

“...Our interest is to provide public space to talk about concerns, ideas and opportunities in an atmosphere of genuine respect, listening and consideration for everyone’s viewpoints.”

Summary:

Since February 2005, the Town of Gibsons has held monthly informal meetings at the town office with the community. These are opportunities for residents, town staff and elected officials to discuss matters of general interest to the community or to focus on current issues, bylaws, policies or matters under consideration by council.

Gibsons Community Dialogue was initiated in response to a perceived need to increase access and opportunities for local residents to provide input into decisions of council and feedback relative to programs that the town has implemented in the community. These meetings do not replace the more formal opportunities to meet with or make presentations to council at regular meetings, committee meetings or public hearings. They do, however, provide enhanced opportunities for residents to have input into council decision making and for staff and council to provide more information and background to the community concerning council decisions or initiatives.

Background:

In January 2005, the Chief Administrative Officer approached council with the idea of implementing Gibsons Community Dialogue as a way to ensure that community members have an opportunity to discuss decisions or initiatives of council and for council to meet informally with residents to hear their concerns or to test ideas for policies, bylaws or positions they may want to take on community issues.

At the time it was noted that the regular biweekly council and committee meeting agendas were so packed with items for consideration that there was no time for any meaningful discussion of issues that were raised by members of the gallery in the two minute inquiry portion of the agenda. Members of the community who came to the meetings often left very frustrated without having had opportunity to ask questions or to offer their opinions with respect to agenda items they were interested in.

Gibsons Community Dialogue was initiated in February 2005 and has been consistently held on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. Response from the community has been very good with attendance ranging from a low of 4 people to over 50 people. The greatest attendance has been for current issues that are of particular concern to residents of a neighbourhood or area of the community and have related to public safety and harbour development.

Discussion:

Gibsons Community Dialogue has been offered now for 18 months. It is advertised and is loyally supported by a core group of residents who attend regularly and who actively promote it in the community.

The following benefits have been noted and are continuing:

1. Participants feel comfortable with each other and with speaking about their issues or offering advice to council
2. Members of council have participated in the dialogue sessions
3. Action items are dealt with in a timely manner
4. Members of the public have influenced policy development through dialogue
5. Participants have direct access to the CAO and other staff
6. Interest and attendance is greater if there is a current community issue
7. There is broader community attendance if the session advertises a specific issue as opposed to just the opportunity to talk
8. People support continuance of this program
9. Cost of the program is minimal: advertising in concert with other community ads, coffee and other refreshments, photocopying

The keys to the success of this program are:

1. **Consistency:** meetings have been held on the same day and time every month since February 2005 with the exception of July and August
2. **Having a Champion:** the Chief Administrative Officer has facilitated each meeting
3. **Focus on Relevant Community Issues:** public safety, harbour development, community restructure, tree cutting, bylaw enforcement, affordable housing, and many others
4. **Commitment to Action and Follow-up:** reports on each session are written and placed on the town's website within 48 hours. As well, the report is sent to each member of council and to the managers for each of the town's 5 departments for action as required
5. **Respect for Other Ideas, Opinions and Views:** ground rules for convening dialogue are acknowledged at each meeting and adhered to by participants

Copy of the Gibsons Community Dialogue Notes for February 2005 and March 2006 are attached for reference.

Attachment 1:

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE: THE FIRST SESSION, FEBRUARY 22, 2005

The first Gibsons Community Dialogue Session was held in council chambers on Tuesday, February 22, 2005. Nineteen people attended this session ranging in age from 16 (two students from Elphinstone School) to seniors. Mayor Janyk attended for a portion of the meeting. We sat in a circle, however, it was evident that some people were more comfortable outside the circle and they established a second row which, given the numbers did not inhibit their participation in discussions.

Introduction:

Bill Beamish facilitated the meeting and opened the discussion by presenting information concerning the objectives of the Dialogue Sessions, as an ongoing program, and the reasons why dialogue is important to the community and to leaders in the community.

The current forms of council –community interaction were summarized to demonstrate that although they are forms of communication, some of which are required by statute, they are not opportunities for dialogue. These include: correspondence to and from constituents; legal notices; newsletters; staff reports to council; meeting agendas; the web-site; two minute inquiry opportunities before and after council meetings; delegation opportunities; referrals or opportunities to comment on variance applications; public hearings and community meetings; debates or decision making.

While each of these methods of communication provide opportunity to exchange information, they are not opportunities for ‘true dialogue’.

Dialogue was defined with reference to the following quotes:

1. “It is a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together.” (Issacs, 1999);
2. “Dialogue is sustained through collective inquiry...” (Senge et al)
3. “...dialogue is a form of talk that is not intended to reach agreement, but to reach new understanding.” (Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*)

The objective of the Gibsons Dialogue Sessions was reviewed and defined with reference to the published advertisement:

“Community Dialogue is an opportunity for residents of Gibsons to think together about issues of shared concern. Our interest is to provide public space to talk about concerns, ideas and opportunities in an atmosphere of genuine respect, listening and consideration for everyone’s viewpoints.”

‘Whoever comes are the right people; whatever is discussed is the right topic; when it is over – it is over.’

The purposes of dialogue were also reviewed. These are:

- To foster collaboration through increased understanding of the interests and values of others;
- To improve understanding of issues;
- To build community and promote active citizenship by searching for common responses to public problems; and,
- To influence others (specifically in this context decision makers).

Dialogue Skills for Leaders, SFU Centre for Dialogue

Finally, the ‘*Ground Rules for Convening Dialogue*’ were distributed (Dialogue Skills for Leaders) and the three ‘E’s’ of dialogue, *Equality, Empathy and Examination of Assumptions*, were discussed briefly.

Discussion:

After the introduction, the meeting evolved into a series of questions and answers or explanations focusing primarily on community infrastructure and recent decisions of council. In other words, we did not have ‘dialogue’.

“A Dialogue needs some time to get going...even with a clear introduction, when the group begins to talk together it will often experience confusion, frustration, and self-conscious concern as to whether or not it is actually engaging in Dialogue. It would be very optimistic to assume that Dialogue would begin to flow or move toward any great depth during its first meeting. ***It is important to point out that perseverance is required.***(emphasis added)”

David Bohm ,Dialogue – A Proposal

The main areas of interest were:

1. lack of a sidewalk in front of GBS on Gibsons Way;
2. pedestrian safety and road safety;
3. condition of the sea walk trail (particularly in Winn, between the water and Gower Point Road)
4. opportunities for volunteers to assist with trail maintenance and parks (Communities in Bloom was discussed)
5. ongoing work in Winegarden Park
6. Elphinstone student project to spend 24 hours picking up litter in Gibsons on February 26th;
7. charette process – what is it?
8. need for improved tourism signage and access to visitor information (Gerry Tretic discussed the current Communications Project)
9. need to improve the road shoulders on Gower Point Road in the area of Gospel Rock

As a final note, we discussed the opportunity to explore more significant community issues like restructuring, the community centre or the harbour initiative at future sessions.

The meeting ended at approximately 9:15 and consensus was that it was worthwhile. The next meeting is scheduled for March 22nd at 7:pm.

Attachment 2:

Gibsons Community Dialogue Tuesday, May 23, 2006 Gibsons Municipal Hall

There were 13 people in attendance at the Gibsons Community Dialogue Session last night, most of whom came to learn about council's plans in 2006 for the Gibsons Harbour Development Project.

The meeting commenced with a general discussion of issues that were of interest to the attendees. These were:

- The Town's Pesticide Regulation
- The status of waterfront properties under development
- The 'Shell Canada Property' and seepage onto sea walk

Chris Marshall, Director of Planning, provided a brief overview of the approach that the Town has taken to regulating the use of pesticides in Gibsons, Bylaw 996-2005, and at the same time educating property owners. The bylaw is available on the Town's website and a pamphlet that describes it will be distributed by the 'Gibsons Green Team' members in July and August. It was agreed that a reminder should be placed in the Municipal memo and will be included on the information sheet that goes to all property owners with the tax notice.

Chris Marshall also provided a summary description of the projects that have been applied for or are being planned for waterfront properties on the Gibsons Harbour. Only one application has been received to date.

Bill Beamish advised that Shell Canada has been informed about the natural seepage from their property and the damage, staining, that has occurred on the concrete adjacent to the waterfront trail in front of their property. Shell has responded favourably to a request to clean up this area however nothing has happened yet. Councillor Tretick noted that Shell Canada has been very supportive of the Town's efforts to make the area look more attractive and that we are currently negotiating use of the vacant lot at the corner of School road and Gower Point Road.

Gibsons Waterfront Initiative:

The majority of the meeting was spent discussing aspects of harbour development and the progress of the Town's initiative to prepare a comprehensive plan for this area. Bill Beamish reviewed the status of various leases on the water and of the Town's Recreation Lease which will be renewed in 2006, after it has been surveyed at a cost of \$45,000.

Chris Marshall described the various development zones and Official Community Plan priorities for the area. Bill Oakford, Harbour Master, and Carol Doyle, president of the Gibsons Landing Harbour Authority, outlined the history, purpose and current activities of the Harbour Authority and the Gibsons Wharf.

Copies of recent reports, the OCP Priorities and the 2005 Coriolis Report: '*Planning for the Future Of Gibsons Harbour*', were provided to attendees. As well, an e-mail from a resident (working in the US) who expressed views on the harbour was provided.

In summary:

- for 2006 the Town is spending \$45,000 to survey the Recreation Lease Area (300' from the shore from boundary to boundary on the waterfront) and all other commercial and private leases within the Gibsons Harbour and waterfront areas;
- the Town will focus on completing other major planning projects, including the Upper Gibsons Neighbourhood Plan and the Gospel Rock Neighbourhood Plan, and starting work on the Zoning Bylaw Update, in 2006;
- the Town will undertake to do a parking study for Gibsons in 2006;
- discussions will commence in the Fall as to how to proceed with the Harbour Study as recommended in the Coriolis Report;
- the Gibsons Landing Harbour Authority will focus on summer operations and is commencing work in a new 5 year plan for their area.

At the end of the meeting we discussed the idea of continuing to have topics that focus discussion on community issues as it was agreed that this is what attracted many people to the session. Some suggestions for future topics include:

- the Highway 101 Extension Project
- Traffic calming and speed control
- Noise pollution
- Bylaw Enforcement
- How to reach out to and include 'newcomers' to the community

The meeting ended at approximately 8:50pm.

The next Community Dialogue Session will be held on Tuesday, June 27th at 7pm. There will be a summer break with no meetings in July or August.