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New community plan uses precautionary principle

North Pender Island's new Official Community Plan includes a commitment to make land-use decisions based on the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle states that when an activity raises threats of harm to the natural environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.

North Pender's OCP also contains measures to protect sensitive ecosystems, new policies to conserve and protect the island's water supply and updated ecosystem mapping of the island.

'These new measures have been included in the new OCP in response to extensive community input following a three-year review,' said Ken Hancock, Local Trustee for North Pender Island. 'With the adoption of the new OCP we now have a new vision for more careful planning of land use on North Pender Island.'

'We heard a wide variety of ideas and opinions on how the OCP should be revised,' added Gary Steeves, also a Local Trustee for North Pender Island. 'We also found that there were recurring themes. This new OCP reflects what the community told us—that we need a more enlightened, progressive approach to planning.'

'We would like to thank all who took time to participate by making calls, writing letters, attending meetings, asking thoughtful questions and sharing ideas,' said Gisele Rudischer, Chair of the Local Trust Committee.

The new OCP is based on the principles of ecological integrity, sustainable community, support for heritage and culture, good governance and support for the quality of life.

The following are the key issues addressed in the new OCP:

- the importance of biodiversity and the need to reconcile the delicate balance between human needs and the needs of the natural environment and ecosystems;
- a zero-exclusion policy to protect ALR lands, and support for agriculture that recognizes working farms and the growing importance of local sources of food;
- the need to retain natural areas and, where development seems likely or inevitable, working with the landowner to mitigate impacts;
- the effect of rapidly increasing property values and housing

cost on the ability to maintain a diverse community; and,

- climate change issues such as the high level of dependence on automobiles for transportation.

The Local Trust Committee is already moving to implement the new goals in the OCP. For example, to identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas and at-risk species and their habitat, Islands Trust staff worked with Parks Canada and BC Ministry of Environment to create new environmental mapping to protect six types of sensitive ecosystem areas including, wetlands, arbutus and Garry oak areas, wildflower meadows, bald eagle, blue heron and raptor nesting trees, coastal bluffs and inter-tidal areas.

'We've also retained an environmental planner to help with a public education program for landowners and the development community on how to mitigate impacts in these rare remaining fragments of intact natural areas,' said Hancock.

As a result of public input during the review, the Local Trust Committee has appointed two new public advisory committees: one to make recommendations on transportation and one on affordable housing.

'People told us that they wanted us to look at creating a better transportation plan for healthier, more efficient ways to get around the island and have appointed an advisory group to develop a transportation plan,' added Hancock.

'We also heard that the island should continue to be a place where people of varying ages, incomes and abilities can find and keep a home and we have established an affordable housing task force to address those issues with our community,' said Steeves.

'This OCP is groundbreaking in many ways and will likely be used as a template for other island communities when the time comes to revise their Official Community Plans,' concluded Rudischer, a member of Islands Trust Executive, 'and I think it was worthwhile to take the necessary time to get it right.'

Public consultation during the review included community input at more than 40 meetings, recommendations from eleven focus groups, and comments from other agencies and stakeholders.

To read the North Pender Island Official Community plan, go to the Islands Trust website at www.islandstrust.bc.ca.

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