

MINUTES
RESILIENT SAANICH TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Via Microsoft Teams
September 28, 2023 at 6:02 p.m.

Present: Tory Stevens (Chair); Councillor Zac de Vries; Kevin Brown; Tim Ennis; Jeremy Gye; Purnima Govindarajulu; Stewart Guy; Chris Lowe; and Brian Wilkes

Guests: Mike Coulthard and Alison Kwan of Diamond Head Consulting (DHC); Shannon Berch; Sarah Cooke; David Fraser; Cori Barraclough; Patrick Lucey; Paige Erickson-McGee; Lynn Husted; Eric Higgs; Cara Gibson; Claudia Copley and Del Meidinger

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager of Parks; Thomas Munson, Senior Environmental Planner; and Megan MacDonald, Senior Committee Clerk

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

Councillor Z. de Vries read the Territorial Acknowledgement and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOVED by B. Wilkes and Seconded by K. Brown: “That the Agenda for the September 28, 2023, Resilient Saanich Technical Committee meeting be approved.”

CARRIED

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by C. Lowe and Seconded by P. Govindarajulu: “That the minutes of the August 17, 2023 Resilient Saanich Technical Committee meeting be adopted.”

CARRIED

WORKSHOP WITH TECHNICAL EXPERTS AND DIAMOND HEAD CONSULTING ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

M. Coulthard and A. Kwan of Diamond Head Consulting (DHC) gave an overview of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) Draft Recommendations (document on file). The following was noted:

- A brief overview of the State of Biodiversity and related content and context was given.
- The BCS contains a number of recommendations, there are eight strategic goals.
- Organization of the goals is difficult as many affect multiple theme areas. They are presented in a numerical list; however this does not imply importance or significance.

The Senior Manager of Parks provided the following update on the recent Provincial implementation of the *Housing Act*:

- The Province has recently mandated that Saanich reach 4610 new housing units in the next 5 years, which works out to approximately 900 units per year. Currently Saanich averages about 300 units per year, this is a big goal to reach.
- Mayor and Council are embracing the targets.
- A cross departmental project group has been established to change processes to streamline development. Speed and efficiency will be increased.
- The BCS will need to be aligned with the new housing targets to ensure success.
- Changes may need to be made to the BCS if some aspects create too much conflict.

The following was noted during committee discussion:

- Amending the language to ensure clarity around research of all species versus just that on plants in the corridors is important.
- Having a strategy to acquire and protect natural areas in the habitat corridors is critical.
- Downzoning is one potential tool that local governments can use to ensure that zoning is compatible with the objectives in the identified protection zones.
- Prioritizing property acquisition in riparian areas may be the most useful way to protect flood zones and biodiversity. These areas are the most valuable in terms of protection.
- Downzoning can devalue land; much thought is needed if it is to be considered.
- Protecting current natural areas through acquisition should be the top priority. Corridors, networks and connectivity are important; however, recreating natural landscape along side development needs to be considered as equally important.
- Riparian area protections could be strengthened. The Province mandates standards, however these could be improved upon in many ways including mandating restoration of areas which were previously not riparian through the development permit process.
- Considerations need to be made if mandated restorations are put in place as cost can be prohibitive and long-term success is difficult if spaces are not maintained regularly.
- Identifying priority areas then focusing energy and attention to restoring them really well.
- Ensuring goals are realistic and practical will allow for higher rates of success.
- Areas planted with native species may need more maintenance than ornamental gardens. This could be a barrier to many members of the public.
- A mechanism needs to be in place to monitor areas on an ongoing basis to determine whether a restoration is successful, and to ensure long term success.
- Developers allocating some land as a natural area is a common practice, it could be a little spot with a Garry Oak ecosystem, if not maintained these areas deteriorate.
- There is a potential that the Province will mandate specific measures to increase missing middle housing. This may include additional density on single family lots.
- More foreshore marine development permit regulations need to be included such as stronger setback regulations. The flexibility to consider current high tide line as well as future considerations for sea level rise and modelling is important.

The following was noted related to Objective 4, enhancing biodiversity on public lands:

- There will be a section of the BCS which directs readers to the UFS for specifics related to trees to ensure consistency.
- People are willing to learn and often hungry for information. Community members, volunteers, students, they want to be doing restoration on site. Providing ways for them to implement restoration is low hanging fruit with plenty of meaningful opportunities.
- It is important to acknowledge all the work that is currently done by stewardship groups on public land. There is value in discovering the best way to encourage these groups.
- Choosing the proper native plants for a location when planning and planting is necessary. Ensure that micro-scale plantings always support the local food web.

The following was noted related to Objective 5, encouraging initiatives on private lands:

- Conservation tax incentive programs could be advocated for at the Provincial level to amend the *Local Government Act*. This would allow local governments to implement a Natural Area Protection Tax Exemption Program (NAPTEP) similar to that in the Gulf Islands. When large properties are developed they are able to register a natural state covenant on part of the land in exchange for a tax exemption.
- Discouraging lawns and green grass would contribute to water conservation. There could potentially be incentives for those who are willing to convert lawns to gardens.
- The Metchosin Foundation is a community group of community benefactors who are interested in nature protection that contribute financially to protection of local areas. It may be a good idea to see if the Saanich Legacy Foundation could do something similar.
- Work should be done to promote green shores related initiatives, which could include incentives for removing existing hard structures.
- Natural state covenants can be expensive, especially management and maintenance.
- Municipal natural assets mapping is a valuable tool that should be utilized to inform what value is present and what it would cost to replace potential lost ecosystem services.

The following was noted during committee discussion on overall priorities:

- The policy and recommendations could be improved by a better link to the science and strategic thought behind them. This connection will highlight the necessity for the document and monitoring progress on the goals.
- Preserving organic soil and biology should be more of a priority during development.
- The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration has brought the urgency of restoring ecosystems to the attention of many.
- Partnerships with universities could be explored to help inform staff and community members with a wealth of knowledge that is current and regional.
- Saanich Peninsula Environmental Coalition recently put together a Bioregional Framework for the Saanich Peninsula municipalities with their OCP updates. The information contained in this document could be a benefit to Saanich.
- Adoption of the open standards for conservation through the Conservation Measures Partnership as a mechanism to determine key ecological attributes would be beneficial. These standards provide a clear methodology utilized worldwide.
- Provincial and Federal conservation targets also need to be considered.
- Adopting a clear vision for what we hope to achieve is necessary. Clear aspirational goals backed by measurable objectives will help foster restoration.
- Ecosystem services or functions and goals related to them should be clearly defined.
- Identifying natural assets and creating a natural asset registry to quantify the financial value of those assets can help with planning on how to invest in restoration priorities.
- Tracking how Saanich ecosystems have changed over time to show what has happened and when it happened serves as a powerful base to mobilize support for the future.
- First Nations and traditional knowledge should have a more prominent inclusion.
- Tracking restoration over long periods of time can highlight progress.
- Access to expertise is imperative, making it easy for members of the community to gain information in a way that is easy to use will ensure they are willing to do so.
- Weed management to maintain biodiversity in wetlands may be a regional initiative.
- Outcomes will be better if we can provide incentives for good behaviour.
- Raising awareness for programs about native plants and pollinators is a great start.

The Senior Manager of Parks asked if any objectives should be identified as more important than others, the following was noted during discussion:

- Worldviews that acknowledge the fundamental interconnectedness of humans and non-humans should be honored as we look to support biodiversity.
- The Urban Containment Boundary is a critical tool to ensure the preservation of biodiversity in rural areas, this should be kept in place and policies strengthened.

The consultants asked for thoughts on how to protect these areas, including the potential for development permit areas, the following was noted during discussion:

- Focusing on features of an area versus mapped areas may be more beneficial.
- The Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) mapping may be beneficial for Saanich. A list of clearly defined features such as wetlands may then need further investigation.
- SEI mapping is much more digestible to the general public; however management and updating of these assets can be a challenge.
- Rare and endangered species mapping can also be a challenge. Sharing this data with the CDC may help ensure information is uniform and work is not duplicated.
- Leading by example may be the best way to move forward. Use the current Saanich land that is deteriorating to put on workshops and examples of how to restore land.
- Reasonable targets for all properties can yield benefits, such as the canopy coverage targets, this encourages all residents to plant trees to help reach goals.

DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY EVALUATION TOOL

The Chair gave an overview of the recent updates to the Environmental Policy Evaluation Tool. The following was noted during discussion:

- Minor amendments were made to bring the Policy Evaluation Tool into alignment with the principles of the Environmental Policy Framework.
- The tool is intended to allow policy makers to meet goals and objectives and internalize knowledge of the Environmental Policy Framework to create better policies.

*** Clerks Note *** – The title of this topic was changed from the “Environmental Policy Evaluation Matrix” to the “Policy Evaluation Tool”.

DISCUSSION OF DRAFT 2 GAP ANALYSIS

Committee member K. Brown gave an overview of updated draft gap analysis. The following was noted during committee discussion:

- More rationale has been added, as well as work on summarizing policies and bylaws.
- This document can be used as a complement to the Environmental Policy Filter.
- Information and feedback on the tool are needed to ensure all aspects are addressed.

The following was noted during committee discussion:

- The analysis contains a lot of really useful information. The detail is appreciated.
- A review by staff who create policy would help to ensure usability.
- Earlier documents provided in August were necessary to use the document. Having all the documents combined is necessary, however the document may be large.
- Much of the background information contained in the Gap Analysis may have been better contained as an appendix in the Environmental Policy Framework. The Gap Analysis should strictly relate to gaps in the framework, not background information.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FRAMEWORK STAFF REVIEW

The Senior Manager of Parks gave an overview of the Environmental Policy Framework, the following was noted:

- The Chief Administrative Officer requested a staff review of the document. Staff have provided comment, and revisions are currently underway.
- Staff have requested that the policy framework be a useable high level document, with

- plans, actions and strategies providing the specific goals and direction.
- There should be a focus on environment related policies and relating this document to the environment pillar in the OCP.
- Some principles are too specific, these may need to be made more general.

The following was noted during committee discussion:

- There is a need for substantive revisions to make it clear that this document fits in as a coordinating document in the OCP, helping to inform many plans and documents.
- Aligning other policies is a good goal for the framework.
- Committee members put significant time and thought into the document thus far. It was shared with staff once the context was included in the draft document.
- Council previously made a Motion to direct Planning staff to consider the draft Principles and Goals for the Environmental Policy Framework in the proposed OCP update.
- Having staff understand the framework will ensure it is used moving forward.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from P. Govindarajulu the meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for October 18, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Tory Stevens, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary