

MINUTES
NATURAL AREAS, PARKS AND TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Council Chambers and via MS Teams
770 Vernon Avenue
May 21, 2025 at 4:00 PM

In Attendance: Nathalie Chambers (Chair), Kathryn Bridge, Hollis Hodson (via Teams) (4:12 p.m.), David Little, Kathleen Woodruff, Brian Wilkes, Michelle Watt (via Teams)
Regrets: Julian Anderson, Kathy Humphrey, Kim McIvor
Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager, Parks; 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 K. Bridge: “That the Minutes of the Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Advisory Committee meeting held April 16, 2025, be adopted as amended.”

RESULT: Carried 7 TO 0

IN FAVOUR: Woodruff, Little, Chambers, Hodson, Wilkes, Bridge, Watt

OPPOSED: None

Note: The minutes were amended to remove the bullet points listed under the item “Future Committee Items.”

COMMITTEE BUSINESS ITEMS

CHAIRS REMARKS

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

- Future meetings may include tours of local parks.
- Recent updates to Saanich’s tree bylaw do not extend protection to bylaw protected trees within the building envelope.
- Suggested tour locations include, Blenkinsop Lake, Beckwith Pond, Swan Lake, PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), Panama Flats, and areas undergoing Garry Oak ecosystem restoration.
- Members expressed a preference for tours that connect to previous committee presentations. It was suggested that Saanich staff provide a brief presentation during the tours to offer additional context.
- By consensus, the Committee agreed that the June meeting will be a site tour at Panama Flats, due to its ecological diversity, including riparian areas and Garry Oak habitats.

BOWKER CREEK BLUEPRINT UPDATE

The Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship gave a presentation on Bowker Creek (PowerPoint on File), and the following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- The Bowker Creek Blueprint Update is being led by the Capital Regional District (CRD), in collaboration with consultants.
- A steering committee for the project is being coordinated by the CRD. It is made up of municipalities (Oak Bay, City of Victoria, and Saanich), Friends of Bowker Creek Society,

School District 61, the University of Victoria, and community associations.

- The CRD is responsible for public communication related to the project.
- Additional information about the project is available on the CRD website.

BECKWITH PONDS UPDATE

The Manager of Park Plan and Development gave a presentation on Beckwith Ponds (PowerPoint on File), and the following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- Three options are being considered for managing the dams at Beckwith Pond. Option #1 would be a direct license transfer (dam retention), option #2 would be to remove the dams (drain pond), and option #3 would be partial decommissioning of the dam (2022 concept).
- There are currently no bullfrogs in the pond. The red-eared slider turtle, while present, is a non-native species. Ducks also inhabit the pond.
- The ecosystem is considered highly disturbed, with a mix of native and non-native species.
- A full dam assessment that meets Dam Safety Regulation standards would cost approximately \$200,000.
- Additional costs could be incurred for tree removal prior to dam work.
- Retaining the dam and taking over the licenses would come with a significant cost.
- Partial decommissioning appears to be the most viable option at this time.
- Saanich is engaging with Don Mann to encourage continued involvement, with the goal of preserving the pond.
- During a community engagement session in February 2023, approximately 100 residents attended. Staff communicated that partial decommissioning was the preferred option.
- Initial estimates in February 2023 suggested a one foot drop in water levels. Later studies indicated a potential four-foot reduction.
- Survey respondents in 2022 may not have been aware that their preferred solutions could result in tree loss due to impacts on the saddle dams.
- Rezoning the park from P4 (Recreation and Open Space) Zone to P4N (Natural Park) Zone would not significantly affect management options. This is generally true for parks across the municipality.
- Zoning determines land use, while bylaws govern user behavior.
- The Dam Safety Officer has advised that Don Mann may be responsible for pond drainage costs for public safety reasons, and may not be able to walk away from the license without incurring some expenses.
- Don Mann received a letter from the Province requiring a maintenance and dam safety plan by March 31. A 90 day extension to June 30 was requested and may be extended further.
- In relation to Option 2, concerns were raised about the survival of cottonwood trees, as their roots are currently penetrating the dam.
- Aqua-Tex Scientific Consulting contributed to the partial decommissioning proposal in 2022 and recommended that approach. No recent assessments have been conducted.

MAPPING EXERCISE

The committee engaged in a mapping exercise.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The Committee had a roundtable discussion, and the following was noted:

- The Committee may explore the topic of sports facilities in parks and consider ways to support their ongoing success.

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- Electric bike safety in parks was identified as a potential topic for future discussion.
 - Certain parks have exclusions on use; however, Saanich does have older trail standards.
 - Members of the public are welcome to email the general Parks inbox to suggest areas where they would like to see new trails.
 - The Committee may consider discussing the role community associations can play when park related issues arise.
 - The previous presentation on PKOLS was impactful.

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by D. Little and Seconded by K. Woodruff: "That the meeting be adjourned."

RESULT: Carried 7 TO 0

IN FAVOUR: Woodruff, Little, Chambers, Hodson, Wilkes, Bridge, Watt

OPPOSED: None

The meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

COMMITTEE CLERK