

Comment: Closed doors on decision-making in North Saanich erodes trust

As in-camera meetings increase, so does the wondering of where our elected officials stand on integral issues.

North Saanich Residents Association Jul 13, 2026 5:45 AM

<https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/comment-closed-doors-on-decision-making-in-north-saanich-erodes-trust-12538244>



North Saanich Municipal Hall on Mills Road. Council is increasingly relying on in-camera meetings for significant decision-making, says the North Saanich Residents Association. DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

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A commentary by the board of directors of the association.

The June 29 article "Spat over conference highlights North Saanich council divisions" illustrated one facet of a troubling situation in our municipality.

Equally worrying is the widening gulf between this council and the citizens of North Saanich, evident in council's increasing reliance on in-camera meetings for significant decision-making.

While there are legitimate reasons for discussions on legal issues or personnel matters to be held in camera, far too many important decisions are being made behind closed doors.

As residents, we are left wondering where our elected officials stand on issues that matter to our community.

If elected officials want to earn the public's trust, they should make every effort to conduct the public's business in public and to disclose, whenever possible, how decisions were reached.

Recently, the following decisions were made in camera, lacking transparency and accountability.

- The citizens' advisory committees were abruptly suspended, with vague allegations of misconduct casting shadows on all volunteer committee members. Who voted to suspend and investigate the advisory committees and why? Who objected and why?
- Council voted to retain an outside public relations firm to "educate" citizens on the role of a municipal government. Who supported hiring outside consultants to explain how governance works? Who questioned that expense and asked why it couldn't be done in-house by communications staff? Who objected and why?
- Council decided to review leasing a building to provide services for seniors. How do we know this is a good idea without knowing what the proposed use of the facility is and what the taxpayers will be paying? How do we know this doesn't duplicate facilities and services in Sidney? Who supported this idea? Who opposed it?

These are not trivial issues, and they were all conducted in camera. They go to the heart of representative government. We elect councillors and a mayor to make decisions on our behalf, and we deserve to know how they vote whenever the law allows that information to be made public.

As the October municipal election approaches, many find themselves thinking, "Maybe it's time to vote them all out." But that would be unfortunate, because there are likely some councillors and/or the mayor who have consistently spoken up, asked the difficult questions, or voted differently.

The problem is that we have no way of knowing who they are or what has been discussed.

The North Saanich Residents Association believes accountability depends on transparency. The association believes democracy works best when citizens can see not only the outcome of decisions, but also who stood behind them.

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QB Good Neighbours Group Commentary

It is a foundational principle of good governance that, as far as possible, municipal government deliberations are held in the public domain.

Please read an insightful article from **Qualicum Beach Insights** from 2024 covering the Town of Qualicum Beach's use of closed door meetings.

<https://www.qualicumbeachinsights.com/post/behind-closed-doors>

Learn more about **local government governance** by reviewing the BC Government's website. Emphasis in ***bold italics*** is added by us.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/governance-powers/councils-boards/meetings>

Local government meetings

Local government meetings are gatherings where municipal council or regional district board members make decisions or move toward making decisions. ***Most meetings are open to the public to facilitate transparency and accountability of the council or the board.***

A municipal council or regional district board meeting is generally a gathering that:

- All members of the council or the board are invited to, and
- Is a material part of the council or the board's decision-making process.

Transparency and fairness of meetings and the decision-making process of elected officials are central to the principles of accountable government. To uphold these principles, provincial rules and a local government's procedure bylaws govern how meetings are administered.

Learn more about:

- [Municipal Procedure Bylaw](#)
- [Regional District Procedure Bylaw](#)

The *Local Government Act* and *Community Charter* provide local governments with the authorities needed to hold and conduct various types of meetings. ***In specific circumstances a local government has the authority to hold a closed meeting.*** Local governments may also choose to hold a meeting electronically, if permitted by the local government's procedure bylaw. Meetings may be held inside or outside the boundaries of the local government.

Open meeting rules

Most municipal council and regional district board meetings and meetings of their committees, commissions and similar bodies are open to the public.

- [Local Government Open Meeting Rules](#)

Closed meetings

Meetings closed to the public, also known as **in-camera meetings**, may only be held in accordance with the procedural requirements of the *Community Charter*. These meetings may only be held in very specific circumstances, for example, discussion of a legal or human resources matter.

- [Local Government Closed Meetings](#)

Closed meeting requirements

Municipal councils or regional district boards may close a meeting or part of a meeting by passing a resolution that sets out the basis for closing the meeting to discuss any of the following:

- Personal information about individuals appointed to or being considered for appointment as an officer, employee or agent of the local government
- Personal information about individuals being considered for an award or who have offered a gift to the local government on condition of anonymity
- Labour/employee relations
- Security of property of the local government
- Acquisition, disposition or expropriation of land or improvements if local government interests could be harmed by disclosure
- Law enforcement, if disclosure could harm an investigation or enforcement of an enactment
- Litigation or potential litigation impacting the local government
- A hearing or potential hearing by an outside administrative tribunal affecting the local government, for example, the Gaming Commission, the Passenger Transportation Board or the Utilities Commission
- The receipt of legal advice
- Information that is prohibited or information that if it were presented in a document would be prohibited from disclosure under section 21 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (business interests of a third party)
- Service negotiations and related discussions that are at their preliminary stages and that could harm the interests of the local government if held in public
- A matter related to the local government that is being investigated by the Office of the Ombudsperson
- Objectives, measures and progress report discussions with local government officers and employees for the purposes of preparing annual reports
- A matter that, under a separate enactment, may be discussed in a closed meeting
- Deciding whether or not the meeting should be closed
- Deciding whether or not a local government wishes to use the authority under section 91 of the *Community Charter* to exclude staff or allow them to attend a closed meeting, or in specified circumstances to allow other persons to attend a closed meeting

Local governments may not adopt bylaws in a closed meeting. All council or board votes on the reading or adoption of a bylaw must be made in an open meeting, even if the issues that gave rise to the bylaw were discussed in a closed meeting.

- [Community Charter, section 90 - Meetings that may or must be closed to the public](#)