

# Zac de Vries: You Killed the Bylaw Review

*In 2024 he moved to table the only motion on the complaint-driven bylaw system, saying tabling "essentially kills the motion." Three months later he seconded the removal of what was left. Drawn from his statements to voters and Saanich's own minutes and meeting recordings.*

## What the record shows

1. Councillor Zac de Vries told voters in 2022: "We must adjust based on how our policies play out in complex contexts" [1]. On February 5, 2024 Council had before it the only motion this term on the complaint-driven bylaw system. He moved that it "be tabled indefinitely and the issue of bylaw enforcement be referred to the Strategic Planning process." The Corporate Officer advised against tabling indefinitely. He answered: "table indefinitely essentially kills the motion." The referral carried [4].
2. Three months later, on May 6, 2024, Councillor Harper moved, on staff's recommendation, to remove "Bylaw enforcement being shared across different levels of government" from the strategic plan's Bike Rack. Councillor de Vries seconded it and told the Committee of the Whole the items had "missed the mark." The chair told the Committee that removal would "cease them from being in the bike rack and they disappear." It carried [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 under that referral [6].
3. He voted for all twenty Section 57 notices registered on residents' homes since 2020; the minutes record him against none [6]. On November 20, 2023 he told Council it was "important that this notice be registered on title," that "it would be negligent not to," and that "I admit that comes at a cost, but albeit in the grand scheme of things a modest one" [7]. The owner of 4573 Prospect Lake Road had just told Council he had paid fines, double permit fees, a designer, a geotechnical firm and two engineers [18].
4. He is running for mayor on a Saanich where "young people could get a start," "families could put down roots, and seniors could age in place" [2]. He chairs the Capital Region Housing Corporation [2][3]. In 2025 he voted for notices on three homes with rental units: a basement suite at 67 Cadillac Avenue, a house its owners were converting to four units at 1845 Fairburn Drive, and five units at 4029 Quadra Street [19]. On June 24, 2024, after ten residents spoke to Council on suites outside the Urban Containment Boundary, he voted against even a staff report on them; it was defeated three to six [12].
5. From 2021 to 2025 the net cost of bylaw and parking enforcement rose from \$863,600 to \$1,598,600. Over the same years residents' rating of bylaw enforcement fell from 54 to 46 out of 100, and of building inspections and permits from 52 to 40 [13].

## In his own words

| What he said                                                                        | What he did                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "We must adjust based on how our policies play out in complex contexts." (2022) [1] | Moved to table indefinitely the only motion this term on the complaint-driven bylaw system (February 5, 2024) [4] |

| What he said                                                                                                                                                                                | What he did                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Success requires us to tweak, revisit, and rethink, our approaches." (2022) [1]                                                                                                            | Seconded the removal of bylaw enforcement from the strategic plan's Bike Rack (May 6, 2024) [5]                                               |
| "I think this enables the desired discussion to take place at the appropriate form." (February 5, 2024) [4]                                                                                 | Three months later: "they've missed the mark" (May 6, 2024) [5]                                                                               |
| "Table indefinitely essentially kills the motion." (February 5, 2024) [4]                                                                                                                   | No report on bylaw enforcement came back to Council through July 2026 [6]                                                                     |
| "It would be negligent not to and I admit that comes at a cost, but albeit in the grand scheme of things a modest one." (November 20, 2023) [7]                                             | The cost to the owner of removing a notice is hundreds of thousands of dollars (see The hostage loop)                                         |
| "The Saanich I grew up in is one in which young people could get a start." (2026) [2]                                                                                                       | Voted for notices on three homes with rental units (2025) [19] and against a staff report on rural garden suites (2024) [12]                  |
| "Bylaws restricting the number of unrelated occupants in one residence were not conceived in the context of housing crisis, much less the context of a student housing crisis." (2019) [21] | Voted for notices on 1845 Fairburn Drive and 4029 Quadra Street, homes with six and five rental units (2025) [19]                             |
| "This is a matter of intergenerational equality. We need to do more to ensure that students have secure access to housing." (2019) [21]                                                     | Voted for the notice on 67 Cadillac Avenue, a basement secondary suite, on January 20, 2025; its current owner bought it in January 2024 [19] |
| "We can effectively find a solution that addresses both neighborhood behaviour and affordability." (2019) [22]                                                                              | Moved to table indefinitely the only motion this term on the complaint-driven bylaw system (February 5, 2024) [4]                             |
| "I want to be able to provide leadership and assistance to these new councillors." (2026) [2]                                                                                               | The only motion he moved on bylaw enforcement this term was to table one indefinitely [4][6]                                                  |

6. Each of those votes followed staff advice. Since December 2021 that administration has been led by Chief Administrative Officer Brent Reems. If the advice was wrong, it was his. The votes were his.

### The motion he tabled

7. Councillor Chambers' motion asked staff to review measures to keep the complaint-driven bylaw system's integrity and confidentiality intact as enforcement was shared with the Capital Regional District and provincial and federal agencies. Councillor Harper seconded it. When Councillor Chambers asked Council to defeat it so that she could bring a better motion, Councillor de Vries told Council he was "of a slightly different opinion" and that his "preference would be to refer the topic to strategic planning" [4].
8. The Corporate Officer told Council: "I never like when anyone wants to table anything indefinitely because it stays on our books," and recommended that Council defeat the motion and refer the topic. Councillor de Vries kept his wording: "I'm typically happy with this. I've seen it done in a lot of organizations . . . table indefinitely essentially kills the motion . . . The referral then takes place so I'm content with it." Brent Reems told Council his "preference would be to refer the topic." The motion to table and refer carried [4].

## Where the referral went

9. On May 6, 2024 the strategic plan's Bike Rack held "Bylaw enforcement being shared across different levels of government," the subject of the February motion. Councillor Harper moved its removal, "basing it on the staff recommendation," and called it "something that's not even possible to achieve given that you're looking at multiple levels of government." Councillor de Vries seconded. He told the Committee he was "appreciative of staff having taken cursory looks at these" and that "they've missed the mark." The chair told the Committee that removal would "cease them from being in the bike rack and they disappear" [5].
10. When other councillors tried to keep two other items, he compared the Bike Rack to a strata audit of bicycles "not in use or in shape to be used," which "are cleared out," and said he had "heard a very strong rationale from staff" [5]. The bylaw enforcement item was removed with no vote recorded against, including from Councillor Chambers, who had brought the original motion [5].

## The owners in front of him

| Date and property                        | What Council heard                                                                                                                                   | His role                                         |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Feb 3, 2020, 3901 Ansell Road            | The owner asked for another week or two; the project was complete except the stairs, and the stair access had been closed off                        | Voted for the notice [20]                        |
| May 30, 2022, 5390 Old West Saanich Road | The owner was called three times and was not on the line                                                                                             | Voted for the notice [10]                        |
| Jul 4, 2022, 5390 Old West Saanich Road  | Harry Bains said he never received notice the item was coming to Council and that no construction had been done since he bought the property in 2018 | Voted to reaffirm [9]                            |
| Nov 20, 2023, 938 Ambassador Avenue      | No discussion recorded                                                                                                                               | Voted for the notice [6][14]                     |
| 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                                       | Spoke for the notice: "negligent not to" [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                       | Voted for the notice, 9 to 0 [19]                |
| 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                                         | Voted to confirm, 9 to 0 [8]                     |

## The coded language

11. Staff give Council keywords instead of facts, and Council votes on them [8][9][14][15][19]:

| What Council was told                                                                                                | What the record shows                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The cost is "a modest one" (Councillor de Vries, November 20, 2023)                                                  | The \$500 is the District's registration fee. Removal requires permits, consultants and remedial work the District orders [7][9]                                    |
| "No financial implications" and a "\$500 fee" (Manager of Inspection Services, November 20, 2023)                    | Stated the fee and left out the cost [15]                                                                                                                           |
| A notice "gets removed for a small administrative fee" (Reems, July 4, 2022)                                         | Minutes earlier Council was told removal takes a building permit application with plans, a completed project and staff confirmation of Building Code compliance [9] |
| "Omitting a notice on title could expose the municipality to liability in the event of a future sale" (June 9, 2025) | No legal opinion, claim or dollar figure for that liability was put to Council [19]                                                                                 |

## The hostage loop

12. 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.
13. Creation. The October 31, 2023 report recommended the notice because it "will reduce Saanich's liability exposure on this file" [14].
14. The key. Council was told the notice comes off for a \$500 fee once the property is brought into compliance with all regulations [14][15], and on July 14, 2025 that the fee is collected "when all the conditions have been met" [8]. 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.
15. 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 [16]. Councillor de Vries was present when it passed; the minutes record no vote against [16]. The October 31, 2023 report told Council the violation was confirmed "by the Bylaw Officer" [14]. A bylaw enforcement officer is not a building official under the Building Act.
16. 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 [8].

17. The review. Cancellation under section 58 is decided by the Council that imposed the notice, on staff advice. On June 23, 2025 the Corporate Officer told Council that staff recommended against removal because the contraventions "impact life and safety on the property" [17]. Council confirmed the notice nine to nothing on July 14, 2025 [8].
18. Two other owners were victimized by the same hostage loop. Councillor de Vries voted for the notice on 5390 Old West Saanich Road on May 30, 2022 [10]. On July 4, 2022 Harry Bains told Council he never received notice that the item was coming to Council; the Clerk said letters had been sent by regular and registered mail on May 7, 2022. He told Council that he learned of it from the front page of the Saanich News, that his realtor, who had a buyer, warned him he would have been sued for non-disclosure, that a business licence inspector had fined him and he was put into collections, and that finishing the work would cost \$300,000. Staff told Council the key was a building permit application with plans, a completed project and staff confirmation of Building Code compliance. Council reaffirmed the notice with no vote against [9].
19. 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 de Vries told Council it would be "negligent not to" register the notice. Council registered it, with only Councillor Harper opposed [7][18].

### **What he brought to the table**

20. On June 24, 2024 he voted to allow secondary suites outside the Urban Containment Boundary; the bylaw passed seven to two [12]. On bylaw enforcement, the minutes from November 2022 to July 2026 record one motion from him: to table the complaint-driven bylaw motion indefinitely [4][6]. They record no motion from him on Section 57 notices [6].

### **Background**

21. He is a lifelong Saanich resident and a 2017 graduate of the University of Victoria. He was first elected to Saanich Council in 2018 and re-elected in 2022 [2][3]. He works as a sector specialist with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food, is a Capital Regional District director, chairs the Capital Region Housing Corporation and chairs the Capital Regional District's Planning and Protective Services Committee [2][3]. He is running for mayor in 2026 [2][3].

### **About this review**

22. 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, "Zac de Vries - Saanich council candidate 2022" (2022).
- [2] The Martlet, "UVic alum and two-term councillor Zac de Vries runs for mayor of Saanich" (July 30, 2026).
- [3] District of Saanich, 2026 Candidate Profile Guide, General Local Election 2026 (Zac de Vries, mayor); District of Saanich, Meet Your Council, Zac de Vries.
- [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 and 8014 to 8086 s).
- [6] District of Saanich Council minutes, 2017 to July 13, 2026, as held in the minutes archive.
- [7] Council meeting video transcript, November 20, 2023, 4573 Prospect Lake Road (approx. 3228 to 3260 s); Council minutes, November 20, 2023, pp. 2 to 3.
- [8] Council meeting video transcript, July 14, 2025 (approx. 4186 to 4200 s and 4277 to 4580 s); Council minutes, July 14, 2025, Request to Cancel Notice on Title, 938 Ambassador Avenue.
- [9] Council meeting video transcript, July 4, 2022 (approx. 2819 to 2898 s); Council minutes, July 4, 2022, 5390 Old West Saanich Road, Appeal, pp. 2 to 3.
- [10] Council meeting video transcript, May 30, 2022 (approx. 727 to 834 s); Council minutes, May 30, 2022, pp. 1 to 2.
- [11] Council minutes, May 12, 2025, Strategic Plan, p. 13.
- [12] Council minutes, June 24, 2024, Public Input and Secondary Suites Outside the Urban Containment Boundary, pp. 6 to 14.
- [13] District of Saanich Financial Plans 2019 to 2026, Bylaw and Parking Enforcement, net actuals 2021 to 2025; BC Stats, Saanich Citizen Satisfaction Survey Report, June 2021; BC Stats, 2024 Saanich Resident Pulse Survey, April 2025.
- [14] District of Saanich, Report to Council, Notice on Title, 938 Ambassador Avenue, October 31, 2023; Council minutes, November 20, 2023, p. 1.
- [15] Council meeting video transcript, November 20, 2023 (approx. 171 to 310 s).
- [16] Council minutes, May 3, May 31 and June 21, 2021, Zoning Bylaw Amendment, No. 9694.
- [17] Council meeting video transcript, June 23, 2025 (approx. 1053 to 1140 s); Council minutes, June 23, 2025.
- [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] Council minutes, February 3, 2020, 3901 Ansell Road.
- [21] Saanich News, "Evicted UVic student questions Saanich's housing bylaw" (January 22, 2019).
- [22] Saanich News, "Student society urges Saanich to revisit housing bylaw that limits how many can share a home" (November 19, 2019).