

MINUTES
SPECIAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Council Chambers and via MS Teams
June 15, 2022 at 6:03 p.m.

Present: Councillor Karen Harper (Chair), Ryan Senechal, Jennifer Grant, Sarah Anderson, and Kaden Callenberg

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager, Parks; Rebecca Newlove, Manager of Sustainability; and Megan MacDonald, Senior Committee Clerk

Regrets: Spencer Gillis, Kurban Ali Keshvani and Braedan Drouillard

MINUTES

MOVED by S. Anderson and Seconded by K. Callenberg: “That the Minutes of the Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee meeting held April 20, 2022 be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

CHAIRS REMARKS

The Chair gave a verbal updated on the following:

- The Environment and Natural Areas Awards will be presented at a Committee of the Whole meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Monday June 20th. ENAC members are invited to attend.
- The committee will not meet during the summer months (July/August), however there may be an informal field trip to a park in August. Details will be sent once confirmed with staff.

NATURAL GAS USE IN NEW HOMES - BC ENERGY STEP CODE AND CARBON POLLUTION STANDARDS

Dr. Deborah Curry of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment presented on the health harms inherent to fracking for liquified natural gas (LNG) in northeastern BC, the health impacts of natural gas appliance use, and the local health harms caused by climate change. The following was noted:

- Natural gas is made of 70-90% methane and when it is burned it creates CO₂.
- Methane causes 86 times the warming effect of CO₂ in the atmosphere over a 20 year period. Satellite imaging shows emissions are much higher than reported.
- Each fracking well uses 10 million litres of fresh water (4 Olympic swimming pools), and over 1,000 different chemicals including known or suspected carcinogens, reproductive and developmental toxicants, and endocrine disruptors.
- There are over 35,000 fracking wells scattered across northeastern BC as of July 2021.
- The health impacts of fracking include risks to pregnancy, higher incidence of brain tumors, asthma, headaches, leukemia in children and mental health issues.

- Gas appliance use releases NO₂ into the home (studies show this creates an increase in asthma attacks in children).
- The environmental impacts of climate change have escalated recently, wildfires, extreme heat, flooding/mudslides have become more extreme. This furthers mental health effects to many.

The following was noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- Municipalities can assist with this urgent issue by passing bylaws to reduce the use of LNG and encouraging the use of electric heat pumps rather than gas heating.
- The data on health impacts to Northern BC communities is limited due to a lack of funding for the scientific community.
- Most studies on health impacts involve cities in the United States, where there is a larger congregation of people affected by this issue.

Salome Waters and Dave Thompson of the Saanich Eco Advocates presented on Low Carbon New Homes in Saanich, the following was noted during the presentation:

- An overview of the Saanich Climate Plan goals, Council and staff were commended for having a robust and detailed plan.
- 35% of Saanich community GHG emissions are from buildings, most emissions are from space heating and water heating. We need to reduce emissions from buildings to achieve our Climate Plan goals.
- Buildings can be heated by clean electricity; electric heat pumps are cost effective.
- Other BC cities have implemented Low-Carbon Energy System (LCES) Bylaws.
- It was suggested that Saanich should implement an LCES bylaw, as they are legal and viable, they will reduce GHG emissions, and they will prevent many new homes from being locked into decades of future emissions.

The following was noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- The Provincial Government has indicated they will be passing legislation related to Step-Code requirements soon.
- More work needs to be done with existing housing and retrofits, but the focus of this is on new builds.

During Committee discussion the following was noted:

- Requiring low carbon and zero carbon energy in new buildings is the most effective way for the industry to reduce emissions, with less cost implications.

The Manager of Sustainability, presented on Saanich's proposed approach towards the BC Energy Step Code and Carbon Pollution Standards. The following was noted:

- Staff presented in front of Council in February 2022, to outline the project background, purpose of engagement and timeline for presenting the outcomes and recommendations to Council.
- Saanich is working with the City of Victoria, the CRD and the District of Central Saanich to lead this work.
- The City of Victoria, District of Saanich and District of Central Saanich have adopted the BC Energy Step Code.

- There have been surveys and workshops completed with varying industry leaders.
- The Step Code will come into effect through the BC Building Code and the expectation is that the Code update will take place December 2022.
- 77% of new builds are installing gas heating.
- By 2030 all new space and water heating equipment sold and installed in BC will be at least 100% efficient.
- By 2024, 2027 and 2030, the Province is introducing different phases just like the Step Code.
- The feedback from general industry has been that there is an agreement that a reduction of carbon emissions needs to take place as well as there is a desire for regional consistency and simplicity.
- Consumer understanding of these initiatives is lagging.

The following was noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- The costs associated with progressing through the step code are quite onerous on developers if not for the incentive funding.
- On Part 9 buildings there is ample retrofit funding available.
- The preferred approach for staff was to introduce bylaws in 2023 after the provincial legislation has come into effect at the end of 2022.

During Committee discussion the following was noted:

- There are concerns over imposing undo hardship on the housing affordability crisis.

MOVED by J. Grant and Seconded by R. Senechal: “That Environment and Natural Areas recommends that Council support the proposed approach to implement the Carbon Pollution Standards and reduce GHG emissions of new buildings to net zero by 2025.”

The Motion was then PUT and CARRIED

UPDATE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES TRANSITION TO PARKS DIVISION

The Senior Manager, Parks gave an update on the transition of the Environmental Services division to the Parks Department.

- This change provides the opportunity to grow the programs for stewardship and regulatory review between public and private lands in the District.
- Amalgamation of these divisions will lead to process efficiencies and improvements.
- Parks staff working with private landowners may encourage better stewardship.

COMMITTEE ROUNDTABLE

Committee members were provided an opportunity to discuss topics of interest, the following was noted during discussion:

- The BC Coroner's Service released a report titled: Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021. The results were alarming as 619 people died related to the heat dome, and 98% of deaths occurred indoors.

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- High density urban areas with more heat absorbing surfaces were the hardest hit by the heat. The report reflects on the importance of urban forests and vegetation.
 - There may be benefit updating the Tree Protection Bylaw to include a minimum tree canopy coverage through development. A request for further information on the Tree Protection Bylaw was made. Staff will provide a presentation at a future meeting.
 - The Urban Forestry Strategy review is underway, a draft report on the State of Saanich's Urban Forest will be ready for public input later this year. An interactive mapping tool will be provided to allow the public to identify ecosystems, provide comments on areas of interest, and identify areas where more trees are needed.
 - Committee members would like to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to the Naturescape Program to allow enhancement and expanded programming in future.

WORKING GROUPS ON STEWARDSHIP

Due to time constraints this item was not discussed during the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date will be determined at a later date.

Councillor Harper, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Megan McDonald, Senior Committee Clerk