

Quick thoughts for the OCP

On Behalf of the Ruddy Potato Whole Foods Market
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Oct 2009

Thoughts about running a business on Bowen Island

Financial survival depends on the ability of the business to generate enough margin \$ to cover both its fixed and variable expenses: true regardless of where on the planet the business is located. Also universal is the business owner's analysis of the size of the market and their target share of that market as a critical factor in deciding if their business will be viable.

Bowen presents some unique difficulties:

- 1) **It is a tiny market.** Even built out to the max of the last OCP, it is a tiny market. Juxtapose this with a cultural history and (hopefully) vision of small community, rural feel, agricultural land, lots of parks, low density, historical preservation, and environmental stewardship, and it becomes clear that retail must fit itself to a small market, not try to force a large one.

Suggestions:

- Like other gulf islands do (hornby, saltspring spring to mind) support and foster **home business** (have you ever been to the donut shop on Thetis?).
 - Turn **Snug Cove into a village that exists for the existing bowen community**. Keep it as the main hub for Bowen. Turn its back on the main road and make the park the "village square" with parking behind. Get away from the tyranny of the off island owned retail spaces along the main drag. Make space available facing the green space and keep rent affordable (really affordable). Keep it SMALL. Build low affordable housing above.
 - Don't build competing centers all over the island, but do allow some development on the west side that is in line with environmental goals. Tie permitting to delivery on these outcomes. Make it Planning driven, not developer driven.
- 2) **Fixed costs** on Bowen are very high compared to potential margins for typical small retail business. Fixed costs are things like the ferry, rent, water, hydro, propane, land cost, building costs. Most retail can't afford to own their land or build their own building. Simply, rents need to come down on Bowen. Retail volumes are and will be relatively small.

3) **Variable costs** on Bowen are very high: things like staffing and transport. For most retail, there is not much room in the salary budget. Stores rely on entry level staff or other non-professional staff: people who bluntly don't make very much money. If the cost of living and working in a service job in a community requires a base income above what a retail store can pay, the retail store closes. Barriers to retail here focus on the cost of living on Bowen, both in terms of accommodation and transportation.

Suggestions:

- Priority one: **foster and promote secondary suites**. Provide tax break support for homeowners to put suites in and regulate rentals by building code compliance and a rental cost schedule. Benefits: we use existing resources, we don't tear up more land, wealth is spread through the community, people of varied income levels live together, community thrives.
- Build low **living space over commercial space** in the cove.
- Avoid isolated "low income housing" projects
- Understand that the income level from on island **retail/service jobs will never support the purchase of an "affordable house"**...this is just more suburb development, primarily good for developers and increasing the population of off island commuters. Fine in itself within guidelines, but not masked as "affordable housing" in the context of keeping lower income citizens in their community.
- Create a Bowen BUS PASS, subsidize it through taxation tilted toward the most affluent. Right now, it's cheaper to run an island car than to use Bowen Transit. How about an electric bus?
- Negotiate price breaks for commercial deliveries to Bowen with the Ferry. The cost of getting goods to Bowen creates are very real barrier to success for small business.