

Saanich council considers bylaw change to allow more unrelated people in a dwelling

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Saanich city staff will review options for amending a zoning bylaw that sets the maximum number of unrelated people living in a household at four.

Photograph By BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Saanich council has unanimously agreed to consider bylaw changes that would increase the number of unrelated people who can live in a single dwelling.

Based on a recommendation from Mayor Fred Haynes and Coun. Zac de Vries, city staff, including the police and fire departments, will review options for amending a zoning bylaw that sets the maximum number of unrelated people living in a household at four.

"We are just looking at options, so there is no final decision being made today," de Vries said in introducing the motion on Monday night.

Coun. Karen Harper said that in the event that changes are considered, there would be public hearings. Harper noted she lived in a house with 10 people during university and is "totally open to looking at the bylaw."

Coun. Ned Taylor said he feels the bylaw is discriminatory toward people of a lower income and that likely many people are already breaking the bylaw.

Coun. Susan Brice said the motion as previously worded, asking bylaw staff to consider the options, was "too narrow" in many ways.

Coun. Colin Plant amended it to allow a broader range of staff departments to be involved. He said he wanted to hear first from staff and that community input can be sought once a report comes back.

Haynes said Saanich is in the midst of a housing crisis and when there's a crisis, "we seek action."

"This is not just about students, it's about those individuals that want to live together in a wholesome way in a community."

Some Saanich residents wrote to council and attended the meeting to say they support the existing bylaw.

They pointed to parties, noise, parking and behaviour problems they said often accompany a large number of people living in one dwelling in a family neighbourhood.

Others told council, in letters, it is shameful Saanich has such a bylaw.

Coun. Nathalie Chambers said while campaigning during the last two summers for the October municipal election, her eyes were opened to the fact people were "sleeping in their cars in Saanich and sleeping in parks" and that there are up to 2,700 vacant homes while others live in fear of renovations and demovictions." She was referring to evictions based on renovations or demolitions by the owner.

The recommendation came on the heels of an uproar over about seven University of Victoria students evicted from a Saanich house, in part because of the bylaw. They have found other housing.