

NATURAL AREAS, PARKS AND TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MS Teams
770 Vernon Avenue
February 19, 2025 at 4:00 PM

ROLL CALL

In Attendance: Julian Anderson, Kathleen Woodruff, David Little, Nathalie Chambers, Hollis Hodson, Kathy Humphrey
Regrets: Kim McIvor
Staff: Paul de Greeff, Manager, Park Plan and Development; Alix Link, Manager, Urban Forestry, Natural Areas and Community Stewardship; Colton Whittaker, Committee Clerk

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by K. Woodruff and Seconded by D. Little: “That the Minutes of the Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Advisory Committee meeting held November 14, 2024, be adopted as circulated.”

RESULT: Carried 6 TO 0

IN FAVOUR: Anderson, Woodruff, Little, Chambers, Hodson, Humphrey

OPPOSED: None

COMMITTEE BUSINESS ITEMS

CHAIRS REMARKS

The Chair welcomed committee members and the following was noted:

- Across the country, regulatory changes are underway in response to the potential threat of tariffs from the United States.
- The adoption of sustainable energy practices will be increasingly important in the future.

OVERVIEW OF PARKS DIVISION

The Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship gave a presentation on an overview of the Parks Division and an overview of Parks’ Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship sections (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- Garry Oak trees are challenging to source from nurseries. To address this, a small program has been initiated to collect acorns and grow Garry Oaks locally.
- The Horticulture section of Parks primarily focuses on ornamental plants, which are often non-native, though some native species are included.
- The Municipal Hall has a heritage designation, which also extends to its surrounding grounds, including certain plantings.
- In some cases, non-native plants may be a more suitable option for boulevards or medians.
- The Urban Forest Strategy, approved by Council in 2024, emphasizes the need to increase canopy cover. The District utilizes Light Detection And Ranging (LiDAR) technology to estimate tree canopy coverage in the region.
- In 2024, 180 meters of the Colquitz River underwent restoration.
- The plan for the trembling aspen grove at Cuthbert Homes has been in development for several years. Funding for this project was secured through the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI).

- Parks projects are directed by Council. Parks staff also bring community concerns to Council for consideration.
- The committee may explore the possibility of submitting a letter to Council in the future in support of biodiversity-related initiatives.
- In 2024, the Parks division hosted numerous community engagement events in partnership with the Habitat Acquisition Trust. Through the Saanich Biodiversity Partners pilot program, the division provided resources to help residents promote and enhance biodiversity on their properties.
- The Parks volunteer team currently collaborates with a variety of volunteer groups across the district including Scouts.

The Manager, Park Planning and Development gave a presentation on the overview of the Parks Division (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- The Saanich Parks division prioritizes accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Last year, Parks staff provided an update on accessibility initiatives. The committee has expressed interest in receiving another update on this topic.
- Council recently passed a motion directing staff to report back on Saanich's procurement processes and the potential impact of prioritizing Canadian-made products and services during the ongoing trade dispute. Parks staff have been encouraged to collaborate with Canadian consultants.
- A Council report outlined three conceptual options for programming intensity at Lambrick Park. The park is a significant hub for baseball and other sport activities.
- Discussions regarding repairing the degradation in Colquitz Creek would align well with the Integrated Stormwater Management Plan (ISMP) and ongoing engineering work.
- The Habitat Acquisition Trust has taken a leading role in coordinating responses from environmental groups related to the Panama Flats Park Concept Plan refresh. Panama Flats serves as a critical migration stop, supporting a diverse range of bird species and other wildlife.
- Mowing and land management at Panama Flats improves the habitat for Vancouver Island Beggarstick plants and helps to control invasive species. Additionally, tilling in the area is being used to help manage methane gas release.
- Agriculture encompasses a broad range of activities beyond traditional farming.
- Replacement of the Viewmont Tennis Court is set to begin. The Saanich Tennis Club, which has operated at this location for many years, is working with the District to establish a new funding agreement for the project.
- Saanich is currently undertaking an Alternate Approval Process, which includes a bylaw related to borrowing for the Parks capital program.
- Parks has received grants through the Asset Management Program and is actively cataloging its assets. The department has an Asset Management Coordinator dedicated to this initiative.

MOVED by H. Hodson and Seconded by K. Woodruff: "That members provide their comments on item B.4 to the Committee Clerk in writing, and that item be revisited at the next scheduled meeting."

RESULT: Carried 6 TO 0

IN FAVOUR: Anderson, Woodruff, Little, Chambers, Hodson, Humphrey

OPPOSED: None

UPDATE ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND URBAN FOREST STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTATION

The Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship gave a presentation on the Biodiversity Conservation and Urban Forest Strategies (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- Funding for implementing the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is allocated over multiple years.
- The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and the Urban Forest Strategy share a combined vision.
- Community stewardship is important, along with the early consideration and planning of trees.
- Aligning staff departments and fostering collaboration toward shared goals is essential.
- The committee inquired about the possibility of incorporating the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and the Urban Forest Strategy into the Official Community Plan (OCP).

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by K. Woodruff and Seconded by H. Hodson: “That the meeting be adjourned at 6:01 p.m.”

RESULT: Carried 6 TO 0

IN FAVOUR: Anderson, Woodruff, Little, Chambers, Hodson, Humphrey

OPPOSED: None

CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

COMMITTEE CLERK