

Bowen Island Eco-Alliance Recommended OCP Update Revisions
October 2009

The Eco-Alliance feels strongly that in order for the OCP to be meaningfully updated, we must have a clear idea of the end result that we are hoping for on this island so we can plan for that future. We believe that most residents have chosen Bowen because of its rural character and because it offers a refuge from the pressures of urban living. Tourists choose to visit the island for the same reason. Bowen Island was recently described in the Georgia Straight as an “earthy green oasis” and as an “escape” from the city. In our view, it is imperative that we plan for a final build-out that retains the rural character that defines us and recognizes the commitment to environmental integrity that the OCP enshrines.

Growth Management

The OCP, under Principles, states that the current Plan is based on the same overall projected lot density as the previous OCP, approved in 1982.

The OCP’s planned build-out is implemented by assigning an allowable lot density for each parcel of land, with a general limit of one dwelling unit per lot (policies 3.1.2. 4; 3.1.3.2). In 2008, Council granted provision for one secondary suite in each residential dwelling. Despite OCP Residential Policy 31C that states there “should” be maintained an inventory of vacant lots to assist in managing the rate and extent of growth within the OCP build-out, no such information has ever been produced.

The new OCP should “require” that such an inventory be maintained, together with other data that would demonstrate the current lot build-out, as well as the potential number of lots remaining within the OCP.

Flexibility while managing the OCP build-out can be achieved by:

- 1) Implementing transferable density rights (TDR): already outlined in the OCP and included in the Snug Cove Village Plan (SCVP).

- 2) Balancing the build-out over time: lots should only be built to levels that exceed the OCP density allowance if the excess density can be re-absorbed into the build-out in the future.

Environmentally responsible land use such as clustered housing should not have to be “purchased “ by granting higher building density to land developers. It should be required.

Policies 31F and 31G provide the basis for “amenity zoning” or “density bonusing” in the OCP. Amenities are described variously in the OCP as including preservation of greenspace, and affordable housing or other socially beneficial contributions. “Clustered development” is defined under Interpretation in the OCP. Rural Residential Policy 3.1.2.1 and Rural Land Policy 3.1.3.1 that currently “permit” clustering, should both be strengthened to ensure that some form of natural open space (whether public, private, or private in common) is definitely retained by residential clustering in all land development as a pre-condition for any amenity-zoning density bonuses.

Currently the subdivision allowance for a parcel may be less than the OCP allowance for that parcel. If a landowner chooses to develop an area at the subdivision level of density, the OCP cap for that parcel should be reduced to the subdivision level. This is to avoid further subdivision of lots, once developed.

Building Form and Rural Character

There is an unresolved conflict in the OCP between objectives to retain rural character, identified as low density, detached housing, and on the other hand, a desire for compact multi-family housing.

The 1996 OCP plan for Snug Cove aimed to limit multi-family housing only to non-market affordable housing, as currently exists on Cates Hill. However, the Snug Cove Village Plan (SCVP), approved in 2005, made all residential land in the Cove eligible for market-oriented multi-family housing (up to 17.5 units per acre is allowed if non-market housing is included). Both market and non-market housing would be built as attached multi-family dwellings.

The Cowan Point rezoning also included provision for 10 market-oriented multi-family dwellings, as part of a commercial mixed-use village. The Eco-Alliance believes that attached housing should be limited to the Snug Cove Village and the future Cowan Point Village, or any other future village core. Wording to clarify when and where multi-family attached housing is permitted needs to be clarified in policy 3.1.4.1 and other parts of the OCP. As well "affordable housing" needs to have a clear definition in the OCP. The crucial element is that affordable housing be "other than market priced housing" and that it "meets the needs of local residents".

Snug Cove has experienced a continuous loss of greenery in the last few years. The Village Periphery DPA should be expanded to include Snug Point, and incorporate a tree retention provision. The Village Revitalization DPA needs a landscape plan that also incorporates tree retention.

Culture and Economy

The OCP makes a worthwhile distinction between Service Commercial polices primarily for island residents, and Tourist Commercial polices that relate primarily to visitors. Differing policies for each sector allow the OCP to encourage an island-centered economy and should be retained.

Home-based occupations are central to sustaining an appropriate scale economy that treasures environmental and social values. The definition of "home based occupations" should be removed from the Land Use Bylaw (LUB), embedded in the OCP itself, and further liberalized to allow for limited small-scale retail of consumer goods.

Tourist Commercial policy 3.7.1.8 ensures that tourist facilities are compatible with Bowen Island's natural amenities and environmentally focused culture, without becoming resort-style destinations in and of themselves.

The Cultural Master Plan (CMP), Schedule K of the OCP, contributes to creation of an environmentally sustainable economy and should also be retained.

Further, while "domestic agriculture" is permitted on all properties (policy

3.3.1), the OCP limits this to products for the personal use of the property owner or operator. We believe this definition should be liberalized to allow small-scale commercial sale of domestic agricultural products. Neighborhood impacts from such operations can be regulated by “performance standards” (policy 3.3.4).

Governance within the Islands Trust

Bowen Island’s relationship to the rest of the Islands Trust should be specifically acknowledged and embraced within the OCP through a section that includes the following wording:

“Bowen Island Municipality in all of its actions shall have regard for the object of the Islands Trust”.

This new section of the OCP should also include wording ensuring that there is greater sharing of planning resources with other Trust islands, including, where feasible, joint professional skills upgrading; and that cultural exchanges with other Trust island communities will be encouraged.

Living in Nature

The OCP contains a patchwork of varying environmental standards that need to be harmonized and updated.

Development Permit Section 6 of the OCP makes clear that “no land within the designated area shall be subdivided or altered...unless the owner first obtains a Development Permit”. Measures need to be included to prevent the DP application process from occurring only after a subdivision application. A landowner needs to obtain a DP before land alteration has already caused any significant environment displacement. Reasonable policies that define “land alteration” and when a land owner must apply for a DP are required in Section 6 of the OCP.

The DP for Hazardous Slopes must be reinstated, and the Guidelines for all DP areas need to be updated to include explicit tree retention requirements, and inclusion of new authority over land use to reduce greenhouse gases, that was granted to DP areas in Bill 27, by the provincial government in 2008.

The DP Guidelines for Environmental Protection that were removed from the OCP through Bylaw 56, in 2002, should be restored to the OCP.

The continuous greenbelt of indigenous vegetation along Bowen's roads, forms an important public amenity for stream purification and contributes to the rural character of the Island. The municipality's Traffic and Use of Streets Bylaw 133, (2005), under Section 35, Highway Use Requiring a Permit, subsection (i) states: "No person shall dig up cut, prune, destroy or damage any tree, flower, or shrubs on any highway or boulevard". The OCP has various clauses that support the intent of Bylaw 133. The bylaw's Section 35 (i) should be inserted in its entirety into the OCP. As well, the OCP should state that the municipality will seek to eradicate invasive plant species on municipal owned land; and will assist volunteer organizations that seek to eliminate all such invasive plants on Bowen Island.

Conclusion

The Eco-Alliance hopes that the revisions that are made to the OCP will keep alive the vision of Bowen as an "earthy green oasis" in the years to come. We can only do that if we keep that as a goal, even at the final build-out of Bowen Island. We need to plan wisely for our future, starting with figuring out what we want as a final product and planning backward from there. Our suggestions are made with that goal in mind. We thank the Committee for considering our submissions, and hope you find them worthy of incorporating into your revision of the OCP.