

The Event

On November 24th, 2018, thirty-nine active members of nine Saanich Community Associations (CAs) met for three and a half hours to discuss major issues in their communities, their successes and challenges as associations, their role in land-use and what assistance and support they need from Saanich and the Saanich Community Association Network (SCAN), to be most effective.

Participants remained at one of five discussion tables for the duration of the event. A table facilitator guided the conversation, while a scribe recorded it on prepared sheets. Participants engaged in three, 45 minute conversations that identified issues, successes, challenges and needs and in some cases generated recommendations to Saanich and SCAN.

After each conversation, a brief plenary session was held allowing each table to report on their conversation to the whole meeting. Their comments were jotted on a large paper on the front wall, and the prepared sheets with the scribe's recordings were collected.

Following the three conversations, a plenary session established next steps. As the meeting adjourned, participants were asked to complete evaluation sheets. Twelve did so, and a further three have returned completed evaluations via email

Finding the themes

While some themes emerging during the afternoon were apparent to all present, it helps to describe the objective factors involved in identifying and reporting on themes. Comments recorded at the engagement session were entered into a database, then each conversation was analysed and comments that were similar in nature were grouped together in "theme buckets". For example, in the conversation about top issues in communities, the comments "traffic", and "traffic calming" both fit into the "transportation pressures" theme bucket. In all conversations, there were comments that were made only once. These have been grouped together in the Outliers theme bucket; when viewed together, these outliers help to provide nuance to the over-arching themes coming out of the event.

The wall sheets created during the short plenaries showed how frequently these over-arching themes recurred over the afternoon or were carried through each conversation. A summary of the conversations' themes and findings is below, while a detailed listing of themes and outliers is contained in Appendix 1.

Impacts of Change: Densification and Transportation Pressure

Engagement participants were clear that the top two issues facing their neighbourhoods and communities are densification (development) and transportation pressures. The interplay between these two is well known, in that the first contributes to the second. It is complicated by the reality that jurisdiction over transportation is shared by Saanich, the CRD and the Province.

At the plenary it was noted that a streamlined, consistent and clarified development process with strengthened amenity requirements is needed. Also, a range of elements to be considered in supporting effective changes in transportation were identified and tied to the need for accurate traffic data.

Demographic shifts, environment and housing affordability vied for the spot of third top issue— indicating that these issues are of great importance to some Saanich communities and less to others. These topics were repeated throughout the afternoon across many conversations.

How can Saanich better support Communities in dealing with these issues?

Improved Communication Participants saw improved communication by Saanich, with neighbourhood residents and Community Associations, to be of paramount importance in helping communities deal with the challenges facing them. Such communication improvements include:

- Updating the Saanich website to increase accessibility by all residents (translation)
- Greater investment in community engagement, including social planning support.
- Supporting the renewal of Local Area Plans and other visionary documents.
- Education

Creating or updating development policy, streamlining and clarifying the development process and communication protocols around it. Part of this would include the support and renewal of visionary documents such as LAPS.

Formal liaison between Community Associations and Saanich was the second most frequently raised measure needed for Saanich to help communities deal with problematic issues.

While the former Council approved the creation of a rotating Council liaison for each Community Association, this has not yet been implemented and details have yet to be worked out. It should be noted that while the Council liaison function may help improve Council members' understanding of local issues and Community Association members' understanding of Council constraints, it will require inclusion of Saanich staff to effectively implement such understanding.

The need for consistent, respectful interaction with Saanich staff came up several times throughout the afternoon.

A common theme in conversations was the idea that the wellbeing of neighbourhood residents needs to be considered, even differently prioritized, in all matters of land use policy. One participant put it this way: “implement a lens of community in all municipal departments”, always keeping awareness of the needs and well-being of residents first when considering proposals.

How can SCAN support communities (&their associations) in responding to these issues?

Promote Exchange and Knowledge Sharing

Overwhelmingly participants identified an important role for SCAN is promoting knowledge sharing and exchange of views among CAs. Preferences were expressed for short, facilitated face to face meetings. It was also suggested that SCAN could facilitate CAs coming together around specific issues that impact them all, so as to bring a unified, consistent approach when liaising with Saanich. While advocacy was not seen as a helpful role for SCAN, it was suggested that SCAN could greatly assist CAs by communicating the commonalities and issues CAs share to Saanich.

Outliers in this section included reviewing the SCAN Terms of Reference and Community Association Boundaries. The first of these is an annual process and the second is beyond the purview of SCAN.

Recommendation for Community Associations

In the plenary, the need for CAs to diversify their membership to include renters and a more accurate reflection of the community population was stated. CAs were encouraged to take action to diversity membership by conducting education and outreach in their communities.



Success and Challenge: Effective Community Associations are Unifying and Diverse

The second conversation of the afternoon narrowed the focus from communities in general to Community Associations; their successes, challenges and needs. Overall, participants defined a successful Community Association as one which:

- Has a diverse active membership
- Acts as a unifying force in the community
- Provides knowledge and information exchange with the community
- Is respected/valued by community residents

Success and Challenge

Participants identified two main indicators of success for Community Associations;

- the sponsoring of well attended community social events and
- successful advocacy on local priorities and issues facing the community.

Other factors affecting CA success included the quality and consistency of leadership, depth of knowledge about the community and its history, quality of communication within and around the CA. Specific actions that built the success of individual CAs were referenced during this conversation, and these include; police liaison, park, watershed and greenspace restoration and the garnering of some valuable community contributions via development.

Participants identified four core challenges that face CAs. The most frequently referenced was the challenge of recruiting and retaining active members and board members—particularly those who reflect a full demographic representation of the community, such as tenants, youth/elders, new Canadians etc. Outreach and communication to energize the community was identified both as a solution to the first challenge, and a challenge in itself.

Other challenges identified related to questions of legitimacy of CAs, understanding the CA's role, developing external relationships with Saanich and other community groups, fundraising, lack of consensus and balancing the CA's social and issue functions.

Some challenges raised were those beyond the capacity of the CA to change, such as it's geographical size and nature or the impacts of a systemic issue such as homeless and affordability. Finally, some Community Association's noted a lack of meeting space as a challenge.

The meeting then turned to structures that could be improved to support CAs in their work.

How can SCAN help Community Associations meet these challenges?

Once again, participants saw SCAN's role in helping Community Associations as one of information and knowledge exchange and education. This role would see SCAN:

- Share best practices information to help CAs develop
- Provide mentorship and leadership training
- Let CAs know what SCAN can do to help

During this conversation there were some requests for SCAN to take on an advocacy role regarding issues commonly experienced by CAs.

How can Saanich help Community Associations meet these challenges? Advertise, promote, embrace and nurture CAs

Overwhelmingly, the suggestions for help needed from Saanich were aimed at improving the quality of the Saanich-CA relationship. During this conversation, Saanich was invited to advertise, promote, embrace and nurture CAs by clarifying and expanding the relationship between SCAN, CAs and Saanich and providing tangible supports such as access to increased budgets, meeting rooms, consistent access to staff and council. It was also noted the Saanich website could provide a clearer understanding of value of the CAs' role. Two outliers in this conversation included working proactively with CAs to establish Terms of Reference and to discuss development issues

Six recommendations came out of this conversation:

- That the relationship between Saanich, SCAN and the CAs be clarified and expanded
- That education and information sharing among CAs and between CAs, SCAN and Saanich be increased.
- That there is easy access to transparent information exchange between CAs and Saanich
- That Saanich reinstate community support programs such as Community Round Tables, Safe Walk to School etc
- That Saanich take a consistent approach to land use across all communities in Saanich.
- That SCAN advocate with Saanich on behalf of CA's about common issues they all share.



Refining the relationship between Community Associations and Saanich: Respect

CAs role in Land Use

In general, participants expressed the CA's role in land use as being one of

- informing, educating, engaging and communicating with community members, while
- interpreting, representing and advocating for their wellbeing at all jurisdictional levels.

Phrased another way, Community Associations can, by interpreting the community to Saanich, provide the "community lens" needed by Saanich Council and Staff when considering community wellbeing in the context of land use. Within this conversation, the need for consistent approaches to land use policy and practice was raised frequently.

While practices vary from CA to CA, depending on size and capacity, there were several practical activities suggested as part of the CA's multi-faceted role, including;

- identifying needed community amenities and obtaining them from developers,
- being first point of contact with developers,
- facilitating discussions about broader land use questions
- facilitating processes that bring developers and residents together

Philosophical perspectives were suggested as well, such as that CAs work to ensure more balance is achieved when change happens in a community, and that they must have an effective working relationship with Saanich Planning staff. It was also noted that the CA's role in land use is not currently clear, and that its interpretation varies widely among CAs.

What needs to be added to the Terms of Reference?

Discussion about the Community Association Terms of Reference allowed participants to explore the formal framing of their CA's land use role and other important aspects of CAs that had surfaced in other conversations over the afternoon. The two primary areas referenced to be included were:

- structural information, such as
 - who is eligible for membership
 - basic requirements for legitimacy
 - conflict of interest
 - specify involvement/connection to Saanich council and staff
 - continuity measures such as new board member onboarding - read and understand role, limits, conflict policy
- principles of operation, such as
 - CAs are a third party in all processes
 - Consistent approach to land use planning
 - Respectful relationship between CAs and Saanich staff and council
 - CA role in land use planning

A third area for inclusion into the TOR related to the CAs role in Arts and culture, community engagement and environmental wellbeing.

Several statements of principle were suggested as well, about topics as varied as environmental stewardship, and respectful relations with Saanich staff.

Outliers in this conversation included references to the CAs role regarding climate change, the requirement for developers to consult with CAs and neighbours , security and emergency planning.

One recommendation came out of this conversation:

- That a Working Group develop TOR language empowering the community

What steps should Saanich take to better support CAs in their role?

Overwhelmingly, participants requested that Saanich support CAs by collaborating with CAs to build its relationship with them and increase consistency, clarity and respect. Saanich Council and Staff were asked to facilitate success by

- creating a Council liaison for CAs
- communicating and consulting meaningfully,
- hearing (and acting upon) citizen input
- helping CA members and boards to fully understand the systems in place
- expecting to act as a respectful, professional resource to CAs
- ceasing to work in departmental silos

Reference was also made to increasing financial contributions to help CAs carry out their work.

One recommendation came out of this conversation:

- That Saanich Planning adopt the policy that the number of neighbours to a development that must be consulted by the developers increases with the size of the development.



OVER-ARCHING THEMES

Consistency

The need for consistency of approach ran through many conversations, including: consistent application of By Law; consistent application of land use policies across Saanich, consistent steps in the development process, consistent role for CAs

Development Policy

While consistent application of policy was seen as necessary, it was also noted in several conversations that Saanich's development policies need to be streamlined, refined and in some cases, created. One suggestion was it is necessary to rethink the economics of land and road use in order to respond effectively to pressures communities face.

Relationship

The need for an improved relationship with Saanich was another thread running through all conversations. While the process of improving the relationship has begun with the planned rotating Community-Council Liaison, it was noted that a similar connection with Saanich Staff would be of benefit also.

Respect

In virtually all conversations over the afternoon, the theme of respect for CAs and citizen involvement frequently recurred. There was a sense by many that their involvement as community representatives is not consistently valued by all Saanich staff. The need for prompt access to information, responsiveness to questions and transparency about decision making were all flagged as of concern.

Next Steps

During the closing plenary session, the following next steps were identified:

- That a report from this meeting be created
- That SCAN recruit willing workers to form an Action group or Sub-Committee to:
 - Spearhead recommendations from this meeting
 - Consult with Saanich about its preferences regarding the TOR and Council Liaison
 - Consult with Developers about their needs in the land use planning process
 - Develop recommendations regarding the Community Association Terms of Reference, Council Liaison and land use planning.
 - Examine its own Terms of Reference
 - Work with Saanich to ensure that an evaluation process into all built into all policies and practices.
 - Hold more engagement exercises such as this one.
- That efforts be made to further develop the relationship with Saanich by
 - Educating new council members about the governance review
 - Encouraging Council to create and maintain functional Advisory Committees