

Regular Council Meeting, Feb. 14, 2022
Reported by Jack Gegenberg

Mixed meeting. In attendance at Council Chambers: Bateman, Beddows, Lajeunesse, Tait. Present virtually: Logins, McMath, St. Pierre.

Summary: A short meeting (1 hour 15 minutes). Items of interest were in Item 11 Reports. The first, 11.3, was a report by the CAO on the Corporate Emissions Inventory. The CAO endorsed a target of 50% reduction in GHG emissions from the corporate sector. The second, 11.4 was the more contentious item. It was a discussion of building permit turnarounds in light of Herb Haldane's letter to the editor of the Sooke News Mirror last week.

11.3 Corporate Emissions Inventory and Reduction Targets (Time 16:04) The CAO and staff are prepared to recommend that Council endorse a target of a 50% reduction of GHG emissions from the corporate (as opposed to the residential) sector. It was approved by a unanimous vote after almost no discussion.

11.4 Carry Forward of 2021 Permit Revenue Fees (Time about 19:00) The CAO presented a motion to carry forward \$225,000 in building permit revenues collected in 2021 to help resolve issues in processing building permit and subdivision applications. The discussion seemed to turn around the content of a letter to the editor of the Sooke News Mirror, written by Herb Haldane, suggesting that Sooke was way out of synch with Langford in the turnaround time for building permit applications. Haldane claimed that the Langford average turnaround time was 48 hours, while Sooke took 3 months to approve these sorts of things. Contra Haldane, the CAO says our current turnaround time is 47 days (up from 43 days last year, mostly as a result of the high volume of applications). The CAO says that Sooke could speed this up by technical changes to the process (e.g. on-line applications) and by going faster on 'low risk applications'. Lots of discussion took place.

McMath wants Council to examine why we are so much slower than Langford. She thinks there is a communication breakdown with applicants. She also thinks that Council should respond to Haldane's editorial.

LaJeunesse thinks Council should consider changing bylaws to make the application process move faster. He also noted that Sooke builders think the process is too complicated.

The Mayor said 'I have been drowning in this for months', with lots of phone calls to her, presumably from builders, asking her to intervene. She also thinks that the pandemic is partially responsible for the slow speed of processing applications because of the inability to have in-person conversations. She was also in favour of a media release countering Haldane's accusations.

Bateman noted that BC has a \$500,000 grant to streamline permit applications, and progress is being made.

Approval of the Carry Forward Motion and constructing a media release was approved unanimously.

What was unfortunately NOT discussed, in my opinion, was the question of just why we would want to streamline the process in the first place.