

Affordable Housing and the Bowen Island Official Community Plan: An Opportunity and Constraints Analysis

This document has been put together to help identify the opportunities and constraints for meeting the OCP objective *“to encourage maintenance of a population with varying income levels, lifestyles and age groups”* on Bowen Island. The document has been organized as follows:

ISSUE

Explanation of the issue

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Actual OCP principles, objectives or policy statements relating to the identified issue

CONSTRAINTS

Identifies how the principles, objective or policies are an obstacle to the development of affordable housing

OPPORTUNITIES

Identifies how the OCP could better support the stated objective noted above

ISSUE #1 NO NET INCREASE IN DENSITY

The existing OCP creates strict limitations upon increasing “dwelling unit” and/or “lot” density in any circumstance. While there is no explicit growth cap included within the OCP, there is an *assumed* growth cap based upon a build out scenario of lots allowed for in the OCP. This build out has been estimated to be roughly 7000 people assuming all lands are developed within OCP designations. What is the rationale to support this particular figure? What exactly does this policy direction, and its assumed population growth cap, set out to achieve? Is it the maintenance of a healthy social dynamic, the management of our ecological footprint, the preservation of a rural and serene island aesthetic, or some combination? Without a clearly articulated community vision and growth strategy, desired outcomes can be compromised by unintended conflicts.

EXAMPLES:

A 500 SF home would likely house one person, while a 5000 SF home could house a large extended family. Several 500 SF homes could be equal to one 5000 SF home in terms of “numbers of people” and ten 500 SF homes could equal one 5000 SF home in terms of site coverage.

The current allowable maximum site coverage on a 10 acre parcel with a Rural (R) land use designation is 1500 m² for home and outbuildings – which is around 16,000 SF. This would be equal to 18 compact homes at an average size of 900 SF per unit. In this instance the site coverage would be the same for 18 compact homes as it would be for one large single family dwelling with outbuildings (keeping in mind we are only talking about site coverage and not other impacts).

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Amidst the various policy statements contained within the OCP, there is no direct correlation between its build out potential and desired community outcomes, as it pertains to density and its allocation. Historically, density (i.e. more people) has seemingly been THE threat to Bowen Island's desired future. Yet, it can be argued that the existing land use policy (which privileges single-family, large-lot sprawling settlement patterns) is more of a threat to Bowen Island's future than exceeding its assumed growth cap within higher density nodes.

While growth management policy would presumably be an accepted means of realizing Bowen Island's future aspirations, there is no true vision statement (a well articulated description of a desired future state), no rationale, nor calculated means of managing growth going forward. As it pertains to affordable housing, the existing OCP policy precludes opportunity because the issue has never been considered in any calculated manner within a larger vision for the Island. By default, affordable housing can only be created within the assumed growth cap that never fully accounted for its creation to begin with. Affordable housing is becoming increasingly expensive to provide with no true incentive for a developer to voluntarily participate. On many levels, the current OCP is a disincentive because creating affordable housing offers no benefit to the developer. Clearly defined incentives for creating affordable housing are critical to encourage developers to incorporate such a community amenity in their development proposals.

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Page 8 – 2.2 Principle three

Generally that there shall be no net increase in overall island lot density from that lot density proposed by policy in the previous OCP.

Page 20 – Policy 3.1.4.9

There shall be no overall increase in dwelling unit density through the provision of multi-dwelling unit housing on any parcel above that allowed for other forms of residential housing unless permitted by transfer of development rights or other methods provided by this plan.

Page 20 – Policy 3.1.4.4

Affordable and special needs housing shall be considered one form of community amenity that may be considered in exchange for *slightly* higher density when provided for in a zoning bylaw

Page 13 – Policy 3.1.J

Subject to limitation imposed by law, Council may support the concept of being able to transfer residential development within a property or between properties.

Page 10 – Snug Cove Village Plan Policy 4.1.3

Providing for higher density residential housing within the Village centre, and within a comfortable walking distance to the ferry and other community amenities will assist in its revitalization and enhance its vitality, while at the same time, work towards achieving a sustainable and complete village. However higher density residential housing within the Village centre should be accommodated only if the housingdoes not contribute to overall growth on the island beyond that anticipated in the OCP.

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CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ The OCP does not enable the municipality to exercise its range of legislative powers, found within the Local Government Act, to encourage affordable housing creation.
- ◆ There is no true vision statement within the OCP that accounts for affordable housing and social diversity.
- ◆ The OCP does not include a true growth management strategy that addresses how a diverse demographic mix might be preserved.
- ◆ The OCP uses the notion of “density transfer” to encourage affordable housing, yet offers no operable mechanism to support the notion.

EXAMPLE:

The only way for the municipality to “get” density is if landowners make applications and receive approvals for development that is at a lower density than what is allowed on their land in the OCP. Although that may happen from time to time, the municipality does not currently “own” any additional density and thus cannot support creating the affordable housing that is needed now.

- ◆ **Policy 3.1.4.9** refers to “other methods” for increasing density but these provide very limited opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Employ a range of legislative and policy related tools, included in the Local Government Act that will assist the community in preserving its diverse makeup.
- ◆ Adopt the Bowen Island 2020 Vision statement prepared by the SFWG into the OCP.
- ◆ Incorporate a comprehensive growth management strategy that supports an overall vision and adequately addresses affordable housing.
- ◆ Incorporate density equivalency allocations within a larger affordable housing strategy

EXAMPLE:

***Policy 3.1.4.11** in the current OCP allows for a density equivalency for Senior’s supportive housing. It states “such supportive housing for up to 24 residents should be considered to be the same dwelling density as four dwelling units”. A similar type of policy could be developed for affordable housing.*

- ◆ Develop an operable density bonus system based upon proven examples found in other comparable communities and incorporate in the OCP.

EXAMPLE:

One of the most common and effective tools available to local governments for creating affordable housing is the ability to increase density when it serves the public good, most often referred to as a density bonusing. “Density bonusing is essentially a system of exchange, allowing zoning requirements to vary in exchange for the provision of housing that benefit the community. Usually developers are allowed to build more floor area, from which they derive more income, in return for provision of the amenity or affordable housing. For the developer the bonus system is voluntary and is an incentive rather than a compulsory requirement. Even with simple provisions, a community can secure significant public benefits without spending tax dollars or imposing fees. In addition, the increased floor area can bring the community increased tax revenues. A density bonusing system is not intended to provide the only solution to a community’s housing needs, or lack of community amenities, but to provide a useful tool to assist in addressing these issues.” For more detailed information go to <http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/BONUSDN/intro.html>

ISSUE #2 LAND USE DESIGNATION FOR COMMUNITY LANDS

The current OCP has inconsistent land use designations for the Community Lands and fails to give any substantive direction as it pertains to preferred uses, density, or how they might address affordability needs within the current housing spectrum. Even though the Snug Cove Plan states that the affordable housing issue will be addressed when considering the use of the Community Lands, this has not happened to date. The Community Lands present some of the best opportunities for affordable housing on Bowen. The OCP update is an excellent opportunity to establish policy to provide direction for the use and/or disposition of these lands.

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Page 38 – Objective 10)

b) Purchase GVRD Parks surplus lands for local community parks

Schedule B – Land Use Designations

Site 1 of the community lands is designated Rural (R), which allows for one residential unit per 10 acres.

Schedule C - Parks and Trails

Identifies the community lands as Regional Park

Page 4 – Snug Cove Village Plan – Section 2.1.1 – describes the land located within Snug Cove Village

Bullet eight refers to “land west of IPS / Cates Hill Chapel and Crippen Regional Park west of BICS on the south side of Mount Gardiner Road”, which would include Site 1 of the Community Lands. The text describes these lands as being within Snug Cove however the maps do not include these lands within the Snug Cove boundary.

Page 12 – Snug Cove Village Plan – Policy 4.1.3 j)

Regarding lands that the Municipality will acquire from the GVRD as part of the surplus lands package, the Municipality will address the affordable housing issue when considering the preferred use and development of those lands.

CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ The OCP contains inconsistent land use designations for Community Lands
- ◆ Some land use designations attributed to the lands seem unfounded and out of line with most recent thinking with regards to Snug Cove Village and affordability

EXAMPLES:

Why would the community acquire parkland from the GVRD with no intent to rezone and develop the lands to address other community needs, such as affordable housing and civic facilities?

Snug Cove Village Plan Section 4.1.5 identifies community facilities as being most appropriately located within the Village center. However, IPS school, Cates Hill Chapel and the pre-school/teen centre are not shown within the Snug Cove boundary. These facilities are all located within 100 feet of the Community Lands Site 1, which could provide housing within walking distance of schools and would contribute to the vitality of these community facilities as well as to Snug Cove.

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- ◆ The Snug Cove Village Plan references affordability in consideration of the Community Lands yet offers no substantive direction that furthers sound decision-making.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Consider the relevant analysis and planning completed to date to create and incorporate a comprehensive plan for the Community Lands in the OCP.
- ◆ To be consistent with Sections 2.1.1 and 4.1.5 of the Snug Cove Village Plan, amend the Snug Cove Village Plan boundary to include IPS, Cates Hill Chapel, pre-school, Belterra and Site 1 of the Community Lands.
- ◆ Designate the appropriate portion of Site 1 and the Belterra lands as multi-family with commensurate density to achieve a more diverse housing mix while contributing to the viability of the surrounding community facilities. This would be consistent with the objective to revitalize and enhance the vitality of Snug Cove, while at the same time working towards achieving a sustainable and complete village.

ISSUE #3 OCP DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Schedule B defines density for land on Bowen. The method for density distribution in the current OCP raises the question of settlement pattern. What is the OCP trying to achieve with the density patterns currently in place?

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Schedule B – Land Use Designations

CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ Density allocations within the OCP do not consistently support the concentration of density in relation to community services, commercial and retail uses. Many locations have higher density designations than those properties within 1.5 km of Snug Cove village centre.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Clustering housing close to services reduces the ecological footprint and infrastructure costs, contributes to affordability, and would support two of the broad objectives identified in the current OCP as noted below:

- To establish a community service and land use pattern with high priority given to environmental and social factors

EXAMPLE

Density clustered close to services increases affordability by reducing construction costs (reduced infrastructure costs for roads and other services) and long term living costs. For example: owning an automobile is expensive – if accommodation is close to services, automobiles may not be required.

- To recognize Snug Cove Village as the commercial and community heart of Bowen Island, and to provide for the necessary expansion of commercial, residential and community/cultural uses that will contribute towards a pleasant village centre

EXAMPLE

The OCP density for Site 1 Community Lands is Rural (R), which allows for one residence per 10 acres, even though there is a school, church and children's preschool within 100 feet of the property and it is within a 15 minute walk from the services at Snug Cove and the ferry.

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ISSUE #4 WHAT IS MEANT BY “RURAL CHARACTER”?

There are a number of policy statements in the OCP that refer to maintaining “rural character”. Rural character might be one of the biggest reasons for resistance to growth – the loss of the rural character on Bowen is a big concern for many people.

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Page 15 – Policy 3.1.2.1

Cluster housing may be permitted provided it does not detract from the *rural character*....

Page 18 – Policy 3.1.3.1

Council may impose regulations as to what percentage of the lots may be less than the average lot size but larger than a minimum lot size as a means to retain *rural character*.

Page 19 – 3.1.4 Objective 1)

To provide for a range of housing options that are affordable and or serve special needs groups without detracting from the *rural character* of Bowen Island

Page 20 – Policy 3.1.4.1

.... multi-family housing shall be permitted as affordable housing Such housing shall be restricted in maximum size and density in order to maintain the *rural residential character* of the island.

CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ There is no clear definition or expression of what is meant by rural character in the OCP. This makes it very difficult for regulatory authorities to evaluate potential developments against this policy requirement.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Incorporate form based zoning approaches that ensure higher density development is appropriate for its rural surroundings. This can be done using visual preference studies, design guidelines, textual descriptions and other visual tools to help assess acceptability and appropriateness.

ISSUE #5 DISCOURAGEMENT OF MULTI-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of policies that appear to discriminate against multi-family development. This perspective does not support the development of affordable housing, nor does it contribute to environmental protection.

CURRENT OCP PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES OR POLICIES

Page 19 – 3.1.4 Objective 2)

To allow limited multi-family and or attached housing as affordable, rental or special needs housing in exceptional circumstances where the clustering of such residential units will provide a significantly greater contribution to the protection of the natural environment than a single family dwelling development of equal density would provide.

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Page 20 – Policy 3.1.4.7

Zoning for multi-family or attached housing shall require the following amenities as a minimum for the development to proceed:

- a) Any residual land not used for access, parking, or the building footprint shall be permanent green space.
- b) Strategically located green space dedicated for public ownership shall be part of the permanent green space.

Page 20 – Policy 3.1.4.8

Multi-family or attached housing shall be designed as garden apartments or row housing and shall be limited in density to approximately four (4) units per development

Page 12 - Snug Cove Village Plan – 4.1.3 e)

Ensure that new higher density residential development does not exceed a height of 2.5 stories.

CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ The wording of **3.1.4 Objective 2)** seems to support an assumption that single family development contributes to greater protection of the natural environment.
- ◆ Providing dedicated public green space may not be possible on smaller lots designated for multi-family (such as Community Lands sites 2 and 3). Requiring residual land to be permanent green space could restrict the construction of communal workshops, greenhouses or other non-park community spaces that support social sustainability and the sharing of resources.
- ◆ There is nothing in the OCP or Land Use Bylaw defining the terms “*garden apartments*” or “*row housing*” making it difficult to evaluate potential developments against this policy requirement.
- ◆ Limiting affordable housing to 4 units per development is a disincentive to provide affordable housing.
- ◆ Requiring a maximum height of 2.5 stories makes it challenging to build stacked townhouses which contribute to affordability in a number of ways and also have a smaller footprint than a conventional townhouse (thus preserving green space).

EXAMPLE

With the height, FSR, site coverage, and parking restrictions, the zoning for Village Commercial or Village Res (VR) do not provide a yield that is attractive for conventional developers. If the land is not desirable, then affordable housing will not be created.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ The OCP could better support the development of affordable housing by having policy that allows for multi-family dwelling units that support conservation, diversity, affordable housing, rural identity, and provide impact mitigation.

EXAMPLE

Apartments, stacked townhouses and townhouses are more affordable to maintain over time and contribute to greater protection of the natural environment than single family development of equal density because of the reduced footprint - infrastructure services are clustered and multi-family homes are typically smaller in size.