

Dean Murdock: You Were in Charge

The Community Charter makes the mayor the head and chief executive officer of Saanich. He chaired every Council hearing on 938 Ambassador Avenue, let the only motion on the complaint-driven bylaw system be tabled, and voted for every notice. Drawn from his statements to voters and Saanich's own minutes and meeting recordings.

What the record shows

1. Mayor Dean Murdock told voters in 2022: "We will restore trust in decision-making and find solutions that make life better for everyone" [1]. He said Saanich's "processes are far too slow" and that "it's time for us to move beyond planning and into action" [2]. Under the Community Charter, "the mayor is the head and chief executive officer of the municipality" and gives, on Council's behalf, general direction to municipal officers on carrying out Council's policies and directions [3].
2. On February 5, 2024 he chaired the debate on the only motion this term on the complaint-driven bylaw system. Councillor de Vries moved to table it indefinitely and refer bylaw enforcement to strategic planning. The Corporate Officer told Council: "I never like when anyone wants to table anything indefinitely because it stays on our books." Councillor de Vries answered that tabling "essentially kills the motion." Mayor Murdock ruled: "You like the tidiness of it. You want the simplicity of it and you want tabling, so I'm gonna allow that to carry on." The referral carried [4].
3. On May 6, 2024, on staff's recommendation, the Committee of the Whole removed "Bylaw enforcement being shared across different levels of government" from the strategic plan's Bike Rack. He voted against the amendment to keep two other items there, and the minutes record no vote against removing the bylaw item [5]. In 2025 the Chief Administrative Officer told Council: "Items in the Bike Rack are not actioned" [11]. The minutes from February 2024 to July 2026 record no report to Council on bylaw enforcement [6].
4. He chaired every Council hearing on 938 Ambassador Avenue: November 20, 2023, June 23, 2025 and July 14, 2025 [7][8][9]. He voted for all seven Section 57 notices registered on residents' homes since he became mayor, and to confirm the notice on 938 Ambassador Avenue [6][9].
5. From 2022, his first year in office, to 2025 the net cost of bylaw and parking enforcement rose from \$1,002,200 to \$1,598,600; the 2026 budget is \$1,748,100. In the 2024 resident survey, bylaw enforcement scored 46 out of 100, down from 54 in 2021, and building inspections and permits 40, down from 52 [13].

In his own words

What he said	What he did
"We will restore trust in decision-making and find solutions that make life better for everyone." (2022) [1]	Allowed the only motion on the complaint-driven bylaw system to be tabled indefinitely over the Corporate Officer's advice (February 5, 2024) [4]

What he said	What he did
"It's time for us to move beyond planning and into action." (2022) [2]	Let bylaw enforcement be referred to strategic planning; three months later it was removed from the plan's Bike Rack with no vote against (2024) [4][5]
"These processes are far too slow," citing delays on garden suites. (2022) [2]	Voted against even a staff report on garden suites outside the Urban Containment Boundary after ten residents spoke to Council on suites there (June 24, 2024) [14]
"As your Mayor, unity will be my priority." (2022) [1]	Voted for all seven notices registered since he took office, and to confirm the notice on 938 Ambassador Avenue [6][9]
"Brent has a proven track record and has demonstrated effective leadership with a focus on transparency, clear communication and collaboration." (on appointing Brent Reems Chief Administrative Officer, January 31, 2023) [24]	Every notice since followed that administration's advice; he voted for each one [6][19]
Residents "will suddenly find themselves in contravention of bylaws": "I find that problematic . . . In my view this is not a productive change." (on retractable leashes, November 1, 2023) [25]	Chaired the vote that registered notices on 938 Ambassador Avenue and 4573 Prospect Lake Road (November 20, 2023) [7]
"The committee may ultimately find that this bylaw is working as it should. We really are not in a position to judge it at this point." (on reviewing the tree bylaw, 2016) [26]	Let the only motion this term on the complaint-driven bylaw system be tabled indefinitely (February 5, 2024) [4]
"I am a champion for healthier, more engaged communities." (2022) [16]	Chaired the meeting at which residents were told bylaw enforcement is not a permitted topic at Open Forum (September 23, 2024) [10]
"The mayor is the head and chief executive officer of the municipality." (Community Charter, s. 116) [3]	The minutes from November 2022 to July 2026 record no motion from him on bylaw enforcement or Section 57 notices [6]

6. Each of those votes followed advice from the administration led by Chief Administrative Officer Brent Reems. The Community Charter gives the mayor, on Council's behalf, general direction over that administration [3]. The advice was the administration's. The direction and the votes were his.

The ruling

7. When Councillor Chambers asked Council to defeat her own motion so that she could bring a better one, Councillor de Vries moved instead that it "be tabled indefinitely and the issue of bylaw enforcement be referred to the Strategic Planning process." The Corporate Officer recommended that Council "defeat the motion and the item of bylaw enforcement can be referred to the strategic plan. It's just to keep it clean." Councillor de Vries kept his wording. Brent Reems told Council his "preference would be to refer the topic" [4].
8. As chair, Mayor Murdock decided the point: "Okay, so I get what's going on here. You like the tidiness of it. You want the simplicity of it and you want tabling, so I'm gonna allow that

to carry on" [4]. The referral carried. Three months later the item was gone from the strategic plan's Bike Rack [5].

The owners in front of him

Date and property	What Council heard	His role
Nov 20, 2023, 938 Ambassador Avenue	The Manager of Inspection Services said there were "no financial implications" and a "\$500 fee" for removal; no one appeared for the owner	Chaired; voted for the notice [7][17]
Nov 20, 2023, 4573 Prospect Lake Road	The owner said plans to bring the dwelling into compliance had been given to staff; the stair was pre-existing	Chaired; voted for the notice [7][18]
Jan 20, 2025, 67 Cadillac Avenue	The complaint was lodged in late 2023; the current owner bought the property in January 2024	Voted for the notice, 8 to 0 [19]
Jun 9, 2025, 1845 Fairburn Drive	The owners said the disclosure form at purchase showed all permits in place and that they had spent over \$100,000 on upgrades	Chaired; voted for the notice, 9 to 0 [19]
Jun 23, 2025, 938 Ambassador Avenue	Counsel said the owner had not been properly notified of the November 20, 2023 meeting	Chaired; Council deferred the decision to allow representation, 8 to 0 [8]
Jul 14, 2025, 938 Ambassador Avenue	Counsel said the notice was affecting the sale and that the warrant was under review by the Provincial Court	Chaired; voted to confirm, 9 to 0 [9]

The coded language

- Staff give Council keywords instead of facts, and Council votes on them. As chair he put each of these to a vote [7][9][14][17][19]:

What Council was told	What the record shows
"No financial implications" and a "\$500 fee" (Manager of Inspection Services, November 20, 2023)	Stated the fee and left out the cost [17]
Notices on title are "necessary to ensure future owners are aware" and "without it, the District may be exposed to liability" (June 9, 2025)	No legal opinion, claim or dollar figure for that liability was put to Council [19]
The fee is collected "when all the conditions have been met" (July 14, 2025)	The conditions are permits, consultants and whatever remedial work the District orders (see The hostage loop)
Contraventions "impact life and safety on the property" (June 23, 2025)	No life or safety finding about 938 Ambassador Avenue was put to Council that night or on July 14, 2025 [8][9]

The hostage loop

- The District investigates the owner, enforces against him, can prosecute him, registers the encumbrance on his title, and then decides, at the same Council table and on the advice of the same staff, whether it comes off. The only key is compliance as the District defines it. The owner's position is that he is unlawfully forced to open his private dwelling to the same

bylaw officers who built the case against him, pays for permits, consultants and whatever remedial work they then order, and pays the District \$500 at the end. Until he does, the notice stays on title and the sale of his home is affected. The only appeal from Council's refusal is to court, at his expense.

11. Creation. The October 31, 2023 report recommended the notice because it "will reduce Saanich's liability exposure on this file" [20].
12. The key. Council was told the notice comes off for a \$500 fee once the property is brought into compliance with all regulations [17][20], and on July 14, 2025 that the fee is collected "when all the conditions have been met" [9]. The \$500 is only the District's registration fee. The cost of a Section 57 notice is hundreds of thousands of dollars. For this house, the title ransom starts at \$100,000 in consulting fees for the building permit alone, with remedial work ordered inside the dwelling up to \$250,000. It is paid on top of the District's fines and on top of double permit fees, which the owner of 4573 Prospect Lake Road told Council he paid [18]. A home renovation becomes an offence, and the owner is penalized twice: Harry Bains was fined and sent to collections, the owner of 4573 Prospect Lake Road paid his fines through the courts, and the owner of 938 Ambassador Avenue was prosecuted.
13. Who holds the key. Since Bylaw No. 9694 (2021), occupancy inspection and entry authority under the Zoning Bylaw extends to bylaw enforcement officers, not only building officials [21]. The October 31, 2023 report told Council the violation was confirmed "by the Bylaw Officer" [20]. A bylaw enforcement officer is not a building official under the Building Act. Bylaw enforcement is not a permitted topic at Open Forum [10].
14. The pressure. While the notice stands, the owner is penalized with the loss of the ordinary ability to sell, finance and insure his home. Counsel told Council on July 14, 2025 that the notice was affecting the sale of 938 Ambassador Avenue [9].
15. The review. Cancellation under section 58 is decided by the Council that imposed the notice, on staff advice. Mayor Murdock chaired both hearings. On June 23, 2025 the Corporate Officer told Council that staff recommended against removal because the contraventions "impact life and safety on the property" [8]. On July 14, 2025 Brent Reems told Council that "the position of the district is that the search was lawful" and that "the opportunity is tonight." Council confirmed the notice nine to nothing [9].
16. In 2023 the owner of 4573 Prospect Lake Road told Council he had paid his fines, gone to court, paid double permit fees, hired a designer, a geotechnical firm and two engineers, and met the District's inspector "every day." He told Council that inspector approved his stairs on February 23, 2023, that the Manager of Inspection Services disagreed, and that a retired inspector he hired found the stairs safe. The stair was pre-existing; he told Council it was in the house when he bought it in 2016. The Manager of Inspection Services told Council there is no correction for such a stair short of replacing it entirely. Councillor Harper told Council that other mechanisms, including letters on the property file, had been used in the past. Mayor Murdock put the question; Council registered the notice, with only Councillor Harper opposed [7][18].

What he brought to the table

17. As mayor he moved motions on tree planting, childcare, Canadian procurement, meeting start times, community amenity contributions, short-term rentals and an amalgamation question on the 2026 ballot [6]. The minutes from November 2022 to July 2026 record no motion from him on bylaw enforcement, the complaint-driven system or Section 57 notices [6]. As a councillor in 2017 he told Council he was "reluctant to support the consideration of garden suites on properties outside the UCB" [15].

Background

18. He was first elected to Saanich Council in 2008 and served three terms, including as a Capital Regional District director [16]. He did not run in 2018 [23]. In 2022 he was elected mayor with 13,631 votes to 13,479 for the incumbent, Fred Haynes [12]. He worked for the B.C. Ministry of Health [16]. He is not seeking re-election in 2026 [22].

About this review

19. The author, Christopher Caddell, owns 938 Ambassador Avenue and is in active litigation with the District of Saanich. This report is separate from that litigation. It is an independent analysis produced with a search engine built for the litigation, which indexes every open Saanich Council meeting since September 2017 (495 meetings and 12.2 million transcribed words) together with the District's agendas, minutes and financial statements. Every statement of fact is tied to a public record listed at the end.

Sources

- [1] Times Colonist, "Dean Murdock - Saanich mayor candidate 2022" (2022).
- [2] Times Colonist, "Mayoral candidates clash over pace of progress in Saanich" (2022).
- [3] Community Charter, S.B.C. 2003, c. 26, s. 116.
- [4] Council minutes, February 5, 2024, Shared Bylaw Enforcement (Notice of Motion of Councillor Chambers), pp. 12 to 13; Council meeting video transcript, February 5, 2024 (approx. 10139 to 10293 s).
- [5] Special Council and Committee of the Whole minutes, May 6, 2024, Strategic Plan Check In, pp. 4 to 5; meeting video transcript, May 6, 2024 (approx. 6323 to 6563 s).
- [6] District of Saanich Council minutes, 2017 to July 13, 2026, as held in the minutes archive.
- [7] Council minutes, November 20, 2023, pp. 1 to 3; Council meeting video transcript, November 20, 2023 (approx. 140 to 420 s and 2700 to 3330 s).
- [8] Council minutes, June 23, 2025, Request to Cancel Notice on Title, 938 Ambassador Avenue; Council meeting video transcript, June 23, 2025 (approx. 1053 to 1140 s).
- [9] Council minutes, July 14, 2025, Request to Cancel Notice on Title, 938 Ambassador Avenue; Council meeting video transcript, July 14, 2025 (approx. 3941 to 4106 s, 4186 to 4200 s and 4572 to 4580 s).
- [10] Special Council and Committee of the Whole meeting video transcript, September 23, 2024 (approx. 9105 to 9170 s); minutes, September 23, 2024.
- [11] Council minutes, May 12, 2025, Strategic Plan, p. 13.
- [12] District of Saanich, "Saanich announces preliminary election results" (October 15, 2022).
- [13] District of Saanich Financial Plans 2023 to 2026, Bylaw and Parking Enforcement, net actuals 2022 to 2025 and 2026 budget; BC Stats, Saanich Citizen Satisfaction Survey Report, June 2021; BC Stats, 2024 Saanich Resident Pulse Survey, April 2025.
- [14] Council minutes, June 24, 2024, Public Input and Secondary Suites Outside the Urban Containment Boundary, pp. 6 to 14.
- [15] Council minutes, September 11, 2017, Garden Suite Study, p. 18.
- [16] VoteMate, Local 2022, Dean Murdock, candidate for Mayor of Saanich.
- [17] Council meeting video transcript, November 20, 2023 (approx. 171 to 310 s).

- [18] Council meeting video transcript, November 20, 2023, 4573 Prospect Lake Road (approx. 1700 to 3320 s); Council minutes, November 20, 2023, pp. 2 to 3.
- [19] Council minutes, January 20, 2025, 67 Cadillac Avenue; Council minutes, June 9, 2025, 1845 Fairburn Drive, 323 Conway Road and 4029 Quadra Street.
- [20] District of Saanich, Report to Council, Notice on Title, 938 Ambassador Avenue, October 31, 2023.
- [21] Council minutes, May 3, May 31 and June 21, 2021, Zoning Bylaw Amendment, No. 9694.
- [22] The Martlet, "UVic alum and two-term councillor Zac de Vries runs for mayor of Saanich" (July 30, 2026).
- [23] Times Colonist, "Saanich councillor Dean Murdock not running again, cites family reasons" (2018).
- [24] Saanich News, "Saanich appoints Brent Reems as district's chief administrative officer" (January 31, 2023).
- [25] Saanich News, "Saanich reins in retractable leashes with new animal bylaw" (November 1, 2023).
- [26] Saanich News, "Saanich OKs review of 2014 tree bylaw" (July 14, 2016).