

Roundabouts, remedies - - and referendums

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The mayors of North Saanich, Sidney and Central Saanich each touched on roadwork and the Saanich Peninsula Hospital during the Mayors' Breakfast Feb. 2. Jack Mar, mayor of Central Saanich, even promised a referendum.

The Saanich Peninsula Hospital warranted the top topic.

"The three municipal councils have a roll to play in terms of taking care of our citizens in getting services," said Ted Daly, the mayor of North Saanich and first to speak. He added that the three should move forward and "speak as one voice" for the Peninsula.

The Saanich Peninsula Hospital is one of the items on the agenda for the tri-municipal meeting slated for Feb. 21.

Daly spoke briefly on the BC Ferry assessment situation.

"The amount of the rollback was unexpected and certainly a surprise," he said. "Staff are meeting with BC Ferries."

"I can't say more than that," Daly said. "It's still items that are being treated in-camera."

Though he didn't want to speak about a possible bridge over the Saanich Inlet connecting to North Saanich, Daly felt that because of the media surrounding a current study it warranted a response.

"If you don't [respond] people wonder why," he said. Daly also noted some people wondered why he didn't make it an election issue. "The sky wasn't falling so I didn't say it was falling," he laughed.

A Ministry of Transportation website shows three possible bridge crossings and a potential new ferry route across Finlayson Arm.

The map is part of a MoT study being done by Stantec Consulting Ltd. on ways to improve transportation between the Cowichan Valley and the greater Victoria area.

The online map shows a potential bridge at Moses Point to Coal Point and a third at Willis Point. It also shows the current Mill Bay ferry and a potential new ferry crossing from the Bamberton lands. The final report is expected next fall.

"It's a study that's out there," Daly said noting there are no results or information on the web site. "I can't believe people would want a bridge that brings a bunch of people in, just in a hurry to get somewhere else," he added.

He also delved into the proposed new elementary school for Forest Park Drive.

"That's their property," he noted, adding the school district has owned the property for years. "In my mind people have moved there knowing there could be a school there."

He predicted a school will be located on the Forest Park Drive property.

Daly then went into the Official Community Plan process. The council plans to be finished with the OCP review in May.

"I don't think that timeline is unreasonable," Daly said.

He hopes to see Sandown rejuvenated.

"After the election I personally said if you guys are serious, let's negotiate," Daly said. Council is still waiting to hear from the Great Canadian Gaming Corporation who made a proposal for the property late last summer.

"I just want to see Sandown revitalized," Daly stated more than once that he simply wants to see something happen there. "I'm not tied to slots."

Mayor Don Amos sees 2006 as a great year for communities on the Peninsula.

The underground wiring on Lochside Drive is well into phase one with phase two set to start this month, he noted. The third phase will follow shortly after and the project should be completed soon, he said. The project is behind schedule because of the Telus strike, which delayed the work for three to four months.

The renovations at Tulista Park are also underway he noted. The reno will see the parking lot moved and "more green space and more park area for our community."

The new hotel at the end of Beacon will offer a marine centre on the main floor, Amos informed those at the breakfast sponsored by the Chamber and the Peninsula News Review. The marine centre could be a main attraction for Sidney, he noted.

The Community Development Centre, to be located in the old Customs House near the Mary Winspear Centre, will include a small visitors' information centre.

Amos touched on the topic of the pair of roundabouts for town.

"The roundabouts we are constructing are workable, and what we need for Sidney," he said. The one in front of the new hotel is slated to go in after construction of the hotel is complete. The roundabout planned for Sterling Way will go in when construction of the new Petro Can and Tim Hortons is underway.

Sidney could also get a new public works yard this year, at no cost to taxpayers.

"We do have a proposal in that looks very promising," Amos said. Like the Shoal Centre, the town will sell the airspace on the parcel of land, retaining ownership of the land.

The Mary Winspear study will help to make the centre even better, Amos noted. He added thanks to the commitment of those working on the board.

The Vision Committee has a few decisions to make: to carry the current focus, or move on is the question.

"The problem we face here is this year we're going out with an OCP review," Amos explained. They don't want to confuse the public between the two.

The OCP is currently in the public input process and Amos said it should be complete by the end of the year.

He touched on the Saanich Peninsula Hospital noting, "we want it there for our community members."

And the recreation centre needs the overhaul that earned the nod in a referendum vote during the municipal election. "We must move ahead with the Panorama Recreation Centre renovation," Amos stated, noting the complex is tired and old. "We need to get on it - It doesn't get built tomorrow, it takes a couple of years.

As chair of the Victoria Regional Transit commission Amos was pleased with services offered last year but hopes to see them improved.

"I'd like to see a community bus that circulates on the Peninsula," Amos said, while admitting they are working with a limited budget.

Sidney council has finished its budget talks and tax increases were kept to about three per cent.

"Remember when you get your tax bill it's not just municipal taxes that are there," said Amos.

Jack Mar was the third mayor to speak during the breakfast meeting.

He noted that Central Saanich is jumping into the hot topics. Those include secondary suite bylaws proposed - with the public hearing set for March 8, 7 p.m. at the fire training centre. Another hot topic is agritourism, but bylaws should be completed in the next two to three months Mar said.

The Brentwood Bay revitalization project, which has almost doubled in cost projection since its inception, earned a gasp from the crowd. Mar noted they hope to get more grants and find some way to fund the now more than \$3 million project which includes a \$1.76 million roundabout at the intersection of Verdier and West Saanich.

Though when it is completed, "that's going to be a major area for redevelopment," Mar promised. He noted the Royal Bank area has already drawn the interest of developers.

Around the Panorama Recreation Centre, where Central Saanich Council has struggled to put faith in an upgrade project proposed by North Saanich and Sidney, that they've asked staff to get more information. He said he hopes to see a referendum question put to the public in early summer.

The owner of property at West Saanich and Keating passed away, putting development on the C5-zoned property on hold. Though it may take some time to find a buyer, Mar expects to see a hotel up there soon.

He touched on the proposed closure of Saanichton school, noting that he attended the recent public meeting and parents were upset.

Central Saanich will review its OCP later this year. Mar gave credit to former mayor Alison Habkirk as "she laid the groundwork," he said.

Mar added his own hot topic is a highway fly-over at the Pat Bay Highway and Keating X Road turn-off to create easier access to the industrial area.

"That's our most important area," he said. "We have the largest industrial park on Vancouver Island."

While he offered no hint of a solution, he touched on the Senanus water issue, a topic he recalls from his earlier days on Central Saanich council. "There's 22 people down there whose water is questionable," he noted.

Mar also mentioned Saanich Peninsula Hospital, adding his voice to the previous two. "The three districts have to work together to save it," he said.

THE QUESTIONS

Amalgamation and transportation were covered by the crowd after the mayors spoke.

The mayors were queried on where they stand on the amalgamation of municipalities.

"We're moving in that direction," Amos said. He noted that the three municipalities already work together on a number of services including Panorama and the sewage treatment plant. "Maybe one day amalgamation does happen."

"We're the only municipalities on the Island that have tri- municipal meetings," he added.

Daly noted he still bears the scars of the last time he floated amalgamation theories while on Sidney council.

"I believe one day the government is going to do it to us," he said. "It's got to come from the people."

"Unless the people say they want it, I'm not for it," he added. "You won't see me leading the parade."

Mar advised that a referendum would be in order. "I'm not totally in favour of amalgamation," he said. He used amalgamations in the east including Montreal and Toronto as an example where too many people sitting around one table doesn't work.

A couple of statements about the poor transit service, the Malahat drive and Highway 17 elicited response from Amos.

He noted that members should call Mike Davis in charge of scheduling. He added that there has been no increase in funding, so they put modest transit in place.

"The provincial government is doing a study on the Malahat," he noted. Amos added that the three municipalities had done a joint study on the Pat Bay Highway. "Some options to improve the highway are sitting there," he said, adding that a basic intersection upgrade would cost about \$8 million.

"We are looking at it," Amos said. "We are working with the government on it."

All three professed an interest in the upcoming tri-municipal meeting.

The tri-municipal meeting is slated for Feb. 21 at Mary Winspear Centre. Though it is a public meeting, and all are invited to see and hear discussions, it is not a public input forum.