

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MS Teams
May 16, 2024 at 5:31 pm

Present: Councillor Zac de Vries (Chair), Jason Arruda, Raymond Chan, Amber Hockin, Patrick Marshall, Richard Michaels, Jesse O'Neill-Bains, Tim Petropoulos, Victoria Shannon, Rachid Ouache, and Robert Wickson

Staff: Mitchell Edgar, Economic Development Manager; and Megan MacDonald, Senior Committee Clerk

Guests: John Jung, Co-Founder, Intelligent Communities Forum and Matthew Owen, Executive Director, Intelligent Communities Forum

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by R. Chan and Seconded by T. Petropoulos: "That the Minutes of the February 15, 2024 Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting be approved."

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS

- Saanich recently adopted a new Official Community Plan (OCP).
- This new plan has much more focus on Economic Development compared to the previous one.

INTELLIGENT COMMUNITY FORUM PRESENTATION

The Economic Development Manager introduced John Jung and Mattew Owen of the Intelligent Communities Forum (ICF) to give a presentation (PowerPoint on File). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- ICF operates as a global network of communities aimed at mutual learning and knowledge sharing.
- ICF provides tools to attract investment, jobs, and talent to communities.
- ICF could serve as a platform for the District to enhance economic prosperity.
- Connecting contacts in international cities to promote knowledge sharing is a common practice of ICF.
- Including First Nations communities in an intelligent community strategy is essential.
- Several First Nations communities in Canada and abroad have been involved with ICF.
- ICF has a global impact and becoming a member community has benefits, particularly in terms of economic development, recognition, and networking opportunities.
- Resiliency and sustainability are deeply engrained within the foundation of ICF.
- Leveraging the intelligent communities' network and existing resources could act as a way for Saanich to continue enhancing livability for its residents.

- Smart City Certification may be an option for Saanich in the future as Saanich already has many aspects of a smart city.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Economic Development Manager gave a verbal update on the ongoing Economic Development initiatives. The following was noted:

- Funding for the new Economic Development Coordinator position was recently approved by Council, the job description is being created. The expectation is to have a new staff member hired by fall.
- An assessment of the region's assets related to research and development with a focus on the life sciences sector is underway. This will enable Saanich to better understand the ecosystem, strengths, challenges, opportunities and to inform the District's Economic Development Strategy.
- Saanich is partnering with Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR) to roll out the Flavour Trails program in Saanich. This regional brand and program will support the local food and farm sector and connect residents to local food.
- The Flavour Trails brand will amplify the local Savour Saanich by moving it onto the Flavour Trails program.
- The central activity of the Flavour Trails program this year will be the Savour Saanich Festival running July 6 – 7, 2024. Over the course of the year, local businesses/farms/assets will be promoted through social media and mainstream media.
- Saanich is partnering with Synergy Foundation to implement a circular economy accelerator program for local businesses. This program will enroll 7 Saanich businesses in 2024 to adopt circular economy principles, finding operational efficiencies, reducing emissions, and developing innovative practices while increasing revenue and cutting operational costs. Businesses will go through a 6–8 hour process over 2-3 months.

The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- There are several businesses in Saanich which are currently exploring the circular economy and how to leverage new initiatives.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The committee had a roundtable discussion about Small Scale Commercial Development in Saanich. The following was noted during committee discussion:

- Saanich's new OCP puts an emphasis on 15-minute communities, small scale commercial development and neighborhood businesses.
- The Tillicum area presents itself as a potential area of interest for further exploration and development.
- Land and building costs, as well as regulations are deterrents for commercial enterprises and development.
- Business tax rates versus residential tax rates and strategies for fostering development are areas for further consideration.
- Fostering an environment that excites businesses and encourages their active participation within the community is essential.
- Mixed-use developments could be used to create a sense of community.

- Consolidating developments can enhance the sense of community, as opposed to having stand-alone projects next to each other.
- Progress is being made on planning specific areas/intersections for small scale commercial development, such as Quadra/McKenzie and Marigold/Burnside.
- Less barriers to development and a streamlined process may increase small scale development in Saanich.
- Parking regulations have posed significant hurdles, complicating the development process.
- Process improvement and regulatory reform are important and are ongoing.
- Early engagement with multiple departments in the District could help to streamline the development process.
- The cultural landscape of Saanich has undergone notable shifts in recent years and continues to evolve.
- Saanich Council recently abolished parking minimums in many cases.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from T. Petropoulos, the meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place Thursday June 20, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.

Councillor Zac de Vries, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Colton Whittaker, Committee Clerk