

“True Green” proponents (TG) say: “We don’t want to be framed as a pro-development group”. That may be so, but it is clear that the results of their vision for our future Bowen Island will mean development – and lots of it. Infinite amounts of it actually, if we are to accommodate their views on growth and their perplexing reticence to acknowledge the boundaries of our small island and limits to our environmental capacity. That our island is finite is a fact, not a debate. They present their vision of our future Bowen as the only one and employ “The Borg” argument to growth and development, i.e., “it’s inevitable; resistance is futile”. Many in the community disagree with TG’s fundamental premise of simply building to accommodate, even invite, endless growth and density as the only future possible for our island. Instead, we feel that, with an open mind and the resourcefulness of islanders, we can meet our community’s needs, now and for the future, in ways that respect the island’s natural limitations, its coastal character, community and lifestyle values and precious natural assets. Other islands around the world, grappling with similar issues, are successfully employing non-coercive but assertive processes to help manage their growth responsibility and to protect their at-risk environments for the sake of all. It is silly to say that we cannot.

We agree there are some challenges for our community and desires: i.e., greater demographic diversity, a more engaged community, more “affordable housing/that stays affordable” options, services for our seniors to age in community, the needs of our young people and an appropriately scaled economy that nurtures realistic sustainability goals – and this is key – is within a Bowen-context of sustainability. However, none of these challenges necessarily require, nor benefit from, a greatly accelerated rate of growth and expansion to be addressed. We can agree on some of the desired outcomes. However, we want to see, first, an evaluation of the lowest impact and least invasive and costly solutions that will address the well-defined needs of our existing community. Then, investigate and evaluate all of our options for managing future growth and development pressures, rather than simply adopting the premise that we will have to build a small city and multiple town centers around our small island in response to urban pressures.

Instead of viewing our current OCP (official community plan) as an obstacle to “progress”, it bears reminding that this document represents community wishes and aspirations -- and this one was crafted by many engaged and concerned citizens. Its specific emphasis on a cautious and measured pace of development, adherence to the Islands Trust protections and its references to rural character and strong environmental safeguards are the values of many of this island’s citizens. Of the 3 top concerns articulated through the present OCP Update process, 2 out of 3 were about environmental conservation/retaining natural beauty and preservation of rural character, the other was about preserving local heritage and character of community. Although the island’s demographics, expectations and priorities may fluctuate over time, it seems that these fundamental “green and character values” have not changed significantly from the current OCP. To the extent that some may disagree with these

values, and they have that right, it does not change the fact that they exist and represent a significant proportion of people of this community.

This clearly expressed desire to have growth/development managed in ways that will not irreparably harm our island's eco- and social capacities is not born out of fear or selfishness as has been suggested – rather it is thoughtful, protective (yes) and forward-thinking. Density housing communities with associated “green spaces” will be a common model for new developments (it already is around the world). The communities that will stand out in the future as truly visionary, are those that manage (against all odds) to retain significant, ecologically viable amounts of natural land/eco-systems for the benefit of its own residents and for the world at large -- in a world of increasingly diminished and vanishing natural inventory. This goal does not preclude having a thriving, in-scale and engaged community here on Bowen living in balance and harmony with our eco-values.

It should also be noted that without the OCP and Islands Trust constraints on intense development pressures of past years, we would not have all this natural land and development potential to argue about now. Contrary to TG's statement “But this public sentiment that you can stop the invasion by saying ‘no’ to every proposal that comes along is misguided and it will only make our situation worse.”; in fact, many projects and initiatives were accomplished under the previously adopted OCP and “yes” was heard rather frequently, including for large, relatively dense housing developments such as Cates Hill. The delays in implementing Cove-related development, including Abbeyfield can, to a significant degree, be attributed to impediments such as lack of funds for the essential sewer upgrade (without which no significant upgrades in the Cove area could proceed). Now that funding is in place, those projects can be revisited and will likely go ahead in, hopefully, island-appropriate ways.

We (the “other greens”) will have more to say over the next few months about “sustainability in a Bowen-context” (we believe not an “absolute” goal, rather a point along a continuum of sustainability that also recognizes our island values and characteristics), density (how much, where, the character of), affordable housing/keeping it affordable, aging in community, the carbon argument, the balanced, healthy eco-system approach to sustaining communities, a look at some other adaptive ideas for an increasingly depleted world such as the “steady state economy” ... “that there are alternatives to our endless-growth economy in the form of what ecological economists call the steady state economy, a sustainable economy that functions within the physical and ecological limits of the biosphere”), the national parks initiative and much more. We intend to contribute positively to the public discussion in an effort to help broaden the community vision and discuss ideas that best fit a small island community and are in keeping with the non-conformist mindset that is the tradition of intentional islanders everywhere.

Ps. I hope that our dedicated historians are creating an archive of OCP discussions to add to the "Story of Bowen". It will make for fascinating reading in 2050+ by historically inclined folks gazing out their windows at the "future Bowen" and seeing – well – it will depend on how the debate goes. We'll see, won't we.

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