

Notes From Sustainable Gabriola Meeting, Sept 29, 2024

In attendance: Steve (facilitator), Bob M (notes), Fay, Nancy HP, John P, Deb F, Dyan, Steve, Suzi, Charlotte, Tom, Katharine, Kess, Susan S, Michelle B, Bob A

Land acknowledgement – Steve described a powerful talk to do with reconciliation by former Chief Doug White. Event was videoed but link is not presently available.

1. Gabriola Carbon Action Project - Steve described this new initiative which will create and administer an island-based carbon fund Gabriolans and visitors can contribute to as a meaningful way of offsetting travel emissions (planes, cruises, long car journeys, etc). The fund will be managed by a board and will support verifiable carbon sequestering and emission reducing projects on Gabriola. For this purpose a website with a carbon calculator will be set up.
2. Gabriola Housing Matters – Nancy announced that BC Housing has confirmed funding for the 24-home Paisley Place affordable rental housing project on Gabriola. Choices need to be made between housing and food-production/land-preservation. More info at <https://gabriolahousing.ca> .
3. Gabriola Road Cycling Map – Steve announced the Gabriola Transportation Society was printing a map of Gabriola directed at cyclists and showing various roads c/w attractions and local hazards. It will be made available on the SG website until such time as GTS has its own website.
4. Gabriola Fire Protection Improvement District – Dyan expressed concern over the 38% increase in the 2025 tax allocation the board requested of Municipal Affairs following its recent meeting, her concern being there were no restrictions on how the tax \$'s, if awarded, will be spent. She said she had brought this concern to GFPIID board member Wayne Mercier, and passes on his emailed response (which is long and so included as Appendix A).
5. GILLS – John reported that GILLS now has something like a \$300K working fund, and that 32 properties have been considered. Problems with doing this are high assessed values and high ongoing upkeep costs. They plan on a fund-raising campaign soon. More at <https://gabriolaislandlss.ca> .
6. Global Climate Change - Deborah passed on her latest report on what's happening in the way of reducing carbon emissions on a global scale. It's also long so included as Appendix B.

7. Artificial Intelligence – Deborah flagged AI as being a concern raised at the recent UN Summit in NY, which concluded that further development of AI should be only for the benefit of all. Not the least of the concerns expressed is the large amount of electricity required to keep the requisite data centres alive, and she mentioned Microsoft’s wanting to refurbish the Three Mile Island nuclear power generation station to meet this increased demand. She recommended that there be an open discussion of the subject on Gabriola (perhaps at the Library?) and that Yuval Harari’s recent book, ‘Alien Intelligence’ was a good source of information. Suzi similarly recommended the podcast ‘[Your Undivided Attention](#)’.

8. Gabriola Health & Well-Being – Bob A described how homelessness and drug addiction were growing problems, including in the Commons forest where a campfire would recently have set the forest on fire but for the prompt action of the GIVFD. Other problem areas are between the seniors’ home (Gabriola Gardens) and North Rd and on the Rooks property. It seems that more and more homeless and/or addicted people are moving to Gabriola. Major components of the problem are that the RDN isn’t interested in intervening and that when homeless people are cleared out of one area they reappear somewhere else. He recommended there be a public discussion of the matter. Dyan added the Collaborative had established a Poisoned Drug Action Table and an Extreme Weather Action Table, and concurred that there needed to be a community discussion about homelessness. As well, a Community Wellbeing Service has been established to support the work of the Collaborative. PHC will be the contract holder and a Community Wellbeing Coordinator position is being recruited. The Coordinator will help the Collaborative to address these complex issues more effectively - <https://ghwcollaborative.ca> .

9. All-candidates meeting – Fay mentioned the event had been very successful, with some 87 attending (not including organizers and candidates), good questions, and thoughtful/respectful conversations.

Next Meeting - Sunday, Oct 27th, 3-4:30 PM at the Commons. Fay to facilitate, Dyan to take notes.

Appendix A: Response from Wayne Mercier re Item 4.

“The situation is both more and less complicated than it might first appear.

The increase in general is necessary because the GVFD has been systematically underfunded for about 10 years. I suspect this of being a reaction against the controversy around the construction of the new firehall, but I wasn’t around then so I’m not sure. The 38% correction, while significant, should be viewed in light of the historical underfunding.

the source of the increase is in two areas (we'll ignore "professional fees" because that has mostly to do with me and what they think I might do).

First is wages and benefits. The main increase here initially is an increase to the wage paid to firefighters, which was substandard and - in fact - well below the provincial minimum wage. There are several theories about why this might be so, but the point is moot. It's necessary, overdue, and amounts to a \$3 per hour increase in firefighter wages. The remuneration of the chief and deputy chief are also planned to increase steadily over the next several years. This is to bring them in line with salaries for officers in comparable departments. The work to assess this seems to have been fairly done and executed in good faith. Again a result of systematic underfunding over years.

There is some question as to the propriety of the method used to expand the officer corps to include a full time deputy chief, but the need was so glaring that it's hard to argue against the position as such. The increased scope of work for the department, and the need for ongoing recruitment to maintain the cadre of firefighters, means a lot of work.

Second is a thornier matter, and has to do with the introduction of new capital levies and the substantial increase in existing levies.

The board committed in December to the purchase of a new WUI (wildland urban interface) engine on the recommendation of the Chief. This expense, amounting to some \$800,000, will essentially wipe out the existing Capital Reserve fund, and leave little room to adapt to unexpected necessity.

The board, for reasons which are unclear, is deeply committed to avoiding long-term borrowing. Their strong preference is to accumulate money in the Capital Reserve fund against planned expenses.

Costs on everything are rising, and maintaining this strategy relies on the accumulation of enormous sums of money in reserve. To this end, the annual contributions to the existing Capital Reserve are planned to increase substantially.

A new capital reserve fund is also anticipated, this one to manage the maintenance and renewal of necessary components of firehall #1. (things like the heat pump, the roof, paving, siding, etc.) This is a wise move generally, and it's a bit strange that nothing was done to plan for this when the hall was built. But here we are.

A third fund is planned to hedge against expiring equipment, some of which is very costly, and closely governed by safety regulations.

These increased capital costs are enormous, and probably necessary. A historical lack of planning has led to this point where it is necessary to make up for lost time saving. And, for better or worse, as long as the board holds to a strict avoidance of long-term debt, this is the way to be able to maintain the necessary works and equipment to have the service the GVFD provides.

With respect to a planned response, the system governing Improvement Districts is obscure. There is no a priori requirement for public consultation. The Office of the Inspector of Municipalities does, though, require that certain bylaws be registered. Taxation bylaws belong to this class of bylaws.

For bylaws that must be registered, the Inspector of Municipalities can impose conditions which must be enacted prior to the registration of the bylaw. The standard example that office provides, when asked about their powers is:

The Inspector can refuse to register a bylaw, or can take any other action the Inspector considers is in the interest of the improvement district or the B.C. government. For example, prior to registering a bylaw that proposes a significant tax increase, the Inspector may require a board of trustees to consult with landowners.

The initiative to hold the Special Public Meeting on September 18 was to meet this interest in consultation. But the Inspector can impose any conditions, or take any action. It is here that the opportunity to respond presents itself.

I don't think the mere existence of a large increase is grounds to oppose the budget. I think the figures presented in the budget and long term plan are realistic, and the intention (if not the execution) prudent. My concerns lie elsewhere.

With this budget, my concern is the practice of the board in managing their Capital funds. The existing capital reserve fund is not bound by bylaw. If such a fund is created by bylaw, another bylaw must be passed to use money from the fund. Without such a bylaw, the accumulated money can be used as the trustees decide, with no further oversight.

The board has adopted the practice of borrowing against the levy, and paying itself back. Most recently, in June, the board borrowed \$45000 from its capital fund, intending to replace it when the levy came in.

Similar moves have been made in the past with smaller sums for similar contingencies. This practice has, in the past, been justified by citing the discrepancy between the district's fiscal year (which is the calendar year) and the point at which the collected levy is disbursed by the province (which happens in July).

More troubling, in April 2022, a payment of about \$358,000 was made to Potlatch Properties without public consultation or authorization. It's difficult to see where, other than the Capital Reserve fund, this money could have come from.

On the whole, the existing fund is managed in a way that can best be described as ... loose.

If the Improvement District intended to use long term debt as a means to meet their capital needs, the government would insist that a reserve fund dedicated to the particular purpose be created. This ensures that the money is only used for what it is intended.

I think the taxpayers deserve the same consideration as the provincial government. If the board intends to accumulate large sums of capital (amounting to millions of dollars in the middle-term) these funds should be secured for the purpose against which they are being collected.

My suggested response - and the one for which I intend to advocate once the board passes the tax levy bylaw - is to promote a letter campaign to the Office of the Inspector of Municipalities urging the Inspector to require the Improvement District to responsibly bind itself to the correct use of the funds it's intending to accumulate.

wow. that was long. hopefully useful.

cheers,
w.”

Appendix B - Global Climate Change Update, Sept 29, 2024 - Deb

1. United Nations Summit “Pact for the Future” Sept 22-23, 2024

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1154581#:~:text=Ensuring%20that%20world%20leaders%20consider%20the%20impact%20their>

World leaders on Sunday adopted the Pact for the Future, a landmark declaration pledging concrete actions towards a safer, more peaceful, sustainable and inclusive world for tomorrow's generations.

The global pact included explicit calls to phase out fossil fuels. The pact called for reaffirmed commitment to the Paris climate agreement (2015), which laid out goals to move away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy.

Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

Thanks to a collective pressure from the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and its network of civil society, governments, Nobel Laureates and thousands of individuals.

2. COP 16 – Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity Oct 21 – Nov 1 Cali, Colombia.

<https://www.nefco.int/events/un-biodiversity-conference-2024/#:~:text=The%2016th%20meeting%20of%20the%20Conference%20of%20the,COP%2015%20in%20December%202022%20in%20Montreal%2C%20Canada.>

COP 16 will be the first Biodiversity COP since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15 in December 2022 in Montreal, Canada
Parties to the Convention are expected to show the alignment of their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the Framework

3. International Conference on BioDiversity, Ecology & Climate Change Toronto, Ont Nov 28 - Nov 29

<https://igrnet.org/Conference/932/ICBECC/#:~:text=2024%20International%20Conference%20on%20Biodiversity,%20Ecology%20and%20Climate>

Gathering of experts in the field of Biodiversity, Ecology, and Climate Change to discuss the latest research and challenges and to increase understanding of emerging scientific issues and research methodologies.

4. COP 29 Nov 11 – 24 Baku, Azerbaijan

<https://www.unep.org/gan/events/conference/un-climate-change-conference-cop29#:~:text=When:%2011-22%20November%202024,%20Where:%20Baku,%20Azerbaijan.%20The>

Particular focus of this COP is on the efforts each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The [Paris Agreement](#) (Article 4, paragraph 2) requires each Party to prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that it intends to achieve.

- Authoritarian leader; 90% of Azerbaijan’s exports are oil & gas
- host of the United Nations COP29 [climate](#) summit, has announced the launch of a new Climate Action Fund with the goal of mobilizing \$1 billion for the support of new national climate targets in developing nations.
- Environmentally harmful subsidies are reaching \$2.6 trillion per year.
- Critics – are noting that soliciting voluntary donations alone would not be adequate, “What’s needed is a proper levy, not just some opaque voluntary mechanism.

ACTION: Letter – not to support such a fund but instead to phase out fossil fuels – re: Pact for the Future – Fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty.

5. Big Oil Facing a rising # of Climate focused lawsuits

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/climate-focused-lawsuits-against-fossil-fuel-companies-are-on-the-rise-report-finds/#:~:text=Big%20oil%20is%20facing%20a%20soaring%20number%20of>

The number of cases filed against oil companies globally each year has nearly tripled since 2015 – the year the UN [Paris climate agreement](#) was signed – with 86 cases filed and 40 currently pending, the authors found...

The suits were filed by cities, states and other government organizations, as well as environmental groups, Indigenous tribes and individuals. Fifty were filed in US courts, while 24 were filed in European countries, five in Australia and four in Nigeria.

The largest growth in litigation was in complaints demanding compensation for climate damages, which account for 38% of cases.

G7 Summit 2025 will be held in Kananaskis Alberta.