

Thoughts on Nanaimo City Council meeting, Feb. 19, 2018

Ron Bolin: Feb. 20, 2018

I am adding links to two related documents produced by the City of Nanaimo which can provide anyone interested in further examination of the issues involved:

- The link to the meeting video: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/meetings/VideoPlayer/Index/C180219V> which provides an outline of the agenda as finalized from a) the original Agenda; b) the Friday Addendum; and c) the introduction of any Late Items made at the meeting. The video is indexed under the video screen to the items finally approved in the Adoption of the agenda.
- A link to the **Council Meeting Summary** which is provided on the day following the meeting and outlines decisions made by Council at the meeting. <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/city-council/council-meetings/summaries/lists/summaries/february-18-2018---summary>

While there were a number of interesting developments during the meeting which will be discussed later, two matters loomed over the meeting in total silence:

- Any news regarding the situation in which Nanaimo's most highly paid Civil Servant is apparently on paid stress leave and simultaneously locked out of City Hall; and
- Any news regarding the status of the Nanaimo Recycling Exchange (NRE) which seems, after being thrown into the lap of the RDN by Nanaimo City Council, to have been given the death of a thousand cuts by the Regional District of Nanaimo; kept alive but without any means of sustenance or relief... My request to Ian Thorpe, Vice Chair of the RDN Board and member of Nanaimo's City Council, for a report to the public on this very significant decision, got no response from Mr. Thorpe, nor was it brought up for inclusion in the meeting....

Following an apparently ever lengthening dissertation by the Mayor on Meeting Decorum, the overt part of the meeting began with a presentation by the Task Force on Community Engagement.

5a: Community Engagement Task Force Final Presentation: This Task Force was established by Council last year and its Report (Final Report?) documented its initiation by Council; its administrative difficulties given mixed messages about Staff and or Council participation; the results of the first public engagement session held at the VICC; and the limbo into which it has been cast without direction. The Task Force proposed a program which would conform with the its original one year mandate at which time the program would be up for review and consideration. Discussion of the Report Council was vigorous, albeit in my mind, often aimless as the purpose in establishing Task Force came under considerable debate by Council members... Any difference between this Task Force and other project defined Committees and Task Forces does not seem to have been universally understood. The essence of this confusion, at least in my mind, lies in its Point of View... Where all other such groups have been established by Council for a particular project, i.e. to get opinion on matters defined by Council, i.e. from the top down; the opportunity provided by this Task Force was to look at issues from the bottom up, i.e. to define those issues which the Community feels to be important and to carry these messages from the

public to the Council. In the end Councillor Bestwick called for the subject to be deferred to another meeting so as to enable. The topic was abandoned and the meeting Summary Notes state:

Options to be considered for Engagement Pilot Program

The Community Engagement Task Force will bring options for the remaining three sessions in the Public Engagement Pilot Program for Council to consider at the February 26 Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Section 6 a

Motion carried.

This task would seem to be beyond the doing as there was no final determination of the nature of the public engagement which is to be taken in devising three additional sessions. It appears to this viewer that many on Council do not wish to hear from the public as a sponsored group on any matter which has not been predetermined by Council. My best wishes go to this group which has worked hard to bring the voice of the community to City Hall and in my opinion deserves to continue the full course originally given to them.

9h –Modular Housing Site Selection: The issue of a provincially funded project to develop 44 units of Modular supportive housing on City owned land at 1425 Cranberry Avenue in Chase River was defeated. One must have sympathy with Council on an issue such as this, as well as with any neighborhood possibly impacted, as no one likes the idea of supportive housing and all the attached bogies of mental illness, drugs, etc, in their midst, though we are all quite agreeable to it being located elsewhere. It remains to be seen whether the City will be able to hang on to the \$7 million dollars in provincial construction money which was due to come for this project. It also appears to me that the City did not use a great deal of imagination in looking for a suitable site as it apparently limited its search to properties owned by the City without widening it to properties owned by other government agencies or indeed private ownership parcels which might be available for trade or sale. The problem of how to locate difficult facilities remains always with us, and to the City's credit it has sought to disperse them around the City rather than agglomerating them in some single area such as the downtown. I trust that we will hear more about how we are going to approach the problem of an increasing number of "redundant" citizens in a world being overtaken by corporate machinery.

No modular housing for Cranberry Avenue

The proposed site for BC Housing's Rapid Response to Homelessness modular housing program at 1425 Cranberry Avenue has been withdrawn from consideration. The City will look to work with BC Housing on other opportunities.

Section 10 h

Motion carried.

7b – Fire Stations #1 Borrowing Bylaw: This bylaw authorizes the borrowing of up to \$17,000,000 for the reconstruction of Fire Hall #1, 666 Fitzwilliam Street. The structure was built in 1967 and is in need of repair and upgrade. There was considerable discussion about releasing and passing the sum of \$17,000,000 as a) there were no plans on which a price could realistically be based; and b) it is unwise to notify potential bidders of the amount of money available as it is sure to be used up.. In the end the borrowing was authorized and

its implementation was designated to be by **7c – Alternative Approval Process - : Fire Station #1 Borrowing Bylaw 2018 No. 7257**” which was also approved. It is important to understand that any City borrowing which will not be paid back within 5 years requires either a real referendum or an “Alternative Approval Process” to be legitimized. It is also important to realize that there is no rush to get this project completed. The Alternative Approval Process deems public approval to take place with no further action by the City unless 10% or more of the registered voters of Nanaimo object by way of signed petitions. It is a form of the old scam where one is notified that unless they object, they will be billed for some trivial service which may be as little as sending an invoice. In many areas it is illegal, but not in municipal government.

A true referendum held on its own was estimated at the meeting to cost \$150,000, a very large increase over the estimated cost just a few years ago.

But a true referendum, held in conjunction with a regular municipal election such as that coming up in November, costs nothing to add to the ballot.

One can only surmise that our City Administration fears that citizens may not be willing to vote for a \$17,000,000 project for which they have very little real information, but on the other hand may find it difficult, if not impossible, to garner sufficient public attention, let alone get the circa 6482 signed petitions needed to stop it in the time allotted.

For more on Negative Option Billing, see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/negative-option-billing-persists-despite-laws-1.1151135>

Alternative Approval Process set for fire hall rebuild

Borrowing up to 17million to rebuild Fire Station 1 will go through an Alternative Approval Process. The deadline to receive responses for the process will be 4:30 pm on May 4, 2018.

Section 8 c

Motion carried.

7d – Committee Recommendations: The Finance and Audit Committee, another name for Council, recommended a number of expenditures which were then given approval by Council, as Council:

Concrete floor for Harewood Covered Space

The Covered Space in Harewood Centennial Park will get a concrete floor with \$161,966 allocated towards one.

Grant for Harris Residence

The Harris Residence at 375 Franklyn Street was awarded a Heritage Façade Grant of \$9,579.41 for a roof replacement and chimney repair.

Sidewalk for Dufferin Crescent

\$300,000 was allocated for the construction of a sidewalk along Dufferin Crescent.

Funds for Climate Resiliency Strategy

Funding of \$236,800 was budgeted for a Climate Change Resiliency Strategy.

Grant for Kids Conference

A one-time grant \$6,500 was awarded to the Kids Conference.

Section 8 d

Motions carried.

9a – Ross Road Traffic Calming:

Speed bumps for Ross Road

Ross Road will gain two speed bumps permanently as a traffic calming measure between Emerald and Howden Drive.

Section 10 a

Motion carried.

9b – 440 Selby Street – Acceptance of Project Under “Revitalization Tax Exemption

Bylaw 2011 No. 7143: This bylaw permits a tax exemption to the owner of a proposed hotel for a period of ten years... This, of course, means that all other City taxpayers must make up the difference...

Other development related matters included Development Permit Approvals for properties at 380 Cottle Place, 5605 Cougar Ridge Place and the issuance of Development Variance Permits for 101 Linley Road and 191 King Road.

In the matter of the Development Approvals which included substantial height variances, it appears that neighbours who might be impacted by the variances do not need to be notified of them and there were some unhappy folks at the meeting who only learned of them more or less by accident. This needs further investigation.

Development around Nanaimo

A proposed hotel development on 440 Selby Street will receive a Revitalization Tax Exemption, development permits were approved for a multi-family development at 380 Cottle Place, single residential strata units at 5605 Cougar Ridge Place and for an existing single family dwelling at 101 Linley Road.

Sections 10 b-e

Motions carried.

The meeting wrapped up with some more or less desultory discussion about Community Policing and the Service Office and the third reading of “Highway Closure and Dedication Removal (a portion of Kentwood Way adjacent to 893 Kentwood Way) Bylaw 2018 No. 7254”

16. There were no questions at Question Period.

The Meeting adjourned at 11:16pm. It was, in my opinion, an unsatisfactory meeting on a number of levels, though indeed some decisions were made.

RLB