



Mayor's Annual Address
December 4, 2023

Good evening everyone. Welcome to your Council Chambers.

As we gather here this evening, let's begin by honouring and recognizing the rich history and enduring spirit of the land upon which we meet.

We are privileged to convene in a place that breathes history and tradition, the ancestral and unceded homelands of the lək'wəŋən speaking peoples - known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, as well as the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, represented by the W̱JOLÉLP (Tsartlip), BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), S̱ÁUTW (Tsawout), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum), and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations. Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial and we are grateful for the opportunity to gather here this evening.

We acknowledge and celebrate the ongoing contributions, resilience, and living traditions of these Indigenous communities, which continue to enrich our world today.

While we begin each meeting with a territorial acknowledgment, our commitment to Reconciliation, decolonization and a stronger future with the lək'wəŋən speaking peoples and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples goes deeper than words.

We acknowledge that colonialism, racism and oppression continue to this day. This Council and our District are committed to examining and challenging the systems of oppression and dispossession, while building meaningful and lasting relationships with the W̱SÁNEĆ, Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

A community where everyone belongs

In recent months, unfolding global events have heightened concerns for the safety and well-being of loved ones across the world. These concerns remind us of the vital importance of community – a community like Saanich, where we not only acknowledge but actively foster a sense of belonging for all. Saanich stands as a beacon of hope and safety, a place where every individual, regardless of their background, knows they are welcomed with open arms.

We are committed to celebrating the rich diversity of people in our community. We are guided by the principle that embracing diversity enriches the lives of all people. We all share the responsibility for creating an equitable and inclusive community and for addressing discrimination in all forms.

And this principle and responsibility also goes beyond mere words. We are actively engaged in building a community where equity, inclusion, and respect are not just ideals, but realities.

I am proud of the fact that we are, and will continue to be, a community where everyone belongs.

Working together for a stronger future

Tonight, I have the opportunity to share a few highlights of the important work that is underway to build a stronger, healthier, more equitable and sustainable Saanich for everyone.

Right after we were sworn in, your newly elected Council got down to work on the priorities you told us are important to you. Your Council is focused on building a stronger Saanich that meets the needs of our growing community:

- Creating homes that families can afford in walkable and accessible neighbourhoods;
- Adding to the vibrancy of neighbourhoods where parks, schools and services are accessible on foot and bike;
- Protecting against the changing climate, restoring our natural areas and adding to the Urban Forest;
- Taking action to build a stronger economy; and
- Creating a more transparent, accountable and engaged decision-making process.

I am going to share a few highlights and upcoming initiatives for each of these theme areas.

Homes that people can afford

Everyone in Saanich deserves a home that meets their needs, at a price they can afford. It's important that we consider how we are going to create more homes that accommodate a range of needs and suit individuals, families, young people, newcomers, older adults and those living with disabilities at all stages of their lives.

We're committed to doing this, and to meeting the ambitious housing targets mandated by the provincial government. Under the Province's directive, we need to triple the volume of permits over the next five years to 4,610 homes. We've got our work cut out for us, but I am confident we are going to meet the targets and create more homes for people to put down roots in our community.

We're working on improvements to the development process, with the goal of making it faster and more efficient. We know that the longer this process takes, the more costly and risky it becomes — and we're working to reduce that risk.

We are working to attract and support affordable, non-market housing by adopting Rapid Deployment of Non-market Housing. That means prioritizing and streamlining approvals for proposals that build homes that are below-market prices. Getting non-market homes built more quickly gives people and their families options that meet their needs and at a price they can afford.

We are moving forward with using Saanich-owned properties to build non-market, affordable housing in partnerships with non-profit housing providers and senior governments.

The Nellie McClung Library Branch at Cedar Hill and McKenzie is a good candidate location for a partnership of this nature. We've started the process to rezone the property to build a new library facility with housing on the floors above it.

We are updating our land use policies with a revised **Official Community Plan** and **Corridor Plans** to guide our growth in our Centres, Corridors and Villages with a vision of creating complete communities supporting employment, shops, services, recreation, and public spaces that are within walking distance for people. Growth will be planned along corridors to link centres and villages with each other, and with regional destinations.

We're also updating our neighbourhood zones to allow for more family-suitable homes like duplexes, triplexes and townhouses. Creating more options for families to build a life in our vibrant neighbourhoods.

After extensive community consultation, the revised **Official Community Plan** will go to Council for approval next week. I am excited about the vision for a thriving future in Saanich and look forward to implementing the initiatives and policies outlined in the updated OCP.

Safer roads for everyone

Road safety is a priority for your Council and we are taking action to ensure everyone can get around safely in our community.

Earlier this year, Council approved the **Speed Limit Establishment Policy**, which provides modern and progressive guidance for setting appropriate speed limits on all Saanich streets. As part of the first phase, nine priority corridors were selected for speed reduction due to accident history, high speeds, and community input. This is an example of just one initiative moving us towards our Vision Zero commitment to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries on our roads.

Tonight, Council will be asked to sign off on the next phase, which includes setting appropriate speeds for residential roads. Our neighbourhood streets are not thoroughfares for cut-through traffic. They are places where kids play street hockey and folks take walks and meet their neighbours. It's time to ensure that vehicle speeds are conducive to the safe enjoyment of our neighbourhoods.

We're also making it easier to walk, ride and roll with the updated active transportation plan. I am immensely proud of the work to build a network of cycling infrastructure and connected, walkable and accessible neighbourhoods that has occurred since ***Moving Saanich Forward*** was adopted in 2018.

Tonight, Council will review and approve the updated plan that will guide our investments and decision-making over the next five years. We will give people safer, more convenient ways of getting to school, jobs and services.

Staff are in the process of finalizing Saanich's first-ever **Road Safety Action Plan**. The new Plan is expected to come to Council for approval this spring. It uses a systems-based approach with an aim of creating safer speed limits, safer road design, safer people and safer vehicles. Once completed, Saanich will be one of only a few communities in BC to adopt a Road Safety Plan.

In 2024, we expect to finish phase two construction of the Shelbourne Street Improvement Project. This Phase is the most significant portion of the project with the majority of underground infrastructure being replaced. New paving, rehabilitated sidewalks, new crosswalks, enhanced bus stops, and dedicated cycling facilities will make it safer and more enjoyable for everyone. In addition, phase three is expected to start next year and will be the final phase for the project. Completion of the entire project is expected in early 2026.

I also want to highlight that Saanich is working with our regional partners through the CRD to create a regional transportation service. We have seen the success that Metro Vancouver has experienced in securing senior government funds for transportation infrastructure. By working together as a region, we can speak with one voice to deliver transportation infrastructure that makes it easier and more efficient for everyone to get where they need to go across the region.

Adapting to Climate Change

We recognize that our natural systems provide the best defence against the impacts of climate change. Healthy natural spaces with robust tree canopy contributes to the beauty and quality of this place. The canopy shade protects us from intense summer temperatures. Trees help absorb stormwater during intense rain events and enrich the air with oxygen and absorb pollution.

Earlier this year, your Council set a target of planting up to 10,000 trees a year on public lands, boulevards and private properties, as part of the renewed **Urban Forest Strategy**.

Of course, reforestation and securing natural spaces are only part of our approach. We continue to move forward with strategies and initiatives to reduce our corporate and community emissions and energy use.

This year, the Provincial government adopted Saanich's highly successful **eBike incentive program**. The District contributed funding to expand the reach of the provincial program for eBikes and cargo bikes that replace motorized travel. With Saanich's top-up, the program helped 237 Saanich residents make the switch to eBikes as their primary way of getting around.

Your Council approved the **Building Retrofit Strategy** to reduce energy use and emissions from residential and commercial buildings through upgrades and improvements.

The Strategy includes the new **Revitalization Tax Exemption**, which makes it more affordable for residential and commercial building operators to upgrade their heating and cooling systems.

That helps extend the life of older buildings, by making them more efficient and saving them from demolition and replacement with more costly newer facilities.

A healthy and vibrant community

Last week, we broke ground on Fire Hall #2 in Royal Oak. This is an exciting project for Saanich, given the tremendous growth and change since the fire station was built in 1978. The new station will be larger to accommodate future growth, provide adequate storage for fire apparatus and equipment and include a much-improved fire fighter training facility. It's an investment in public safety that ensures Saanich residents continue to receive high quality protective services well into the future.

As our community grows and the District renews our significant community assets, we do so with an eye to achieving multiple benefits that meet the future needs of our community. The Saanich Operations Centre is our greatest opportunity to replace an aging Saanich facility while contributing to the residential and commercial vision of our busiest corridor. Conceptual planning, market sounding and financial analysis for the centre's replacement is underway now. This includes discussions with the private sector and non-profit partners to explore potential for mixed use, multi-storey residential buildings on this major corridor, while ensuring the District's Operations in Public Works and Parks remains the highest of the project's priorities. Residents can expect to see public facing activities in the year ahead.

Another sign of a healthy and vibrant community is the growing use of our recreation centres, sports fields and community programs. In 2023, we surpassed pre-pandemic service levels in our recreation facilities. Our centres are full, busy and buzzing with activity, and pass sales have increased significantly.

The Lambrick Park campus, home to the Gordon Head Rec Centre, offers opportunities to grow our recreation services for our growing community. In 2024, we will get started with the Lambrick Park Planning process that will identify new facilities, including a potential new home for skating and hockey in Saanich.

We're also actively looking to expand our partnerships and collaboration opportunities with School Districts and community partners to explore shared use of sports fields and co-location of services to better serve our residents.

A stronger local economy

Saanich's first-ever **Economic Development Strategy** has gone through drafting and consultation throughout the past year. The new Strategy will come to Council for approval in the early part of 2024. It will include priority actions to create walkable neighbourhood hubs with commercial spaces for coffee shops, restaurants, corner stores and doctors' offices. Our centres, corridors and villages will feature spaces that attract employers in Life Sciences, Health Care, Cleantech and the Creative Economy. The strategy will support local businesses to put

down roots in Saanich and create well-paid, family-supporting jobs for people in our community.

Transparent, accountable and engaged decision-making

Transparency and accountability are foundational to building and maintaining trust in decision-makers and the decision-making process. To create greater transparency, Saanich Council has requested the development of a **Voting Dashboard** to track Council votes on major issues. I am pleased to report that we're moving forward with a new **Electronic Agenda Management** system that includes a **Voting Dashboard**. We expect that to be fully implemented by mid-year in 2024.

Tonight, Council will consider updates to its **Code of Conduct Policy**. As part of that process, Council will be asked to appoint an Ethics Commissioner. I am incredibly proud of the respectful, open and transparent conduct of this Council. A healthy governance model is fortified by the dispassionate and impartial guidance of a third-party advisor. It's an important role that will support this Council in doing its important work for our community.

We're also working towards better and more robust public engagement tools to ensure everyone can have their voices heard in planning and decision-making. Launching in the New Year, a new online engagement platform will be a one-stop shop for those interested in our projects and initiatives. We know that working people don't often have time to attend an Open House or information session. The new online tool offers access to more information about projects and opportunities to provide input at the time and place that's most convenient for you.

A Stronger Saanich for everyone

Saanich launched its first **Accessibility Plan** this past August. This plan is a roadmap that reflects our support for accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Our goal is to go beyond just meeting compliance standards. This plan reflects our collective commitment to creating an accessible, inclusive and welcoming environment where every individual can fully participate. I encourage everyone to join us on this journey as we continue to build a stronger community where everyone belongs.

This year, Council approved the District's new **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Report and Action Framework**. The Framework presents Saanich with the opportunity to meet the needs of its BIPOC (black, indigenous and people-of-colour) and LGBTQ2+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit) community. The new strategy is designed to anticipate the diverse needs of our growing community by ensuring a continuum of programming choices, creating friendly spaces, recruiting a diverse workforce, and working collaboratively with community leaders.

I am also pleased to let you know that the long-discussed **Citizens Assembly on Amalgamation** with the City of Victoria is now in motion. MASS LBP was selected through a competitive process to lead the Citizens Assembly. It will be composed of 48 local volunteers from Victoria and Saanich who will be selected by civic lottery next year. The process is expected to be a deliberative one, providing the residents of Saanich and Victoria with the opportunity to participate and analyze options based on a number of criteria. Your Council has committed to holding a referendum on the Assembly's recommendations. It will be the people of Saanich and Victoria - not your Councils - who make the decision.

Continuing the work for a Stronger Saanich

On a personal note, I wanted to share that this first year as your Mayor has been one filled with absolute joy. It has been the honour of my life to serve in the role, work with my Council colleagues and the amazing Saanich staff to build a stronger, healthier, more equitable and sustainable Saanich for everyone.

Among a lot of special moments, a highlight for me from the past year was serving ice cream with my colleagues at Strawberry Fest at Beaver Lake Park. It is so wonderful to see the return of community events that bring people together to spend time and enjoy our great outdoor spaces. It reinforces for me everything that makes Saanich the incredibly vibrant community that we all love.

While we have much to be proud of in our first year, there is still a great deal of work ahead of us. I look forward to continuing to work with this great group of people on these shared priorities.

We will create homes for individuals and families to put down roots in the community. We will continue to build walkable and accessible neighbourhoods, where parks, schools and services are accessible on foot and bike. We will protect against the changing climate by restoring our natural environment and adding to our Urban Forest. And, we will take action to build a stronger economy, and create a more transparent, accountable and engaged decision-making process.

To my colleagues, Saanich staff, and our wonderful residents, thank you for a great first year of the term. I look forward to continuing on this journey with you.

Thank you.