HAT

Creating Conservation Legacies

Delivered via email

October 25, 2021

To: Mayor of Saanich and Members of Saanich Council

cc: Paul Thorkelsson, CAO
cc: Suzanne Samborski, Director of Parks and Recreation
cc: Save Kings Park Community Group

Dear Mayor and Members of Council:

The intention of this letter is to respectfully share some comments and insight on the ongoing work to permanently protect the Kings Road urban green space. This is in advance of the Saanich Council meeting on November 22nd, 2021, where we understand this item may come up for discussion.

On October 8th, 2021, representing Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), I participated in a site visit of the Kings Road urban green space along with Chris Wieczorek, HAT's Land Protection Coordinator. We had an informative meeting with Rebecca Sterritt, Julian Lum, Deanna Pfeifer and Robbie Newton from the Save Kings Park Community Group. Currently, the property appears to have significant ecological value given its intersection with Bowker Creek and the riparian habitat present at the site, providing habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. If this land is protected and preserved into the future, there would be significant potential for enhancements to dramatically increase the biodiversity and ecosystem services provided by this property, which would appear to include flood abatement, water quality improvement, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat creation, and the enhancement of recreational values important to community members and the broader public. However, these objectives cannot be realized until the land is permanently secured as a protected area.

Saanich's foresight and involvement in the purchase of this property, with the intention to acquire the land as a permanent green space, park, or equivalent land usage, should be applauded for the long-term vision and leadership it demonstrates. That being said, we understand from speaking with members of the community that there are real and pressing fundraising concerns that may threaten the permanent conservation of this property, which Saanich currently owns.

We were told at our site visit that community members are currently required to raise a total of $2.75 million to preserve this site. To be sure, community members have done an excellent job in raising nearly $40,000 to date. This is added to the $250,000 that has been contributed by the City of Victoria, and the $75,000 contribution from the District of Oak Bay. HAT's understanding therefore is that nearly $365,000 has been raised to date. Set against the $2.75 million total, this leaves close to $2.39 million outstanding.

It is HAT's considered opinion that asking the community to raise funds of this magnitude to guarantee the permanent success of this project is not a realistic expectation. As you may know, HAT recently engaged in a substantial fundraising effort for the Mountain Road Forest Property. HAT's involvement in this ambitious project was predicated on the premise of raising $1.4 million, of which $200,000 had been pledged in advance as matching funds. Further, this fundraising target was a "stretch goal" for HAT, and our organization undertook this effort knowing that there were real risks involved and that significant organizational resources would need to be dedicated to achieve a successful outcome for this project. From the outset of our fundraising campaign, we devoted the equivalent of a full-time employee position to this effort. Importantly, we also hired and employed a full-time professional fundraiser for six months in order to successfully raise the amount of money required. To be clear, this was a significant effort for an established NGO that is fortunate to have considerable organizational experience and enjoy positive working relationships that have been formed over 25 years with members of the community. In our view, it is unrealistic to expect volunteer community members to have the organizational expertise, monetary capacity, and time to devote to raising nearly $3 million for this cause.

As well, while HAT is certainly supportive and appreciative of the dedicated efforts that have gone into this property so far from all involved partners, our organization is not in a position to engage in a formal fundraising role for this parcel of land at the current time, nor would we consider such a goal feasible from private-sector fundraising.

Given these considerations, we recommend that the District of Saanich takes measures to substantially reduce the $2.75 million fundraising target that has been asked of this group of community members. Should Saanich succeed in substantially reducing the fundraising burden it has asked of the community, it should be rightly congratulated for setting the community up for success and having the foresight to permanently preserve this important piece of land for generations to come. Finally, once the site is successfully secured, there is considerable potential to attract further funds for ecosystem restoration from a diversity of funding sources.

To reiterate, it is our opinion that the community will be best set up for success to permanently secure the Kings Road green space if its fundraising burden is significantly lowered. We know that dedicated community members and Saanich Council alike share a desire to preserve this special piece of land, and hope that reasonable steps may be taken to deliver a positive outcome for all involved.

Respectfully submitted,
Habitat Acquisition Trust

Kate Blake