



November 26, 2015

District of Sooke
2205 Otter Point Road
Sooke, BC V9Z 1J2

To Mayor and Council

The Sooke Fine Arts Society has appeared before Council on more than one occasion to plead its case for support. We have provided extensive statistics, backed by extensive, independent research, explaining the beneficial role arts and culture in general, and events like the Sooke Fine Arts Show in particular, plays in a community like ours. We do not wish to reiterate them here. There should be no question by now that the social, economic and health benefits to every member of this community - whether they are patrons of the arts or not - are significant.

Indeed, that role is enshrined in the District of Sooke's own Official Community Plan. It is cited in the District's Corporate Vision, and it is teased out in great detail in the Cultural Plan—all of it drawn from considerable community input.

We are therefore deeply troubled by the District's Grant Review Committee's recent recommendations to halve the Sooke Fine Arts Society's funding for Sooke Fine Arts Show programming, and slash other arts funding entirely. The basis for these recommendations was not in accord with the criteria set out in the Community Grant Application, and flies in the face of the values and policies laid out in the OCP (see Appendix below).

Council should not agree to a grant reduction that could be seen as Council going against community aspirations for *increased* support for the arts, not less. It risks triggering a cascade of negative consequences, perhaps quite unintended, that would result in a crippling loss of financial and community support to the Sooke Fine Arts Show. It is a slap in the face to the more than 1000 DOS residents that participate in the Show as art lovers and volunteers, and make up a significant proportion of the District's constituency.

Looked at through a purely financial lens, the Sooke Fine Arts Show provides an excellent return on investment. We have leveraged District funding to obtain funding from other levels of government, leveraged our credibility and resources to raise additional funds for other non-profits in need, and leveraged an event that is, as one business sponsor has described it, "revered in Victoria", to make Sooke a more attractive community live and do business in.

We have expanded the show's programming to engage children, youth, seniors, volunteers and ordinary citizens in activities that promote community beautification and pride, self-esteem, social inclusion and skill development. We have even created jobs in the community (a feat to be lauded, not decried, and one that more than pays for itself).

The Sooke Fine Arts Show is something this community does very, very well. It is time, as we approach the Show's 30th anniversary, that we celebrate Sooke's extraordinary achievement over three decades. It is time we work together, as a community, to ensure its future.

Sincerely,

Geraldine McGuire
President, Sooke Fine Arts Society

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Appendix A

Excerpts from the Official Community Plan - Adopted as a By-law, May 17, 2010

Community Vision –

“Tourism is an important economic driver combined with a well established visual and performing arts scene.”

3.2 Guiding Principles -

“3.2.6 A Culture of the Arts, Leisure and Recreation

Sooke citizens are united in wishing to preserve and enhance their culture. Sooke acknowledges its roots and appreciates its heritage from the T'Sou-ke Nation and early pioneers. Sooke supports the large number of societies and voluntary organizations that are engaged in year round activities that help keep residents healthy, active and engaged in arts and culture, including spiritual practices. The OCP supports Sooke's cultural heritage and opportunities for a greater arts presence, leisure, and upgrades to recreational infrastructure.”

“3.2.9 Preserving Sooke's Character

Sooke will aim to preserve and enhance its character through the following:

...

e. Promoting Sooke as a unique experience that differentiates itself from similar destinations through the community's arts and culture, recreation, adventure and location as a gateway community; “

Section 4.2 -

Objectives

a. Become a cultural centre by developing a complimentary economy to other adjacent communities that focuses on Sooke's assets, including arts and culture, food and the ocean front;

Section 4.8 –

Arts and Culture

Sooke's arts and culture are intrinsic to its neighborhood and community identity, livability, and diversity. It educates, entertains, generates revenue and employment, and enhances the quality of life for all residents. Community cohesiveness can be strengthened through support for Sooke's heritage, arts and culture, recreational and institutional facilities, programs and services, activities and events that bring people together, create citizen involvement and community partnerships.

4.8.1 GOAL

It is the goal of the community of Sooke to sustain its unique cultural identity by honouring and supporting the history, celebrating the community diversity, and promoting a dynamic arts and cultural community.

4.8.2 POLICIES

- a. To encourage and support the arts and cultural community, including the performing, visual, literary, historic, and multimedia arts;
- b. Encourage community programming for a variety of artistic disciplines;
- c. Work with other municipalities, school districts, Chambers of Commerce and other agencies to plan and coordinate arts initiatives;
- d. Encourage the use of theatres, spaces and venues for public participation, education and enjoyment of culture through the planning and design of buildings, open spaces and public areas, including the street environment;
- e. Recognize and promote cultural excellence and diversity within the community, including the professional and amateur, the traditional and innovative, the aspiring and the established;
- f. Encourage opportunities and resources for education, participation and enjoyment of arts, culture and heritage for all residents;

- g. Promote local career training opportunities at the middle school and high school and encourage post secondary and continuing education;
- h. Support the integration of public art in the design of public and private developments;
- i. Encourage the installation of public art on or within public buildings and property, including public waterfronts, parks, and streets. Public art may include permanent and temporary installations of statuary, murals and other visual art displays reflecting local culture;
- j. Encourage ongoing participation in regional arts and culture initiatives;
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- r. Encourage and support private sector involvement in the arts;
- s. Promote and communicate the value of the Municipal Arts Program to the community.
- t. Conduct regular reviews of and make recommendations to Council for improvements to policies and bylaws pertaining to arts;
- ...
- w. Support the Municipal Arts Program Policy.

Part VI – Implementation

The simple act of stating community goals, objectives and policies never assures their realization. Rather, it is necessary to utilize a variety of methods to confirm that the aspirations of the community are consciously and actively engaged. In order to fulfill the vision expressed in Part I of this Official Community Plan (OCP), the policies contained in the previous section must be implemented.