

## **Mayor's Public Address – April 6, 2020**

\* Transcription of video recording \*

Good afternoon, everyone.

A number of things to share this week - firstly I'd like to thank everyone who is observing social distancing and just to let you know we're thinking about all of you. You may be aware that at council we have received new provincial legislation that enables us to have electronic municipal council meetings with no public attendance, however the intent under the provincial order is for us to deal with only emergency or finance related matters to ensure business continuity within the District of Sooke. An example would be last Tuesday we had a special council meeting to adopt the 2020 – 2024 Five Year Financial Plan bylaw. Rather than going back and amending the bylaw, the intent of us adopting this was that council then gave direction to staff to examine and to focus on only core issues and to also curtail any discretionary spending. We are waiting for the province to respond on whether or not the May 15th deadline to adopt the tax rate bylaw will hold or whether or not that will change, but while we're waiting this will enable us to consider amendments to the financial plan and to look at what we can actually focus on in these extraordinary times.

We do have a regular council meeting scheduled for April the 14<sup>th</sup>, and over the course of the next couple of days we will determine if this meeting will go ahead given the standards that we need to work around. Should the meeting hold, then any public feedback can be sent to [info@sooke.ca](mailto:info@sooke.ca) and if the meeting is canceled we will also post that on the website. As needed, we can always schedule special council meetings to bring forward those emergent issues that we need to deal with. We're also waiting to hear on what will be determined for public participation in cases of public hearings or in other text amendment type of matters related to development and we expect to hear more about that in the coming days.

You may know that bylaw enforcement has stepped up to aid in educating and warning the public around social distancing, public gatherings, and park closures. We would like to thank all the residents who are complying and who are staying home. We are receiving complaints of gatherings of up to twenty or more people on Whiffin Spit in the evenings. I do wish to remind everyone today that Whiffin Spit, Sooke Bluffs Park, Ed Macgregor Park and the marine boardwalk are all closed to public access as well as the playgrounds both at our schools and within our parks.

We'd like to thank all of the business who have been so nimble in altering the way that you operate - whether this is a temporary closure, implementing a delivery or pickup model, or altering the way that you serve our community. Protecting both your staff and your customers, the flexibility of our Sooke businesses is really appreciated and we know that these are very difficult times for you. We'd like to encourage everyone to shop local and to choose Sooke whenever possible. You'll note that on the district's website we do have a COVID-19 page that does list off essential businesses and if you find that we are missing someone please email us at [info@sooke.ca](mailto:info@sooke.ca) so that we can update this information.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce for stepping up at this time. The Chamber staff are following every announcement that's been made, whether it's federal, provincial, or even local government so that they can provide information that's timely and factual to their members. The Chamber also has a weekly zoom chat set up for its members and I was very grateful

to participate in today's at 11:00 a.m. This is a way for members to gather and to answer questions or to share successes, so a big shout-out to Sooke Region Chamber. I think what's important right now for groups like the Chamber is that they're able to bring together the interests of their members and then to come forward with a suite of advocacy matters that are important, so it's many voices speaking together as one.

The COVID-19 info pages on our website includes financial support information and will provide a summary and links to various financial supports to residents such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, the BC Hydro bill deferral and crisis funding, ICBC's monthly payment deferrals, rental supplements, mortgage deferrals, and more. You'll find this information will be updated as we collect new and evolving updates to support vulnerable British Columbians during the crisis. The province is providing a three-million-dollar emergency grant from the community gaming grants programs to Food Banks BC. Food Banks BC will then distribute the money among food banks province-wide to support their immediate needs to buy and distribute food, pay employees, and cover other costs essential to the delivery of the programs. Food Banks BC was selected to distribute the funding because of their expertise in management of food distribution. I'd like to thank and acknowledge the Sooke Food Bank under Kim Metzger's leadership for really ramping up at this time. They were one of the first to reach out to us as this as the crisis happened and as their need ramped up, so we're very appreciative of the work that you're doing and just how quickly you managed to evolve.

Community caring - many people are reaching out to one another for help on social media and it's been very heartening to see the community of Sooke rally and come together this way more than usual to help a neighbor or even a stranger they may not know. I've seen many people step up to pick up groceries, prescriptions, drop off hot meals - the community has a lot of heart year-round but it's lovely to see people going above and beyond to care for one another.

Many parents have been in touch with their teachers as SD 62 launches virtual classrooms. Each teacher is approaching things a little bit different, with different learning tools and assignments after reaching out to parents last week to find out what works best for their families. Kudos to the teachers and the school district for continuing to adapt to this new normal. We also enjoyed the video that the teachers at EMCS put together.

Easter weekend is coming up now and as difficult as it is during these times when we're used to gathering with loved ones, the advice from the province has been to stay at home and not to gather in person with families. Instead, find something creative - have a video meal together, a video potluck, or send videos of kids decorating eggs. Stay connected with one another in a meaningful way.

Aa few other updates from transit - as you know public transit plays an extremely important role in our communities. The service has decreased substantially given that ridership is down and we have been advised that BC Transit will be extending rear boarding until April 30th and at which time it will be re-evaluated based on advice from our public health officer. This also means that fare revenue will not be collected but the decision is to ensure continued protection of the health and safety of the drivers as well as to enable physical distancing for customers. Passengers can still load through the front if they require the use of the ramp or other accessibility factors. There's also been guidance that the ferries are for essential travellers only.

A few items that have come up from residents - it's been noted that there is a significant amount of litter tossed out of cars and trucks every day on our highways and roadways. I'd like to thank our residents for picking that up, and really wish to discourage this type of behavior. If you have any trash, please bring it home with you and dispose of it there. There has been concerns of roadwork - essential roadwork or pothole repair not happening - within our community. Please be advised that our staff are continuing on with this necessary work. There was a delay in service delivery last week due to the weather, however our staff have been engaged with our contractor and they expect that work to happen early this week.

Another item is that the donation bins for clothing are closed however, we still have what looks like a large amount of clothing being dropped off at the bins and it's creating a bit of an unsightly mess. Unfortunately, nothing can be handed over and so even sites like Sooke Embrace on Facebook have noted that donated items cannot be distributed at this time and the same is true with these bins. The items cannot be picked up until it's safe to do so. Please just keep all of these items with you in your house somewhere so that when the time comes it can be handed out, otherwise it's just creating a bit of a mess out in our community.

It should be noted that while our parks are closed, they are still sustaining some vandalism. I'd like to thank our staff for staying on top of this and for any of you that may see or witness anything that happens in our parks if you can please contact 911 so that we can continue on and follow up on this as it happens.

The weather has turned a bit brighter today, so hopefully that will see many of you outside enjoying your homes and your gardens and dealing with some of the spring work that you would hope to attend to. I'm very grateful to live in such a warm and caring community and I thank all of you for your messages of support and the support that you're giving to one another. I wish you all very good health as we work through this together. As always please remember to wash your hands and please stay healthy.

Thank you.