

## Background Paper #1: Why an Update?

***In BC, an Official Community Plan (OCP) is a local government's over-arching document, setting out broad policies about its physical, social and economic future. The current Official Community Plan (OCP) is being updated. Why an Update and not a full blown Comprehensive Review? This background paper explains the rationale behind an Update vs. a major Comprehensive Review and identifies some of the issues that point to the need for an Update.***

### What is a Comprehensive Review?

A Comprehensive OCP Review is a major re-examination of a community's future. It is a major undertaking that involves considerable effort and occurs in situations where a municipality needs to respond to significant external or internal pressures. A Comprehensive Review examines the community with 'fresh eyes' on its ecological, economic, physical and social vision and development. Such a review sets the existing OCP aside and identifies a new direction, new principles, new objectives and new policies that address changes in the community (e.g., loss of major employer, major environmental impact, rapid growth) or new external influences. It involves a significant investment of community time and major financial investment. It is usually the only major item on Council's agenda for the duration of the Comprehensive Review and may involve a freeze on development approvals until complete and adopted.

### What is an Update?

An Update builds on the strengths of the existing OCP. Rather than starting fresh, as in the case of a Comprehensive Review, an Update examines the existing OCP and identifies what needs to be changed, modified or added to bring it into conformity with new legislation or manageable new needs or issues. An Update recognizes that the existing OCP's vision, principles, objectives and policies generally align with current community thinking.

OCP's are often re-examined every 5 years to determine if they require a Comprehensive Review, an Update or simply 'left as is'. Such considerations examine the existing OCP, the currency of its content, the amount of effort and energy and thought that went into its development, the relevancy of the existing principles, objectives and policies contained within it, the available resources (financial and human) to complete a Comprehensive Review or Update, relationship to new legislation, and relationship to Councils' priorities and the 'other items' that may be on Council's 'decision table'. In Bowen's case, it was decided that an Update was the most appropriate approach. Why?

1. The existing OCP, adopted in 1996, has proven to be a broadly supported document that was developed after 18 months of intensive community consultation involving numerous task forces composed of 150 community members. It continues to well serve Bowen and offers a solid foundation for the near future.
2. As confirmed by community consultation at the August Community Workshop and the Community Questionnaire (see: other areas of website for details), the existing OCP Principles and Broad Objectives are broadly supported (notwithstanding the need to refine them) and form a strong foundation for an Update rather than a complete review and replacement.
3. The municipality has been staffing its planner positions and a comprehensive review is not timely during such a period.
4. The resources to complete a Comprehensive Review would be significant in terms of financial resources (in the order of three times an OCP Update budget).
5. There are a number of legislative changes and requirements as noted below that require a 'quick' response, rather than a longer drawn out Comprehensive Review timeline (often 14-18 months).
6. An Update frequently precedes a Comprehensive Review so that it can put in place recommendations for studies that can facilitate a timely future Comprehensive Review.

## Implications for the Update

Since 1996, when the existing OCP was adopted, there have been local, regional, provincial and global changes. These include:

1. Global awareness of climate change and its potential local impacts;
2. Fewer births than deaths throughout the “western world” — the result being a rapidly aging of the population;
3. Heightened awareness of the importance of “sustainability”, in all forms — financial,
4. social, economic, physical.
5. Legislative changes in BC that provide municipalities with more autonomy, plus planning tools that require municipalities to plan for energy / water conservation AND GHG reductions (see below); and
6. Increased challenges for lower income households in the region, manifesting itself
7. particularly in the cost of housing, both rental and ownership.

## BC's Legislative Changes Since 1996

### Legislative Framework

In the intervening years since Bowen's OCP was comprehensively reviewed, there have been a number of Provincial legislative changes that directly impact the process, content and implementation of a municipality's OCP.

***One of the main reasons the Bowen Island OCP is being updated is to bring the plan into harmony with Provincial legislation, and to ensure that all innovative “planning tools” of the legislation are incorporated into the OCP.***

## Three Significant Years

Among the many Provincial legislative amendments since 1996, three years stand out as being the most consequential in relation to the OCP — 2001, 2004 and 2008:

- **In 2001, legislative amendments to the *Local Government Act* included:**
  - ▶ Setting out goals / values which municipalities are to take into account in OCP planning processes, such as avoiding sprawl, settlement patterns that minimize the use of automobiles, economic development that supports the unique character of communities, affordable housing etc. (See: Section 849 *Local Government Act* and attached item);
  - ▶ Enshrining the importance of consultation in the planning process beyond simply
  - ▶ advising the public and neighbouring jurisdictions (Section 879); and
  - ▶ Establishing “Development Approval Information Areas / Circumstances” to give
  - ▶ municipalities clear authority to require applicants to provide relevant impact analysis
  - ▶ related to their application (Section 920).
- **In 2004, there was a sea-change in the relationship between the Province and local government. Legislation changes were significant, including:**
  - ▶ Enactment of the *Community Charter*, replaced almost all of the *Local Government Act* as it applies to municipalities. “Natural person powers” were enshrined. This legislation confirmed municipalities as a legitimate “level of government”. The *Act* established a new legal foundation for municipal government in BC, providing the core powers and responsibilities for municipalities. The *Act* substantially changed the framework for municipalities in three key areas: the municipal and provincial relationship, municipal autonomy and powers, and municipal accountability to the public. From a planning perspective, the major benefits of the *Charter* are associated with the ability of a municipality to carry through an OCP’s policies. For example, if the OCP sets out a goal of revitalizing an area, the *Charter* provides a specific tool — tax revitalization exemption — to facilitate achieving the goal. If the plan sets out goals regarding affordable housing, the municipality now has unfettered authority to enter into contractual arrangements with partners, both non-profit and business.

**Note: Land Planning and Management remains in the *Local Government Act* (Parts 25 and 26)**

- **In 2008, the legislature adopted Bill 27 (Green Communities), along with a timeline:**
  - ▶ Requirement for OCPs to include targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as policies and proposed actions to achieve the targets (Section 877 [3]) of the *LGA*. May 2010 is the targeted date for inclusion in OCP’s.

## Concluding Comments

In the past few years, there have been a number of legislative amendments that impact on the process, contents and implementation of Official Community Plans in BC's local governments. These amendments will help to shape the update of Bowen Island's OCP.

### From Section 849, Local Government Act:

- (a) avoiding urban sprawl and ensuring that development takes place where adequate facilities exist or can be provided in a timely, economic and efficient manner;
- (b) settlement patterns that minimize the use of automobiles and encourage walking, bicycling and the efficient use of public transit;
- (c) the efficient movement of goods and people while making effective use of transportation and utility corridors;
- (d) protecting environmentally sensitive areas;
- (e) maintaining the integrity of a secure and productive resource base, including the agricultural land reserve;
- (f) economic development that supports the unique character of communities;
- (g) reducing and preventing air, land and water pollution;
- (h) adequate, affordable and appropriate housing;
- (i) adequate inventories of suitable land and resources for future settlement;
- (j) protecting the quality and quantity of ground water and surface water;
- (k) settlement patterns that minimize the risks associated with natural hazards;
- (l) preserving, creating and linking urban and rural open space including parks and recreation areas;
- (m) planning for energy supply and promoting efficient use, conservation and alternative forms of energy;
- (n) good stewardship of land, sites and structures with cultural heritage value.

***DRW/CitySpaces, December 2009***