

Transition Sooke Council Watchdog Group
Report on the Sooke Council Committee of the Whole September 8th, 1:00 p.m.
Submitted by Hester Vair and Diane Bernard

Council Members Present: Mayor Maja Tait, Councillors: Beddows, Lajeunesse, Bateman.
Absent from Council Chambers: Councillors Logins, McMath, St-Pierre. (they may have been on line, but no mention made)

Agenda Items:

1. Presentation on Wild Life Interaction in Sooke by BC conservation officer Scott Norris
2. Presentation on Economic Development Initiative by the South Island Prosperity Partnership [SIPP]. Kieran Buggy, Manager of Operations was listed as presenter, but the speaker's name was Emily (did not catch the last name).
3. Presentation of Council Strategic Priorities Report (to replace the Strategic Priorities Chart) by staff member McInnis, Sooke's Chief Administrative Officer;
4. Presentation of Draft for Council Parental Leave

Wild Life Interaction in Sooke

- Norris gave an excellent presentation. He emphasized that their primary objective is public safety. He also spoke about the balance between public safety, prevention & conservation.
- overall conservation officers first strategy is education & their last resort is to euthanize the bear.
- wildlife includes bears, cougars, wolves, deer (focus for Sooke is bears).
- philosophy is "control your attractants" and bear conflicts are a human problem; not a bear problem.
- education: about electric fencing, location of garbage, leaving fruit late on trees or on the ground.
- 2020 60 bear calls to date & more expected with fruit season.
- 2020 1 bear has been euthanized; in 2013, 30 bears euthanized.
- various penalties in use including fines for leaving garbage (whether intentional or not).
- Discussion raised by Counsellor Bateman re: consideration of status of a "Bear Safe" community – i.e. Port Alberni.
- Sam of Wild Wise Sooke (affiliated with Transition Sooke) is looking into this. Council has not heard back yet from Sam (perhaps she could use some support).
- Wild Wise Sooke was mentioned several times re: good work, collaborative, education. DOS supports Wildlife Sooke with annual \$7000. grant
- NOTE: Councillor Beddows offered earlier to help re: bear-proof garbage bins & Bateman offered to help with establishing Sooke as Bear Smart Community.

Presentation by South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP).

This item is relevant to TS with it's interest in local economic development.

- Confusing presentation & overall speaker relied on generalities of economic development
- SIPP is a broad organization of 65 institutions in South Vancouver Island.

- It includes municipalities, government bodies, employers, First Nations, educational institutions, industry associations & nonprofits.
- SIPP started up after 2008 financial crisis. SIPP is currently focusing on economic recovery of COVID 19
- DOS is newest member & joined in 2019.
- Costs for Sooke's membership is \$16, 644. If Sooke's tax base is in trouble next year there will be no increase otherwise, there is 2.5% annual increase.
- Beddows made a relevant statement & posed good questions: Beddows noted that as lobbyists, facilitators & collectors of data, he gathered that SIPP assisted organizations to network, make connections to foster economic development & have a variety of projects (to help bring business to the region & train workers).
- He asked: What are the success stories from your group? Are you a lobbyist group or do you run programmes?

Both Transition Sooke observers (Hester & Diane) noted while SIPP focused on Sooke's economic integration into the region, it was along the line of as a labour supply, rather than the location of a major industry (i.e. Seaspan)...Very low on specifics & answer was to come to the AGM. Diane & Hester agree: this is not in keeping with Transition Sooke perspective of what local economic development means for Sooke

So what's in it for Sooke's \$16,644 annual buy-in?

- Mayor Tait relaid Sooke had been served well by SIPP with economic initiatives (no specific details provided) that had begun in Sooke, however, Sooke did not have the resources to pursue;
- She commented that economic development in the wider region has a positive effect for Sooke.
- She noted that SIPP had the ability to look at women's role in the economy & hoped they were doing this.

- Counsellor Beddows did not appear to be entirely convinced because it was difficult to get clarity on specific actions that have been helpful for Sooke, but was willing to withhold judgment until he learned more.

- Jeff Bateman asked if the five Chamber of Commerce that are now involved have to pay fees to belong. They don't

Adoption of the Council Strategic Priorities Report.

The report is available on the council's website as part of the agenda package for the meeting. This item is critically relevant to Transition Sooke because of our intention to engage in the development of an Official Community Plan that aligns with the values of a sustainable community that does whatever it can to combat climate change.

As ZOOM attendees, we could not see the slides & cannot comment on this. (District Staff now inform us that this will be changed effective at the September 2020 Council meeting & we should be able to view slides presented to Council.

- The strategic plan is a document which attaches resources, time & responsibility to the initiatives that council directs.
- It is summarized in a chart, & the hope is this will provide a document to lay out the work needed to implement Council's policies.
- It was pointed out by the Mayor this is a new practice; in the past there was not always a plan, & where there was, it was not followed.
- This plan connects the goals & policies set out by Council to budgets, actions & work plans, timelines & quarterly reviews.
- This will be a benefit to the staff, the counsellors, and any organization or person wishing to engage in what Sooke is doing.
- With this plan people can check & make sure there is no slippage between goals & objectives & actions. The detailed plan lays out clearly what the city is doing on these issues.
- There is a summary chart of the priorities & associated actions which is intended to become a constant reference for council & for staff to have a clear view of their collaborative work & to stay on track.

(Hester) I wonder if some version of this might be published in the newspaper?

(Hester) My first perusal of this report disturbed me because it appeared that the 'now' items under climate actions were limited in scope, while the 'later' actions were very generally worded endorsements of action to fight climate change. I know that my response was echoed by others who had a quick look at the report. However, at the meeting it became clear that the reason for these priorities is because items cannot be considered 'now' action items until they have been allocated money in the budget. Thus the current designation of 'now' and 'later' items may not be a cause for alarm.

In my view (Hester), no areas of concern for Transition Sooke emerged from the discussion at Council. However, after a closer reading of the report I found several areas of concern. In brief, the issue is that the document has an emphasis on business as usual, only in a more professional and efficient manner. There is no inclination to think outside the box, to consider radical actions, or to move in any way beyond accepted 'best practices'. Many of the insights of Transition Sooke would remain well outside of the world-view that can be found in this document. Further, I think it is possible that the practice of developing strategic plans adopted in this document mitigates against developing innovative strategies.

(Diane) In general I agree with Hester & what I see is a council not keen on upsetting the smooth kart/operation. Status quo is always easier & staff like it too. Disagreements mean debate and looking at alternatives. So any alternative / green viewpoints are seen as 'outside the box' and let's not do this now. (we'll do it later). And if there is a willingness to consider alternatives, councillors fall in line & vote with the majority & hide behind the excuse of 'collaboration'. Change is hard work and it's so much easier & smoother to go along & not 'rock-the-boat'. How do we get them to break out of this mode and look at the serious issues that bring our challenges to the forefront? Tony has made several attempts and, with his inexperience & lack of assistance from fellow councillors, he is regularly 'shut-out' and voted against. Ideas?

Report from staff on a parental leave policy.

Staff was directed in 2019 to put this together. Elected councillors don't get parental leave benefits, as they are not part of the Employment Standards Act.

- There are different policies across the country; in B.C. only Whistler & Squamish have such policies. Ontario requires municipalities to do this.
- The DOS draft policy allows for 20 weeks of pregnancy leave, with 32 subsequent weeks of parental leave. Men would be allowed 32 weeks of parental leave (for up to 52 weeks?).
- This is guiding document and cannot be established as a requirement (unexplained in the meeting, but I assume for legal reasons).
- This policy is not to affect quorum & not applicable to future councils. (??)
- Mayor Tait commented that this was an important policy in encouraging younger people on council.
- Mayor Tait forgot to ask for public comment & would have if there was any. So at the Committee of the Whole, I would suggest Transition Sooke can comment on many items at the COW, to have our considerations reviewed...hmmm

No new business & meeting closed to public.