

Overview of Findings

The findings from the survey responses form the basis for the recommendations that follow. They are organized by three themes: managing growth, conserving biodiversity and freshwater, and creating affordable housing.

Managing Growth

Current projections suggest that the population could grow from the current 4425 to 6,632 if all vacant lots, lots with potential for secondary suites, and subdividable lots on Gabriola were built-out and occupied. This projection also assumes full year occupancy compared to the current year-round occupancy rate of 72%. This projection excludes the lands set aside for Treaty because there is no way of knowing the subdivision potential at this time.

The goals in the Gabriola Official Community Plan (1997) only explicitly mention the term “growth” once – in which “gradual and appropriate” rather than “rapid” growth is to be encouraged. The other policies and objectives speak to regulating the density that is already permitted through zoning. Anticipating or managing new growth (except for multi-family affordable housing) does not seem to be contemplated in the OCP.

Survey 3 (Q8) asked respondents whether they wanted to *maintain* the current regulations that could result in maximum build-out or wanted to see regulations that would permit an *increase* in the projected population, or a *decrease*. The majority of Gabriolans surveyed want regulations that would result in a population decrease (53%) or maintained at its current trajectory (23%). One-quarter (24%) wish to see regulations that would result in an increase in population.

Respondents were also asked to rate policies to manage growth (Survey 3 Q6). There is comparatively little support for maintaining the status quo. Instead, there is strong support for policies addressing water conservation and protection, as well as support for limiting the potential for the creation of small lots through subdivision. Almost 52% of respondents support requiring provision of affordable housing as part of a subdivision application.

In Survey 3 Question 9, respondents were asked about for a variety of regulations that could be implemented to manage growth or mitigate its impact. There is qualified support for all the options presented but establishing minimum lot sizes for subdivision, requiring the inclusion of affordable housing (supported by a housing agreement) as part of subdivisions, and regulating secondary suites were the most often chosen options and received more than 50% support.

Over half of property owners with subdividable or adjacent lots indicated that they would voluntarily reduce their density potential through rezoning or lot consolidation

(Survey 3 Q7) on the condition that the densities be used for affordable housing elsewhere on the island.

Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation

The responses to Survey 2 Q2 show clear support among respondents for incorporating the concept of biodiversity into the Official Community Plan. Although only a small number of respondents propose using the term biocultural diversity, this term is being proposed in academic journals as a more robust way of understanding the relationship between human culture and nature (for example see [British Ecological Society](#)). This suggests that the concept itself needs to be clearly articulated – for instance, delineating the difference between *biodiversity* or *biocultural diversity*, which incorporates the role of human activity.

Survey 2 (Q 3) examined attitudes towards policies that *encouraged* actions versus policies that *required* actions. Current OCP policies lean towards encouraging certain behaviours and applying more prescriptive strategies (e.g., through rezoning applications or establishing DPAs) in targeted areas. There is a clear desire among those surveyed to take a more assertive approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity on the island including: establishing regulations that would apply to all property owners; and, establishing DPA to address priority conservation objectives. A need was also expressed for more educational materials directed to increase understanding of what is possible in each of the specific land use areas and zones.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for specific policies in the Coastal Douglas-fir Toolkit (Survey 2 Q4). There is clear support for all measures to protect and enhance Gabriola's CDF biogeoclimatic zone. There is strong support for developing new policies which prioritize parkland dedication at the time of subdivision if it results in protection of CDF ecosystems (95%), establishing new Development Permit Areas to protect and restore CDF ecosystems in high priority areas of the island (94%), and developing new policies and regulations to protect and restore CDF ecosystems on private properties (91%).

Survey 2 (Q 5) addressed freshwater conservation. There is strong support for the entire array of policy options for protecting groundwater on Gabriola. There is also support for developing and distributing informational materials to all householders and new residents. Freshwater conservation was a constant theme throughout all three surveys and a majority of respondents indicate that they depend on well water or a combination of well water, rainwater collection and bulk water purchases for both potable and non-potable needs. Over 80% of respondents (Survey 3 Q13) indicate they would consider installing a rainwater collection and storage system.

The early implementation of the BC Energy Step Code received stronger support than the Universal Access Design requirements (Survey 3 Q14). Concerns are primarily around the cost implications for new construction arising from these changes.

Affordable Housing

In Survey 1 (Q2) respondents were asked to rate the current criteria for evaluating multi-dwelling affordable housing development proposals. Overall, the highest ranked criteria are all related to administrative guidelines and processes as to how proposals would be evaluated and managed, with one exception – the impact on water, waste, greenhouse gas emissions and energy use.

The lower ranked criteria are all related to infrastructure, suggesting that with the exception of the ecological impact considerations, concerns about infrastructure such as project density, dwelling size, etc. are of less concern than how the project was designed to meet need and managed. Nonetheless all the criteria received more than 50% approval.

Respondents give strong to moderate support for expanding the categories of housing need (Survey 1 Q3) to include any low-income households (76%) and to include low to moderate income households (68%).

Survey 1 (Q4, 5 & 6) explored secondary suite policies and challenges to increasing stock. Currently, secondary suites are allowed on properties larger than 2 hectares / 5 acres. Opportunities exist to expand this policy to include properties smaller than 2 hectares / 5 acres, and to introduce a new policy allowing a flex zoning approach targeted to specific needs for all residential properties. However, expanding the potential to create secondary suites in all residential zones may not be the best tool to address housing affordability given that survey responses show that property owners perceive some serious barriers to providing secondary accommodation. Survey 1 Q4 asked those with these properties what the barriers are to building a secondary suite on their property but did not ask them *whether* they would consider doing so. The main barriers to construction of secondary suites on properties over 2 hectares / 5 acres are financial cost, responsibility of being a landlord, and the risk of reduced privacy.

Fewer than one-third of respondents supported allowing secondary suites on properties smaller than 2 hectares / 5 acres (Survey 1 Q5 & 6). Forty-six percent (46%) felt it would be appropriate, but their support came with significant caveats regarding ecological protection, limiting floor area and lot coverage, specifying a minimum lot size, requiring rent limits to ensure affordability, and requiring higher construction standards.

A bare majority of respondents (54%) unconditionally supported flexible zoning in residential zones, and an additional 22% were undecided but not opposed. As with other options, a primary concern was water and the impact on the environment. There



appears to have been some confusion as to whether or not 'flex' zoning would result in increased densities.

Survey respondents (Survey 3 Q2 & 3) were asked whether they supported more flexible zoning for commercial and institutional parcels in order to incentivize the construction of rental or market housing units during redevelopment. There is qualified interest in this option. The support for allowing an increased number of residential units in commercial or institutional zoned properties is conditional on water and an assurance that the units would remain as rental units with affordability guaranteed.