

Initial OPSRRA Submission to the Citizens' Advisory Committee's Review of the Otter Point Official Community Plan

The Otter Point & Shirley Residents and Ratepayers Association (OPSRRA)

OPSRRA is a registered non-profit community society with a mandate to advocate about community development issues on behalf of the best interests of the residents of Otter Point and Shirley. Current membership is 394, comprising 336 individuals in Otter Point and 58 in Shirley. The Association has been actively involved in local community planning issues for the past 18 years.

The OSRRA Board welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Citizens' Advisory Committee about the review of the Otter Point Official Community Plan (OCP). This initial submission focuses primarily on the identification of outstanding Otter Point planning issues and pressures for change which we think should be considered in the OCP review process. It also draws attention to different OCP planning approaches and policy tools which the Advisory Committee might find useful in the OCP review process.

The Otter Point Official Community Plan

The review of the Otter Point Official Community Plan is timely given:

- the community experience gained over the past five years using Otter Point's first Official Community Plan;
- the development of the 2008 *Strategic Vision for Otter Point, Shirley and Jordan River*, which identified broad community values and goals as well as strategies to achieve those goals;
- new provincial legislation requiring CRD planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the CRD area;
- the current review of the CRD Regional Growth Strategy, expected to be completed in 2012-2013, which established broad regional planning goals that are binding upon Otter Point; and
- emerging pressures for change in land use regulation in Otter Point.

Community Issues and Pressures for Change

Various interrelated and sometimes conflicting community issues and pressures for change need to be recognized when reviewing the Official Community Plan. These include:

- the high value many Otter Point residents place on the preservation of rural green space, the natural beauty of the area, and the maintenance of a rural lifestyle with privacy and "elbow room";
- ongoing provincial, regional and local public debate about the impacts of global climate change and the future role of non-urban areas such as Otter Point in managing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing local food security, and dealing

- with extreme weather events;
- current and anticipated CRD regional planning goals of keeping regional urban growth compact and avoiding the development of urban sprawl by maintaining policies such as restricting CRD water and sewage services west of Sooke;
 - growing concern by residents about maintaining a secure water supply and the recognition that a community-wide planning process is needed: to assess long-term community water supply options (including Kemp Lake water, potential CRD water, and a mix of potable well water and catch/retain residential cistern systems); to identify potential community water supply development costs; and to establish measures to manage and protect local water supplies;
 - growing recognition that science-based information and standards should be the basis for identifying and conserving the natural environment, particularly dominant sensitive ecosystems, streams, watersheds, aquifers and bodies of water;
 - general awareness that long-term land use planning in Otter Point should be integrated with long-term planning for the provision and funding of fire protection, security of water supply, transportation, and other services;
 - growing recognition by Otter Point residents that governmental decisions about local environmental conservation, community services, and land use planning are made primarily by decision makers who are neither residents of Otter Point nor elected by Otter Point residents;
 - increasing interest in Otter Point in the establishment of a parks and trails network linked to trails in neighboring Sooke and Shirley, which would support local and tourism-related outdoor recreational activities;
 - ongoing and anticipated initiatives by large commercial land developers and the construction industry to have Otter Point develop as a small-lot, high-density, low-regulation, rural "bedroom village" for the Capital Regional District; and
 - growing community concern that such a "business only" development model will lead to ongoing deforestation, environmental degradation, small-lot urban sprawl, higher property taxes, and the loss of the district's rural character.

Different Planning Approaches and Policy Tools

The challenge for Otter Point is to support a review of its OCP, which recognized external planning requirements while reconciling community values about strengthening environmental conservation, dealing with community water supply issues, and establishing long-term development goals that are better integrated with planning for necessary community services. The challenge for the Citizens' Advisory Committee is to develop specific recommendations about how the existing OCP should be revised or replaced with a substantially new OCP in a manner which addresses community concerns and priorities. When carrying out this work, the Committee might find it useful as part of their deliberating process to examine how some neighbouring rural jurisdictions have dealt with these issues in their OCPs and to examine some of the policy tools used by local governments to reconcile environmental conservation, community planning and residential/commercial development pressures.

The [Highlands Official Community Plan](http://www.highlands.bc.ca/) – <http://www.highlands.bc.ca/>

The District of Highlands is predominantly rural and residential, with an area of 3,475 hectares and a population of about 2,000. Its current OCP, enacted in 2007, deals with many of the issues currently facing Otter Point. The vision statement it sets out includes the following statements:

- *We will retain sufficient lands in their natural state to maintain a diversity of plant and animal life and to ensure that the rural lifestyle we enjoy can be experienced by future generations.*
- *We will strive to diversify its economy while preserving our natural systems, including the aquifers on which we depend so heavily.*
- *We will encourage alternative transportation choices, housing choices and a community hall.*
- *We will provide for an adequate tax base including light industrial, related commercial and nature related recreation uses in some areas of the Highlands to support basic, affordable municipal services and facilities.*
- *New development in the Highlands will be in keeping with the rural character of the community and carefully designed to protect sensitive environmental areas.*

The Highlands OCP has six goals:

- *to protect the natural environment;*
- *to retain and strengthen the rural character of the Highlands;*
- *to ensure the long term sustainability of the Highlands community;*
- *to support economic diversification that is consistent with Highlands' rural character and its natural environment;*
- *to provide basic, affordable public services and facilities; and*
- *to encourage involvement in a healthy rural environment, including all planning decisions.*

To implement its vision and achieve its goals, the Highlands OCP identifies different types of land use (rural land, residential land, intensive residential land, managed forest land, recreational tourism land, commercial-industrial land, institutional land, public parks and Bear Mountain Comprehensive Development), each with different land use objectives and related development policies. The remainder of the OCP is organized into sections dealing with a variety of community issues (the environment and resources, parks and trails, services and utilities, social well being, economic diversification, development permit areas, greenhouse gas reductions, a regional context statement, and implementing the OCP). Each of these sections includes specific objectives and/or policies.

A close review of these interrelated objectives and development policies would inform the Committee as to their potential applicability and usefulness in Otter Point. To

illustrate, the Highlands OCP includes objectives and policies such as:

- environment and resources objectives of protecting the aquifers underlying the district, protecting wells, and ensuring a long-term supply of potable water through policies that include public education, developing a comprehensive groundwater monitoring plan, and using development permit area policies to establish protective measures for a 30-meter area around all wells;
- a general land use objective of encouraging conservation measures, such as the implementation of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building standards, throughout the district;
- a managed forest land use objective to maintain forestry as an economic activity through a policy that encourages forage production, wilderness-oriented recreation, agriculture and conservation of ecosystems in addition to managed timber production;
- a commercial industrial land use objective of allowing a range of light industrial and service-commercial land uses that would increase the district's tax base with minimum infringement on the rural, less disturbed land in the rest of the district;
- a parks and trail policy to create a network of recreational trails that will be publicly accessible for designated non-motorized modes of travel;
- an environment and resources objective of preventing steep slopes from inappropriate disturbance or development and ensuring that human activities do not contribute to flooding, increased water runoff, soil erosion or soil instability; and
- an economic diversification objective of encouraging rural entrepreneurs to establish district-suitable enterprises through policies that encourage home-based businesses and small-scale recreational and tourism businesses in designated land use areas.

The [Metchosin Official Community Plan](http://www.district.metchosin.bc.ca/) - www.district.metchosin.bc.ca/

The District of Metchosin, which also views itself as being rural and residential in nature, has an area of 7,040 hectares and a population of about 5,000. It enacted its OCP in 1995 and has made a number of small amendments since that time. Although the Metchosin OCP deals with some of the same planning issues as the Highlands OCP, it is structured quite differently.

The consolidated Metchosin OCP does not contain a vision statement or broad goals about the desired future for the district. Rather, it is organized around 13 broad land use planning issues: environmental policies, agriculture, forestry, parks, residential, commercial, commercial recreation, industrial, transportation, institutional, community services, implementation of the plan, and a regional context statement. For each of these issue areas (except forestry, community services, implementation of the plan, and the regional context statement), the OCP provides some background information and establishes goals and policies to support the achievement of those goals. Again, the Citizens' Advisory Committee might find a review of this OCP in its entirety beneficial when considering ways to address Otter Point planning issues.

To illustrate, the Metchosin OCP contains objectives and policies such as:

- an environmental management objective of identifying and preserving sensitive natural environments for future generations and maintaining sufficient lands in their natural state so that rare and diverse plant and animal life will continue to flourish;
- in addition to general environmental management policies, more detailed policies were also established for watercourses and water bodies, riparian-wetland areas, marine shorelands, lagoon ecosystems, wildlife habitats, natural heritage sites and provisions to support maintaining a "tree cover";
- additional environmental management policies that establish development permit areas and detailed policies for Shoreland Slopes development, Center Mountain development and Bilston floodplain development;
- environmental management policies that include a requirement that Council maintain an inventory of sensitive environments and give due regard to maintaining the Proper Functioning Condition of riparian-wetlands. (Note: A Proper Functioning Condition is a scientific standard used for assessing the proper functioning of riparian-wetlands.);
- agricultural objectives including: minimize negative effects on agriculture from non-agricultural use of lands and preventing reductions in parcel size of agricultural land;
- parks objectives including: providing local parks, trail systems, and recreation for future needs and placing a high priority on the development of a marine park system, and a related parks policy specifying that the acquisition and development of parks, viewpoints and linear systems should follow the guidelines outlined in the Metchosin Parks and Recreation Plan;
- Residential objectives including:
 - ensuring a type, scale, intensity and rate of residential development which maintain the district's rural character
 - ensuring a scale and form of future development minimizing demand for extensive community services
 - permitting residential development only where an adequate quantity and quality of water is demonstrated and where soil conditions are suitable for the long-term operation of septic disposal fields
- commercial objectives including the prevention of ribbon commercial development, the provision of opportunities for home businesses compatible with maintaining a rural community, and a related commercial policy discouraging commercial development in areas other than the Village Center;
- transportation objectives including the improvement of public transportation services and minimizing the number and length of new roads required to meet the demands of community development; and
- a Community Services section limited to describing existing municipal, school, fire protection, law enforcement, community hall, church, water supply, sewage and solid waste disposal, and rain water management services, with related policies outlined only for strengthening rainwater management capabilities.

Other Policy and Planning Tools

The OPSRRA Board would like to also draw your attention to other documents which might be of use during deliberations about changes to the Otter Point OCP.

- 1) Green Bylaws Toolkit For Conserving Sensitive Ecosystems and Green Infrastructure

(<http://www.greenbylaws.ca>)

This document was initiated by the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria and published in 2007. Its purpose is to provide information and practical tools to local governments about how to conserve sensitive ecosystems and protect green infrastructure. It includes a wide range of planning tools including: the rationale for protecting sensitive ecosystems, local government jurisdiction for environmental planning and regulation, case studies of local government experiences, examples of environmental regulation in rural communities, sample bylaw wording and references for further reading. It outlines how regional growth strategies, official community plans, zoning bylaws and environmental development permit areas can be used. It reviews the use of covenants, rainwater management programs, regulatory bylaws, riparian area regulations, compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

- 2) Water Balance Model (<http://bc.waterbalance.ca/>)

Climate change is a very complex multi-disciplinary area of scientific study. The “experts” have confidence in most global predictions, but it is difficult to predict exact timing and variance ranges in specific locations. However, by 2050 it is anticipated that Southern Vancouver Island will see more rainfall with altered seasonal variations: wet season – shorter/wetter and dry season – longer/drier. Winter temperature will warm 2 to 4 degrees and summer will warm up by 2 to 3 degrees. It is projected that we will also see: increased storm surges with greater wind extremes, warm season droughts with increased wildfire risks and cold season precipitation increases with related flood and landslide risks. This altered climate also has implications for water aquifers, water quality and species range changes.

(Source:

<http://www.pacificclimate.org/docs/presentations/Murdock.CRD.19Nov09.pdf>)

How might we begin to plan future land use for such contingencies as increased precipitation and storm water runoff? The *Water Balance Model (WBM)* for British Columbia is an on-line, science based planning tool that might be useful for this purpose. The model is used to evaluate the effectiveness of applying different storm water source controls under different development conditions. Using rainfall volume as a performance target to quantify the effectiveness of various storm water source control strategies, the Water Balance Model provides users with a convenient pre-design planning tool that they can access over the internet. A key objective is to integrate storm water volume reduction with other land use planning and development practices.

The Water Balance Model project was established in 2002 with participation from all

levels of government in BC, the Urban Development Institute and the Real Estate Foundation of BC. The model is an extension of *Stormwater Planning: A Guidebook for British Columbia*, a provincial guidance document that presents a science-based methodology for setting storm water control performance goals. It was developed to help planners and design engineers 'think outside the pipe' when developing sites and neighbourhoods.

" The key value to developers in using the Water Balance Model is that the model can help move projects through the approval process. The model improves communication about storm water management issues and allows designers to communicate ideas effectively within the design team and with regulators . The water balance model is a pre-design tool that is best suited in a decision support or policy evaluation role at the strategic or functional planning stage."

There are over 20 municipalities and regional districts now using the Water Balance Model, including Highlands and Metchosin, Central Saanich and Cowichan Valley Regional District. This **WBM** tool has already been applied locally in the District of Sooke which shares some watersheds with Otter Point. (See [District of Sooke , Liquid Waste Management Plan \(Stormwater\)](#), Stage 1, Technical Support Document November 28, 2006 which is available on-line .

The **WBM** is now being refined to a *water centric guidance* approach to better fit a range of storm water management applications in British Columbia. The BC Government, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Real Estate Foundation of BC jointly funded a paper presented to the Union of BC Municipalities Annual General meeting 2010 . See *Beyond the Guidebook 2010* (www.waterbucket.ca/cfa/sites/wbccfa/documents/media/402.pdf)

Conclusion

The Board of the Otter Point and Shirley Residents and Ratepayers Association is making this initial submission to present a range of community issues and concerns that we regard as important to address in the review of the Otter Point OCP. We also believe that reviewing other OCPs, policy and planning tools can usefully contribute to the review process.

The task facing the Citizens' Advisory Committee is substantial. Identifying community concerns, assembling information, carefully considering and debating planning priorities and options are necessary parts of your decision making process. We welcome your continuing efforts to involve Otter Point residents in this process and appreciate the opportunity to make a submission this evening.