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Minister signs new Galiano OCP while trustees work for forest solutions ~ Art Moses

In a strong vote of confidence for the exhaustive two-and-a-half year community-based process to review Galiano Island's Official Community Plan, the Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development has signed a package of OCP amendments that largely reflect the community's recommendations.

The Minister signed the package just a few days after it was approved by the Islands Trust Executive Committee. 'We're absolutely elated the Minister has signed off on our new OCP', says Galiano trustee Louise Decario, who led the review along with fellow trustee Sandy Pottle and Trust planning staff. 'Residents and off-island owners have worked hard on the process and have good reason to celebrate.'

The new OCP will boost efforts to create more affordable housing and promote more food and agricultural production and other economic activity, while protecting Galiano's sensitive island ecosystems and water supply, and complying with provincial government requirements to protect riparian areas through development permits.

The package now goes to the Galiano Island Local Trust Committee for the fourth and final reading on November 14.

At their last meeting October 17, the LTC moved ahead with efforts to address forest policy in the OCP in a way that does not surrender local community control under the Islands Trust to the provincial *Private Managed Forest Lands Act*.

Trustees Decario and Pottle placed potential amendments to policy for Forest Lands without managed forest status on the Local Trust Committee's Projects list. They also directed staff to review the budget in order to include funding for potential amendments to the OCP and land use bylaw for Forest Lands.

A proposed zoning change to allow an accessory residence with conditions on large forest lots was a key recommendation of the community advisory committee that reviewed forest policy as part of the comprehensive OCP process. Despite the recommendation, the same forest policy advisory committee and other advisory groups to the OCP review, including the Steering Committee, recommended that the LTC not proceed with changes to forest policy without receiving an exemption from the provincial government to Section 21 of the *PMFL Act*. Section 21 forbids local government from enacting any by-law or permit 'that directly or indirectly interferes with a forest management activity' defined by the act as such things

as building a residence, worker accommodation, roads and bridges.

The BC Supreme Court has confirmed that because Galiano's OCP and by-laws currently preceded enactment of the *PMFL Act*, current local zoning continues to apply on PMFL land.

There is considerable concern in the Galiano community that any new by-laws affecting PMFL lands would not apply, because of Section 21, and open the door to inappropriate (but PMFL-sanctioned) industrial activity such as rock-quarrying and blasting, as well as poorly-planned building sites with the potential to encroach severely on neighbours' quality of life.

The trustees are continuing discussions with the province to secure an exemption from PMFL Act Section 21. The lands in question constituted the commercial tree farm formerly owned by forest giant MacMillan Bloedel.

'We're trying to resolve this issue by getting Galiano removed from Section 21 or accommodated in some way to acknowledge local interest in planning for privately owned forest zoned lands, an area that now constitutes 40% of the island,' says Pottle. 'We want to work with the provincial government and the forest lot owners to resolve the issue of accessory residential use so our community can plan and take into account the location of critical infrastructure such as roadways and Hydro corridors, while preserving the integrity of unfragmented forest ecosystems.'

Meanwhile some Forest-zone landowners are moving to take advantage of existing opportunities for residential use now.

For example, the package signed by the Minister also includes the rezoning of 120 acres of Forest-zone land near Bodega Ridge into six, 5-acre home sites re-zoned to Rural Residential, with the remaining 90 acres rezoned as Nature Preservation and donated to BC Parks as a community benefit.

Another Forest-zone property is also moving toward achieving zoning for accessory residential use. At their November 14 meeting trustees will give further approval to the rezoning of a 50-acre lot on the island's North End from F-1 to F-3 under existing OCP forest policy. The rezoning will enable the owners to build a house in return for a covenant promising to practice sustainable forestry on the area of land not used for a dwelling site and outbuildings.☞

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