

Trustee Notebook

By Laura Busheikin

REPORT FROM THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING BOX

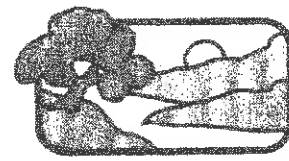
When I became a Trustee, I was bequeathed a cardboard box of history: a collection of documents pertinent to affordable housing on Denman Island.

This tidily-labelled box has material dating back to 1992 (some of it written on typewriters!) and as recent as 2011. There are reports from community task forces, advisory committees, and focus groups. There are consultants' studies, statistical analyses, and survey results. There are records of public meetings and bylaw reviews. There is, in short, an astonishing amount of material reflecting the hard work and best thoughts of community volunteers, Trust staff, and experts of all stripes.

Affordable housing continues to be a pressing concern for Denman Islanders and so I am offering an annotated list of some key documents. This month I will focus on recent studies and reports from other parts of the Trust Area. In a future column, I'll look specifically at the Denman Island documents, which provide a great history of Trust initiatives to address affordable housing on our Island.

1) The Island Trust Community Housing Tool Kit: A Guide to Tools Available to Support the Development of Affordable Housing in the Trust Area, 2010. This 48-page report is full of suggestions for Local Trust Committees and the Islands Trust Council, but is also useful for community members. It begins by identifying an "affordable housing continuum" which it defines as 1) emergency/cold weather shelter; 2) housing for the homeless and/or special needs; 3) housing for those at risk of homelessness; 4) housing with rental assistance; and 5) entry-level ownership opportunities or market rentals.

To help local trust committees address the needs along that continuum, this Tool Kit offers discussions of the pros and cons of secondary cottages, suites, boarding houses, density transfer, amenity zoning, housing agreements, density bonuses, increased density around the downtown core, and the creation of an Affordable Housing zone. It puts forward some intriguing ideas, such as a recommendation that Local Trust Committees consider bringing tenant-landlord conflict resolution education and processes to the community, or that it create a Housing Council to work on housing issues in an ongoing way.



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2) Affordable housing strategies from other Islands: The Gabriola Affordable Housing Needs Assessment (2009) and the Salt Spring Island Community Affordable Housing Strategy Action Plan (2011) are Island-specific, but still useful and thought-provoking. For instance, in the Gabriola report, we see we are not alone when we read about the "dramatic increases in housing prices, increasing rent while income levels remain the same, reduced diversity of age within the population, and a lack of affordable housing options." And there are some interesting suggestions that don't appear in other material, for instance the suggestion to develop an "ecological footprint formula" which would look at the ecological impact of things like water, sewage disposal, building design, and location to assess whether additional accommodation should be permitted. (Note: the Trust also has a Seniors' Housing Strategy — an issue which to some degree overlaps with affordable housing.)

3) Secondary Accommodation Units: A Housing Option for Gulf Islands and Other Small Communities, Jan 2008. Hornby Island Trustee Tony Law prepared this study. He writes that "in the Islands Trust area, 46% of renters are in core housing need, more than three times the rate for all Canadians." The report starts out by recognizing that the islands, and other small communities, have different circumstances than typical urban communities, and then examines these circumstances. Shifting demographics, a shortage of market rental housing, limited development potential, and in some communities the impact of tourism create pressure for more affordable housing. At the same time, any proposed regulatory change needs to take into account a finite water supply, the need for adequate sewage systems, the maintenance of rural character, and the challenge of assuring a secondary unit is used for its intended purpose (ie affordable housing). The report goes on to lay out regulatory options and to look at what has been done in other places.

All of this material is entirely accessible to a lay person and is available on the Islands Trust website (just use the site's search engine). If you have trouble locating them, or don't "do" Internet, contact me at lbusheikin@islandstrust.bc.ca or 250-218-3216.