

MINUTES
ARTS, CULTURE, & COMMUNITY WELLBEING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MS Teams
770 Vernon Avenue

May 22, 2024, at 5:03 p.m.

Present: Councillor Karen Harper (Chair), Pamela Carroll, Barbara Elson, Mark Leiren-Young, James Hesser, and Peter Quinn

Staff: Suzanne Samborski, Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services (via Teams); Erin Stockill, Emergency Program Officer; Corey Volk, Sergeant, Community Engagement Division; Karen Robinson, Constable, Bike Patrol and Community Engagement Division; Jason Youngren, Parks Operations Manager (via Teams); Rebecca Chow, Manager Occupational Health & Safety (via Teams); Cristina Caravaca, Senior Manager, Community Services; and Colton Whittaker, Committee Clerk

Guests: Grace Shyng, Co-Chair, Help BC Hear Better (via Teams)

Regrets: Andie Britton-Foster, Municipal Solicitor; Susan Hendricks; Danielle Lemon; and Kimberly Van Nieuvenhuysse

ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

MOVED by P. Carroll and Seconded by J. Hesser: "That the Minutes of Arts, Culture and Community Wellbeing Advisory Committee meeting held February 28, 2024, be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

CHAIRS REMARKS

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

- The Saanich Operation Centre (SOC) has committed to painting the Pride Flag and Trans Flag colours on benches around the SOC to signal their commitment to Saanich's approved Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Report and Framework.
- To mark the beginning of Pride Month, Saanich will hold a ceremony to raise the Pride Flag at the Municipal Hall on June 3, 2024.
- Councillor Harper's UBCM motion on hearing loss is scheduled to be presented to Council on June 10, 2024.
- Two committee members have resigned due to relocation out of Saanich.

HELP BC HEAR BETTER

The representative from Help BC Hear Better gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file) and the following was noted during committee discussion:

- Hearing loss often goes unnoticed until it suddenly becomes apparent.
- People with hearing impairments are often mistakenly perceived as rude because others do

- not understand that they have hearing loss.
- Hearing loss often feels very isolating.
- Transcription software is greatly improving with advancements in AI and Technology.
- Having a doctor monitor and record your hearing over time is an excellent way to stay informed about your hearing health, as gradual changes can often go unnoticed.
- Establishing a baseline for your hearing is important at any age.
- Numerous organizations provide coverage for hearing aids, yet they are not included in British Columbia's Medical Services Plan (MSP).
- WorkSafe BC offers excellent coverage for hearing aids, however, eligibility requires prior exposure to occupational noise.
- Three quarters of seniors suffer from hearing loss.
- Addressing the needs of seniors and young children is a priority for the Hearing BC Committee.

MOVED by M. Leiren-Young and Seconded by P. Carroll “That the Arts, Culture, and Community Wellbeing Advisory Committee endorse Councillor Harpers UBCM resolution regarding increased funding for hearing aids for vulnerable populations.”

CARRIED

COLD WEATHER PROTOCOL FOR UNHOUSED RESIDENTS

The Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, the Parks Operations Manager, the representatives from the Community Engagement Division and Bike Patrol Unit of the Saanich Police Department and the Emergency Program Officer from the Saanich Fire Department presented on the Cold Weather Protocol For Unhoused Residents. The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- There are several stakeholders collaborating to ensure community safety, including Saanich Fire, Police, Parks, Recreation and Community Services, Planning, and Bylaw departments.
- Prior to 2018 the Parks Management and Control Bylaw, 1997, No. 7753 did not contemplate sheltering in parks. The Regina Park encampment of over 100 tents highlighted a need to update the current bylaws to assist with the need to shelter in parks when there is nowhere else to house. These amendments aligned the bylaw with the BC Supreme Court rulings on temporary overnight sheltering in parks. These updates included a new protocol for Saanich fire, police and park staff to maintain safety.
- Saanich is responsible for managing over 171 parks.
- Saanich has garnered praise for its approach to working with the unhoused population within the community.
- Those experiencing homelessness often shelter in diverse locations, including parks, private properties, and other areas.
- One-on-one relationships are key to assisting and offering resources to this demographic.
- Many unhoused individuals struggle with drug addiction and mental health issues.
- There are 4 Bike Patrol officers in Saanich. These officers are often the first point of contact.
- The Housing Action Response Team (HART) brings together government, health, police, bylaw enforcement staff and social service agencies in one team to provide support and information to people experiencing homelessness.
- Factors like owning a dog and concerns about personal safety frequently discourage individuals from seeking local shelters.
- Bike Patrol officers spend about 90% of their time interacting with a very small group of individuals.
- Police dedicate significant time to educating individuals experiencing homelessness about

local bylaws. Subsequently, they transition to enforcement measures such as issuing tickets. As part of their outreach efforts, they distribute resource cards, which they leave in vacant tents. These cards contain information regarding the storage location of belongings and available outreach resources.

- Many community members donate food, socks, camping gear, toques, and more. Police distribute these items to those experiencing homelessness.
- The process for evicting people from parks is lengthy and complicated.
- Police engage in collaborative meetings with neighboring municipalities to monitor the presence of individuals in parks.
- Police inform unhoused individuals when cold weather is expected and offer them blankets and other protective items.
- The Emergency Program receives updates from BC Housing regarding shelter occupancy rates.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness may be hesitant to use shelters due to concerns about storing belongings and caring for pets.
- A growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness are drawn to Saanich due to the quality of treatment from District staff.
- Belongings are often left behind for park staff to handle disposal. Many of these items are dangerous, which presents potential risks to staff. Police presence is ensured. Personal items are stored in the parks yard for one month and then discarded.
- Taking a proactive approach helps maintain a manageable number of camps in parks.
- Saanich successfully hosted an exhibition titled 'Building Bridges', showcasing artwork created by individuals experiencing homelessness. The exhibition aimed to provide them with pride, purpose, community, creativity, and other forms of support.
- Police play a crucial role in data collection and addressing specific incidents, however, solving this global issue extends beyond their jurisdiction and capabilities.
- Police are facing significant understaffing issues, resulting in insufficient resources and inadequate mental health support to effectively address the complexities of homelessness.
- Effective communication is pivotal to the success of the Police response and is a central aspect of their approach.
- There are ample opportunities for retirees or individuals with spare time to contribute as volunteers at various non-profit organizations throughout the region.
- On an average day, there are typically 8-15 individuals sheltering within Saanich, with the possibility of additional individuals residing deeper within wooded areas.
- The Saanich Police work collaboratively with the Capital Regional District (CRD) on this issue.
- There are many different approaches to dealing with sheltering in parks.
- Changes in how the Bylaw department is structured and its approach to assisting individuals experiencing homelessness would require careful deliberation and a significant timeframe.
- Expanding support to unhoused residents would require the addition of more roles in counseling and mental health services.
- A community police station is located at Uptown, along with a volunteer coordinator that focuses on public education.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness have been intermittently accessing shelters. Some unhoused individuals, who also have pets, may be resistant to complying with shelter rules. Additionally, these individuals often form their own communities within the unhoused population.
- The purpose of this presentation is to further advocate to the Province on this complex issue.
- Further discussion on this topic would be appreciated.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from P. Carroll the meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date will be on September 25, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

Councillor Karen Harper, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Colton Whittaker, Committee Clerk