

Saanich Residents: A year in Review

Seasons Greetings and thank you to Saanich residents for your continued engagement and support. I am inspired daily by your stewardship of ecosystems in our parks and backyards; your guardianship of our roads, advocating for safety, good governance, affordable housing, our urban forests, etc.

It has not been an easy time for many living in the region with Covid-19, and the provincial health measures that continue to impact our daily lives, finances, families, food security, and mental health, etc.

I am thankful to see the decorative seasonal lights and believe it has cheered us all up.

These colourful lights have brightened our skies and lined the streets of Saanich with hope. A positive sentiment in setting our intentions for a better 2021.

This is the Spirit of Saanich

It is an honour to be your councillor in the most culturally diverse municipality in the region. As the past chair of the Healthy Saanich Advisory committee, I am so pleased at the committee's most recent accomplishment, building on the success of the Embrace Saanich report, written by Jasmindra Jawanda. Moving the District closer towards our common goal and strategic direction of becoming a more culturally diverse and inclusive Saanich.

A place where everyone belongs and can live in harmony, despite race, religion or economic status.

This diversity and inclusion statement is now being read in at every meeting:

**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 for addressing discrimination in all forms.**

This will be read after the territorial acknowledgment: that Saanich lies in the territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt and the Wsanec people known today as the Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Tsawout, Tseycum and Malahat Nations. The territorial acknowledgements were initiated last term and were reaffirmed by the Council this term.

At our inaugural ceremony for the first time at the District of Saanich, the Songhees were in attendance at the ceremony.

This made a great start to the term, and furthered our progress towards **Improving our relationships with our First Nations neighbours.**

This was even further reinforced through Council to Council dinners with the Tsartlip and Tsawout people. **Another first** was an invitation for neighbouring First Nations to participate in the upcoming LAP planning process. As well, I am also pleased to announce that the Wsanec leadership council has been engaging since that time and the draft LAP has incorporated that engagement to the extent possible. This will be back to Council for consideration Q1 2021.

My First Motion:

First Nations First (funded) asking for an art piece in the Chambers to signify the shifting governance in Canada followed our signing on to the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people,

Another wonderful initiative although it has not been funded yet wishes to build on the work that started in 2013 “when 600 First Nations, Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey and their supporters marched to the top of Mount Douglas for a renaming ceremony and wanted it renamed back to P’kols”.

<https://theyee.ca/News/2013/05/27/Peoples-Geography-BC/>

The official renaming of Mount Douglas to P’kols is a strategic initiative of Council although it has not yet been funded.

Saanich residents can be confident that the District of Saanich, our CAO Paul Thorkellson, Mayor, council and staff have been exemplary and been working in the public interest during the management and delivery of services during the Covid-19 health emergency!

All residents were considered and emergency operations (EOC) were set up in record time. Regular and ongoing updates were/are provided whilst keeping in alignment with Dr Henry's health measures.

My appreciation for Saanich staff is well known and I was particularly pleased that in addition to the regular sick time benefit, council supported adding specific pandemic leave benefits for additional flexibility for all employees.

With our current challenges in mind I would like to discuss a turning point for me as a councillor.

When Covid-19 hit the district and we were unsure of our financial situation, **I voted for a status quo budget** with no new resource requests including the dedication of our 2019 annual surplus to assist residents. **A moment of seeing the forest beyond the trees.** We decided that once we had more financial information that we would revisit our strategic initiatives. To consider future surplus when more information was available.

Our priority (a majority of council) was to ensure the smallest tax increase without forwarding debt onto next year's taxes or delaying contribution to infrastructure management costs. To me, **a 0% increase represented costs being deferred to the 2021 budget when there are still many unknowns. In my mind a tax hike was of course not an option.**

We used the precautionary principle here, with regards to financing, taxing and the budget, my only wish is we could have adopted this approach when trying to replace the biodiversity strategy.

We are so lucky Saanich is located in the rainshadow of the Olympic mountains range, a nationally renown biodiversity and marine hotspot. With a Mediterranean climate, ample sunshine, rain and mild winters. A growing mecca. A cultural mecca. Located within the Coastal Douglas-Fir biogeoclimatic zone. The home base of the endemic Garry Oak ecosystem and some of the most exquisite wildlife on the planet.

Living on the waterfront and shores of the Salish Sea with the critically endangered and federally listed habitat of the southern resident killer whales, sensitive ecosystems, best soils and drinking water in Canada is a great responsibility.

Last council term, the EDPA, the mechanism for protecting sensitive ecosystems and trees during development in Saanich (triggered upon subdivision) was rescinded and without a replacement placing Saanich's long history /legacy of environmental protection and good governance into question. Many residents were very upset about this.

The removal of the EDPA has been responsible for much biodiversity and habitat loss and further placed the endemic Garry Oak ecosystem and the CDF in peril.

I ran in 2017 to restore this legacy of environmental protection.

In June 2019 Council voted against the biodiversity framework despite letters from Drs Tuners, Higgs and Penn (experts on the Garry Oak ecosystem) and the public asking the council to reconsider.

There was also a public appeal that was unsuccessful in trying to overturn the decision.

This was a particularly hard vote for me, and this loss of ecological resilience represents to me the most Anti-climatic vote of the year. It has been hard to talk to residents about it after a series of name changes. It has been a difficult process for the public to follow.

Good news!

The EDPA-biodiversity strategy: Resilient Saanich and is now commencing but will be a multi-year process.

I attempted 3 different motions to replace the gap left in conservation by the removal of the EDPA and all were defeated. There also is a narrative on my council that does not believe in regulations on private property and that biodiversity conservation and resources should focus on parks. As parks are already protected and not subject to development this was not a priority in the past.

<https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/focus-magazine-jan-feb-2020/replacing-saanich%E2%80%99s-edpa-by-law-proves-challenging-r10/>

<https://www.peninsulanewsreview.com/news/saanich-councillor-chose-pragmatism-over-politics-in-opposing-edpa-replacement/>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-councillors-oppose-development-variance-due-to-loss-of-trees/>

All along-I have understood the **Housing For All** statement to include and mean considerations for other species. I believe that the anthropocentric housing crisis especially without adequate environmental protection has decreased our resilience, and further accelerated the biodiversity decline and climate crisis. **Creating a Habitat Crisis**

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-councillors-oppose-development-variance-due-to-loss-of-trees/>

<https://www.peninsulanewsreview.com/news/controversial-townhouse-complex-in-saanichs-caddy-bay-all-but-approved/>

The suspension of the Local Area Plans is also worth noting, while I understand that the council has a common priority on housing, I disagree with focussing and prioritizing our resources ahead of a biodiversity strategy; a fully functioning, a DCC park fund, a community amenity policy, regulations for development in sensitive areas, and a Housing Needs Report.

Good news

The CRD Housing Needs Report is here to assist and focus and guide development. It is on the Saanich website. <https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-council-pauses-updates-to-local-area-plans/>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-councillor-accuses-development-community-of-undue-influence/>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/municipal-election-signs-to-shrink-to-address-public-complaints/>

“Nathalie Chambers, who had voiced a desire to eliminate the signs from municipal property”

I was deeply influenced and inspired when first elected by the collaboration of the GreeNDP, working together for the environment, climate and people and planet over profit.

- Everybody pays their fair share.
- closing the gap in election financing
- getting big money out of politics

Leading to my personal policy of not accepting Developer Donations!

DCC's - All I will say here is I was camped on this hill and would not change sites.

This was a very stressful item for me and although it was intended for more affordable housing projects to come forward, the point that Saanich residents were paying beyond their share of infrastructure did not compute and from what I could see did not create any more affordable projects. However, the CAO reassures me that a number of units are now at the building permit stage about to be issued for construction.

Here again, I was guided by the everybody pay their fair share sentiment. My issue was other municipalities were paying more fairly and this delay in DCC's cost taxpayers 2 million dollars.

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/sparks-fly-at-saanich-council-meeting-when-chair-threatens-to-throw-fellow-councillor-out/>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-councillor-accuses-development-community-of-undue-influence/>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/vrba-warns-saanich-of-negative-consequences-if-new-dcc-bylaw-approved/>

The DCC bylaw passing is a success for All Saanich Residents. The bylaw was adopted by Council in January 2020, it February 2020 it was approved by the inspector of municipalities , and the phasing in of new rates starts February 2021 over a 5 year phase into February 2024.

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/vrba-warns-saanich-of-negative-consequences-if-new-dcc-bylaw-approved/>

<https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/focus-magazine-jan-feb-2020/replacing-saanich%E2%80%99s-edpa-bylaw-proves-challenging-r10/>

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/behind-saanich-s-edpa-bylaw-a-question-of-science-1.23606124>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-councillor-continues-to-oppose-edpa-replacement/>

<https://www.peninsulanewsreview.com/community/video-saanich-farm-converts-vegetable-stand-into-veggie-drive-thru-as-covid-19-spreads/>

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/saanich-councillor-presses-for-temporary-ban-on-tree-cutting-1.23604521>

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/saanich-council-votes-against-adding-shelters-to-parks-for-socializing-amid-pandemic-adverse-weather/>

<https://www.cheknews.ca/saanich-council-rejects-bylaw-to-allow-alcohol-consumption-in-parks-678012/>

<https://www.bccolnews.com/news/saanich-looks-at-relaxing-farm-stand-ban/>

I was pleased to help to select the Technical Committee for the Resilient Saanich and I am very pleased and confident with its membership. I happen to know there are some dynamo's here.

Protection of our sensitive ecosystems cannot happen fast enough, though the Technical committee will make recommendations on the best way to protect sensitive ecosystems in Saanich this will be a multi-years process with plenty of opportunities for public input and there may be a place for interim measures although council formerly voted against interim measures and my 3 motions were voted against

There is a lot of recent successes.

The CRD Housing Needs Report has been published and will hopefully guide development in the right direction and those that are most critically implicated by the housing crisis will be helped. **The Electric Mobility Strategy has been adopted and this is a huge action in meeting our Climate objectives.**

chrome-extension://oemmndcbldboiebfnladdacbfmadadm/

<https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/Planning/sustainability/E-Mobility-Strategy-web.pdf>

More good news:

There was a unanimous vote to direct these items to budget deliberations to make requests:

1. Develop a prioritized tree mapping and tracking system based on Saanich's GIS (estimated at \$120,000 annually).
2. Train a Parks Subject Matter Expert (SME) to develop custom reports through the Tempest (permitting) system (estimated at up to \$15,000).
3. Provide an updated landscape level (canopy cover) map ensuring data compatibility with the 2009 forest cover mapping (estimated at up to \$50,000)

With Covid-19, the economy, climate change and a habitat crisis upon us many of us have had to lean on our agricultural roots to make ends meet and provide healthy organic food to our tables when we live in the best climate for agriculture, with the best soils in Canada!! When 77% of our fruits and vegetables come from the US or other climate stricken locations- **This is not food security or being climate logical.**

Importing food from other destinations is anything but climate logical and the immediate shift to a local economy is what is needed. The **allowance of Roadside stands inside the UCB is a positive step towards this.**

This is really a motion after my own heart as a market garden farmer at Madrona Farm. Now we can grow for our families and sell the rest.

In conclusion,

Thanks to the support from the senior government through the Safe Restart Grant, Saanich is able to use some of \$2.7 million of the funds set aside to help residents during the pandemic. Although some funds need to be retained for outstanding claims. Thanks to the exemplary financial management of the District, the leadership of Mayor and council the recommendation made by the director of finance was unanimously approved.

Reallocation of the 2019 Surplus

Council has unanimously voted direct annual surplus of:

1. One-time request equally \$913,400
2. Transfer to the Facility Replacement Reserve Fund of \$1,165,000
3. Transfer to the Strategic Initiatives fund of \$662, 900

Although the Resilient Saanich Technical committee is commencing it will be a multi- year process that will extend into next term.

It is with this in mind that I thank you, the steward the stewards of Saanich (SOS) who have been holding the line in the absence of environmental protection that is in alignment with an ecological and climate emergency.

In the face of a housing crisis -a ecological and climate emergency which is further fragmentation and is threatening ecosystems.

I believe 3 years is too long.

Therefore, I am calling the residents of Saanich to please join me in preserving, and protecting ecosystems, biodiversity and trees through ecological restoration, agroecological practices and cultural revitalization whether on private, or public lands, whether renter, owner, homeless or passerby we can all be stewards!

Seasons Greetings!

<https://www.vancourier.com/2.2065/saanich-councillor-encourages-owners-to-be-environmental-stewards-of-their-land-1.24230333>

Be the change you want to see in the world!