

Reporters: Hester Vair, Susan Belford

Present: Maja Tait, Al Beddows, Dana Lajeunesse, Ebony Logins, Jeff Bateman, Tony St-Pierre. Megan McMath absent.

The first half of the meeting was an update on the OCP with a presentation from the two consultants 'Engagement Strategy and Work Plan'. The presentation itself had 3 main parts. First, an inspiring and authentic-sounding introduction by Jennifer Fix from; second, Lucas (another consultant presented an outline of the intended procedure and engagement format; third, the consultants asked the councillors three questions to gather information about what they wanted from an OCP. These questions were: (1) What matters most to you and your community? (2) What is the one message we need to convey and why? (3) If we dream big and act boldly, what can this OCP accomplish for Sooke?

We have copious notes of the meeting which we can make available to anyone who is interested in having them. We can also send a pdf of the presentation from DIALOG if anyone would like it. What follows here are the highlights. The emphasis is on critique and may seem negative. However, our role is to look for potential for problems in the way our city is administered.

The inspiring introduction

Ms. Fix presented an OCP as a visionary and community building document that should engage and represent all members of the community and incorporate progressive values, such as setting GHG reduction targets and equity. Ms. Fix balanced this with a clear statement that an OCP is a land-use document - although here too, she took a somewhat visionary tone, insisting that land-use policy is also health policy & social policy.

- There was much in this introduction that Transition Sooke should keep in mind in order to remind council, and each other, what an OCP can be. Ms Fix said several times that the OCP was for everyone, all of the community. Two phrases she used were that this is a 'journey we are embarking on together', and that in the process we will 'identify the things we cherish'.
- It is worth noting that Jennifer Fix said "Land is a finite resource and growth is a currency that we carefully manage. It's ok to say no to some kinds of development; Saying 'no' to one thing means saying 'yes' to another"

How OCP will Proceed/Engagement Format

The plan will have four phases:

- 1) Setting a baseline of existing conditions—now to September 2020. This includes gathering information about Sooke's demographics and existing conditions.
- 2) Vision and Growth Scenarios (Sept-Dec 2020) The Vision part of this will be asking the public for vision ideas for the community and drafting a vision and guiding principles. The Growth Scenarios part will create different growth projections based on a demographic analysis of Sooke. This will generate several options to choose from which will each be compared to the baseline. A preferred growth scenario will be canvassed through public engagement, but of course, Council will decide.
- 3) Draft OCP (Jan-April 2021)
- 4) Final Revision and Approval) April-Dec 2021)

Engagement Format

The Engagement format will be both broad and deep. At the broad level, citizens and the general public will be canvassed using a variety of engagement tools. Deep engagement will include more in-depth conversations over time with specific interest and community groups as well as T'Souke Nation. A preliminary list did not include Transition Sooke, however Councillor Bateman added TS to the list.

Given the extremely large number of community groups on the list, we think it would be useful to find out what engagement with Transition Sooke entails and make sure our voice is heard. Perhaps we should try to get a working group that will seriously engage with DIALOG.

Consultants were asked how they planned to engage youth. While the consultants didn't have a lot to say about that, our councillors had loads of good ideas and why it is vital to do, citing how valuable youth's clear insights are. (we found that encouraging) Some ideas that were suggested by the councillors are: contact schools directly and have youth engage community mapping exercises, identify where things feel unsafe and where they are great, get input multiple times through the process, engage youth K to 12, and hold block parties to engage whole families.

Council Conversation

The conversation Councillors held to answer the consultant's questions is summarized below.

(1) *What matters most to you and your community?*

The bulk of responses fell into two major and related themes: Balance of Aspirational with Practical Values and Length of View.

Balance of Aspirational with Practical Values

Much of the discussion floated between the two poles of aspiration-practicality. with most councillors making statements that were aspirational (self-sufficiency, maintaining rural character, keeping our unique character, maintaining the immersion of the community in the natural world) and also making statements that affirmed the need to be practical (OCP cannot be filled with statements and goals that can't become real; focus on what OCP needs to be, not what it can be; the 2010 document was not achievable.) Mr. McKinnis expressed the opinion that OCPs with too many 'aspirational elements' will fail. Counsellor Logins raised the example of Campbell River's plan which marries "sustainability values" with OCP elements required by law.

Length of View

- As with the practical-aspirational question, there was a range of views. While a lot of concern was expressed that Sooke needs "to be careful not to lock ourselves into something impractical later", and must keep planned actions within a "reasonable" time frame, there were also many desires expressed that the actions outlined by the plan should have long-term value. Thus, the OCP needs to enable nimble response to unfolding reality, while keeping a "7th generation or long-range vision" in view.

Other points mentioned:

- The value of a sense of pride and identity in community (raised by most counsellors).

- How to manage growth and remain consistent with the vision that dates back to CRD local area plans to retain Town Centre with rural surround- Let Sooke be Sooke
- Move the Highway ais way from downtown (shift north?)
- Stay true to 2017 OCP review values: Protect environment; Celebrate Community; Build Economy
- Become a more resilient complete community by building on our unique character and many assets
- Groundtruth the plan on the ground (don't base ideas just on the bird's eye map view) because things on the ground are not what they seem from just looking at a map.

(2) What is the one message we need to convey and why?

All councillors emphasized the importance of having the community engaged in the process and committed to the final product. Much of the discussion focused on ideas of how to best engage Sookians.

Specific points mentioned:

- Giving people a sense of how important the OCP is as a "big picture"
- "Your input is essential and will be valued"
- Want people to read it and see it as realistic.
- Need to be clear with public about what is and what is not possible (in terms of regulations and jurisdiction)
- Teach community how to use the OCP to keep Council accountable
- It is evident that growth is going to continue and it is important to make clear that OCP is not a tool of control. (Mr. McInnis).

(3) If we dream big and act boldly, what can this OCP accomplish for Sooke?

Councillors made comments about maintaining Sooke's unique identity and its small city / rural character where people are happy and connected to each other.

Another section of the discussion focused on becoming a sustainable, independent, small city rather than a bedroom suburb of Victoria. A number of comments acknowledged the difficulty of achieving this goal. Thirdly, the counsellors had a number of concrete ideas for things that would be good for Sooke. Generally these ideas were of two kinds: how to build the local economy to be sustainable and independent, and how to improve life (housing, good neighbourhoods, enhancing our connection with water and the nature around us).

Specific points mentioned

- Public harbour/water views from the Town Centre
- We need to have a 'heart' to the city where everyone goes.
- We can be a "progressive small town community that truly "gets it" that the index of happiness is measured, not by development activity, affluence and the number of chain stores that can be squeezed into a new shopping mall, but rather by smart growth, civic planning, local jobs, independent business and the circular economy, public, private and not-profit collaboration, waste reduction and re-use. Green energy, affordable, alternative, net-zero housing, reskilling education, regional food security, voluntary simplicity and overall raising of the index of happiness of the community." (Bateman)
- Connections between Sookians are important
- Showcase our artistic, creative assets, promote film industry
- T'Souke Heritage as well as Sooke's is important
- Build strong local economy
- "Work from home" zoning
- Affordable housing so that we do not price young Sookians out of the housing market

- What can we do to wean the district off the growth economy and the use of development funds and property tax to pay for things (City of Nelson has a Power utility)
- We are the gateway to the Westcoast; this has big economic value
- A customs office could be a source of revenue
- Attract investment

Watchdog's Analyses While this was not the forum to be explicit about the limits that practicality will place on the aspirational, we got no sense of which aspirational desires (if any) were seen as critical and non-negotiable. It seemed that high levels of future growth were taken for granted, but this was not acknowledged as a threat to the aspirational values. Instead, the idea of Smart, managed growth was prevalent. Of course, managing growth can include restricting it. In generating growth options, TS may wish to ensure that a "restricted growth" option is included and promoted.

Councillor Logins talked about the importance of principles and related how Campbell River has done a "sustainable OCP" defined as a SOCP—which integrates the scope of an OCP with 3 pillars of sustainability- society, environment and economy. This speaks to a possible way through the practical-aspirational divide, and may be useful in countering the big growth bias. This approach is consistent with the CAC's global goal of *"ensuring a 'climate first' approach in all municipal decision-making and planning processes, including the Official Community Plan"*. Such an approach would creating a pathway for the realization of aspirational elements.

We believe that the goal for this OCP should be to have "practical aspirations". For example, an aspiration to reduce GHGs would be made practical through land use measures and supported by targets and the steps for meeting them; an aspiration to protect wildlife and ecosystems would include the practical steps involved in doing that.