

Gabriola Commons Council Meeting Notes

August 4, 2015

Cheryl O'Neill, Guy Mireau, Jinny Hayes, Linda St. Clair, Mary Wilson (note taker), Rebecca Furnell, Judith Roux, Alison Fitzgerald, Robbie Huston, Patrick Roux, Kit Szanto, George Szanto, Muriel Wiens, Louise Amuir, Bob Andrew, Christos --, Cameron Murray, Megan --

Note: This meeting followed a unique format. Instead of beginning with a twenty minute discussion followed by roundtable introductions and team reports, twenty minutes was dedicated to updates on five ongoing project/issues:

- Signage
- Safety and Security
- Parking
- Annual General Meeting
- Water

Each issue/task was presented by a representative of the team or taskforce working on it, then discussed by all attending. For the benefit of those working on the issues/tasks, comments are included in full.

Reports from teams and other ongoing discussions are included at the end of the notes. A table of contents is included since the notes are quite long.

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Signage Task Force

The goal of the signage group (a sub-group from the Communication Team) is to ensure that wayfinding is easy, and that there is clear signage for everyone to indicate the extent of the Commons. Signs need to be significant enough to be appropriate for the lengthy North Road frontage.

The concept presented by Cameron Murray on behalf of the group is a larger sign at each end of the property, with smaller specific signs at each entrance: e.g., West entrance, Main entrance, PHC/Commons entrance, Wednesday Market/Poetry Yurt entrance, etc.

There will be another order of wayfinding signs within the property for pedestrians. In total five orders of signs are proposed: Major sign on North Road, parking signs (standard blue and white “P” signs familiar to all), wayfinding signs on trails and for buildings, entrances, and acknowledgements of major donors/funders. Maps are included in the wayfinding category. Way points could be made (similar to signs in the 707 Park) with numbers, and could be marked on a large map plus smaller paper maps.

Suggestions/comments from those attending

- Large double-sided sign with a painting or other image of the cob wall, with internal signs for direction.
- Would be valuable to get this done quickly.
- Support indicated for multiple, marked entrances.
- Congratulations to the group for a tremendous amount of work and useful thinking.
- Main driving entrance must be identified; it should have a sign that is visible from both directions, since it also serves as an awareness-raiser for the Commons. It was noted that there is enough room along North Road to angle the signs so they will be visible from cars as well as for those on foot.
- Problem with putting names on individual small signs is that it puts more emphasis on that function, when there are many other functions that could be identified.
- If the gate signs have removable components, it would be possible to alter them - e.g., things like parking could be in different places for different events, new functions could be added, etc.
- Farm areas should also be mapped (kitchen garden, allotment gardens, look but don't pick signs, etc.)
- Should use high-quality materials and make the signs outstanding - this is the face of the Commons and it makes a statement. Let's not cheap out! Will need grants and/or specified/targeted donations.

Safety and Security Task Force

The complete report of this task force is included as an appendix to these notes.

Question raised by team: How should incidents be reported when they are observed? How do we log or keep track of instances of fearful moments or other things that need to be registered, but not reported to the RCMP?

- Most incidents having an impact on property have occurred when people are not here to see them.
- Noted that when you're doing physical work on the Commons you see a lot of people who spend time at PHC; there is interaction.
- Some people who attend PHC functions also participate in Commons activities, particularly TAGS.
- Covenant team could consider way to integrate reporting of untoward things as part of the stewardship plan.

- The more activities, the more people, the safer the area becomes (Jane Jacobs).
- Thanks to the group for considering these issues in such detail, and in such a heartfelt way.

Parking

Two issues were raised by the group:

1. What is the main entrance of the Commons?
2. What to do with the cars/access for cars

Current parking is now often full to overflowing. Parking is on the Long Range Planning chart, and has been identified as a fairly high priority.

Alternatives presented (electronic maps available on request)

1. Expanded parking behind the goat barn, plus angled parking inside the hedge.
2. New entrance by the arbutus - near the hydro pole - with two rows of parking behind the goat barn.
3. Parking behind the hedge with disabled drop off in front of the house.

Comments from those attending

- TAGS favours the west entrance (Huxley Park end) for driving, with a pedestrian entrance by the arbutus
- Share the Commons favours the arbutus entrance
- Other possibility - move the entrance more or less to the middle of the frontage, but further east than the tree.
- Parking should be done in stages, beginning with the building of the entrance.
- Communications - general consensus for alternative #2.
- Encouragement for people to be encouraged to take Gertie, bring bikes, etc.
- Note that overflow to the road is a safety issue - busy road with cars on both sides. Also noted that village trail will take care of some of this issue when it is complete.
- Note that there is a need for gravel for the currently-unavailable parking lot. (Because of fire hazard it can't be used at the moment.)
- Appearance on paper is of turning the front of the Commons into a parking lot; this does not appear to be people-oriented first. There needs to be a way of incorporating people safely into the Commons as a primary focus.
- Before final decisions are made, numbers need to be made. Currently Alternatives #1 & 3 = 56 cars; #2 has 40 cars; #4 has 13 spaces. (Note that the alternatives are not intended to convey specific numbers of parking spaces, but rather just to indicate possible locations.)
- Must recognize that all Island events often get parking overflow, including the farmers' market, the salmon barbeque, etc. - we will never be able to accommodate all cars that people want to bring to events such as the Fall Fair.

- Need good pedestrian entrance, plus good pedestrian access from the parking areas to everywhere else.
- Thanks to the group for tackling this challenging discussion.

AGM approach

Trustees feel that the Commons AGM has become a larger, more tedious, and more energy-absorbing event than it needs to be. Trustees originally proposed a simplified version of the AGM to take place at the end of the September Council meeting. Now trustees would like to move the meeting to October for the benefit of treasurer and assistant treasurer, since finances are a major part of the AGM. There is a legal requirement to have your AGM within six months of fiscal year end; this would not be met, but it's clear in the regulations that an exception is possible for this. Key requirements for AGM: election of trustees; passing of any new bylaws; presentation of financial statement. There will be no bylaw changes this year, so all that has to be included is presentation of the financial report. Since this happens at Council meetings anyway, the only additional item is the election of trustees. Current trustees want a short, sweet AGM, without team annual reports, etc. since this seems like a redundancy with regular Council meetings. All legal steps (notifications etc.) would be taken. Trustees have recently learned that AGM decisions can be done in the usual way of making decisions (that is, by consensus). It is the intention of the trustees to conduct the AGM with people seated in a circle, etc.

- Might be a good idea to have the AGM before the regular Council meeting.
- Support for the idea of the AGM being in a circle
- People attend the AGM who do not regularly attend Council
- Could maybe take the place of the 20 minute discussion
- Feeling that Council needs to be differentiated from the AGM
- General sense that people are concerned about tacking the meeting on to Council; seems to be more support for a separate AGM but in a new form
- If it's going to be very short, let people know ahead of time - some will not attend for a very brief meeting
- Noted that the Co-chairs' report was perceived as quite meaningful and helped engage some people further
- Meeting in a circle is a critical component of the Commons
- Time could be a problem/challenge if the meeting forms part of a council meeting- financial discussion for example could lead to more questions, etc.

Water

Water is often taken for granted, both in the house and other buildings, and also within the gardens. Although we are all careful in the buildings and in the gardens, we are not careful enough.

Pond: Water is considerably, approximately 3 feet, lower than usual. Water in the ground below the pond should not be for us; we have to work with nature.

At some point or another, we will have to remember that we and our gardens are not first; nature is first, and we may at some point need to turn off the tap. Alternatives (cisterns etc.) are hugely expensive; gardens easily use 2000 gallons per week, so the number of cisterns required seems outrageous.

Solution likely lies in changing our thinking.

Well: Currently we are experiencing a small amount of silt in the filters; this does suggest that levels are low. Not using the well for a period of time allows the water to move towards the well site, thus recharging.

- Could designate recharge times when outside taps would be/could be turned off.
- Only one garden (kitchen garden) is on the well.
- Note that taps should be turned off during power outages; resetting is required, re-priming, etc. - it is a big job.
- Signage that educates could be added (ie, Please let the well recharge between the hours of X and Y)
- Danger with a sign is that many more people would take water if they knew it was allowed.
- A sign that says “Please be mindful of water usage, we do not have unlimited supplies” might be useful.
- Cisterns may not be a bad idea; can be used on a trickle-fill as a way of refilling the cisterns.
- We are in a drought; gardeners should take steps. (No overhead spraying systems; hand watering, etc. - education in how to water gardens is needed.)
- Should stress the idea that gardeners must mulch. Spend money on the hay and save water!
- Note that John P. at Namaste has sent out information requesting people to mulch and not use much water; nothing has been sent out by South Gardens.

Kitchen stewards

Until recently the Village Foods card was going to the Community Kitchen. Approximately \$1000-2000 is needed to fully equip the kitchen; there may be a request for that from the non-allocated funds, but it will depend on the amount currently allocated towards the kitchen.

Roundtable introductions/discussions

- **Communications:** We agreed to have a table at Sunday Street Art, August 16 which needs volunteers. We’ve also been asked to lead discussion thanking Village Foods for commitment to the community; Judith took this on. Also need volunteers to attend Welcome Wagon meetings once a month to talk about the Commons. If you can help with either of these from time to time, please let Jinny know ASAP.
- **Farm team:** Attendance is down at meetings. Soup chef volunteers are in shortfall; no one has volunteered from August 8 to September 19. Recruiting for chefs! Soup is generally made for approximately 12

- people. Ingredients are available. Looking to purchase a scale for the fall fair and for market produce. Next meeting Aug 31 9 a.m.
- **Cook book:** Work in progress. Please continue to send recipes to Sharon Arnell.
 - **Namaste Farms:** Enthusiastic group of volunteers from Camp Miriam did great work and this will be repeated.
 - **Solar array:** Nearly complete
 - **TAGS:** Meets Saturday AM during workbees
 - **Share the Commons:** Next meeting August 19, 10 a.m.
 - **Covenant Team: Working on Biomapping of the Commons, the Baseline Report, and the first Stewardship Plan. Next meeting Aug 10 1.00 pm at Camp Ground.**
 - **Trustees:** Next meeting Thursday, 2 p.m. at the Campground (Descanso Regional Park)
 - **Mid-week Market Wed. 2:30 in the timber frame:** Operating since May 19. Very social event, people selling produce for the growers. Farm Team has raised over \$400 from this project.
 - **Property Management Team:** Is there a way to communicate to property management team that things need to be done? Yes: queries should be emailed to property management: property@gabriolacommons.ca Currently notes go to Mary Wilson, who redirects as needed. Next meeting TBA - should be soon since there are concerns about electricity use etc.
 - **Fall Fair:** Coming together. Will be Sunday, September 13.
 - **Pottery group:** Needs electricity to be hooked up for the kilns. Also needs to know how to set up for classes; Christos, Mary and Jinny will meet to talk about this part. Share the Commons has started to draft a template for stewardship for groups like the kitchen stewards, the pottery, etc. Will need to be discussion with an electrician, since there is one 55 and two 35 amp kilns. More is needed than currently exists; there will need to be a budget for this. Patrick will get an estimate from an electrician for the work. Not much water is required - a bowl of water is sufficient for an evening.

Safety and Security Task Force Report

The perpetrator who robbed Gertie is now in Nanaimo. Opinions are mixed in various Teams as to whether or not to put up a camera to detect harm doers.

As our discussion proceeded, we began to realize that our security as a community depended on not only setting up watches to catch culprits, but on prevention, in the form of building a better community amongst Commoners.

It was best expressed by Cheryl Bailey, when she reminded us that the Commons is not a top-down organization that tells us how to operate, but a cooperative, consensus-building group. It would be inappropriate for the Commons to dictate specific measures to address risks, and the proposals of

each user group should be subject to the consensus approval of all users at the Commons.

The new social worker on Gabriola has enlarged the focus of PHC somewhat to include, in addition to those isolated by poverty, other Gabriolans who have isolated themselves. This is changing the nature of the CPR community.

A useful discussion began when we learned from Brenda that the people who are involved with the PHC organization have, with very few exceptions, built a community among themselves, and are grateful that Gabriola has a place like the Commons, which has made room for them. Then the question of membership in the Commons arose - which is, simply, anyone who lives on Gabriola. That includes the people associated with PHC.

The PHC Commoners were very upset by the news of the break-ins and damage to the Commons property, and felt that it reflected badly on them. That information stimulated us to look at the Commons in terms of an inclusive community that feels safer for all of us.

With respect to property damage, self policing is most effective and arises out of a sense of not only belonging, but empowerment. So we began to think of ways that might enhance that sense of belonging, empowerment, and safety among the PHC group. Brenda reminded us that poverty, in our success-oriented culture, robs people of their self-worth.

That there is a "class" distinction is an embarrassing truth which those of us privileged to have escaped poverty have been slow to recognize. We began to discuss how we might encourage those of us who attend Council to move out of our "comfort zone" so that we can think of ways to include the Commons members who are associated with PHC. The "fear of difference" exists on both sides of the divide. Currently, no member of the PHC community would feel "equal" enough to attend the Council, for instance, and there is also a felt constraint on the part of many Commoners with respect to the PHC community. This very real social barrier can only be bridged one individual at a time.

Some are bridging that gap. Already, the Gertie drivers are having lunch at PHC. Lunch is on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. One way to cross the divide between PHC Commoners and the rest of us, is to drop in occasionally to those lunches, and introduce ourselves to the other part of our membership. There is social magic in knowing peoples' names.

When people walk out of the woods, those of us who are farmers might introduce ourselves, and perhaps, if you can spare it, even offer a bit of produce in exchange for some help with the gardening. PHC people might want to introduce themselves, instead of walking by, trying to be invisible. That little gesture would do a lot to make us a genuine Commons. We will all feel safer if we know whom we are meeting.

Fortunately, the Community Kitchen is an excellent way to meet the genuine need for building a sense of Community on the Commons. Opportunities exist for including PHC Commoners in sharing resources and ways to cook together. Discussions have already begun about that. The advantage of building a more inclusive community is that everyone who is on the property

feels a sense of ownership and will be more inclined to stop harmful acts or report them faster.

Reporting property damage would be made easier if there were signage distributed around the property, telling people whom to call if they see something happening they wish to report. Signage would also show what produce was there for Commons usage and what was protected, such as the PHC garden, and plots used by some people who need to keep everything they produce.

We realize that we have only begun the process of building a stronger sense of community and shared responsibility for the property. Each Team will deal with it differently. We welcome any feedback and suggestions.

NEXT CCC MEETING: SEPTEMBER 1, 2015
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