

Sidney Community Association
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Dear Mayor Price and Council:

The purpose of this letter and our presentation to Council is to introduce the Community Association to you. Similar Associations are commonplace and a natural part of life in other municipalities, but there has been no residents' association in Sidney for more than a decade.

On May 18th, 2016 the Sidney Community Association received our registration under the Society Act of BC. The purposes contained in our Constitution are:

- a. To provide a non-partisan forum for dialogue and information sharing.
- b. To promote informed public interest and participation in the affairs of the Town of Sidney and to protect and advance the interests of the community as a whole.
- c. To promote constructive dialogue, respectful communication and responsible reporting.
- d. To take an active role in the development of the Official Community Plan and encourage adherence to it.
- e. To undertake and support other activities which may from time to time be deemed appropriate.

We held our first Annual General Meeting June 22, 2016 and elected nine very capable Sidney residents to our Board of Directors. Each of us cares deeply about the present and future of our Town and has concerns about many of the decisions taken by Council. As of today, without advertising, the Association has 115 members and the number grows every month.

Our website, sidneycommunityassociation.com was launched in August. It contains current and background information about the Association and its activities.

WHAT WE DO

Dr. Bob Carey, one of our Board members summarized it very well, "... our role is to ensure residents are well informed, to maintain transparency of governance, accountability of Mayor and Council and adherence to the OCP." While we are non-partisan, we operate under the principles of openness, inclusiveness ... to become a true forum for the betterment of the town."

Specifically, since April 1, 2016, our volunteers have attended every Council meeting, taken notes and shared a summary of proceedings with our members. Taking great care to be

accurate and responsible in our reporting, we try to make the information easy for the ordinary resident to understand. We notify our members of upcoming issues and events. We share information and experience regarding situations like public hearings.

We also plan to hold as many public information meetings as we can afford, to inform residents and promote dialogue on topics of interest. Before incorporation, we held information meetings for our group on the first Barefoot report on Densification and on the Community Safety Building. That second meeting led to a series of questions for Town staff. We very much hope that in the future, Town staff will be available if invited to attend as speakers to share their expertise with interested residents.

We will undertake other activities consistent with our purposes as our resources permit.

RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

Since getting involved, our Board has learned a lot. We have gained a much fuller understanding of the context and the complexities Council must deal with. Our respect for the work done by staff and Council has grown.

We recognize and appreciate the recent improvements in the Town's website which make it easier for residents to find information. The newly available videos of Council meetings are much appreciated. We also appreciate the prompt attention from staff to respond to questions, particularly the list we sent regarding the Community Safety Building. We have been invited to participate in stakeholder activities for the Downtown Streetscape, the Waterfront Vision and the West Sidney Local Area Plan projects and will do our best to be constructive and represent the views of our members and other residents.

We are deeply concerned that the Mayor and some members of Council continue to characterize Sidney residents as misinformed, misled and unable to make judgements about the information they receive from social media or elsewhere. Respect works best when it is a two way street. As reflected in our survey, summarized below, members clearly want a more constructive relationship with Council for Sidney residents. Things don't look good for our Town when residents believe that a majority on Council are unable or unwilling to hear their concerns. Sidney is currently engaged in many projects and decisions that will change our Town. Openness to the views of residents, who have invested their lives here, is essential to success going forward. How can we work together to improve this relationship?

MEMBER SURVEY

A questionnaire at our Annual General Meeting, and available on our website, prioritized members top "extremely important" and "somewhat important" goals for the Association's first year as:

1. Hold public meetings on topics of interest to members
2. Express Concerns of members to Council

3. Encourage the Town to start reviewing the Official Community Plan before the scheduled review in 2018
4. Develop a constructive working relationship with Sidney Council and Staff.

The most important issues for members were:

1. Preservation of Sidney neighbourhoods
2. Densification approach that Council is taking
3. Preserving trees and green space
4. Gateway Shopping Centre proposal
5. Health of Beacon businesses, vacancies in shopping area

OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Whether called Neighbourhood Associations, Residents, Ratepayers or Community Associations groups like ours are commonplace in most cities and towns in Canada, The City of Victoria website lists 12 such Associations, each with a Council liaison, and the District of Saanich lists 17 such groups. In the District of North Saanich, the Residents' Association has been a voice in the community since 1948. The District of Saanich website says:

“Saanich Community Associations are comprised of Saanich residents and provide valuable input to Council and Saanich staff on items of interest such as land use and planning proposals.”

MOVING FORWARD

1. We welcome the appointment of a Council liaison if Council sees fit.
2. We would be pleased to include any member of Council or staff on our “courtesy email list” if they want to receive the emails we send to members but feel that it would be inappropriate to join the Association.
3. We hope that Town staff or Council members will be willing to attend and/or speak at our meetings if invited, to help residents understand their perspective and vice versa.
4. We are always open to constructive dialogue, clarification of information and other means to open channels of communication to improve the mutual sense of respect between Council and residents.
5. We will continue to bring the concerns of residents to the attention of Council and staff.

Yours truly,

*Jocelyn Gifford, President
Sidney Community Association*

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