

Mayor's Public Address – May 4, 2020
Transcription of Video Recording

Good afternoon everyone,

I wish to formally recognize the territory of T'Sou-ke Nation upon whose lands our municipality resides. I would like to give a special thanks to all our frontline in essential workers, thank you to our business's, volunteers, and service groups for always finding ways to continue to deliver services and such valuable supports to our community. To our residents for physically distancing, staying home and caring for everyone throughout these extraordinary times.

Today please note that I am also streaming this live to my Facebook page and I have two cameras now to look at, so if you bear with me while I work with the technology.

Highlights today, as you may know the district closed several municipal parks and all municipal playgrounds back on March 25th in an effort to reduce social contact in areas with limited space, such parks as the marine boardwalk and Whiffin Spit, on Friday the parks were reopened and while physical distancing is still required, it's just great to have them open again. The playgrounds remain closed due to the shared touch nature of the equipment. Our bylaw officers reported a high level of compliance with physical distance over the weekend with most residents doing their part to protect themselves. It is important to know that the gradual relaxing of restrictions does not mean we can be less vigilant though we know our residents really want to get outdoors with their families to enjoy all these great public spaces. We are pleased to make this available again, but we all need to remember that the fight against the virus continues our bylaws staff will be on site to monitor compliance and to give some friendly reminders to our residents. Users of Whiffin Spit trail or park do ask if possible, to keep your dog on-leash now as friendly visits between people and pets easily close the two-meter gap. Keeping our pets close for the time being will help us to keep us all healthy. Many want to know though that our other parks do have a dog off leash or dog under command approach available so there is plenty of areas to have your dog run.

For property taxes you may know that Council met last week on April 27th and we directed staff to eliminate the tax increase that was proposed at about 4%. I would like to thank all our staff and Council for working together to find these savings. At an upcoming meeting Council will receive and consider the tax rate bylaw, this has a legislated deadline of May the 15th and once the tax rate has been adopted property tax notices will be sent out. The payment date does remain July 2nd. You will also may know of the deferment programs that are available through the province, these are for folks that are 55 plus or families with young children, there are minimum equity requirements but the province does have an online calculator that you can use to check it out.

Council has been meeting over zoom and these meetings are recorded, they are uploaded to our website and public input is always available by sending an email to info@sooke.ca.

Unfortunately, Canada Day celebrations have been cancelled, as large gatherings of people are not possible. The celebrations including the fireworks are canceled for 2020. I do wish to acknowledge and thank the Sooke Lions Club for working so closely with us and we hope to plan a community event down the road together whenever that may be possible.

I am pleased to share that the Sooke Fine Arts show will proceed in an online virtual forum. The board is currently working through this transition and they hope to deliver a spectacular show in a virtual format.

As you may know street cleaning has been underway and as spring cleaning continues the sweepers are finishing the area east of Otter Point Road, then progress westward covering the areas north of West Coast Road. Please park off street wherever possible.

Plans to reopen municipal hall to the public are currently underway. We have been closed since March the 17th and pending further guidelines from the BC Health Minister a timeline for reopening will be established and I'll share that with you once it's available. Along of course with enhanced health and safety procedures to keep our staff and residents safe.

You may have heard about ministerial order M 139. This came out on Friday and it's a new order authorizing electronic public hearings. Council also recently received a staff report on how land development processes may continue through the pandemic. This will further add to the district's ability to process development applications. Staff are reviewing these options based on our available technology and will advise on new procedures in the coming weeks.

BC housing in conjunction with local organizations opened a transitional shelter in the dry arena, a SEAPARC, for people experiencing homelessness or those who have been displaced from their homes. I would like to share that we have had vulnerable populations within our communities for decades and people who do not have access to stable and permanent shelter often have higher rates of health concerns. With public washrooms and restaurants closed to the public the facilities are not available, so creating an environment that helps facilitate distancing and providing access to good hygiene facilities, including showers and regular hand washing this keeps all of us safe. Enhanced screening and cleaning protocols are in place in Seaparc to reduce the virus spread. I will note that this facility is for Sooke residents only and is completely full. Here in Sooke we always take care of our own.

I would like to share news of a growing together program, when we all want to get outdoors group of food-related organizations within the Capital Regional District has launched an initiative called growingfood-together.com. This initiative is to encourage and support residents throughout the region to grow their own food, convert lawns to raised beds, pots patios or windows stills. To promote local food security and to spark hopefulness. The initiative aims to get folks outdoors and to experience the health and well-being benefits of growing a successful garden. Anyone interested in the program or in becoming a mentor for beginner gardens, can learn more www.growingfood-together.com

As for the Capital Regional District parks, these have remained open throughout but please note that pay parking at the suit potholes is now in effect.

While CRD committee meetings are on hold, the board meets every two weeks via an online meeting platform.

The Demamiel Creek Golf Course also opened on May 1st and summer registration has opened for limited programs. The staff there are closely monitoring to see what they can success successfully deliver to all of you this season.

Our transit services rear door loading will continue throughout May, as fairs will not be collected, there's free fairs while the rear loading is in effect. The service has been scaled down as ridership has dropped to nearly 75 percent.

On an exciting note did you know that a new shopping mall has opened here in Sooke, featuring 60 local businesses. You all know how incredibly challenging this time is for our local business community, these are families and friends of ours that have done so much to create such a vibrant network for all of us. This new shopping mall will take you to a virtual store, it's all online at www.betterbuysooke.ca. There are over 60 businesses participating and it is an opportunity for us to rediscover what our local brand is. You will find local designed t-shirts, dinner for takeout, chimney cleaning services, plumbing, home décor, all the usual's that you have enjoyed. Many times, you can now find these by visiting the better by Better Buy Sooke website. By clicking on the business logo, you will either be taken to a new online store that has been created or to their own online website.

You will also know that the Sooke Country Market also opened this past week, online, and we have seven local farms participating. If you visit www.sookecountrymarket.com the link to the market site and how you can go about shopping is on their site. I would like to thank all the organizers about at both the Sooke Region Chamber and also the Sooke Country Market for being so innovative in these times.

To conclude I send best wishes to all of you. Keep healthy, stay strong, wash your hands, and thank you so much for all that you are doing. We will see you again soon.