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Galiano OCP changes open new possibilities

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After an exhaustive process, including strong community support at a public hearing last month, Galiano Island's Local Trust Committee has given third reading to an extensive package of amendments to the Island's Official Community Plan. The package has been approved by the Islands Trust Executive Committee and sent to the Minister of Community, Sport and Culture for approval.

The amendments give a strong boost to efforts to create more affordable housing to keep and attract young families on the island. They also promote more food and agricultural production and other economic activity.

At the same time, when signed by the minister, the OCP amendments will provide more protection to Galiano's sensitive island ecosystems and water supply and will comply with provincial requirements to protect riparian areas through development permits.

The Process

Contained in a total of 14 bylaws, the amendments include the rezoning of a Forest-zoned lot to six, 5-acre residential housing sites plus a land donation to BC Parks. They are the culmination of an almost two-and-a-half-year review of the existing OCP by scores of Galiano Islanders, with the support and involvement of Island Trustees Louise Decario and Sandy Pottle.

'The review was thoroughly comprehensive,' says Mike Hoebel, who chaired the Steering Committee for the review. 'From the outset the trustees, with the support of Trust staff, established numerous advisory committees to work on the key issues. Anyone who wanted to join a committee was welcomed. Once the minister has signed off on the amendments, it will be up to the trustees, working with the community, to ensure that the potential provided by these amendments is realized.'

Decario and Pottle have announced they are seeking re-election on November 19.

The OCP advisory committees, which met regularly throughout the review process, included groups on affordable housing, agriculture and food security, community economic development, water, transportation, ecosystem protection, and forest policy.

New Opportunities

Once approved by the minister, the amended OCP will add a new land-use designation for community housing intended for affordable, rental and special needs housing. The provision will allow the LTC to consider applications for rezoning to a higher density than currently permitted. The amendment also enables the LTC to consider amending zoning to allow secondary dwellings for affordable housing in residential zones. The LTC will also be allowed to consider amending zoning to create a new zone for a manufactured-home park.

Already, one group, spearheaded by long-time Galiano resident and business owner Tom Hennessey, has secured an option on a site, and is working on a rezoning application for an affordable housing project, with density equal to that of the adjacent Page Drive seniors' residence.

Under agriculture land use policies, the amendments stipulate that floor area of accessory buildings will ensure that the needs of farm operations are met.

The new OCP will enable the LTC to amend the Land Use Bylaw to permit community gardens and farmers markets in all appropriate zones, and may permit agri-tourist accommodation at the same density as B&Bs.

With regard to water supplies, the OCP amendments add new policies to identify aquifers and water recharge areas and recommend standards through professional analysis to ensure development minimizes impacts on potable water sustainability. New developments will be required to provide cisterns in critical groundwater areas. Other conservation and protection provisions encourage shared, as opposed to individual, docks. A new First Nations Cultural and Archaeological policy calls on the LTC to avoid approving development applications that would result in disturbance to archaeological sites.

Forest Lands and the PMFL Act

At their last meeting, the Local Trust Committee continued the effort, which received intensive attention during the OCP review, to move toward a solution to the long-standing issue of residential use on Forest-zoned lands which were formerly

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owned as a commercial tree farm by MacMillan Bloedel. These lands now comprise about 40% of the Island.

Because Galiano's bylaws pre-date the *Provincial Managed Forest Act*, Galiano's current OCP and Land Use Bylaw provide local control over development through site-by-site rezoning requirements on these Forest-zoned lands. Section 21 of the *PMFL Act*, which currently does not affect these pre-existing bylaws, prohibits local government from introducing bylaws restricting 'forest management activities' including the building of houses, worker accommodation, roads and bridges.

As a result of the recent OCP review, Galiano's LTC was prepared to expand the zoning on Forest land to permit an accessory dwelling on lots greater than 50 acres with conditions, without the need for site-by-site rezoning.

However, throughout the OCP review process numerous community-based committees recommended that trustees not proceed with Forest policy changes before the provincial government exempted the Galiano Local Trust Area from the *PMFL Act*, Section 21.

Therefore the OCP amendments do not include Forest policy changes. The trustees have begun meeting provincial officials and the minister to press for Section 21 exemption.

Meanwhile, Trustees Decario and Pottle have asked trust staff for a report on whether they could proceed with Forest policy changes affecting only those Forest lands that are at least 50 acres in size and do not have managed forest status under the *PMFL Act*. The staff report, which indicates the approach is feasible, was slated to be on the agenda for the Local Trust Committee meeting on October 17. ✉