

MINUTES
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams
June 16, 2021 at 6:07 p.m.

Present: Councillor Rebecca Mersereau (Chair) (6:53), Kevin Brown (Acting Chair), George Klima, Ryan Senechal, Al-Nashir Charania, Jennifer Grant, Braedan Drouillard, Karthik Narayan.

Guests: Dr. Lorien Nesbitt, Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia; Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Director of Research, Oceans Asia.

Staff: Nathalie Dechaine, Manager of Community Development/Business Systems; Thomas Munson, Senior Environmental Planner; Megan MacDonald, Committee Clerk.

Regrets: Anqian Wei and Tiffany Joseph.

MINTUES

MOVED by R. Senechal and Seconded by K. Narayan: "That the Minutes of the Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee meeting held May 19, 2021, be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS

K. Brown, Acting Chair, noted that Councillor Mersereau is away due to a Council meeting schedule conflict, she will join the committee meeting when the Council meeting is over.

ACCESSIBLE URBAN FORESTS

Dr. Lorien Nesbitt, Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC) presented information on creating just and accessible urban forests. The following was noted:

- Urban Green Equity is defined as fair access to and governance of urban forests, regardless of differentiating factors, such as socioeconomic status, racialization, cultural background or demographics.
- Some benefits of urban forests include increased biodiversity, reduced flooding, reduced air pollution, CO2 sequestration, climate change adaptation, increased property values and community investment. There are also numerous health benefits for the public including physical health, emotional health and lower stress.
- Public appreciation of urban forests is growing as people become more aware of the benefits of urban forests including trees, shrubs and urban gardens.
- There have been studies that show consistent evidence of unequitable distribution of urban canopy, with positive associations to income and education.
- Recent analysis of the distribution of the urban forest in Vancouver has shown that neighborhoods with residential instability, material deprivation, or ethnic concentration experienced lower access to public parks, lower residential exposure to vegetation and water and higher residential exposure to buildings and pavement.

- There is building evidence that access to urban vegetation is unequitable, higher real estate values and higher income areas have a higher concentration of urban forest.
- Some cities such as Vancouver are beginning to address urban green inequities.
- Green gentrification is defined as the physical or psychological displacement of marginalized residents due to improvements to urban forests that increase cost of living or create a sense of exclusion and barriers to urban forest.
- Our relationships with nature influences our culture and vice versa. Biocultural diversity provides a lens to understand urban green equity, a framework to address conceptual challenges, and a case via which to examine green equity approaches.
- A biocultural diversity case study of Vancouver highlighted four of many unique discourses/expressions, which are:
 - Ecosystem Services & “Vacouverism”: This expression is recognized as the dominant discourse in many cities in the world, green is viewed as good; nature provides services to humans, often along with sustainability branding and identity.
 - Indigenous Reciprocity & Resistance: This is a reciprocal relationship with nature, a holistic view of the urban ecosystem where nature and humans are viewed as one. All beings have rights and responsibilities, and opportunities for intercultural learning exist. Examples in Vancouver are Stanley Park and UBC Farm.
 - Asian Aesthetics: Scenic representations of Asian culture such as the Dr. Sun Yet-Sen Traditional Chinese Garden, which also provide opportunities for learning, some examples are modeled after Ming Dynasty gardens.
 - The Three Sisters: A traditional Mayan farming practice of reciprocity and care, using the three sisters, corn, beans and squash. The Tal A'xin: Maya in Exile Garden was established by Mayan refugee families in the mid 1990's, and offers intercultural learning, workshops, volunteer opportunities and knowledge sharing.
- Mosaic governance may be a path towards equity. Multicultural cities have high biocultural diversity and an interesting urban nature that grows and changes. Diversity is typically absent from dominant urban forestry discourses.
- Recognition justice and recognition equity acknowledges the fundamental value of what is other than your own. This is the recognition of the diversity of people, communities and their (biocultural) experiences, and the importance of their participation in urban forest processes such as decision making and stewardship.
- A mosaic of governance approaches across the urban landscape supports diverse practices, cultures, people and institutions including an institutional commitment to context-sensitive governance. There is an important leadership role for institutions such as municipal/regional governments in this process to provide coordination and resources while allowing for flexible governance.

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

- A cost/benefit analysis on biodiversity which includes health benefits, qualitative information, and quantifiable objectives would be helpful. There are economic benefits to appropriate management of urban forests.
- Some studies suggests that lower income populations are more likely to experience health related benefits from contact with nature than higher income populations.
- Urban green equity is a way to efficiently distribute ecosystem services where they are most needed. Finding a way to encourage the population to interact with nature is important. Reducing barriers to access urban forests is difficult but necessary.
- There are many metrics for analysis of the health benefits of nature. In terms of having people active in their neighborhood, trees for shade are important. Restoration in nature can happen in a city park where there is less traffic noise and more healing.
- There is an intentional process of present moment awareness called forest bathing, which can be done in an urban forest environment, the directions given are restorative.
- There are studies that look at the time required for positive health benefits in natural

- versus unnatural settings, both provide benefits.
- Having residents take stewardship roles is extremely beneficial for all.
 - Some of the barriers to mosaic government are consistency and connection. There may be hesitation from levels of government to give rights to one group as those rights may lead to inequity for another. There are often barriers to people and organizations.
 - Access to intersectional data is often a barrier in highlighting inequities while understanding diversity. There is demographic data missing.

*** Councillor Mersereau joined the meeting at 6:54 and took over as Chair ***

MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Director of Research for Oceans Asia, presented information on marine plastic pollution. The following was noted:

- Oceans Asia is a Hong Kong based marine conservation organization specializing in investigating, monitoring and researching various ocean related activities including illegal fishing operations, conservation efforts and marine plastic pollution.
- The Oceans Asia team has been researching plastic pollution on remote islands near Hong Kong. The beaches are boat access only, which means the plastic on the beaches is oceanic waste, not left behind by visitors. Beaches in Saanich are typically quite clean, remote beaches are generally quite bad, littered with plastic pollution.
- Aerial shots were taken with a drone to monitor the accumulation over time and seasonal changes. Samples of micro plastics were taken regularly as well. In February 2020 the team began finding masks, there were 70 masks collected over a 100 metre of beach in less than one hour. They have now found up to 156 masks in an hour.
- The research team has been working to find out approximately how many masks are entering the oceans due to COVID-19. Marine plastic pollution is an issue, the recent report highlights personal protective equipment (PPE) and plastic waste from COVID.
- There are many discarded masks around Saanich, most of which will enter the ocean whole, or break down to micro plastics and enter the waterway from there.
- The PPE market exploded during the pandemic, almost half a billion masks are produced per day. A conservative estimate is that there were about 52 billion masks produced in 2020. Around 3% of plastic that is produced enters the ocean. This means that approximately 1.56 billion masks entered the ocean in 2020. Masks are a small fraction of the marine plastic pollution problem. This has a devastating impact on marine wildlife and ecosystems.
- Plastic can entangle animals, causing many issues or death. Large gobs of sea gear sweep the bottom of the ocean, harming delicate species. Plastic does not go away.
- Masks break down into micro plastics. A single mask with exposure to sunlight and wave action/movement will release up to 173,000 microfibers a day. This plastic bio accumulates and bio magnifies in predators, including humans.
- Micro plastic has been found everywhere, including in sea spray, deep in the ocean trenches, all the way to the snow on the top of Mount Everest. Action at every possible level is needed to address the serious threat posed by marine plastic pollution.
- Masks are hard to recycle as they are made of multiple types of materials. Lots of work needs to be done, including a deeper understanding of how to tackle the issue. While beach cleanups are great, however they are not the solution. If the bath is overflowing it is important to turn off the water before grabbing the mop.
- At an individual level, there are sustainable and renewable options to almost all single use plastic items, everybody needs to reach for reusable items when possible.
- There are technology options such as sustainable fibers and compostable masks.
- Governments need to foster and support initiatives to step away from single use items.

- The government could increase fines for littering and dumping, adopt policies to encourage sustainability, as well as pass legislation that requires producers to establish end of life disposal policies. We can design public spaces and the urban environment to decrease littering and increase effective disposal of waste.
- Wildlife safe garbage bins are essential to stop animals from tearing apart the bin.

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

- Some important steps that can be taken at the local level are regulatory approaches, such as banning specific items one by one, or from design angle, such as identify and address littering hot spots. One targeted way to solve waste issues is installing properly designed waste bins, a multifaceted approach will be the most effective.
- The Provincial and Federal government have made announcements that they plan to make aggressive changes to ban the use of single use plastics.
- There is a global phenomenon of missing plastic, scientists do not know where the plastic has gone, which is concerning.
- Saanich does not have an audit program to monitor where waste comes from.
- Dumping of household garbage in parks is an ongoing issue. This needs to be looked at from a regional level to ensure that everybody has affordable and accessible disposal options. If there are barriers to proper disposal people may dump garbage.
- OceansAsia has done investigations on garbage that washed up on the beach, where the polluter was identified and changes were made to solve pollution problems.
- Cradle to cradle design is important, designing products that are recyclable encourages reuse and recycling. A circular approach to reuse and recycle is important.
- Waste management measurements and audits should be implemented by all.
- End of life recycling should be a normal procedure for producers/sellers of that item, such as a shoe recycling program being implemented by stores that sell shoes.
- Saanich has recently implemented a zero waste strategy.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT PRINCIPLES, GOALS & OBJECTIVES FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Senior Environmental Planner gave an update on the Summary of Public Feedback on the Draft Principles, Goals & Objectives for the Environmental Policy Framework. The following was noted:

- The Draft Principles, Goals & Objectives for the Environmental Policy Framework were finalized, and the public engagement process has now concluded as well.
- Best practices for transparency and inclusion were implemented despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. There was a virtual open house, mail outs, and targeted stakeholder engagement took place, as well as ads in the newspaper, e-newsletters, posters, e-bulletins and delivering materials to senior's centers.
- A consultant will summarize all of the comments into a detailed report for Council.
- Comments on the draft vision included improving the clarity of the terms, such as what are measurable improvements, the definition of "collaborative" and clarify time lines.
- There is a need to seek more feedback from First Nations. Mail outs and requests for feedback were sent to W̱SÁNEĆ nations, but no responses were received. The First Nations representative position on the RSTC was vacant for most of the meetings.
- It is important to identify how we can protect, preserve and restore natural areas in Saanich while increasing density. Public land and private land both need to be involved in the process, with clear expectations and regulations for both.
- 80% of respondents supported the draft principles and goals. Other areas to consider would be preservation and protection of greenspace and biodiversity. Saanich was a leader in protecting along rivers, streams and corridors. We need to look at what was

done then, and what we need to protect now.

- A clear definition of restoration and sustainable living should be established, as these items may be different to different people. Reducing environmental impacts and reducing tree loss, is extremely important. The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) will likely have the opportunity to comment on the new Urban Forest Strategy.
- Ideally the Resilient Saanich process would be based on inclusion, equity, balance and empowerment for all cultural groups in Saanich.
- Feedback included that there could be more links to the Climate Plan, One Planet Saanich, and the climate emergency. All documents should work together to achieve common goals. The Resilient Saanich strategy should integrate all plans and policies.
- It is crucial to increase and improve the enforcement of existing regulations.
- Recognizing the role of the development industry and the impact of development on biodiversity in built up urban areas may help us to leverage the industry as partners. There are opportunities to enhance urban areas when development takes place.
- Connectivity between areas of biodiversity is a key concept in biodiversity conservation. Green hubs with corridors and connections between hubs, such as was suggested in the Saanich Green Belt Proposal would be ideal.
- A state of biodiversity report could establish a baseline of where we are at and provide information about how we are progressing with the goals.
- The objectives could be improved by applying the SMART theory. This acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. For RSTC this would mean more clarity on achievements and goals, more specificity on indicators and measurements, or describing the costs to achieve goals and objectives.

ROUNDTABLE UPDATES

A committee roundtable discussion took place, the following was noted:

- A committee meeting will be held in the near future to hold the near future to review applications for the Environmental Awards.
- The committee recommendation to recognize the 50 year anniversary of the Saanich Green Belt Proposal was recently supported by Council.
- The committee regularly does not meet during the summer. The next regularly scheduled committee meeting will take place in September.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is Wednesday, September 15, 2021.

Councillor Mersereau, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary