

Mayor's Public Address – March 23, 2020

* Transcription of video recording *

Good afternoon, everyone.

I wish to acknowledge that we are here today with gratitude on the territory of the T'Sou-ke Nation. I am here to provide a greeting and update from Council Chambers. I wish to start by thanking all of our frontline workers and all of our community who are following the provincial orders.

This will be a weekly update that I will be doing and while I recognize that this camera is a little distant, we are maximizing the use of our existing technology and this will be what we will use for the foreseeable future.

There's been a lot of talk recently in town about why we are doing these orders and what is important. For myself the main part of this is to, number one to keep our vulnerable populations our seniors and those with compromised health safe, and secondly also to keep our frontline workers healthy and safe. We appreciate that this is far from over and we all have a responsibility as individuals to do the very best that we can. This is a multiple government response to the crisis, and we know in the province that the government, opposition parties, and independents are all working together. Partisanship has been set aside and what it is important now is that we work together to serve our people. Whether that's local government, federal government or the province, it's our people that are our priority.

This morning at 10:00, Dr. Henry and the Minister of Health were live. They will be returning to the typical 3:00 p.m. spot from Tuesday to Friday. The Premier and Minister of Finance also provided an update live at noon to the Covid-19 crisis plan. While we hear a lot from the federal government and the provincial government, we often are asked what the role of local government is. Our role is to help implement the orders, to model best practice, to educate and share information with our community and to enforce as needed. We have heard that the supply chains are being managed across governments to ensure that necessary supplies and essential services goods and personnel will make it through the crisis and through the recovery.

Some of you have asked why we have not done a state of local emergency when other communities have already done so. A state of local emergency is to address a localized concern such as a wildfire or a flood that may only impact our community. At this time we are all impacted together and so Minister Farnsworth and Minister Robinson earlier today stated that if a local government were to evoke a local state of emergency that would actually be suspended it is important now that we work together and be in lockstep with the province so we can enact the orders and respond and be prepared in a joint coordinated way.

What's happening here at the District of Sooke - while we are closed to the public please note that our staff are working to assist residents and business owners to their very best over the phone or through email. Our wastewater staff are now working in shifts so they can self-distance while also maintaining this very important infrastructure. Building officials are finding unique ways to complete inspections with videos, photos etc. Administration are finding this as an opportunity to catch up and eliminate any backlog that we may have. Work on our important planning documents like the Transportation Master Plan, Parks and Trails, as well as other grant applications and other district priority work - this is all continuing and we are looking to find avenues for public engagement likely through an online means. The Sooke Official Community Plan has a planned review commencing in 2020 and this work will also continue.

An Official Community Plan is a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management. Local Governments are encouraged to consider how the OCP can be integrated with other strategies including transportation, sustainability, waste management etc. so that our community has an integrated and a coordinated effort. Those at home, this is a great time to hear from you. What is working well in your neighborhood? What would make it more livable? What do you like about your part of the community? What would you like to see more of? Since we're all at home, this is a great time to see how things are working for you. In terms of Council meetings, when council adopted the Procedural Bylaw recently in late 2019, the change enabled council members other than the chair to participate electronically. Our staff are currently testing the technology and we will likely conduct meetings using existing means like our telephone system and the webcast. BC local governments are also asking the province to examine the Local Government Act and to provide avenues for public commentary as your input is essential in our decision-making. As I announced last week, Regular Council meetings have been suspended for 30 days, however it is possible we will be meeting sooner using our electronic means and we will provide notice when and if a special meeting has been scheduled. In this way the public will be able to view this through our existing webcast system the same way that you are viewing this video now.

We have already raised some local government concerns such as filing deadlines, property tax payments etc. with the province and they are currently developing a legislative framework so they can respond to these concerns. Local governments are in regular communication with the province and the province has been listening to us.

What is an Emergency Operations Center? You may have seen media releases that we have fired up our EOC. Please note that this is completely separate than our fire department. While our EOC director is deputy chief Matt Barney, we also need to ensure that our firefighters and

our responders are free and able to respond to calls as they are needed. It's a separate entity but it does operate out of the same building.

I suppose one positive that came out of the wildfires of 2017 and 2018 is that they provided us with excellent training. Communication lines have already been established, a chain of command, grant opportunities, funding opportunities. In this way the District of Sooke was able to establish training and be prepared for times like this. I'm very grateful to our Deputy Chief and all of our staff who are involved in the Emergency Operations Center. This includes finance, administration, our engineers, planning staff, communications and so forth. The provincial entity provides updates to our EOC daily. Our staff also monitor all of the provincial addresses that are given. Our regional CEOs meet via conference calls to share information and best practices and right now our EOC is reaching out to the local business community and volunteer groups to determine the impacts and changes that may be needed for levels of service in the community. Planning and logistics are working together with other agencies to assist with service to vulnerable populations including our homeless population here in Sooke. There is work happening to source materials and necessary equipment. They are also regularly communicating with our RCMP and also tracking costs for reimbursement through the disaster administration program.

A few other updates. While the province has said that you can get outside in small numbers with your families, we ask that you please refrain from using the playground equipment in both our community parks as well as the schools. In this way we are working with School District 62 to keep in place and maintain signage. We simply do not have the resources to keep the equipment clean and safe for use at this time. We've been advised that Jordan River Park, which is outside of our boundaries here but is a CRD park, is now closed. Backyard burning - I know this is a great time to clear up all the debris in your yard and while even the venting index may say it's a good day to burn we are discouraging and we ask that you postpone any burning at this time. Your neighbors may be suffering and stuck in their home and I'm sure they would greatly appreciate it if you could just hold off.

For those of you that have a concern about safe drinking water, this will be for those on well systems, our Emergency Operations Center is looking into this as well as the Electoral Area director Mike Hicks. At the moment the best source is water deliveries and there are several companies that deliver to our region as any self-serve dispensing stations in the grocery store have been ordered to close. This closure applies to both the bulk food dispensers and the water dispensers. Those of you that are still traveling on transit you may know that on March 20th the Victoria Regional Transit Commission announced the need to board from the rear doors unless you require the use of the accessibility ramps in which case the drivers will assist you. Fares have been suspended for 30 days so there is no charge for transit, however please note

that the schedules have also been adjusted in response to a reduction in riders and driver availability.

The news is changing rapidly and so we'll do our very best to give timely updates. I will provide an update on Mondays at 1 o'clock from Council Chambers. Those of you that are aware of my public Facebook page, I'm also doing short updates. There's no need to like or follow me, it's completely open to the public. The provincial and federal governments have all of their video updates archived on their websites in case you missed any of the live newscasts. With so much news coming through our daily feeds it's so important that we verify the source. When in doubt you could also just send it to the publisher at the Sooke News Mirror the Sooke Pocket News, both of these have been actively serving our community and can easily recognize a fake news headline.

For myself, I'm remaining connected with our Councillors, our staff, elected colleagues from every corner of BC, as well as across the country. I have ongoing conversations with our MLA and MPs offices - both may be closed to the public, but they are able to take your emails and your phone calls - T'Sou-ke Nation, Electoral Area Director Mike Hicks, Capital Regional District Union of BC Municipalities well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The intent here is just to share information and to find ways to manage through the situation together. Like you, I'm caring for my family and thinking of my friends in these challenging times.

I will share that we are in this together, and when we work together, we are stronger. Sooke is a very kind and resilient community and I think this will take us well into the future, in fact I know it will.

Keep healthy, be kind, and wash your hands.

Thank you