

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Held virtually via MS Teams

June 27, 2023 at 5:31 pm

Present: Councillor Zac de Vries (Chair), Amber Hockin, Jennifer Vornbrock, John Wilson, Patrick Marshall, Raymond Chan, Rob Wickson, Tim Petropoulos, Victoria Shannon

Guest: Steve Nichol, Lions Gate Consulting

Staff: Mitchell Edgar, Economic Development Manager; Cam Scott, Manager of Community Planning; and Megan MacDonald, Senior Committee Clerk

Regrets: Alan Winter and Richard Michaels

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair put forward a motion at the June 26 Council meeting to forward a recommendation to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). This resolution requested that UBCM lobby the provincial government to develop a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act that requires public bodies to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. This motion was supported unanimously by Council and has now been forwarded to UBCM for consideration at the annual meeting.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by R. Wickson and Seconded by A. Hockin: "That the Minutes for the May 9, 2023, Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting be approved."

CARRIED

STRATEGIC OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

The Manager of Community Planning presented on the strategic Official Community Plan (OCP) Update (PowerPoint on file), the following was noted:

- The OCP is the primary document that guides growth and change within Saanich.
- The long-term vision is a livable community based on shared values and sustainability.
- This is a legally binding overarching framework for all other District policies and plans.
- Decisions made within its scope are required to conform to its policy direction.
- Most of the 2008 OCP content is still relevant, so a strategic update was preferred to build on recent processes and adopted policy/Council direction. This is a more effective use of limited resources and allows for priority updates in a short time frame.
- Updating the OCP will incorporate new demographic data, update the land use framework, refine sustainability framework and strengthen monitoring/implementation.
- Currently the project is in phase 2 where the draft will be refined. It is expected to go to Council for consideration in fall/winter 2023.
- "Three Pillars" (Environmental Integrity, Social Well-being, and Economic Vibrancy), "One Planet Living" and the "15-minute Community" are the three main sustainable foundation frameworks that complement and guide the policy direction.

- Climate change response is incorporated as a plan foundation that recognizes achievable targets and implements adaptation strategies.
- The four strategic land use directions look to maintain the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB), accommodate most new development in the primary growth areas, to expand housing diversity in the neighborhoods and work towards a 15-minute community.
- Integrating more commercial services into communities is challenging from an economic perspective. Looking at ways to encourage these uses is important.
- Urban plazas and urban parks will provide accessible green spaces and walkable parks.
- The 3-30-300 rule (3 trees for every home, 30 percent tree canopy in every neighborhood and 300 meters from the nearest public park or green space) is the guiding principle that focuses on the crucial contributions of the urban forest and other urban nature to our health and well-being, as well as climate change adaptation.
- An active transportation network will provide more access to amenities.
- Our history with the First Nations Peoples is acknowledged in the OCP, focusing on reconciliation, revised history, Indigenous Relations, and policies woven throughout the document. Consultation is being pursued for spring/summer 2023.
- The public is encouraged to participate and provide input on various platforms such as webinars, open houses, and digital workshops. A survey is available online and in printed form. Once the survey closes all feedback will be considered and a final version will be considered for approval by Council.

The following was noted in response to questions and comments from committee members:

- Members commended the incredible work that has gone into the update so far.
- Light industrial areas which sustain well-paying jobs need to be supported. The intention in the OCP is to maintain and further support these lands.
- Detailed work and designations will happen through Area Plans or rezoning.
- Future land use of existing sites will need to be examined on a site-by-site basis to ensure best use based on several factors, the OCP does not go into that much detail.
- The general use of light industrial areas will not change through OCP updates.
- The OCP will enhance and grow economic development with objectives and policies for opportunistic initiatives that arise; as well as land use planning that indicates where growth and change can be accommodated. Primary growth areas will support housing and employment opportunities and other elements to ensure vibrant communities.
- The Centers, Villages and Corridors Plan will also support economic development by providing mixed use development and ensuring vibrant mixed use amenity rich areas.
- The engagement so far has included all advisory committees, in addition to quality feedback from stakeholders and community groups, open houses and surveys.
- Metrics of the OCP update includes a Draft Preliminary Indicators Framework document, which will highlight high level indicators of strategies and plans. The general indicators will provide a sense of progress and achievement. Council is keen on receiving more frequent updates for monitoring and implementation.
- The nature of economic development has changed from previous decades; land use planning terms need to be further defined, such as the term “sustainable community”.
- Ensuring the language in the draft OCP supports an evolving and logical expansion of existing centers, villages and nodes is important.
- The process of development in Saanich needs to be examined, a member noted that members of the community have expressed concern over the timeline for approvals.
- Parking standards for development are currently being examined and may be updated.
- The Economic Development Strategy will have more direct actions related to economic development; an objective could also be included in the OCP.
- An objective to expedite development permits would be beneficial in the OCP.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Economic Development Manager gave a brief verbal introduction to the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) then introduced the consultant Steve Nichol, of Lions Gate Consulting who presented the introduction (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted during the presentation:

- The rationale for creating an EDS is to maintain/expand the business tax base, while aligning actions with existing approved District plans. This strategy is a necessary step to create a productive and inclusive labour market in a changing global economy.
- Some challenges to the local economy include demographic changes, migration to smaller communities, an equitable labour market, the gig economy (decentralized places of employment), supply chain disruption, technology, climate change and sustainability initiatives.
- Local challenges include regional growth, housing, diversification of employment opportunities, as well as low availability for growth due to land and building constraints.
- Work on the strategy began with data collection and an assessment of the current data.
- Public engagement has included focus groups, surveys, interviews and workshops. The survey received over 2,200 responses. Seven focus groups with 51 participants took place, along with workshops with staff to prioritize, refine and strengthen initiatives.
- Using our assets to ensure businesses are well rounded, competitive, and adaptable will bring wealth and high wages to our region, improving livability and affordability.
- Values and high-level principal statements include think regionally act locally, a balanced and fair regulatory climate, quality services, a skilled and talented workforce, a knowledge economy and a sustainable economy.
- There are a number of important types of opportunities that exist in general economic partners, sector partners and technology partners.
- Target sectors covered are not exclusive, but some current retention and expansion areas include post-secondary education, healthcare, life sciences and tourism.
- Priority themes are broken down into two categories, place development such as supporting smart development and the creation of urban value, and service development which supports business retention, expansion, and attraction.
- Aspects of place development include quality economic infrastructure, a competitive business climate and creating new urban value.
- Service development includes business services, marketing, and entrepreneurship.

The following was noted during committee discussion:

- Staff are currently submitting feedback on the draft strategy, once edits are made staff will send the draft strategy to the committee. The Economic Development Manager will provide the current situation analysis, as well as the draft to members once available.
- The draft strategy will be submitted to Council for consideration in September.
- Once approved, the EDS will be the work plan for the Economic Development office.
- Advocating for economic development will be balanced with other policies, procedures and culture. Decision makers such as Council must determine if the balance is correct.
- Land use priorities, corporate strategies and the EDS have areas that intersect, finding opportunities for new partnerships and policies to support the strategy is important.
- A forward-thinking mindset when reviewing the draft strategy is necessary.
- The advisory committee will be integral to prioritize and advocate for the strategy.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from A. Hockin, the meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for September 26, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.

Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary