



Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee

Minutes of Special Meeting

Date: February 27, 2025
Location: Electronic Meeting

Members Present: Susan Yates, Chair
 Tobi Elliott, Trustee

Regrets: Peter Luckham, Trustee

Staff Present: William Shulba, Senior Freshwater Specialist (electronic)
 Landen Matechuk, GIS Consultant and Researcher (electronic)
 Emily Bryant, Planning Team Assistant (electronic)
 Narissa Chadwick, Island Planner
 Carly Bilney, Recorder (electronic)

Others Present: There was 1 member of the public in attendance.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Yates called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

2. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chair Yates acknowledged that the meeting was being held on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish First Nations.

Landen Matechuk introduced himself as a GIS consultant and researcher who has worked with the Islands Trust for the past five years with a focus on ecosystem resilience and the Suitable Land Analysis.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

By general consent the agenda was approved as presented.

4. BUSINESS ITEMS

4.1 Suitable Land Analysis Review Presentation

Senior Freshwater Specialist William Shulba introduced the project, and made the following comments:

- The Suitable Land Analysis aims to:
 - Balance the preserve and protect mandate of the Islands Trust;
 - Evaluate and prioritize areas across the Islands Trust for sustainable development while emphasizing environmental preservation;
 - Identify areas suitable for additional residential density; and,

- Integrate several themes – ecological sensitivity, freshwater sustainability, transportation and infrastructure and slope stability – to inform land use decisions and address opportunities for suitable development.
- The Suitable Land Analysis uses third-party information, as well as primary data created by the Islands Trust.
- The Suitable Land Analysis uses data that planners have already been using to integrate ecological, social and economic factors into planning, and align with official community plans and bylaws.
- There is a lot more work we can do around this by collaborating with First Nations and local interest groups.
- This presentation is a first step in presenting the methodology of the tool as well as presenting the data, but it is not set in stone.
- The objective of the tool is not to identify non-suitable lands for conservation.
- Gabriola is the most data-rich island.

The following comments were made about the Suitable Land Analysis methodology:

- The analysis involved collating and processing datasets and using existing maps and spatial information.
- The tool looks at the values of freshwater and environment, and how they align with sustainable infrastructure to find areas suitable for potential increased density.
- The analysis uses ArcGIS Pro's Suitability Modeler Tool to weigh values using a multiple-criteria decision analysis for prioritization.
- The layers within each value include: Marine Shore Adjacency, Sensitive Ecosystems, At Risk Ecological Communities, Dominant Age of Forests, Groundwater Recharge, Groundwater Well Density, Watershed Resiliency, Saltwater Intrusion Risk, Road Access, and Steep Slopes and Geohazards.
- Each layer has been weighted equally important for analyzing land suitability, but the weighting of each layer can be changed.
- Local Trust Committees can work with planning staff and communities to adjudicate the weightings and determine whether these are appropriate layers for the suitability analysis.
- The classification value of each layer and its corresponding suitability cannot be changed (e.g. a sensitive ecosystem results in a low suitability for increased housing density).
- It is possible to make the ArcGIS tool available online for community members to better access the Suitable Land Analysis, though that is beyond the scope of this current project.

Discussion ensued and the following comments were made:

- It is the perspective of staff that anything done should be fully transparent and shared with the public as an online tool.

- The Suitable Land Analysis tool might show suitability for parkland or land in the Agricultural Land Reserve, but development will not occur there.
- This is not an AI planner, but rather it is a high-level tool that does not supersede the detailed work that is necessary for a rezoning application (e.g. proof of water, community engagement, etc.).
- This tool is useful in demonstrating to the public what planners use to make evidence-based land use decisions, and brings all the data they are already using together in one place.
- Following this presentation, there could be engagement with the Local Trust Committee and community to identify suitable weightings for each value.
- The confidence in each data set varies (some data, for example, is outdated).
- There is a lot of work yet to be done on salt water intrusion data.

A map was shared to show attendees the various colour-coded layers encompassed by the Suitable Land Analysis, and where areas of high, low and moderate suitability exist on the island. The following comments were made:

- There are certain parcels that have quite high suitability and others that do not.
- A layer that shows water balance is not included, but can potentially be added from the Freshwater Footprint data (and could perhaps replace the well density layer).
- Groundwater balance is very important on a regional level.
- Investigation of groundwater resources will still be needed for each individual parcel where development is proposed.

At 10:47 a.m. it was noted that the meeting was not being live streamed due to technical difficulties. The presentation continued and Mr. Shulba described each layer of the map. The following comments were made:

- Agricultural Land Reserve areas that have been clear cut and show a low number of wells would show high suitability though development would not occur in these areas.
- The challenge in updating or amending data varies.
- The 2019 State of the Islands Indicator Project shows Gabriola at the cusp of ecological balance; staff will review the report and compare the biodiversity layer to what is used in the Suitable Land Analysis.
- Any development on the island is going to have an impact on groundwater recharge.

Mr. Matechuk spoke to the Watershed Resiliency mapping layer and made the following comments:

- Water resiliency data was developed when doing research for the City of Victoria to quantify the resilience (the ecosystem's ability to respond to natural and human-caused disturbances) of the system.
- This has been included in the mapping through various characteristics (e.g. amount and diversity of species in an area, structural diversity of an

area, and the variability of one area and its characteristics compared to its neighbours).

- Where the mapping layer indicates areas of high resiliency would result in low suitability for development.
- Gabriola has the highest density of wells of all the Islands Trust area (because there are no community water systems).
- Only roads included in the Ministry of Transportation and Transit's Schedule 39 appear in the Suitable Land Analysis.
- The GERTIE bus route could be included in the Suitable Land Analysis.

The meeting resumed live streaming at 11:02 a.m. Discussion continued about how data sets are used in the Suitable Land Analysis. Comments were made about the particular challenges of the salt water intrusion data and what might be done (e.g. modelling, seeking feedback on lived experience, etc.) to improve it.

Staff commented that further discussion will be held to determine how the information shared today will be presented to the community. Staff also commented that the Regional District of Nanaimo has been a huge help with the Freshwater Footprint project.

A break was held between 11:29 – 11:38 a.m.

4.2 Major Project: Gabriola Island Comprehensive Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw Review Housing Section Discussion – Staff Report

Planner Chadwick presented the Staff Report and compared suggested changes to the Official Community Plan, based on feedback received, to what currently exists. Discussion was held and the following comments were made:

- Results of a recently held meeting between Islands Trust staff and Snuneymuxw First Nation staff will be shared in a staff report.
- Comments were made about aligning definitions with provincial and federal definitions (e.g. “attainable” versus “affordable” housing) to assist grant applications.
- Reference to a density bank, which has never been used, has been removed.
- The focus group supported policies that encourage small clustered housing developments; this could be addressed in a similar way to multi-unit housing.
- The focus group supported secondary suites or accessory dwelling units on smaller lots that were closer to the village.
- The Housing Advisory Planning Commission supported additional dwelling units on smaller lots that had adequate groundwater, but were not necessarily closer to the village; land that could be available for increased density may not be close to the already dense village.
- Water sufficiency and proximity to the village and bus route should to be taken into account when assessing increased density on a lot.
- If the land use bylaw and the Official Community Plan are too prescriptive on dwelling type, then, the flexibility to live in a cooperative ownership model is reduced.
- Support was expressed for amenity zoning.

Trustees expressed support for flexibility in zoning, where different sizes of lots have the ability to have various numbers of units within a maximum floor area. They agreed that they would like staff to explore options for amenity policy options. Discussion continued and the following comments were made:

- Incorporating the Conservation Density Bonus/Homeplate Zoning Model, Ecovillage Zoning Model and Eco-Density Bonus outlined in the Housing Toolkit should be explored.
- A presentation by former Islands Trust Chief Administrative Officer Linda Adams was referred to in describing amenity zoning where a policy in the Official Community Plan describes, in broad terms, what kind of amenities the community would like (e.g. more conservation green space); this is important to include to show developers what is desired.
- This meeting is to provide staff with direction for an updated draft of proposed policies that will go through another public comment process.
- It would be good to include a requirement for staff housing – a general statement that can later be refined.
- The policy regarding strata conversion of existing buildings needs further consideration.
- A requirement for water catchment systems for all new builds has been added.
- Whatever is defined as a dwelling is a dwelling, and anything one can get a building permit for is fair game.
- We can include policies that require housing agreements for tiny home clusters.
- For environmental policies, staff has turned to the Green Bylaws Toolkit.

Planner Chadwick commented that all kinds of feedback is welcome as staff creates another iteration of the draft objectives and policies. Comments were made that there will be more opportunity for discussion.

GB-2025-014

It was Moved and Seconded,

that the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee request staff draft policies as discussed at the Feb 27, 2025 meeting for the housing section of the Official Community Plan.

CARRIED

5. ADJOURNMENT

By general consent the meeting was adjourned at 12:34 p.m.

Susan Yates, Chair

Certified Correct:

Carly Bilney, Recorder