

**Response by Bowen Island Properties Ltd., Cates Hill Joint Venture to November 30, 2009**

**Invitation to Bowen Island Development Community to Contribute to the OCP Update**

In response to your invitation, please receive our comments as follows.

**Introduction.** It is probably helpful to realize that most of the major, formative land use decisions for Bowen Island were made between the early 1900s and the 1960s. We should be aware that most of the lands which are still undeveloped are: a) owned by the Crown and not available for development, or b) exposed to serious challenges regarding topography and provision of infrastructure and services which drastically limit the development potential, or c) have an OCP classification and/or LUB zoning which already provides the highest and best use from an economic point of view, and therefore will not change due to initiatives from the owners, or d) are already covered by some kind of comprehensive zoning.

Therefore, any change in the OCP at this time or in the future for lands which are still vacant and undeveloped can be best described as “fine tuning” by way of spot or in-fill zoning. We have to keep in mind that a change in land classification or zoning to increase density rarely provides sufficient financial advantage for the property owner due to the increased development costs and time for market absorption, unless the density would be increased to a sufficiently high number which then runs the risk of being considered politically undesirable. Unfortunately, the Municipality does not own land of sufficient size and quality to use potential density transfers as a solution, except on a very small scale. Therefore, we do not expect many changes in regard to future development other than the ongoing slow absorption of properties already zoned under the existing LUB or comprehensive zonings.

Having said that, and looking back over the last 20 years, “more of the same” may not exactly be what Bowen Island really needs, nor what may be desirable from enlightened planning perspectives, but we cannot see how this situation could change unless the current attitudes toward density change. We are of the opinion that the OCP review process, therefore, should focus on the possibility to “repair” obvious planning mistakes in the past, and equally important try to address issues which were not as apparent two decades ago as they are today. Some of the issues which have emerged over the last 10 to 20 years, and which have since become glaringly obvious, are conditions which are commonly referred to as

“dysfunctional” or “unsustainable.” Therefore the need for “sustainability” has to be treated as a crucial precondition to maintain the health, and proper function, of Bowen Island’s increasingly fragile community. The world will undergo major dramatic shifts and changes on many different levels over the next decades, from which Bowen Island will not be isolated. Any planning, therefore, should anticipate and respond to current and future foreseeable challenges.

**1. What are the challenges for Bowen Island?** In the simplest terms, to maintain a sustainable community. Sustainability is most commonly described as a three-legged stool, each leg representing one of three fundamental elements: social, environmental, and economic well-being. If any of those legs is missing or is too short, the stool will topple.

**a) Social well being.** Bowen Island is very poorly served in comparison to public services, facilities, and affordable housing which can be found in most other rural communities (even remote ones). The way Bowen Island cares for the needs and social well being of its seniors, teens, and young families is unacceptable. The lack of decent public facilities for recreation, arts, and culture stands in stark contrast to the private wealth on Bowen. The lack of affordable and special needs housing violates all rules in the book of sustainability, and has become a source of shame for many Bowen Islanders.

**b) Environmental well being.** The need and desire to protect the natural environment on Bowen Island is not only obvious, but it is forcefully enshrined in the mandate and legislation of the Islands Trust, together with Municipal bylaws and regulations from numerous other governmental bodies. In addition, almost everybody who chooses to live on Bowen Island is already more or less an environmentalist at heart, and takes comfort in the vigilance of Bowen Island’s environmental custodians.

**c) Economic well being.** The most vital role for the social and economic well being of a community is played by its own local economy. Unfortunately the awareness and political recognition of that fundamental fact on Bowen Island is very weak, notwithstanding the Municipality’s own Mission Statement. What makes up Bowen Island’s local economy? The three most obvious segments are the construction industry, hospitality, and retail – plus a widespread, but not very noticeable, assortment of home-based businesses. However, most of the income of Bowen Islanders is generated or derived off

island, which is typical of bedroom and retirement communities. The current disparity between the size of the population and the locally generated income is unhealthy, and over time will inevitably result in more social and economic distortions — just the opposite of what sustainability is all about.

**2. What should be addressed by an updated OCP to stop and reverse that trend?**

**a) Diversity.** Most important, serious and practical steps have to be taken to restore and maintain a healthy level of diversity within the community. Diversity of age, income, lifestyle, occupation or profession, family status, ethnicity, gender, practical artistic, intellectual, or spiritual interests, etc.

**b) Affordability.** Diversity without the provision of an adequate stock of affordable housing is impossible. Bowen Island urgently needs decent rental accommodation, especially for young families with children, single and single couple households, young local employees and trades people, and seniors. It further needs a more enlightened variety of alternative affordable housing forms, i.e. houses on small plots, whether detached or attached; 2 ½ storey walk-up apartments; a mixture of fee simple, co-op, or lease lands for special and age-related needs.

**c) Community life/community spirit.** It is a testimony to the strength of Bowen Island's community spirit that it is actually still alive. A sustainable community requires the provision of adequate community facilities, not only as gathering places to maintain social health and connectedness, but as an outlet for recreational, artistic, and cultural activities. It would be hard, if not impossible, to find another community in British Columbia (if not in Canada) of the size and wealth of Bowen Island with such a dearth of community facilities.

**d) Local economy.** Bowen Island's close proximity to Vancouver makes it ideally positioned for the creation of an island-specific local economy, which could consist of a wide variety of educational, artistic, and cultural enterprises, for example: a) facilities that provide classes and courses for performing and other art forms; b) facilities to teach artisan skills – such as movable type printing; glass blowing; creation of leaded glass compositions; building of string instruments and small wooden boats, canoes, kayaks; bookbinding; classic furniture building; restoration of art works and museum exhibits; and model building – which could ultimately lead to a fully functional arts and crafts community on Bowen Island; c) a

variety of health and wellness-oriented facilities, including spas; d) public and/or private sports and gymnastic facilities, dance and ballet schools, yoga; e) adult and seniors-oriented housing with assisted living modes; f) studios/workshops with attached living spaces for artists and artisans; g) a number of small inns and guest houses to create the base for a viable hospitality industry and to provide accommodation for the visitors and participants in the aforementioned facilities. The changes for the quality of life on Bowen Island could be profound by gradually shifting away from a commuter-dependent bedroom community towards a sustainable live/work community. All other businesses would have a broader customer base and would be more sustainable. An improvement and growth of alternative public transportation modes would provide further local business and employment, and could provide a greater variety and frequency of on-island micro bus services, and passenger ferry connections between Bowen Island, downtown Vancouver, and the North Shore.

**3. How can planning mistakes of the past be changed?** First, by realizing that the subdivision of large tracts of land into acreage-size properties is not good planning – it inevitably leads to future further subdivisions, and over time destroys the natural landscape and the soul and character of the land. Therefore, planning over the last decades has demanded that residential development take place in densified clusters of 4 to 20 households per acre surrounded by large areas of open space to retain as much natural habitat as possible. For example, instead of a now typical subdivision of a 50-acre parcel into 10 lots of 5 acres each, we suggest that 15 to 20 lots be permitted on approximately 5 to 10 acres, and the remaining 40 to 45 acres be retained as protected natural open space or park land. The OCP review process should formulate provisions for a change to the current land classifications of vacant, undeveloped land in order to achieve the protection of remaining large areas of open space and to avoid urban sprawl in the future.

The above suggested changes to an updated/new OCP will, without a doubt, result in a moderate increase of density on the island, but it should still be considerably less than the population cap of 10,000 which had been envisioned as an upper cap rate for a healthy community as referenced by the famous group of architects and planners around Christopher Alexander – the publishing by that group was widely used as a source of guiding wisdom during the last OCP review.

We further suggest that future cluster housing or increased densities for special needs and/or non-market housing be concentrated in those areas which are already served, or could be easily served, by expanded public or community water or sewer systems with appropriate advanced treatment facilities. This would facilitate the sharing of high capital and operational expenses associated with the infrastructure of such systems by a larger number of users, which would be an important step toward increased affordability and fiscal responsibility.

Finally, we strongly suggest that any additional retail use outside of the Snug Cove boundaries not be encouraged. The existence of many retail outlets in Snug Cove is already threatened due to low business volume; all too often many of those outlets survive only because their owners make tremendous personal sacrifices. All retail and other professional and specialized services currently located in Snug Cove deserve to be treated like “endangered species.” Additional retail uses outside of Snug Cove are not likely to be viable in the first place, but until that proof has been delivered by their consequent closure it may already have put other operators in Snug Cove out of business.

We regret that the invitation for input from developers has come so late in the OCP review process. That forced us to publicize our ideas and visions in different ways. Attached please find copies of:

- Handout for Public Information Meeting re: Parkview Slopes/Seymour Landing Density Transfer & Rezoning Application held October 17, 2009
- Ad published on October 2, 2009 entitled “Invitation to Attend Public Meeting”
- Ad published on October 9, 2009 entitled “Sustainability and the...Future of Bowen Island”
- Ad published on October 16, 2009 entitled “‘Density Transfer’ – what it means and how it could help toward the goal of sustainability”
- Ad published on November 13, 2009 entitled “Local Economy – Does It Really Matter?”
- Ad published on November 27, 2009 entitled “Community – What Does It Actually Mean?”
- Ad published on December 11, 2009 entitled “Dreams – like flowers in the wind”
- Ad published on December 18, 2009 entitled “Bowen Island’s Future – What Will It Be?”

Submitted by email (PDF) December 20, 2009