

MINUTES
RESILIENT SAANICH TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Via Microsoft Teams

May 24, 2022

Present: Councillor Rebecca Mersereau (Council Liaison); Tory Stevens (Chair); Kevin Brown; Tim Ennis; Purnima Govindarajulu; Stewart Guy (Telephone); Chris Lowe; Brian Wilkes; Bev Windjack

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager of Parks; Thomas Munson, Senior Environmental Planner; Katie Turner, Park Stewardship Coordinator; Nancy Chaggar, Senior Committee Clerk

Regrets: Jeremy Gye

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m.

2. **TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT**

Councillor Mersereau read the Territorial Acknowledgement and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement.

3. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

MOVED by T. Ennis and Seconded by B. Wilkes: "That the Agenda for the May 24, 2022 Resilient Saanich Technical Committee meeting be approved as amended."

- Add 'OCP Update' to Councillor Mersereau's updates
- Add 'Receipt of Correspondence'
- Remove Environmental Policy Framework working group update

CARRIED

4. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

MOVED by K. Brown and Seconded by C. Lowe: "That the minutes of the April 26, 2022, Resilient Saanich Technical Committee meeting be adopted as amended."

CARRIED

5. **RECEIPT OF CORRESPONDENCE**

MOVED by B. Windjack and Seconded by T. Ennis: "That the correspondence be received for information."

CARRIED

6. **DIAMOND HEAD FIELD TRIP DEBRIEF**

B. Wilkes provided an update on site visits that occurred on May 8th and 10th with

Committee members, staff and Diamond Head consultants (DHC) and noted the following:

- The purpose of these site visits was to demonstrate risks and impacts to biodiversity.
- During site visits, the groups looked at: sites with unprotected species at risk; off-leash dog damage; deer damage; fenced versus un-fenced spaces; extent of invasive species in various parks; potential for biodiversity connections in neighbourhoods; and biodiversity enhancement in non-park natural areas.
- Current mapping discrepancies were communicated with DHC.
- These meetings provided an opportunity to clarify to the consultants what the Committee is looking for: understanding the current state of biodiversity and its risks/threats, and the delivery of a Report that is original and unique to Saanich which uncovers the unvarnished truth.
- Provincial standards should be used when assessing ecological conditions.
- Active management is required in order to protect natural areas.
- DHC will return for additional site visits.

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

- Committee members emphasized the need for Provincial standards to be used for assessing conditions rather than DHC's own methods.
- It was expressed that DHC may choose not use Provincial Standards in certain circumstances because it may be limiting in an urban setting.
- The groups found evidence of damage, possibly as a result of dogs running through the underbrush, at Glendenning Trail; *Friends of Mount Doug Park* have written to the District with concerns about the impacts of off-leash dogs.
- DHC will attend the June 28th RSTC meeting to provide an update on the mapping review.
- Through staff, the Chair will request a table of content for the State of Biodiversity Report from DHC prior to the content review which is due to occur at the August 23rd RSTC meeting.
- DHC is working towards a detailed scope of work as outlined in their contract.
- Staff indicated they may be able to share the contract with Committee members.
- It was conveyed that the contract cannot be changed.
- Aqua-Tex Consulting provided examples of their work to demonstrate riparian areas which could be used as corridor; DHC has indicated they are looking for these types of spaces.

7. RSTC WORKING GROUP REPORTS

C. Lowe provided a preamble for a Motion from the Stewardship Working Group; the following was noted:

- The consensus is that stewardship is largely focused on park lands.
- Staff don't have capacity to facilitate stewardship on private and non-park lands.
- Additional resources will be required to proactively work with homeowners to steward their land and adjacent non-park/public lands.

MOVED by C. Lowe and Seconded by S. Guy: "That the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee recommends that Saanich staff work with Resilient Saanich Technical Committee representatives to develop a business case for a new dedicated enhanced private and non-park-public land stewardship coordinator staff position in anticipation of the 2023 Saanich budget planning process."

- The Stewardship working group is pulling together work that has been completed over the past year in order to prepare clear/formal recommendations which will come forward soon.

- Staff, Council, and the RSTC alike will have to balance financial commitments and priorities as the new budget planning cycle nears.
- Any new staffing requests require strong justification and planning.
- Enhanced stewardship will not come free.
- It was prompted that Bryn White had presented on establishment of a local conservation fund as a model to support enhanced stewardship.
- It was suggested that the Motion be tabled until after the staff presentation on Parks Stewardship.
- It was expressed that the stewardship fund may be presented as a separate Motion, as the existing Motion suggests it is for a business case.
- A Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is yet to come; ideas such as the conservation fund may be included as an action in the Strategy.
- The specific wording of 'coordinator' is not set in stone.

The Motion was then Put and TABLED

8. STEWARDSHIP IN SAANICH PARKS

The Park Stewardship Coordinator provided an overview on stewardship in Saanich parks and noted the following:

- Partnerships between community volunteers and District staff is vital to the environment and community.
- The District's official policy for environmental stewardship states: "Foster and support public awareness, engagement, and participation in community environmental stewardship initiatives".
- Various participants and partners are involved in park stewardship.
- The *Pulling Together* volunteer program includes over 200 lead stewards and volunteers who perform invasive species management and habitat restoration.
- The *Park Ambassador* volunteer program is comprised of 13 volunteers at Mount Douglas Park who provide education and outreach to the community. They contribute over 500 hours of volunteer time per year.
- Programs have seen steady growth in the last 20 years, other than a downfall in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Many youth groups and schools are involved with stewardship in Saanich; this provides a good opportunity for knowledge sharing and inter-generational learning.
- Community outreach and education is a key component of the programs.
- There is increased interest and demand for volunteering.
- Succession planning is key to sustain these programs for the long term.
- The *Pulling Together* program is at capacity and has a waitlist of groups wanting to start new projects.

In response to the Parks Stewardship presentation the following discussions ensued:

- One goal of the *Park Ambassador* program is meaningful engagement with First Nations. Staff have facilitated training sessions with various First Nations community members to deliver their perspectives and ideas to program volunteers.
- The programs are limited due to coordination capacity. The Parks Stewardship Coordinator role is at full capacity and additional resources are required to expand the programs.
- Volunteer coordination requires onboarding of volunteers, as well as project planning and using best practices for a thoughtful approach to stewardship.
- There are various advocacy and stewardship groups in the community. Staff partner with some of these groups on certain projects.
- Staff work with the volunteer community to build capacity on monitoring and research projects.

- There is a gap for new non-park high value sites in the *Pulling Together* program.
- The current involvement of schools is due to keen individuals who take initiative. Staff hope to have a more fulsome discussion with District level staff about possible opportunities for stewardship partnerships.

CONTINUATION OF MOTION DISCUSSION – STEWARDSHIP WORKING GROUP

- It was suggested that the wording of the Motion be changed to ‘position’ as it is to develop a business case.
- It was suggested that wording be added in the Motion that highlights the fact that the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is coming soon.

MOVED by C. Lowe and seconded by T. Ennis: “That the Motion be amended to revise the wording as follows:

- Delete ‘coordinator’
- Add to the end ‘and to be ready to respond rapidly to recommendations anticipated in the upcoming Biodiversity Conservation Strategy’.”

Main Motion as Amended:

“That the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) recommends that Saanich staff work with RSTC representatives to develop a business case for a new dedicated enhanced private and non-park-public land stewardship staff position in anticipation of the 2023 Saanich budget planning process and to be ready to respond rapidly to recommendations anticipated in the upcoming Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.”

CARRIED

9. MILESTONE 3 WORKPLAN

The Chair led a discussion on the work plan for Milestone 3 and noted the following:

- One of the final tasks in Milestone 2 is to draft a Milestone 3 work plan.
- The Chair suggested that a working group would be in order to review Milestone 3.
- The big piece that needs to be finalized in Milestone 3 is the Strategy.
- More detail about the environmental portion of the Climate Plan is required, in addition to finalizing the enhanced stewardship program.
- The Milestone 3 Working Group will be comprised of: Chair, Tory Stevens; Kevin Brown; Brian Wilkes; and Councillor Mersereau (to help with process).

The Chair led a discussion on the Secretariat position and noted the following:

- There is support for a Motion to put out a contract to hire a stand-alone person to help the Committee.

MOVED by T. Stevens and Seconded by K. Brown: “That the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) recommends that the District of Saanich hire a third party consultant to work with the RSTC in writing its Environmental Policy Framework recommendations and enhanced stewardship report.”

- There seems to be discrepancy across the Committee in terms of the Environmental Policy Framework (EPF) and what remaining work is intended.
- It was suggested that the Motion be tabled until the Milestone 3 workplan discussion occurs.

- It was suggested that the Motion be amended by indicating that the Secretariat/consultant will work with the Committee to help with decision making around EPF recommendations and the enhanced stewardship report.
- The Secretariat is someone who may help with document management, calling meetings, setting dates, summarizing actions and discussions, performing data collation, tracking actions, and helping with moving towards timely decisions.
- It is unclear what is meant by “work with the RSTC in writing its EPF recommendations”; it was understood that this work is substantially complete and that the draft document would go to staff for implementation.
- The EPF outline has been completed substantially but it hasn’t been filled in completely: it is missing input from First Nations, and some sections indicate that they are yet to be written. More work is required before the EPF goes to staff.
- It is unclear how the Secretariat would help the Committee to make decisions.
- It was suggested that the Committee may wish to write the scope of work for the Secretariat role.
- The Stewardship Working Group has written good information; it was expressed that members haven’t found adequate time to compile the work.
- It was suggested that this written information may be provided to the consultant who will work on the Strategy as they will be providing the final recommendations.
- A scope of work for the Secretariat role will be drafted by a Committee member, and circulated for review, input, and consensus in the next few days.
- The Committee is to discuss the matter by email and a Motion will be brought to the next meeting, if necessary.

The Motion was then Put and TABLED

10. **PARKS UPDATES**

The Senior Manager of Parks provided updates from the division and noted the following:

Parks Division Staffing Update:

- The Environmental Services group has joined the Parks division since a couple of weeks.
- The work of Environmental Services staff continues to be the same at this point.
- Staff will take some time to learn about each other’s work and work flows, and then will start looking at streamlining processes to find opportunities for growth.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was noted:

- The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy will provide some guidance on how to deal with private land management. If some form of Environmental Development Permit Application is implemented, then Parks will organize work processes accordingly.
- All functions that Environmental Services fulfilled under Planning (such as Streamside Development Permit Applications and reviewing potential for conservation covenants on private property) will continue.
- Private lands will not be left unattended with this change.
- This change was the CAO’s decision based on the Planning department’s need to focus on land use planning (housing), and to look at efficiencies between Parks and Environmental Services as there are a number of overlapping theme areas.

Urban Forest Strategy Review Update:

- Diamond Head Consulting (DHC) is performing data analysis using CRD mapping and analyzing the integrity of data and differences in canopy cover.
- It was anticipated that the first round of public engagement would occur in June;

however, DHC wants to complete a draft State of Urban Forest report prior to public engagement.

- Over the summer, DHC will host an interactive map for the community to go online and make notations about why particular areas are significant or need more trees.
- Discussions have occurred about a joint consultation meeting with First Nations around conservation and biodiversity.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was noted:

- The RSTC will have an opportunity to engage with DHC on the Urban Forest Strategy Review during information sessions that will be offered.

11. COUNCIL LIAISON UPDATES

Councillor Mersereau provided updates on the following topics:

In-person Meetings:

- Committees now have the option to meet in-person.
- There is no option for hybrid meetings; they must be either in-person or virtual due to logistical reasons.
- It is at the Chair's discretion to determine how the RSTC will meet moving forward.

Marine Shoreline Mapping:

- Earlier this year, the RSTC passed a Motion recommending that Council include funding for mapping of the Marine Shoreline in the budget.
- It was confirmed that this funding was approved and included in the budget.

First Nations Relations:

- The letter that is being drafted for Eric Pelkey to invite feedback from the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) Environment Committee will come from the RSTC Chair.
- Discussions have occurred about inviting the WLC Environment Committee for a joint workshop with RSTC members to discuss biodiversity and trees. This may be a form of engagement for two important processes that are currently underway. Councillor Mersereau will provide further updates on this.
- Saanich sent letters to Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations to advise of corporate initiatives that are underway, including the work done by RSTC, in order to invite participation. Councillor Mersereau will report back on any responses received.

Official Community Plan (OCP) Update:

- The OCP is a guiding document that articulates the vision for the future through policy.
- Saanich's OCP is from 2008, and is recommended to be updated every five years.
- This will be a strategic/focused update of the OCP.
- The update has been endorsed by Council and work will occur over the next year.
- The OCP is the highest order policy document in Saanich, and the Environmental Policy Framework is a lens for operations across the Municipality.
- Councillor Mersereau raised the risk of not coordinating these two pieces of work with staff. A commitment was made to keep all parties informed as these projects move forward.

The following discussions ensued in response to the OCP Update:

- The RSTC's work is critical to the upcoming OCP updates. It will be important to ensure its outputs are integrated into the OCP as a fundamental piece.
- It was expressed that the most important elements to share with Council are the principles and goals, and the context that has been written by the RSTC.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

- The June 28th RSTC meeting marks the current Chair's last meeting for its six month term. Committee members are to think about who they wish to nominate as Chair for the next term.
- The Chair will email the group about action items coming out of this meeting.
- The principles and goals of the draft Environmental Policy Framework will be sent to Council.

12. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from B. Windjack, the meeting adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for June 28, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

Tory Stevens, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary