



Sustainability Advisory Committee (ESAC) on June 17, 2015, seeking support from the City of Surrey to sign a municipal declaration or equivalent to recognize the rights of Surrey residents to clean air, water and safe food. ESAC recommended that Council consider receiving the Blue Dot movement presentation.

Surrey Blue Dot members presented at the Council-in-Committee meeting on July 27, 2015. The delegation stated that changing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms will require further work at the Provincial and Federal levels, but adopting a declaration at the municipal level will provide a high level, non-binding framework that complements the existing Surrey Sustainability Charter. The delegation requested that Council pass a declaration ensuring the right of the citizens of Surrey to a healthy environment.

A number of resolutions related to the right to a healthy environment were put forward at the recent 2015 Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) conference. Resolution A5 calling on the Province of British Columbia to enact an Environmental Bill of Rights was passed at UBCM.

## **DISCUSSION**

Led by the David Suzuki Foundation, the "Blue Dot" movement is a grassroots movement across Canada. Part of their outreach includes targeting Canadian municipalities and requesting that cities and towns pass declarations respecting the right of their citizens to live in a healthy environment. Their goal is for municipalities to pass such declarations, thereby prompting each province to pass an environmental bill of rights, and ultimately to enshrine the right to a healthy environment within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The support of seven out of 10 provinces representing more than 50 per cent of the Canadian population is required for amendments to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In October 2014, the City of Richmond was the first municipality in Canada to adopt the Blue Dot Declaration, 'The Right to a Healthy Environment'. Since that time, 103 municipalities across Canada have passed a declaration of a right to a healthy environment. In Surrey, the Surrey Blue Dot Movement is an organization comprised of volunteers that believe "every human has the right to live in a healthy environment which includes the rights to clean air, water and safe food"; the group has collected over 1,000 signatures in Surrey in support of the Blue Dot Movement. In presenting to ESAC and Council this past summer, the group requested that the City support a Declaration to recognize the rights of Surrey residents to clean air, water and safe food.

At a general level, the Declaration concerning the right to a healthy environment includes the following components:

- Breathing clean air, drinking clean water, consuming safe food;
- Accessing nature;
- Knowing about pollutants released into the local environment; and
- Participating in government decisions that will affect the environment.

The full text of the proposed Declaration for the City of Surrey is attached as Appendix "I".

### **Proposed Approach for City of Surrey**

The goals of the Blue Dot movement and the municipal Declaration represent very basic human rights to clean air, water and food and access to nature. These are important issues that are

protected in Canada by federal and provincial legislation, and supported by the work of local governments including through the protection of riparian areas, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (including from transportation), creation of parks and green spaces, and support of local food growing and healthy eating.

The principles of the Declaration are aligned with those of the Surrey Sustainability Charter, the Official Community Plan, and the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS). The Sustainability Charter vision includes that "Surrey values and protects its natural environment through stewardship of its rich tree canopy, and enhancement of its natural areas and biodiversity". Access to nature, safe food, clean air and clean water are all embodied in Sustainability Charter goals and actions across all three pillars of sustainability, including the Environmental Goal to "demonstrate good stewardship of the land, water, air and built environment, protecting, preserving, and enhancing Surrey's natural areas and ecosystems for current and future generations while making nature accessible for all to enjoy". Specific goals also exist for protecting terrestrial and aquatic habitat, preserving air quality, reducing consumption and waste, and promoting food self-sufficiency. Action items relating to air and water quality state that the City will advocate for sound practices to monitor and report on water and air quality, minimize air emissions, and encourage waste reduction.

Further, many ideas from the Declaration can also be found in the BCS, which recognizes that preserving nature (including plants, wildlife, and ecological values and functions) provides many benefits such as clean air and water, improved health and livability, and recreational values. The BCS was developed as a shared vision for conservation and is designed to facilitate cooperation amongst citizens and leaders of the public and private sector. It acknowledges biodiversity as a foundation for a healthy, livable, sustainable, and resilient community and offers a clear and operable strategy to preserve the natural environment while accommodating urban growth objectives.

Several of the actions outlined in Clause #5 of the Declaration are already being pursued by the City, including increasing density, prioritizing active transportation, reducing solid waste, and establishing accessible green spaces in residential neighbourhoods. Through Surrey's Sustainability Dashboard ([www.surrey.ca/dashboard](http://www.surrey.ca/dashboard)), targets have been established for many of these indicators (e.g.s, density along transit corridors, solid waste diversion, kilometers of bikeways and greenways) and regular reporting to Council shows that progress is being made. Participation in local government decisions is also already part of the City's processes including through Council delegations and public hearings, and participation on City advisory committees.

### **Legal Services Review**

The Legal Services Division has reviewed this Report and has no concerns.

### **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The proposed Declaration focuses on the right to clean air and water, safe food, and access to nature. These issues are reflected in the Sustainability Charter's vision statement and Environmental Goals, as well as the following Actions:

- SC 14 (Support Food Security)
- EC 12 (Surrey's Agricultural Land Base)
- EC 16 (Increased Transit and Transportation)

- EN 2 (Waste Reduction)
- EN 3 (Vehicle Fleet Programs)
- EN 6 (Enhancement and Expansion of Nature Matters Program)
- EN 9 (Sustainable land Use planning and Development Practices)
- EN 12 (Surrey's Commitment to Climate Change Action Plan)
- EN 12 (Enhancement and Protection of Natural Areas, Fish Habitat, and Wildlife Habitat)
- EN 16 (Land, Water and Air Quality Management)
- EN 17 (Enhance Biodiversity)

## CONCLUSION

The proposed Declaration outlines the City's support for the right to live in a healthy environment. The current and planned revisions to the Surrey Sustainability Charter, along with the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and other key City plans and policies, reflect these issues and specifically reference these objectives. It is recommended that Council endorse the Declaration as outlined in Appendix "I".

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Attachment:

Appendix "I" Model Municipal Declaration – Right to a Healthy Environment

## **Council Declaration The Right To A Healthy Environment**

### **Preamble:**

In proclaiming this Declaration, Council is articulating public policy principles, but not creating or guaranteeing any legal rights or obligations. The Declaration represents the intent of the City of Surrey. In the case of any discrepancy between the contents of this Declaration and the City of Surrey's Bylaws (as well as policies and strategies), the City's Bylaws will take precedence.

### **Declaration**

Whereas the City of Surrey understands that people are part of the environment, and that a healthy environment is inextricably linked to the well-being of our community;

Whereas the City of Surrey recognizes the mutual importance and interconnectedness of a healthy environment, a strong economy and a healthy society as we move toward sustainability;

Whereas the City of Surrey recognizes that environmental protection is a fundamental value held by its citizens;

Whereas the City of Surrey recognizes that our world and all of its inhabitants are faced with the growing and increasingly urgent impacts of climate change, air and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity;

Whereas the City of Surrey recognizes the importance of protecting citizens' health from environmental hazards such as air pollution, contaminated food and water, and toxic chemicals;

Whereas the City of Surrey has a structured sphere of influence and a defined jurisdiction;

Whereas in proclaiming this declaration, Council is articulating public policy principles, but not creating or guaranteeing any legal rights or obligations;

Whereas the City of Surrey supports the recognition of the right to a healthy environment in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;

Whereas the City of Surrey, through the Official Community Plan and its policies, reflects the values of its citizens and demonstrates a commitment to protecting the environment and moving toward a more sustainable future;

Now therefore the Council of the City of Surrey declares that:

1. All people have the right to live in a healthy environment, including the right to:
  - breathe clean air;
  - drink and access clean water;

- eat safe and healthy food;
  - access nature;
  - know about pollutants and contaminants released into the local environment; and
  - participate in decision-making that will affect the environment.
2. Within its jurisdiction, the City of Surrey has certain authority to respect, protect, fulfill and promote these rights and commits to encouraging the respect, protection, fulfillment and promotion of these rights.
  3. The City of Surrey shall take measures to prevent the degradation of the environment and protect the health of its citizens where threats of serious or irreversible damage to human health or the environment exist.
  4. The City of Surrey will consider costs to human health and the environment when evaluating reasonably foreseeable costs of proposed actions and alternatives.
  5. By June 30, 2016, the City of Surrey will specify objectives, targets and timelines and actions the City of Surrey will take, within its jurisdiction, to address the residents' right to a healthy environment under section 1, including priority actions to:
    - a. distribute environmental benefits and burdens within the municipality, preventing the cumulative health impacts of exposure to environmental contaminants;
    - b. ensure infrastructure and development projects protect the environment, including air quality;
    - c. address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and implementing adaptation measures;
    - d. responsibly increase density;
    - e. prioritize walking, cycling and public transit as healthy and economical modes of transportation;
    - f. prioritize infrastructure and protected water sources for the provision of safe and accessible drinking water;
    - g. promote the availability of safe, local foods;
    - h. reduce solid waste and promote recycling, re-use and composting;
    - i. establish and maintain accessible green spaces in residential neighbourhoods, and protect and conserve nature in public open spaces;

- j. attract and invest in green businesses, green energy, clean tech and jobs of tomorrow.

The City of Surrey will review the objectives, targets, timelines and actions every five (5) years, and measure progress towards fulfilling this declaration; and

The City of Surrey will consult with residents as part of this process.

- 6. The City of Surrey will send letters to the provincial government and to the federal government calling for the development of provincial and federal legislation that recognizes the right to live in a healthy environment.