycling facilities is proposed as a priority project.
- A long-term sidewalk and trail network map has been created separately.
- Trail connectors have been removed to simplify the mapping.
- Engagement opportunities included various pop ups at locations within Saanich and two open houses at Gordon Head Recreation Centre and Saanich Commonwealth Place.

The committee made the following comments:

- A resource that will help the public avoid traffic while following the trails on PKOLS would be well used.
- Elevating the focus on accessibility and having programs focus on staying active as you age will assist the aging demographic in Saanich.
- The two new trail definitions are multi use and recreational.
- An update to the signage for bikes, trails and pedestrians will be considered.
- Prioritizing sidewalks is considered through road classification, access to transit, safety and equity deserving areas.
- The sidewalk that ends between Cedar Hill X Road and Mortimer Road should be considered a priority because it is close to schools. A crosswalk is necessary.

CURRENT PARKS WORK (BLENKINSOP LAKE)

- There is a proposed subdivision at the end of Beckwith Road.
- There is a proposed trail network connection that is highly desired from a park planning prospective.
- Some of the connections will be difficult to achieve due to high density areas and overgrown foliage.

The committee made the following comments:

- The southern trail that goes through the wetlands is very costly but should be considered as a connection. Lighting for this area is imperative for safety.

MOVED by C. Du Bois and Seconded by D. Marecek: “That the Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Committee recommends that council direct staff to consider the South Blenkinsop Connector, Beckwith to Lochside trail, be considered as a priority addition to the Active Transportation Plan.”

CARRIED

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 14, 2023.

Councillor Brownoff, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Clerk