



A Brief History of Discussions on Cottages, Cabins and Suites

As promised in this space last month, here is a review of some past community discussions on the pros and cons of secondary suites and cottages. I hope this will provide useful fodder for thought in the lead up to the **August 25 "Cooking Up Housing" community forum** that will formally launch discussion of this issue as the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (DLTC) prepares to re-evaluate its housing policies.

Accessory Dwelling Advisory Committee (ADAC)

Back in 2002, a group of six Islanders carried out a lively and thorough study of one part of this question – accessory dwellings (in common parlance known as cabins or cottages, depending on your propensity). This was the Accessory Dwelling Advisory Committee (ADAC), appointed by the DLTC.

Their conclusion was interesting, as is the data they collected along the way – survey results, letters, delegations, analysis of possible density changes in different scenarios, comparisons with other islands and more.

The six person committee ended up split – half in favour of allowing accessory dwellings, and half against.

Those in favour said that allowing accessory dwellings on certain lots "is the only realistic way" to meet community needs for more caregiver, family, guest and rental facilities, and that "the benefits to the human community of [a] limited number of accessory dwellings...outweigh the inevitable negative impacts." They pointed out that "almost all other Trust Islands have provision for accessory dwellings, apparently reconciling the 'preserve and protect' mandate with their community needs."

But the other three members said that the potential benefits "are outweighed by significant costs to the community fabric and environment." They identified these costs as water issues, potential for a sharp increase in short-term vacation rentals, which has proven to be a serious problem on other islands, and bylaw compliance problems. They argued that there is no assurance that cottages and cabins would in fact provide affordable rental housing for those who need it.

In 2002 this committee distributed a survey to every household on Denman. Nearly 200 people replied. In response to the question, "In general, do you favour allowing one accessory dwelling on Denman Island lots of a certain size and zoning to provide accommodation for caregivers, family members, renters or guests?" 85.6 were

in favour. Of those, 61% favoured doing this with fewer restrictions.

The Committee also looked at possible build-out under various scenarios. In their Interim Report, they wrote that, if one accessory dwelling was allowed per lot on all lots 2 ha or more in size, and if 50% of lot owners took this opportunity, that would create 197 secondary dwellings, a projected population increase of 422 at total buildout, approximately 25% more than build-out with no accessory dwellings.

In its conclusion, this committee recommended that a new advisory committee be struck to investigate alternative strategies for meeting housing needs, such as co-housing, co-op land tenure, sites in houses (granny flats, rooms over garages), temporary dwellings and non-governmental projects. It's worth noting that since then the Island has produced one affordable co-op/cohousing project and is getting closer to realization of a non-governmental project (the Denman Community Land Trust Association's Keystone project).

Advisory Planning Work of 2007 and '08

The advice to strike a new committee was left on the back burner, until 2007 and '08, when the DLTC tasked the Advisory Planning Commission of the time to explore options to encourage affordable housing. (Note that the Islands Trust has neither the budget nor mandate to *create* affordable housing; all it can do is create favourable and/or protective land use regulations.)

This group came up with nine main recommendations, three of which dealt with suites and cottages:

1. allow accessory rental dwellings on lots over 1 hectare in the R1 and R2 zones, with the proviso that these would only be used for affordable housing. This proposal called for a Housing Agreement (a legal document, somewhat like a covenant, registered on title) that would define a rental cap and require proof of water supply and septic capability. As well, the dwelling would have a maximum of 1500 square feet and should be built according to green building standards.
2. allow affordable secondary suites in lots zoned R1 and R2, with a housing agreement as in the first recommendation, above.
3. undertake a study to gauge the desirability of creating a sub-zone within a 1 km radius of downtown Denman which would allow affordable

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Trustee Notebook

cottages and suites

So what became of these suggestions?

The DLTC looked into the feasibility of housing agreements and concluded that they are too bureaucratically onerous. A community meeting was held to discuss secondary dwelling units, including the option of allowing them only in a 1.5 km radius of downtown. Public response was lukewarm at best. There were concerns that without a housing agreement or equivalent, the suites and cottages wouldn't be used for affordable housing. The 1.5 km radius idea was critiqued as being too limited and unfair ("There should be the same opportunities all over the Island," said some people). So these ideas went no further, although some other recommendations by this group were adopted.

What Now?

Two in-depth community processes led to uncertain conclusions. But the issues have not gone away; in fact, they seem to be intensifying as the population ages, the economy tightens, the school shrinks and the climate heats up.

The DLTC has been urged by many diverse voices

Profile of the Month continued

Riane studied bellydance with Bronwyn and taught on Denman, Hornby and Vancouver Island for 10 years. She has served on a number of committees (Accessory Dwelling Advisory Committee, Northlands committee, Parents Advisory Council, etc.) and produced a long list of entertainment events on Denman. While co-ordinating the Home and Garden Tour with Laura Busheikin in 2007, she reconnected with volunteer Brian Miles and they began dating. Brian proposed under a full moon in Mexico in January 2008, and they were married that August. Their daughter, Selena, was born in 2009.

In 2011, busy Riane thought: "I need to slow down before life slows me down." She took a break, a 3 day camping trip on her own, but the evening after she returned home, she suddenly felt a 'pop' behind her right eye and a violent headache. Soon she was nauseated and unable to process what people around her were saying. Rushed to St. Joseph's hospital and then to Vancouver General, she spent 3 days in the neurological intensive care unit with a diagnosis of subarachnoid hemorrhage. Following her return home, Riane attempted to resume her routine but suffered from headaches, confusion, and anxiety. She returned to her job at Re/Max after just 3 weeks, but 2 weeks later she 'crashed' – feeling totally

to re-open a discussion on housing. The community and the regulatory milieu have new experiences, new information, and – I am quite sure – new ideas.

As we "cook up" housing policy for the future, knowledge of the past is a key ingredient. If you're looking for more ingredients, there's a well-stocked "pantry" of documents on the Denman Island section of the Islands Trust website, and these are also available at the Denman Island Library in a blue binder labelled "Cooking Up Housing."

The most essential ingredient for the housing discussion stew-pot by far is you, the community – your thoughts, your experiences, your hopes, your ideas and your creativity.

So please get out your calendar and write the words **Cooking Up Housing – community forum on secondary suites and cottages, on August 25, 2:00 – 5:00 at the Back Hall**. This will be the first of several meetings offering an opportunity to discuss, brainstorm, listen, innovate and evaluate possible changes to Denman's housing regulations. This event promises to be lively and exploratory.

overwhelmed and unable to make sense of things. Recovery took many months with wonderful support from family, friends and the Denman community.

Riane currently works as a gardener, house cleaner, farm helper, and more, and continues to cut hair. She also does work exchange with friends in each other's gardens and artistic projects. Riane loves to create sculptures from found objects, despite the prediction of her grade 7 art teacher: "You'll never be an artist!" She is currently studying singing and musical theatre, with recent performances at the Sid Williams Theatre. Riane loves: "dancing, nature, my family, my community and laughing".

Haircuts by Riane

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