

Watchdog Report on Sooke Council Committee of the Whole Meeting
April 19th, 2021 @ 7.00 PM
Hester Vair & Paula Johanson for Watchdog Committee, Transition Sooke.

Notes on the first portion of the meeting by Hester Vair, second portion by Paula Johanson.

In attendance: Mayor Tait, Jeff Bateman, Tony St-Pierre, & Dana Lajeunesse. Megan McMath came in remotely after the item on homelessness as she was driving home from work.

For a summary – look at ‘Take away from this meeting’ at the end of this document.

Homelessness in the Sooke Region - Sooke Communities Health Network

Mary Dunn from SEARCHN and Gemma Martin were part of the delegation.

Relevance to Transition Sooke : Transition Sooke does not have a working group working on inequality, although the issue is part of the purview of the Multi-Belief Initiative, a group associated with Transition Sooke. This issue of homelessness overlaps with concerns about how growth and urbanization in Sooke affects the life of our community.

Gemma Martin, who was working with the Sooke Regional Health Network and wrote the report “Amidst the Paradise Homelessness in the Sooke Region” gave a presentation. I have notes with more details if anyone would like them, and Gemma’s report is available in the agenda package - link from the district’s “Meetings” .

The report is a review of homelessness in Sooke. In her report Gemma covers the problem of gaps in services and difficulty in finding and accessing services; the particular situation of First Nation homelessness, and of ‘hidden homeless’, ie, people who are on the edge of homelessness; the effect that growth will have on homelessness; the dependence on sometimes unreliable grant funding; and the need for communication and education. She has seven recommendations, but no specific items to request from Council at this time.

Councillors were appreciative of the report, and it was received by Council for information.

Note: In the discussion Maja asked Bateman, who is her alternate at CRD, to be the liaison to the Sooke Coalition to End Homelessness, and to chair the coalition. Maja mentioned that there is too much on her plate at the moment.

Report of the Climate Action Committee with three requests to Council.

The presentations were made by Anna Russell, and Elizabeth Lange. Anna has expertise in public policy research and Elizabeth’s area is transformative sustainability education; the first part of the report, given by Anna, focused on initial planning for carbon neutrality - how to get there and how to monitor, and the second half, given by Elizabeth, focused on how to engage and educate the community.

Climate Action Committee had Three Requests for Council: First Request update emissions reduction target

The Climate Action Committee requested that Council change the target for the reduction of emissions from the current flexible target of 40 to 50% reduction to a 50% reduction of emissions by 2030. They recommend that this be considered in terms that are easier to manage - a 7% annual target - which they refer to as the 7% Solution.

- Anna explained what is already being done by the district that will help move us to that goal, and made general suggestions on what else could be done. She suggested that it high impact actions might focus on energy use in buildings and on transportation.

- She reported that the group is working on a 5-year 'actionable step-by-step plan'.
- What would 7% per year look like, and how would we achieve it?

Council's response to a commitment to a 50% reduction in emissions

This request had the most response from council. Several councillors were worried about such a target.

- Councillor Beddows was not opposed to the possibility of such a target, but said several times that without more specific details about what this would entail, he would not commit to the suggestion of a specific target. I had the impression he felt council was asked to sign on the dotted line without reading the details. In other words, it is my impression that the need for 50% reduction came first for the Climate Action Committee, and how to get there was work in progress, but for Councillor Beddows, the target for reduction would be dependent on what had to be done to get there.
- Beddows also mentioned that the municipal level of government did not have control over emissions, and to expect that the District could reduce their emissions might be unreasonable. Councillor Lajeunesse expressed some sympathy with this view. This is worth noting because it is a common perspective that there can be few actions on climate change at the local level. Anna responded that the committee would keep their recommendations to what the district can do, and, if such a target was adopted, it would put the district in a stronger position in their conversations with other levels of government.
- McMath was supportive of the committee, but pointed out that in Sooke the biggest issue might be the commuting back and forth, and a commitment to such a target might 'set us up for failure'. Very supportive responses came from St-Pierre; Bateman and Tait were also supportive.
- Councillor St-Pierre pointed out that the biggest impact that we could make on emissions is a change of diet, and he suggested that big targets are what is needed to get people on board.
- Bateman pointed out that we are mandated in our Official Community Plan to have a target.
- Tait said that we can begin with choosing a target and ask the committee how to get there.

All of council was very pleased with the committee's proposal to lay out a 5-year plan. Tait spoke on this most clearly.

Second Request to consult on the Official Community Plan and Council Response

The Climate Action Committee requested that Council set in motion a meeting (or meetings?) between the Climate Action Committee and people working on the Official Community Plan to discuss the emissions reduction target that will be part of the Official Plan, and offer advice on this. Mr McInnis, the Chief Administrative Officer, suggested that the Climate Action Committee be a delegation at an upcoming meeting of the Committee working on the Official Community Plan - this was agreed to. Note - Councillor Beddows was concerned that the committee might want a great deal of involvement with the Committee working on the Official Community Plan, possibly derailing a committee (my words, not Beddows) which is finished gathering information and at the point of writing.

Third Request for funding to hire communications consultant to help with public engagement

The Climate Action Committee requested that Council approve the request for funding (\$7500 from the Carbon Tax Rebate Reserve Fund) for a communications consultant, Denise Withers, to develop a plan for educating and engaging the community along the lines of a storytelling approach to education for change.

This request comes out of the education and engagement plan, presented by Elizabeth Lang. She presented the proposal to use a storytelling approach to communicating the problem of carbon emissions and expressing the various responses to this. A storytelling approach would be used in the process of communication with the community - from expressing the problem of carbon emissions, through outlining possible successes, to expressing resistance to change, and finally creating new stories that the community can engage with. It would involve different population segments and their responses to emissions reduction. This would be part of a public engagement plan beginning with Earth Week 2021 and finishing in the fall with the launch of a climate change campaign and a Citizen call to action for an emission-free Sooke.

stopped around 1:48, Paula's notes follow:

Lang observed that the Climate Action Committee is looking to dovetail with the OCP (councillors approved of this statement).

Bateman asked how much time from Christina Moog would the committee need?

Lang suggested some 4 hours a week from Moog for meetings and work for the committee.

The Corporation Services Manager McInnis was introduced to the meeting.

Susan Belford suggested that GHGs from residential development should be included when calculating the planned 7% reduction annually. (Discussion suggested that tons of GHGs to build a house are very hard to reduce and might overwhelm any reductions in annual use afterwards, so reduction suggests building fewer new houses.)

Mayor Tait called for a vote on the first recommendation, of 7% reduction per year from 2018 to 50% by 2030. Bateman moved, it passed.

Tait called for the second recommendation, a Data working meet with Sustainable Solutions Group & district staff. Moved & passed.

Tait called for the third recommendation. \$7,500 from the Carbon Tax Rebate Reserve Fund to have Denise Withers (denisewithers.com). Moved & passed.

9pm.

Agenda item 6.1 on Public Interest Discussion, moved & passed.

Agenda item 6.2 an update by McInnis

He displayed spreadsheets that impressed the council VERY much, as compartments on these sheets were used for tracking not only staff activities but fees, revenue, and hours staff members worked on each item.

Takeaway from this meeting:

-Council has accepted the Homelessness report but its only action is to ask Bateman to be the liaison to the Sooke Coalition to End Homelessness, and to chair the coalition.

-Council has confirmed not just their prior 40% to 50% reduction in carbon footprint by 2030 but now a 50% reduction with annual goals of 7% reduction.

-Our 7% solution has been accepted, but implementing it will be a challenge, particularly for councillors Beddoes and Lajeunesse.

-As Tait says, the Climate Action Committee needs to be **more specific**. We need to show council what the 7% and 50% reductions look like in actions that can be implemented by the District of Sooke. **Be concrete**, with specific actions for food security, waste stream management, public transit, and more.

-Transition Sooke should work with the Sooke Coalition to End Homelessness on their Homelessness report, to promote not just their seven recommendations but concrete actions that can be implemented now by the District of Sooke.

-Our specific actions on Climate Action and Homelessness will impress the council more if in addition to being written in sentences, they are presented as **spreadsheets** like McInnis uses, tracking staff activities, hours of staff members work, expenses to implement an action, any revenues, and carbon footprint impact (each action's share of 2018 amount tracked next to the intended reduction) as well as impact on homelessness/housing.