



## *Important Decisions by Saanich Council and How They Impact You... (IMO)*

It is an honour to be celebrating six years as an elected official at the District of Saanich. It has become a regular practice for me to write to my constituents to inform, engage, and to inspire public participation. As your independent, 100% not-development-funded voice for a sustainable Saanich. I stand for transparency, accountability, and good governance. This includes informing the public about what is happening at Saanich Council in the absence of a voting dashboard.

Last term, when public participation was at its lowest because of the provincial health order, many of our foundational documents were changed via recommendations from the former mayor's Standing Committee on Housing. These recommendations were approved by the majority of council.

Local Area Plans were suspended last term and this term they have been decoupled from the Official Community Plan, downgrading their status from bylaws to resolutions. The changes made to approved community plans during pandemic restrictions were intended to remove barriers to building affordable housing. However, these incentives did not result in any new affordable housing being built. Coincidentally, a new definition of affordable housing, unaffordable to a growing majority of residents, was proposed, and has been used in updating the Official Community Plan.

The Province has overridden local government's authority on zoning. There are now areas legislated for upzoning and blanket rezoning, etc., and Official Community Plan-compliant development applications can be waived without a public hearing, even if they do not contain affordable housing. The public is banned from public hearings that are Official Community Plan-compliant.

Many of the changes mentioned above are resulting in rapid development, including an expedited Active Transportation Plan. They are also occurring at a time of reduced civic engagement with the banning of public from Official Community Plan-compliant hearings and removal of Open Forums.

Some of the residents just finding out about the changes that have occurred to our planning documents feel angry and frustrated, and many feel there is less opportunity to engage with Council. Saanich Council's voting has also changed and is more prescribed, rather than being able to respect neighbourhood zoning issues. Some of my constituents feel unheard and want a platform through which to express their concerns and get answers. Fortunately, Council has added an opportunity for engagement through triannual Town Hall meetings.

So, for the record, I voted:

- NO to separating the Environmental Services and Planning Departments.
- NO to the suspension of Local Area Plans and decoupling them from the Official Community Plan.
- NO to delaying Development Cost Charges.
- NO to aligning our Official Community Plan documents with Bill 44, and I questioned the impacts of the province's overtaking of municipal authority.
- NO to the new definition of affordability
- NO to the removal of the Open Forum.
- FOR implementing the Urban Forestry and Biodiversity Strategy.
- FOR retaining environmental protections on private property.
- FOR three annual Town Halls.

Council must leave meetings open to the public as per the Community Charter, but I have recently learned that it does not have to allow for public input. The public's right to speak is granted by Council and can be taken away. I believe the Open Forum was removed due to decreasing decorum in Council Chambers. I do not want to see any further reductions in public input.

Sincerely, *Nathalie Chambers*  
Saanich Councillor

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