

MINUTES
MAYOR'S STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
AFFORDABILITY AND SUPPLY
Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2
Monday, September 30, 2019 at 8:30 a.m.

Present: Mayor Haynes and Councillors de Vries (on speaker phone), Mersereau and Plant

Staff: Paul Thorkelsson, Chief Administrative Officer; Sharon Hvozdanski, Director of Planning, Cameron Scott, Manager of Community Planning; Shari Holmes-Saltzman, Manager of Current Planning; and, Susan Nickerson, Senior Committee Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Haynes called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau: "That the minutes of the September 9, 2019 Mayor's Standing Committee on Housing Affordability and Supply meeting be approved."

CARRIED

DISCUSSION- SAANICH HOUSING STRATEGY

Discussion ensued with committee members making the following comments:

- Before finalizing a Saanich Housing Strategy, it should be noted that the terminology might not appear in the draft Strategic Plan.
- For a robust discussion, the topic of Saanich Housing Strategy should be deferred to a future meeting.
- Housing strategy was widely discussed at the recent Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) meeting.
- The City of Burnaby, in conjunction with the Centre for Sustainable Dialogue out of Simon Fraser University, facilitates community engagement representative of community diversity. Reports and resources are available and should be reviewed for guidance in the future.
- This topic relates to item 4 on the agenda: "Approach for possible pause in ongoing updates to Local Area Plans (LAPs) to enable resources to be applied to Saanich-wide housing needs" which is also a housing strategy.
- Timing of future discussions are important as the Strategic Plan and actions are currently underway.

Mayor Haynes distributed a list of ideas and possible topics for future discussion and noted Councillor Mersereau has two documents to be shared with the committee.

MOVED by Councillor Mersereau and Seconded by Councillor Plant: "That a Saanich Housing Strategy be discussed at the next meeting of the Housing Affordability and Supply Committee."

CARRIED

Discussion continued, with committee members making the following comments:

- Given the consistent public interest and presence at meetings, it may be beneficial for the committee to add the item "Public Input" to the agenda, similar to Council meetings.

The CAO stated:

- Adding public input to the agenda would be contrary to the Council Procedure Bylaw.

REQUESTS OF STAFF FROM THE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2019

Local Area Plan Work Plan reports to Council dated September 14, 2015 and September 11, 2017 are included in the agenda package.

Development Process Review reports to Council dated March 19, 2018 and June 11, 2018 are included in the agenda package.

The Manager of Current Planning stated:

- The summary is by application type and includes all applications received over the past five years. A written report will be provided to add to the minutes of this meeting.
- Timelines are based on the date an application is received to final approval at Council and does not take into consideration the amount of time it takes to go through the Council process.
- A more detailed breakdown of the timeline is not available from the land management system.
- Various factors that determine timelines include scheduling for Committee of the Whole, Council and Public Hearing; housing agreements and covenants; legal; amenities; and the amount of time the applicant takes to complete the required work.
- For a development permit that also includes a rezoning or subdivision and where Council approval is required, the average for the last five years has been 17 months from date of application to final approval from Council.
- For a stand alone development permit, the average is 15 months from date of application to final approval from Council.
- For a subdivision application which includes a rezoning with development variance permit application, the average is 17 months from date of application to conditional subdivision approval.
- For subdivision applications, it takes an additional four months from conditional subdivision approval until it is registered at the Land Title Office – this time frame is under the control of the applicant.
- A stand alone subdivision, from the date of application to conditional subdivision approval is nine months. To final registration at Land Title Office is an average of 17 and half months – this time frame is under the control of the applicant.
- For a development permit amendment where Council approval is required, the application takes on average five to seven months from date of application to final approval.
- For a minor amendment to a development permit, the application takes on average two and a half weeks from date of application to final approval.
- For a stand alone rezoning, it takes approximately 21 months from application to final approval. There have only been two applications of this type from 2015.

The Director of Planning stated:

- There are three phases to the development process:
 - The pre-application stage is prior to the application being received and takes a considerable amount of time. During this time period, applicants consult with the Planning Department for guidance.
 - Step 2 is from the date the application is received to the date the staff report goes to Legislative Division.

- Step 3 is when the application works its way through the Council process and any legal obligations.
- Some information pertaining to timelines can be found in the Development Cost Charge (DCC) report.
- Upon receipt, applications are processed and forwarded to Community Associations and internal departments very quickly.
- Referrals are consistently received back on time.
- Staffing issues in the Parks Department have resulted in delays.
- The amount of time it takes for applicants to resolve deficiencies will vary.
- Delays can occur due to capacity and allocation of staffing resources.
- Owner/applicants who are not familiar with the process may take longer to complete deficiency requirements.

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau: "That public input be permitted at this time."

CARRIED

PUBLIC INPUT

A. Cooper, Sea Wood Terrace stated:

- Clarity about the referral process timeline would be appreciated. A specific timeframe is not noted in the DCC Report.

The Director of Planning stated:

- The standard timeframe for internal referrals is four weeks.

A. Cooper, Sea Wood Terrace stated:

- Staff have stated the current timeframe is approximately 90 days which is not reflected in the DCC Report.
- Personal data indicates it can take nine months to receive a complete set of comments.

The Director of Planning stated:

- To speed up the process and help the development community, reports are going out without comments from the Parks Department.
- In the future, there is a risk that Parks may require a change to work that is complete.

A. Cooper, Sea Wood Terrace stated:

- Applicants must be in receipt of the full package, including comments from the Parks Department, before they can respond or resubmit.

The Director of Planning stated:

- Applicants are strongly discouraged to make revisions or resubmit drawings prior to receiving all comments.
- The situation will improve with increased support to the Parks Department.

Members of the committee made the following comments:

- An overview of the development process, including diagrams, would provide Council and applicants with a better understanding.
- In order to address timelines, it would be beneficial to know the number of housing units in each category as well as the length of time for deficiency letters.
- To allocate resources and measure impact, the internal and external experience data must match.

In response to questions, the Director of Planning stated:

- The 4-week target is from receipt of application to final action.
- Applications are distributed to various departments for comment simultaneously.
- An overview of the development process will be provided to Council.
- Delays in the processing of applications may be caused as a result of the situation the Parks Department is going through, incomplete deficiency letters, deficiency letters that have been held up waiting for referrals, and limited resources.
- Another pinch point in the process is when there is limited resources competing, for example, a community planner working on a long range project and a current planner working on development files all needing admin staff to process the work.
- Council has just recently approved an additional planner and admin support person which will help address this issue.

In response to a question the CAO stated the following:

- The level of park and tree regulation in Saanich is different than most other municipalities and has a significant influence on timelines.
- Council is trying to increase these regulations and expectations; all these different moves in these areas have impact which is not always recognized in the moment.
- The expectations for enforcement by the Parks Department has increased and at the same time, the same staff are involved in the permitting process which has an impact on the development piece.
- It is not just a development approval process, there is approximately ten different processes that are very broad and interconnected which is a challenge.

Mayor Haynes requested additional information for the next meeting to help better understand the different processes and pinch points.

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau“ That the local area plan and development process review reports be received.”

CARRIED

MOVED by Councillor Mersereau and Seconded by Councillor Plant: “That the local area plan minutes be received.”

CARRIED

ZONING BYLAW CHANGES

Report from Councillor Plant dated September 23, 2019 regarding Zoning Bylaw changes.

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau: That the Standing Committee on Housing Affordability and Supply recommend to Council that:

1. Staff be directed to bring Council proposed changes to the Zoning Bylaw 8200 permitting greater height and density in RA-zoned properties (apartment zone); and,
2. Staff be directed to bring Council a report recommending the creation of a new (or modified RA or RS zone that would be applied on inside the Urban Containment Boundary that would permit micro units in multi-unit developments on lots that were previously single family lots provided certain criteria (ie. setbacks, minimum lot sizes) were met.

Members of the committee made the following comments:

- Where the OCP already permits properties to go higher, the zone should allow the increased density without going through a rezoning process.
- The intent is not to create urban sprawl but to determine where it is appropriate to have increased density given the need for additional housing supply.
- The zoning bylaw is old and needs to be revisited and would require public consultation.
- Micro units will help with affordability and supply in multi-family buildings that were previously single family lots.
- In order to protect properties outside the Urban Containment Boundary, we need to look at how density levels and height requirements can be changed within it.
- The report also recognizes timeline savings to make the process more straight forward.
- It is difficult for applicants to make a proposal in six storeys in area where the height limit of buildings is four storeys.
- Staff is constrained by existing policies within the OCP.
- There are existing tools to achieve a certain outcome however they may not be effective as it creates too much uncertainty particularly given our current timelines for processing applications.
- The current system causes frustration in communities when there appears to be exceptions to policies.
- The system favors developers that have a lot of experience working with Saanich.
- There needs to be a level playing field for people that want to invest in housing.
- There needs to be explicit change to the zoning bylaw to allow density where we know it is more appropriate given our affordability and environmental challenges.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Director of Planning stated:

- If a developer offers an amenity, Council has ability to change zoning bylaw.
- There are low income groups in society that need help more than others and there needs may not be met by the market and this needs to be part of the equation as well.
- As we move forward looking for solutions, we need to ask: Who are we helping? Where are the priorities? What are the means to help these groups?

PUBLIC INPUT

A. Cooper, Sea Wood Terrace stated:

- If you amend the OCP to reflect you would consider up to six storeys, it would give staff the ability to better evaluate where appropriate.
- The Uptown Plan should reflect the desired zoning to incentivize developers to bring in the housing that you want.
- This is a perfect time to test pre-zoning with the Uptown Plan.

Members of the committee made the following comments:

- The City of Victoria has already experimented with pre-zoning.
- If the zoning is prescribed it reduces risk and increased certainty and presumably expands our housing market potential.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Director of Planning stated:

- Page 72 of the agenda package includes information on the implications and complexities in pre-zoning.
- Council may want to try pre-zoning on a small scale to test.

- There are 152 RA zoned properties in Saanich – 46% are located within major and neighbourhood centres.
- Could describe expectations around affordability housing within the zone.

The Motion was then Put and CARRIED.

In response to a question from the Committee, the CAO stated:

- This report can be brought forward to Council as background information at the same time as the resolution.

DISCUSSION- PAUSE ON LOCAL AREA PLAN UPDATES

Members of the committee made the following comments:

- Need more background and context, for example, how do we use our current resources.
- If staff were not working on a local area plan review what would they be working on.
- Has contractors being considered to take on significant additional workload.

The CAO made the following comments:

- There are no additional resources to hire contractors.
- Reallocating staff will have implications from a human resources perspective.
- Direction has already been given by Council for staff to undertake the LAP process.
- Council will need to determine what they are after in terms of strategic direction and staff will then determine how that will be achieved.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Director of Planning stated:

- Saanich has current and community planning teams (2 streams) and there is overlap.
- If you slow down LAP process, there is other policy work in the queue.
- Could temporarily or permanently re-allocate work to current planning, staff would come back with the implications of that.
- Better product and price if someone is hired to undertake specific projects however, it still requires staff support to ensure the job and obligations are done right.
- There are two active local area plans: Cordova Bay and Cadboro Bay plans, one planner per plan.
- At certain times, other planning staff assist in the LAP process if there is increased work or an event tied to the plan.
- When the planners are finished with the process, they are given a break with other assignments but some of those decisions involve labour relations.

Mayor Haynes requested that this item being brought forward to the next meeting for further discussion.

In response to a question from the Committee, the CAO made the following comments:

- In regard to whether staff can prepare a report for the Committee on options for continuing with the LAP versus the re-allocation of planning work, a recommendation should go to Council as staff already has a list of priorities items to work on.

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau “That it be recommended to Council that at the time the report comes to Council regarding the first set of local area plans, include an approach for a possible pause in ongoing updates to local area plans to enable resources to be applied to Saanich-wide housing needs and the pros and cons of doing so.”

CARRIED

NEXT MEETING

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau: "That the next meeting of the Mayor's Standing Committee on Housing Affordability and Supply be on October 21, 2019 from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m."

CARRIED

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Mersereau: "That the meeting be adjourned at 10:00 a.m."

CARRIED

CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

COMMITTEE SECRETARY