

2019 DIALOGUE #1 - COUNCIL-COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

The dialogue was held at High Beam Dreams and attended by 19 people, plus four members of Gibsons Council (Mayor Beamish, Councillors De Andrade, Croal and Ladwig). Two members of Gibsons staff were also present to assist with set-up and to help facilitate the discussions. The dialogue commenced shortly after 7:00 pm and ended at 9:30 pm.

Mayor Beamish opened the session by providing some context to the purpose and history of Gibsons Community Dialogues and explaining why, for legal reasons, one very controversial community issue could not be discussed at this time.

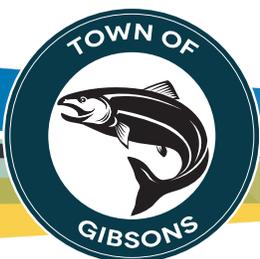
Two handouts were provided:

- A description of the Gibsons Community Dialogue Program, 2007, with example reports from dialogues held during that period (*pdf available on Community Dialogues webpage*)
- An overview of the purpose of the July 30th Dialogue which identified four (4) objectives for the session:
 1. To find ways to improve communications, or style of communication whether written or spoken, between Council-Staff and Community Members. This will enable us to listen and respond effectively and to increase opportunities to discuss issues or to get answers to important questions, recognizing that we all have something to contribute to a discussion and an ability or opportunity to influence decisions before they are made.
 2. To discuss the legislative processes that Council is required to follow with respect to informing the public about issues like rezonings or OCP amendments. We can also talk about the more formal opportunities that the public has to become informed on an issue and to present information to Council. Other less formal opportunities to present information to Council also exist.
 3. To provide an opportunity for participants to bring up issues that are of immediate concern to them.
 4. To discuss topics, plans and scheduling of future dialogues.

In order to ensure that the dialogue would function effectively, the key rules of dialogue were referenced at the start of the session:

A good dialogue offers those who participate the opportunity to:

- Listen and be listened to so that all speakers can be heard.
- Speak and be spoken to in a respectful manner.
- Develop or deepen understanding.
- Learn about the perspectives of others and reflect on one's own views.



A good deal of the discussion focused on the current issue of the Supportive Housing Project and an explanation by Mayor Beamish of the Local Government Act and Community Charter requirements for process and advertising which must be complied with by the Town in respect of projects that require zoning and OCP amendments. Failure to follow these steps could result in both a lengthy and costly repeat of the processes and delay. Another issue concerned the frustration that some people have with respect to their ability to present information and have meaningful discussions with Council on current projects as they are being considered by Council at regularly scheduled committee and business meetings. The matter of trust was also raised.

It was noted that the intent of holding regularly scheduled dialogue sessions, held monthly or bi-monthly, is to provide opportunity for residents to raise and more thoroughly discuss issues in the community and that members of Council are prepared to be available for these discussions. However, it is also important to note that these are not held as Council meetings and do not take the place of Council or Committee meetings, where Council make decisions and votes on resolutions.

Issues

- Community being run on old ideas of governance (i.e. 1886 Town founders)
- Need for sustainable development
- Separate governments, but in reality, the Sunshine Coast is one unit – develop a government which reflects this
- Diversity of opinion/perspectives is needed
- Need for meeting protocols
- People need to be able to exercise their right to speak at Council and to be treated with respect
- People need answers to their legitimate questions without the need to refer to the developer
- People need to know about the true operation of the Town – invite community members to be part of standing committees
- Lack of trust between Council, staff, and community – takes relationship-building through dialogue
- Need for effective ways for people's concerns to be heard
- Decisions are being made from the top down
- Authority needs to be exercised with compassion, fairness, thoroughness and openness – citizen forums
- People have a right to express their opinions even if it is not what Council wants to hear - trust is earned
- Make public records more easily accessible – not always through FOI requests

Ideas

- Allow for more opportunities for delegations
- Raise public awareness on the current process of how to appear as a delegation before Council/Committees
- Provide other less formal ways of communicating with Council
- “Open up” Council meetings by allowing more inquiry periods
- Brainstorming/discussions need to happen early in the process
- Audit (at the appropriate time)
- Complement the formal process with informal processes (e.g. dialogue) early in the process
- Address historical issues of past councils, rather than “wiping the slate clean” and moving forward.

The next dialogue will be scheduled for September and will be advertised in advance in the newspaper and on the Town's website.

