

Click #1

Mayor's Chamber Presentation – April 24, 2008

Madam President, Special Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the invitation; it is a pleasure to join you today. It has been 22 years since I last addressed the Chamber – then as the Immediate Past President. So perhaps this is a report on what I've been up to for the past 22 years, from the 'suburbs north of Tolmie Avenue'. Well, we're a lot more than a quiet suburb; in fact, Saanich is now the 7th largest municipality in British Columbia, and the largest on Vancouver Island with 114,000 people **(pause & click #2)**

Many do not realize they are in Saanich when they are overlooking Prospect Lake, enjoying the beach at Gyro Park in Cadboro Bay, strolling along the Gorge Waterway, shopping at Mattick's Farm in Cordova Bay, or admiring the farm land in the Blenkinsop or Oldfield valleys. From mountains to coastline, farm land to forest, and urban to suburban settlement, Saanich's 103 square kilometre land base is greater than Victoria, Oak Bay, Esquimalt, View Royal, Central Saanich, and Sidney combined **(pause & click**

#3). Within its boundaries reside seven major shopping centres, two technology parks, 22% of the region's industrial land, 4200 businesses, two college campuses, and we share the University of Victoria with Oak Bay.

We're big, but our goal is to be safe, healthy, and sustainable – that's the bottom line. As a place to live, raise a family, work or retire, over 93% rated the quality of life good or very good in the last Citizen Survey. Of the 58 local government services rated, 86% met or exceeded customer expectations – an approval rating any business would covet. I am able to tell you why people like to live in Saanich by using our strategic plan. We use the Balanced Scorecard model of strategic planning which was developed by an entrepreneur and an academic at Harvard in the early 90's and embraced by over 50% of Fortune 1000 companies. The Balanced Scorecard helps us operate the Municipality like a business: we listen to our customers, we watch the bottom line, we cut red tape, and we innovate.

In fact, Saanich has received a best practices award from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities for effectively integrating strategic planning, operations, and budgeting.

So how are we doing, and where are we going? Let me address that with regard to the five themes in our strategic plan: community, environment, economy, safety, and transportation.

ON COMMUNITY – SAANICH IS HEALTHY (pause & click #4)

The “Healthy Community” theme encourages Saanich residents to become physically, socially, and culturally active. It describes a community where housing, public services, and amenities are affordable, accessible and inclusive, and neighbours know each other and get involved in the community.

How does Saanich achieve a healthy community? Through a regional Parks and Recreation presence, community partnerships, and a genuine interest in housing affordability.

We have 1,687 hectares of parkland in Saanich. How much is that? That is larger in total than one third of the municipalities in BC – not their park land, but their total size.

Yes, we have more park land in Saanich than the total size of Esquimalt, or the total size

of Oak Bay. In fact, park land in Saanich amounts to two thirds the total size of Victoria. And with 85 kilometres of trail, Saanich has more trails than Langford has roads.

For our centennial, we added and improved 20 kilometres of trail. By 2010, we will complete another 15 kilometres. This Centennial Trail network criss-crosses the Municipality with multi-use routes for commuters and families.

Saanich parks such as Mount Douglas and Mount Tolmie also serve both locals and tourists and are consistently recognized as the best views in the region. **(pause & click #5).**

In Greater Victoria Parks and Recreation, Saanich is a leader. The majority of our customer base lives in other municipalities. With 62 sport fields, 54 playgrounds, 35 tennis courts, 44 beach accesses, four seniors centres and four full-service community centres, Saanich serves the region. The award-winning Saanich Commonwealth Place is the most internationally recognized recreation facility in Greater Victoria. Not only

does it cater to families, it is recognized as a world class competitive venue for international aquatic sports.

SCP hosts 50 events annually such as the Canada Cup Diving, Men's Water Polo World League, and the Pan Am Swim Trials. In 2006, SCP hosted the Pan Pacific Swimming Championship with a televised world audience of over 200 million viewers **(pause & click #6)**. This year, SCP will host a national swim meet and the Olympic diving trials. Many of the coaches and athletes competing in the Beijing Olympics call SCP their "home training centre".

Saanich's other community centres also help meet regional needs. Pearkes Centre has twin ice surfaces and an indoor field house that support numerous regional hockey, lacrosse, baseball, and soccer associations. As well, the centre hosts over 90 days of regional trade shows annually.

Cedar Hill Community Centre plays a vital role for regional racquet sports with four international squash courts, four indoor tennis courts, and a "sprung" hardwood

badminton floor. The Centre hosts Tennis BC and Pacific Sport community tennis programs, and last week hosted the Canadian Junior National Squash championships.

With over 7,500 recreation programs and 5.5 million visits each year to our community centres, Saanich plays a pivotal role regionally in supporting active lifestyles for all ages.

But our regional contribution does not stop here. Saanich reaches out to youth, seniors, and the less fortunate. Years ago, Saanich brought youth to the table and crafted a youth advocacy strategy. We now have three youth centres, a skate park, and a water park. And this year, we will produce our first regional arts festival for youth with Greater Victoria youth agencies. ***(Comment: 7 grade 12's)***

Recognizing Saanich's strong track record on seniors, the World Health Organization selected us as one of two Canadian cities to participate in a global health and planning study for older adults **(pause & click #7)**. Census figures show that persons aged 60 and older make up 23% of the Saanich population, with 45% projected in the next decade. The project, in partnership with UVic, VIHA and the Province, looked at how to

design an “age friendly community” with a strategy to support healthier lifestyles and independent living worldwide.

Saanich knows that you must take care of those less fortunate. The LIFE Program (Leisure Involvement for Everyone) offers programs and services at prices those less fortunate can afford. This program received an award of excellence from the BC Parks and Recreation Association and is now a regional program in Greater Victoria.

We also achieve a healthy community through community partnerships for infrastructure and services. Saanich has 35 schools which represent a lot of open space and floor space. So we have partnered with both school districts to construct three new middle schools – at Colquitz, Gordon Head, and most recently at Royal Oak.

The schools get greatly enhanced facilities to enrich their curriculum, and area residents get new community recreation space in the evenings and on weekends. These new spaces are the equivalent of seven James Bay Community Centres. **(Comment: 7 in 5 years!)** Saanich received a UBCM Best Practices award for the first partnership we

accomplished at Colquitz Middle School, and received a second best practice award for helping renovate and expand Cordova Bay Elementary to create space for a “seniors centre” (**pause & click #8**). Looking ahead, we will be expanding this centre in Cordova Bay and upgrading Gordon Head Recreation Centre thanks to federal and provincial grants.

Saanich also partners with sport groups to increase their capacity to serve the region.

We are leveraging a \$100,000 grant and \$250,000 interest-free loan into \$1 million retrofits of existing sand-based fields to artificial turf, significantly increasing our regional sport fields' capacity.

And Saanich builds a healthy community with a focus on housing. In 2004, we worked with industry to create low-cost, adaptable housing guidelines to make all new apartment units more accessible for the elderly and infirm. We now have 656 new adaptable apartments in Saanich, and other municipalities are following our lead.

Housing affordability is a growing regional concern. **(pause & click #9)** Saanich has over 2,300 units of social housing **(Comment: means 5% of our housing stock)** and contributes roughly \$300,000 per year to the Regional Housing Trust Fund. We are presently pursuing a number of new housing proposals:

- A Habitat for Humanity flex housing project on Bethune Avenue.
- A small lot subdivision on Cherry Road.
- Low-cost municipal land on Vernon Avenue for social housing.
- Supportive housing for the homeless on Carey Road.
- New policies for housing affordability in our new Official Community Plan such as legalizing secondary suites on a phased basis, guaranteeing rental units through covenants, and creating affordable housing through amenity agreements with developers.

ON ENVIRONMENT – SAANICH IS SUSTAINABLE

For over 20 years, our community has taken many steps towards a greener Saanich.

We were walking the talk of energy efficiency and climate change well before it was

fashionable, and here are a few examples:

- In 1985 – Saanich adopted an Energy Conservation Policy.
- In 1992 – We played a significant role in the CRD Task Force on Atmospheric Change.
- **(pause & click #10)**
- In 2002 – Saanich partnered with a manufacturer and was the first in the region to install solar-powered pedestrian beacons.
- In 2004 – We initiated an energy retrofit of major municipal buildings.
- In 2005 – Saanich set a LEED Silver Standard as a minimum for all new municipal buildings. Saanich Centennial Library is our first LEED building.
- In 2007 – Saanich worked with industry to develop a private sector green building policy and we were first in BC to offer builders rebates for green energy efficient dwellings.
- And this year – Saanich will lead the quest to become carbon neutral. We have a Carbon Neutral Plan that targets a 10% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2010. To become carbon neutral in 2008, Saanich will contribute \$90,000 to a municipal reserve fund for local greenhouse gas reducing projects, the amount

needed to offset our annual carbon emissions from operations. Our carbon neutral reserve is a first for local government in British Columbia.

So this year, to accelerate our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint, we will pull all this together into a “Sustainable Saanich Action Plan”. The plan will be a best practice for other local governments across the country.

I should also note that Saanich has been leading the way on sustainable land use for decades. In 1968, we established one of the first Urban Containment Boundaries in BC, if not Canada. Forty years later our Urban Containment Boundary is holding firm, preserving over 55% of the municipality as a rural greenbelt.

ON ECONOMY – SAANICH IS VIBRANT (pause & click #11)

Saanich’s key economic advantage is the high quality of life, place, and environment we offer business. Our 2006 Business Survey shows a positive 88.4% quality of life rating from business operators. We were pleased that the September, 2007 issue of Canadian

Business Magazine rated Saanich as the second best place in British Columbia to do business (behind Abbotsford). So how did we get here?

In 2000 Saanich led the introduction of an intermunicipal business licence system that significantly reduced the time and cost to acquire business licences in all Greater Victoria municipalities. Approximately 1,000 Saanich businesses took advantage of the new system in the first year. In 2002, Saanich partnered with the Province's "One Stop" Business Registration System to introduce a comprehensive online business registration portal. In late 2007 Saanich introduced BIZPAL, an online business permit and licence service. This one stop 24/7 automated service helps business owners research the permits and licences required for all levels of government. Early returns show average research times can reduce from seven hours to only 20 minutes with this online tool.

The world class Vancouver Island Technology Park received Council support to reconfigure its site in 2007, paving the way for the next phase – a new 80,000 square foot building, home to another 500 employees. This knowledge village currently has 31 employers and 1,300 employees, and contributes over \$280 million per year to the local

economy. When fully built out, it will have a further 235,000 square feet and a total of 2,800 employees in high technology manufacturing and research.

Council approved almost doubling the size of the Town & Country Mall last year (**pause & click #12**). Replicating a downtown, “Uptown” will have over 650,000 square feet of open air retail with a central outdoor piazza for concerts and exhibitions, surrounded by stores and restaurants.

We are also helping the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce with seed funding to establish the Greater Victoria Development Agency. I commend the Chamber for this initiative.

ON SAFETY – SAANICH IS SAFE (pause & click #13)

In our Citizen Survey over 84% of the respondents said they felt safe or very safe in their neighbourhood. What have we done recently to reinforce that Saanich is a safe place to live? In a word, “partnerships”.

In 2007, Saanich and Oak Bay signed an agreement whereby Saanich Police supports Oak Bay in homicide and major investigations as well as other investigative services such as forensic identification, crash analysis, child abuse, and street crimes. This partnership builds on the joint dispatch and records management service Saanich and Oak Bay Police currently enjoy.

Saanich Police took the lead in the design of the new Regional Crime Unit, which will target prolific offenders. We've seconded investigators to this unit, and backfilled the positions. In fact, aside from the on-call regional integrated units, we have a total of 15 full-time secondments to 11 federal, provincial and regional policing units. This demonstrates our commitment to a community-based police force that works with our partners on integrated units for support and specialized services.

As well, Saanich has just constructed the only police and fire communications centre in the region built to post-disaster operational standards. In the Fall, Saanich will link its fire dispatch to E-COMM on the lower mainland, giving Saanich the most enhanced computer-aided fire dispatch capability in the region, including mobile work stations for

fire fighters. Saanich Fire currently provides emergency dispatch to North Saanich, Sidney, Oak Bay, and Esquimalt.

(pause & click #14)

Saanich Fire has been a lead player regionally in developing a response to risks like extreme weather, tsunami, hazardous material spills, pandemics, and West Nile Virus outbreaks. To support the Fire Department's greater role in regional fire and disaster response services, Saanich will develop a regional fire training facility behind Fire Hall #2 in Royal Oak.

We want people to feel safe in Saanich and the key is working cooperatively with our neighbours. So we deliver first class community-based police, fire, and disaster preparedness services while providing support and leadership for regional integrated units.

ON TRANSPORTATION – SAANICH IS BALANCED

An efficient transportation network is vital to businesses and people in the region. We must offer easy ways to move people, goods, and services. Like other communities in the region, Saanich is automobile-oriented. Unlike other communities, all major highways go through Saanich and we have over 600 kilometres of road to maintain.

Fortunately, the public understands you cannot solve traffic congestion overnight. They recognize that Saanich is building a more balanced transportation network – one that lets people choose how they are going to move safely and comfortably whether by bike, bus, car, or on foot **(pause & click #15)**.

I recall the surprised reaction of some when Saanich built the first section of the Galloping Goose – Lochside Trail system behind our Municipal Hall. Today this corridor regularly has more than 2,000 bicycle and pedestrian commuters daily.

Saanich has renewed its efforts to make bus travel more convenient. For example, we are constructing the new Royal Oak Transit Exchange near Highway 17 and Elk Lake

Drive - infrastructure that serves the entire region. At the request of Saanich, BC Transit will dramatically increase its spending on bus shelter improvements to help keep bus riders out of the rain and with a place to sit. What was a \$150,000 pilot to provide more benches, more accessibility, more cover, and more route information has now morphed into a \$4.2 million regional program.

Road infrastructure is expensive and our greatest challenge. **(pause & click #16)** The Admirals Bridge replacement slated for 2008, for example, will cost \$2.7 million and serve mostly regional travellers.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE – WITHIN 8 YEARS

And speaking of infrastructure, Saanich is committed to sustainable infrastructure replacement funding **(pause & click #17)**, as is the FCM. To remain competitive and safe, we must reinvest in our core business – roads, water, sewers, storm drains, and facilities. So we have established the current value of our infrastructure and the amount which should be spent on replacement and maintenance each year in order for these assets to be sustainable. We've made a lot of progress in the past 10 years.

Infrastructure spending in Saanich has increased from \$4 M in 1997 to \$27 M in 2007.

By using a blend of accelerating Federal Gas Tax transfers, property taxation, user fees and debt management, we will continue to increase spending and strive for sustainable funding within eight years. **(Comment: yes, in 8 years)** This is an accomplishment few local governments in Canada can match or even contemplate.

How can we afford to ramp up our infrastructure funding? Fortunately, the Municipality is in good financial health. Our debt-to-equity ratio is low at 1:3 and our reserves-to-debt ratio is good with at least 1.5 times our debt held in reserves. At the end of 2008, the total municipal debt outstanding will amount to \$180 per capita. For comparison purposes, regional, provincial and federal debt per capita is \$410, \$7,700, and \$15,200 respectively.

In summary, Saanich is safe, healthy, vibrant, and sustainable. **(pause & click #18)**

Through regional partnerships, effective service delivery, and innovative and progressive governance, Councils will continue to offer good value for the tax dollar -- something our citizens have come to expect.

Yes, we might be one of the largest municipalities in BC, but we strive to be one of the best. Having recently celebrated our centennial and with all of these positive things happening, is it any surprise that Saanich is looking forward to its next 100 years?

Thank you. **(pause & click #19)**