

MINUTES
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Council Chambers
April 21, 2021 at 6:02pm

Present: Councillor Rebecca Mersereau (Chair), Al-Nashir Charania, Ryan Senechal, George Klima, Tiffany Joseph, Kevin Brown, Anqian Wei and Braedan Drouillard.

Staff: Adriane Pollard, Manager of Environmental Services; Nathalie Dechaine, Manager of Community Development/Business Systems; Eva Riccius, Senior Manager Parks; Rick Hatch, Assistant Supervisor Natural Areas; Megan MacDonald, Committee Clerk.

Regrets: Carmel Thomson, Karthik Narayan and Jennifer Grant.

MINUTES

MOVED by R. Senechal, and Seconded by G. Klima: “That the Minutes of the Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee meeting held March 17, 2021, be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair provided a verbal update to the committee. The following items were discussed:

- The Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee (ENAC) motion recommending new resources for mapping the urban forest was submitted to Council.
- The resource requests for the urban forest were approved with the 2021 budget.
- A revised agenda was distributed, which removed the summary of public feedback on the Resilient Saanich Draft Principals, Goals & Objectives. The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) has not yet had the opportunity to receive the feedback. This will be presented to RSTC first, then it will be presented to the committee in May.

OVERVIEW OF SAANICH'S NATURAL AREAS

The Senior Manager of Parks and the Assistant Supervisor Natural Areas presented an overview of parks and natural areas in Saanich, the following was noted:

- Saanich is located in the Coastal Douglas Fir zone, one of the most endangered ecosystems in BC, with only 1% of land protected and over 200 species at risk.
- There has been plenty of research on the physical health and mental health benefits of nature. Natural Intelligence is a Saanich initiative to improve knowledge of nature, parks and how to improve our environment.
- Natural areas are considered spaces that are relatively undisturbed, abundant with native species that provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife. There are very few areas that are completely undisturbed, so we strive to enhance where we can.
- Saanich has over 860 hectares of park land, approximately 500 hectares (62%) of

- which is considered to be natural areas. Private landowners play an important role in the conservation, restoration and protection of our natural areas.
- A timeline of the history and growth of the Natural Areas program was discussed.
 - The primary elements of the Natural Area Program includes: invasive species management, restorations, trail work and restoration planting, community outreach and partnerships, natural area habitat structures and tree appreciation day.
 - Volunteer groups such as Pulling Together play an integral role in managing areas.
 - There are over 400 areas where invasive species are being managed by parks staff and environmental services staff. These areas will be included on a new GIS layer.
 - Herbicide use has been reduced as most species are now manually removed.
 - The Douglas Creek restoration included an entire stretch (approximately 900m) of the creek being restored, with dozens of restoration sites within riparian zone.
 - The Colquitz Creek Eastridge restoration included nature benches, split rail barriers and a wood chip trail to a viewing area. Partnerships with Saanich Parks, Peninsula Streams and Public Works have led to significant improvements and restorations along other areas of Colquitz Creek, Swan Creek and Bowker Creek.
 - Trail work and restoration planting has taken place on Lindsay Trail along the Colquitz River, Southridge Trail up Mount Doug, Glendenning Trail and Playfair Park. This includes split rail fencing to protect some sensitive environmental areas.
 - The winter 2020/2021 Natural Areas Planting Program ran from the end of October 2020 until March 2021, during this time over 30 sites were planted, including over 600 trees and more than 4000 shrubs, ferns, forbs and grasses.
 - Partnerships with volunteers, youth groups, first nations and non-profit organizations are important. These groups provide over 15,000 volunteer hours per year. Saanich provides pile pick up, onsite support, trees, tools and tarps to support these efforts.
 - Many beneficial habitat structures such as logs/boulders, bat boxes, wood duck boxes, swallow/wren boxes and Great Horned Owl nesting platforms are provided in restoration areas and natural areas to benefit native plants and animals. One of the owl nesting platforms was in use within days, and video confirmed hatchlings within it.
 - Saanich will continue working on the Natural Intelligence campaign, engaging and highlighting restoration opportunities to celebrate the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, trail closures and habitat protection as needed. Short term goals include micro restorations, drip line restorations, and pollinator plantings in parks.

In response to questions and comments from the committee, the following was noted:

- The Parks Department is primarily focused on public land. The RSTC and Planning Department are working on policies and strategies to create connectivity between expectations on public and private land on Saanich.
- Saanich is a leader in natural areas management.
- The volunteer groups play a significant role in the successful management and stewardship of natural areas in Saanich, which is greatly appreciated by all.
- It could be beneficial to see what other municipalities are doing with their natural areas.

*** N. Dechaine, E. Riccius and R. Hatch exited the meeting at 7:28 p.m. ***

*** A. Charania exited the meeting at 7:30 ***

DISCUSSION ON THE FAIRY CREEK OLD GROWTH

B. Drouillard introduced the topic of the old growth logging blockades in the Fairy Creek watershed. Saanich Council will be discussing the Fairy Creek old growth logging item on Monday. The following was noted during committee discussion:

- There are a number of complicated factors when it comes to logging old growth trees.
- Old growth trees and forests are at risk in BC, with most areas unprotected. These areas are extremely important to biodiversity and sequestering carbon.
- The area surrounding Port Renfrew and the Fairy Creek watershed are at risk of being logged, activist blockades have stopped the logging temporarily while the matter is with the British Columbia Supreme Court. The media have brought increased awareness to this situation, various blockades have been in place since late 2020.
- Logging is an essential part of the Pacheedaht First Nation's economy. Their mill can only mill old growth trees, they do not have the ability to log second or third growth.
- There may be a debt owed to the logging company for the purchase of the mill.
- The Pacheedaht First Nations have asked the public not to engage in the blockades.
- In this situation, there is not a clear way to support stopping old growth logging without causing significant financial implications to the Pacheedaht First Nations.
- The motion put forward by Councillor Taylor does mention an economic transition, however it does not go far enough to support the complex financial repercussions of completely stopping old growth logging. There is not a clear way to support this item.

*** A. Charania entered the meeting at 8:17 ***

SAANICH ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS UPDATE

The Manager of Environmental Services gave an update on the Environmental Awards. It was noted that if the awards are to proceed, Staff has recommended that the nomination period be open for 4 weeks instead of 6. The committee consented to a shorter nomination period.

ROUNDTABLE UPDATES

The following updates were noted:

- The 2021 budget included many climate action resource request approvals. There were approximately 2.6 million dollars in new resources related to climate change, including new staff positions and active transportation network upgrades.
- The resource request that the committee supported for tree mapping and funding for a new staff position (Manager of Urban Forest) were also approved.
- The CRD Solid Waste Strategy went to CRD Environment Committee. Based on the feedback that was received from the community, it was suggested that more aggressive approaches to reducing waste should be taken. The strategy has been revised based on committee and public feedback, it will next go to the CRD board.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is Thursday May 19th, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Councillor Mersereau, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary