

MINUTES
NATURAL AREAS, PARKS & TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Learning Centre, Annex building, 780 Vernon Avenue
May 11, 2023, at 4:02 p.m.

Present: Councillor Judy Brownoff (Chair), Pamela Carroll, Catherine Du Bois, Christine Harbord, David Little, Dave Marecek, Evan Papps, Don Sutton, Darrell Wick.

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager Parks; Alix Link, Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship; Kirsten Brazier, Senior Committee Clerk; Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Clerk.

AGENDA

MOVED by D. Wick and Seconded by D. Sutton “That item five on the agenda, Saanich Environment Awards, be postponed until September 7, 2023, in order to confirm if an in-person event is scheduled.”

CARRIED

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by P. Carroll and Seconded by D. Sutton: “That the Minutes of the Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Advisory Committee meeting held April 13, 2023, be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

CHAIR’S REMARKS

The Chair welcomed the committee members, and the following was noted:

- Pop-up dog parks have seen steady growth and will stay open until the end of summer during daylight hours.
- Rutledge Park’s open house is scheduled for May 31, 2023, to solicit feedback regarding the plan and the design for the future.
- The Capitol Regional District’s (CRD) recent update to their Annual Report logs the work they have completed thus far in the local parks to improve and protect the ecosystems.

ECOSYSTEMS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Chair introduced the memo and noted that there are no policies in Saanich concerning ecosystems.

Committee members were asked to provide feedback on the memo, and the following was noted:

- It is requested that the committee focus more time on the parks and natural areas because of the ongoing degradation due to people and dogs.

- Urban forest, as a concept, fits well within our Terms of Reference, whether it's a forest in a natural area or an urban boundary.
- Diamond Head Consultants has begun its work on the Urban Forest Strategy and The Biodiversity Strategy.
- "Saanich sites" and "Development sites" as referred to in the memo, are any land owned privately or publicly that is being developed.
- The recommendations that are made to the consultant in the memo are better described as a consideration as they are completing their work and not as a direct statement.

ADVOCACY RESOLUTION TO 2023 UBCM CONVENTION

A memo related to protecting and restoring biological diversity with a resolution to support biodiversity in the local communities was attached to the agenda. The committee members were asked to provide feedback on the resolution and the following was noted:

- Saanich is ahead of the other municipalities in advancing the Resolution: Supporting Biodiversity in Local Communities Rural and smaller municipalities may have more interest if the topic was broader and included topics like climate change, the production of green house gases and a potential for funding.
- It is requested to change the wording in the memo's last paragraph to "protect, acquire and restore".

MOVED by D. Marecek and Seconded by C. Du Bois "It be recommended that the last paragraph of the Advocacy Resolution to 2023 UBCM Convention be amended to add the word restore as follows":

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Province work with local governments and First Nations to support the protection and restoration of biological diversity in local communities, including establishing a *Local Natural Areas Protection Fund* to support local efforts to protect, restore and acquire land for biodiversity and ecosystem health."

CARRIED

URBAN FOREST STRATEGY UPDATE

The Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas and Community Stewardship presented the Urban Forest Strategy (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- The Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) and the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) are being done in parallel by Diamond Head Consulting.
- Public engagement and feedback for both strategy's closed earlier this week. No information from these engagements has been provided yet.
- All the trees on public and private land, parks, and conservation areas, are defined as the Urban Forest.
- Trees provide habitat for wildlife, stabilizing steep slopes, cooling urban areas, and improving mental and physical health.
- Council endorsed the first UFS in 2010 and an update is now crucial. Establishing a baseline of the current state of the Urban Forest, providing a fifty-year vision and a ten-year implementation will be included in this update.
- The process of updating the UFS began in 2022 by analyzing the state of the Urban Forest, gathering various forms of public engagement, and presenting to Council and Committees.
- A finalized UFS document is planned for completion by 2023 - year end.

- The State of the Urban Forest Report measured the canopy cover, which includes the volume, health, and maturity of the trees within the different communities.
- Because Saanich's tree canopy varies in size and age, the distribution is uneven throughout the urbanized, rural, and suburban areas.
- A large percentage of Saanich's trees are on private property and are not owned by Saanich; therefore, decisions for removal are made without consultation.
- As cities become more urbanized and the need for utilities increase, the space for trees to grow and thrive becomes less.
- The decline of our tree health is mostly identified in natural areas struggling with climate change related drought impacts.
- Various planting programs within the District are contributing to the "10,000 trees by 2025" planting target from the Climate Plan (2020).
- Saanich has made progress since 2010 by creating the Urban Forest Reserve Fund, adopting the Tree Protection Bylaw, and investing in stewardship programs. There are many challenges with limited resources, planting site availability and priorities for space and climate risk.

Following questions and comments from the committee, the following was noted:

- PKOLS is included in the canopy cover for Gordon Head, which seems misleading and potentially alters the data.
- This data will confirm that the rural and park areas have high tree coverage, but also what areas require work and focus.
- Council motioned to increase the tree planting target to 10,000 per year for a total of 100,000 trees in 10 years. In addition, an incentive for homeowners is anticipated.
- The Zoning Bylaw and infrastructure conflicts with the amount of space that is needed for trees to survive.
- A team of arborists continue to analyze and update the approved tree planting list. The quality of the soil and the location availability are factors.
- Although fruit trees would provide nutrition to all, maintenance must be considered.
- Protecting the trees is becoming more of a challenge as the need for housing utilities increases. Therefore, a plan to replace these trees is imperative.
- An idea was brought forth to offer an incentive to discourage clear cutting of reserved land for farming.
- UFS should include tree canopy protection for the fish bearing streams. For example, when the temperature was measured at Douglas Creek, the sun caused the temperature to increase 1 degree every 300 meters down. In comparison, during the winter months, the temperature decreases 1 degree every 250 meters. Bowker Creek and Douglas Creek are both susceptible because there are no trees to protect them.
- Weather patterns and disease are causing damage and stress to the Western Red Cedar and the Grand Fir.
- Efforts are made in the planning stages of development to plant native trees to maximize survival.
- Council has provided funds and direction to create a tree map to include location and varieties. One of the priorities is to focus on the trees that are required to be planted because of development and the importance for future homeowners to have resources to identify them to avoid destruction.

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The Senior Manager of Parks presented the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- Biodiversity is defined as the variety and variability of life; this includes the smallest to the largest organism.
- The State of Biodiversity Report aims to develop a baseline inventory of the biodiversity in the District.
- The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is to identify a “Habitat Network” and through various resources provide ways to conserve and enhance Saanich’s natural assets. Data and feedback from various outlets will help inform and create a draft strategy.
- The mapping layers, which include aquatic and terrestrial systems, highlight the species and ecosystems that are at risk.
- The iNaturalist app offered peer reviewed data, which helped identify the plants and animals within the District.
- The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) assisted and recommended to create Biodiversity Target Categories. From these categories, information was gathered to create the Biodiversity Ranking Map which assisted in observing the development that has occurred or is occurring in Saanich and the effect it is having on biodiversity.
- There are many common threats to biodiversity, but development and invasive species are ranked at the top and affect local ecosystems.

Following questions and comments from the committee, the following was noted:

- Efforts are made in the District to protect native species, but no official program is in place.
- IAPP (Invasive Alien Plant Program) is a tool that Saanich is investigating to update the technology that is used in the District.
- Development is causing disruptions and damage to the local creeks, so land has been acquired to protect these areas.
- The land outside of the Urban Containment Boundary contains farming fields which displays a low density of trees.
- Saanich staff welcomes volunteers to offset the costs involved to repair and maintain the land.
- Establishing some targets will help the community programs grow and will oversee the progress.
- The updates and revisions on the park project list should be provided.

The Chair made the following comments concerning the Advocacy Resolution to 2023 UBCM convention memo, and the following was noted:

- As the consultant reviews the zoning requirements, specifically in the Shelbourne Valley and the Uptown Corridor, there is a growing concern that the tree’s root zone are being destroyed because of installation of water mains and hydro lines.
- The Engineering Department is reviewing the issues concerning the space of audit and how it has become smaller.
- A method is needed in Saanich to protect the current ecosystems and measure the amount that exists.

Moved by D. Little and Seconded by Councillor Brownoff “That it be recommended that the consultant will continue to review the zoning requirement as it relates to the Urban Forest.”

CARRIED

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 8, 2023.

Councillor Brownoff, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Secretary