Salt Spring Island Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw Amendment Project

What We Heard Report

March 2026



FALL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents a summary of what we heard in the first round of public engagement for the Salt Spring Island Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw Amendment Project.

The **What We Heard Report** serves as a tool to record and document community knowledge and sentiments and to bring the wealth of information provided by the community into the process alongside technical data and assessments for a wholistic picture. The report is a provided as a reference for planning and decision-making.

About the Project

The purpose of the project is to update the Salt Spring Island Official Community Plan (OCP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) to better respond to current and emerging community needs. The project is focused specifically on increasing housing options and housing equity on the island, while remaining consistent with the Islands Trust mandate and policy framework.

The Engagement Process

Engagement provides a structured opportunity for people and organizations with knowledge and lived experience to share and inform the project outcomes. Community members hold understanding of practical realities that can provide insights that technical data and analysis alone can not reveal. Engagement is an opportunity to identify, clarify, and record community priorities and sentiments and to engage in productive dialogue and information sharing.

The **Communications and Engagement Plan** set out the engagement process, identified ways to reach diverse audiences, described equity and accessibility approaches, ethical engagement practices, and provides a roadmap for awareness building and engagement activities. Awareness building is communication of clear information so people understand the project and know how, when, and where they can participate. Engagement provides the opportunities for people to share their perspectives and contribute input that informs the work. The Engagement Plan defines the areas of inquiry – topics that planners, staff, and decision makers need to understand community desires when making decisions. To inform engagement planning, the project team held two 45-minute workshops with Islands Trust staff and one 45-minute engagement discovery meeting with the PAPC to identify and understand local needs, context factors, and key issues to engage on. The

project team listened carefully to input and worked to build an engagement process that was accessible, balanced, and unique to the Salt Spring Island community.

Engagement design was guided by International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) best practices, professional expertise, and input from Islands Trust staff and the Project Advisory Planning Commission (PAPC).

Awareness Building

Ahead of the engagement period, a marketing and communications campaign was used to create public awareness of the role of an OCP and LUB, the project purpose, and to encourage participation by sharing details of upcoming opportunities to participate. Communications and outreach efforts included:

- Designated project webpage
- Social media
- Posters and handouts in community

The awareness building campaign was launched in the weeks leading up to engagement and continued during the engagement period.



Figure 1:Sample social media post from Islands Trust Linkedin

Engagement Activities

The first round of public engagement gathered feedback from the community on key themes that will guide updates to the bylaws. Questions addressed a wide range of topics, including housing needs, land use planning, infrastructure capacity, environmental considerations, and sustainability. This approach ensures that public input will inform all aspects of the Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw development process.

The engagement period held between September 15 and October 24, 2025 combined in-person and digital engagement methods. In-person events were hosted on Salt Spring Island during and outside of typical work hours to reach a wide range of community members. Activities included:

September 15th

- 0530-0700 – Intercept style “tailgate talks” around Ganges Harbour and town centre area
- 0700 – 1200 – Grocery Store Pop Up at Country Grocer (1-2 staff, display boards, activities)
- 1330 – 1830 – Tuesday Farmer Market, Centennial Park (2 staff, display boards, activities)

September 16th

- 0730 – 0930 - Intercept style conversations and post card handout around Ganges Harbour and town centre area
- 0930 1230 – Pop up at the Library (1 staff, display boards, activities)
- 1600 – 1900 – Pop up at the Swimming Pool (1 staff, display boards, activities)

Data collection methods and activities at in-person events (*Figure 2*) included:

- Display boards with selective questions from the online survey.
- Time Capsule activity with Salt Spring Island-shaped paper cutouts and a prompt: *What should Salt Spring Island look like 20 years from now?* Participant responses will remain with the Islands Trust as an option activity to revisit during the next OCP update.



Figure 2. In-person engagement at the library.

An online survey was available throughout the duration of the engagement period, and paper copies were available for pick up and drop off at the library. A QR code link to the survey was posted at in person pop-up events and on posters and post cards handed out to advertise the engagement.

Questions on display boards and in the online survey were open-ended to encourage participants to share their perspectives in their own words. Questions were broad and future-oriented, inviting participants to consider how the Island should address housing needs, guide development, and promote economic and environmental sustainability over the next decade and beyond.

What We Heard So Far

In-person and online feedback from the first round of public engagement reflects a range of perspectives, with some themes emerging, as well as concerns and questions from community members that require further exploration.

Community Wellbeing

Participants described Salt Spring as having a strong sense of community and small-town character, where people look out for one another. This sense of wellbeing was closely tied to shared pride in the island's agricultural heritage and long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship. Participants emphasized the importance of protecting watersheds, forests, and shorelines, noting that conservation and sustainability practices are already embedded in the Island's identity and planning approach and should be maintained. Ganges Village was frequently characterized as an artisan-focused centre with a distinct charm that supports social connection, local livelihoods, and overall community wellbeing. Responses consistently reflected that these were qualities participants felt were important to preserve.

Participants also highlighted the beauty of ocean views, trails, parks, and shoreline access as one of the island's great recreational assets. The walking loops, nature paths, and green corridors were praised as intrinsic to Salt Spring's quality of life. Additionally, some respondents noted that social infrastructure, such as gathering spaces that support social connections, are just as crucial to community wellbeing and economic vitality as physical infrastructure like roads and pipes.

Housing

There was strong consensus among participants that environmental protection and expanded, affordable housing can and must coexist, provided development is guided by responsible, place-based planning. Numerous respondents emphasized that *"Salt Springers want both affordable housing and environmental protection"* and rejected the idea that these goals are mutually exclusive.

Participants widely encouraged building upward within existing developed areas and avoiding outward expansion, to protect sensitive ecosystems and reduce the impacts of sprawl. As one respondent stated, *"Ganges can go UP not out"*. Another added that clustering housing *"...near transit routes... reduces reliance on the automobile..."* and helps maintain affordability.

There was strong support for expanding purpose-built rental, co-operative housing, smaller scale ground-oriented forms, mixed-use buildings (ground floor commercial with residential above) tiny homes, secondary suites, and flexible housing options. Participants repeatedly stressed the need

for residential options "*for a range of incomes*" located close to daily amenities, with many describing the lack of affordable homes as a key barrier for working families, health-care staff, and young residents. Comments highlighted that "*we need affordable housing close to transit or areas where people work*" and urged enabling "*housing for families, workforce housing, co-ops... 2 or 3 floors*"

A very large portion of respondents pointed to the Common Ground Consensus for the Future document as an important foundation and document to inform the OCP update. Many comments emphasized that they felt the document *"reflects community agreement, is aligned with the LTC's priorities, and has been vetted by a planner."* Note: many comments in the survey dataset were repetitious or verbatim, reflecting coordinated inputs rather than distinct individual inputs.

Environment and Sustainability

Participants frequently linked environmental stewardship with economic stability and equity, emphasizing that long-term economic health depends on protecting ecosystems, water, and farmland. Many comments stressed that *"environmental protection must come first"* and that economic development cannot outpace ecological limits, especially water, forests, and sensitive habitats. Respondents noted that the island's economy is inseparable from its natural assets, with several stating that *"the natural environment is why we live here"* and why visitors come.

Participants also encouraged policies that integrate conservation with community planning, with repeated calls for *"nature reserves, not just parks intended for recreation"* and for economic decisions to reflect *"measurable ecological targets—water consumption, energy efficiency, and ecosystem protections tied to carrying capacity"*. Many urged the OCP to support green infrastructure, water conservation, rainwater collection, and clustered development to reduce sprawl and protect ecological corridors.

A large portion of respondents also supported strategies that treat environmental sustainability as the foundation for economic resilience, frequently repeating that *"all of these priorities are interconnected"* and must be planned together. Several noted that the island's long-term economic stability depends on avoiding overdevelopment and respecting its limits: *"Growth has to be contained... that's the point of the legislation and the OCP"*.

Land Use and Settlement

Participants strongly emphasized that land-use decisions in the OCP and LUB must take a coordinated, integrated approach, ensuring that housing, infrastructure capacity, servicing, and community needs are planned together rather than in isolation. Many cautioned against allowing expedited residential growth to override broader requirements, with several noting that development

"must meet measurable…targets" and that policy areas must be aligned to avoid fragmented or contradictory decision-making. Respondents stressed that growth management should be deliberate, paced, and connected to clear planning frameworks rather than driven by development pressure.

Across the engagement, participants showed broad support for directing growth to established village nodes, with Ganges Village overwhelmingly identified as the most viable centre due to existing services, transit access, and walkability. Feedback showed strong, repeated opposition to further development in Channel Ridge, citing limited water availability, distance from services, lack of transit, high fire risk, and general unsuitability for a village designation, with many recommending its removal from the OCP. In contrast, some respondents identified Vesuvius as a more appropriate candidate for a village designation due to proximity to ferry service, transit links, and mixed land uses. Overall, respondents favoured concentrating density in Ganges, and where feasible, Fulford and Vesuvius, to reduce dispersed development, improve efficiency, and ensure growth occurs where infrastructure can support it.

Infrastructure and Servicing

Survey respondents frequently described Salt Spring Island as highly automobile-dependent, noting limited safe or practical options for walking or cycling. Many highlighted the need for improved public transit, calling for better schedules, increased frequency, expanded routes, and greater reliability to strengthen connections between rural areas and Ganges Village. Participants also emphasized the importance of improving walkability, particularly for seniors, by creating interconnected pedestrian routes that allow residents to reach essential services without relying on a vehicle and to better support aging in place. These sentiments were paralleled at in person events, particularly those held at the library and grocery store. Community members emphatically described dangerous roadways and frustration at the lack of connectivity and active mobility on the island.

Feedback also supported revitalizing and modestly densifying Ganges Village to address island-wide transportation challenges and reduce car dependency. Participants felt that well-planned infill and more housing options within Ganges would allow more people to live close to shops, services, and community amenities. Several respondents suggested that bringing more residents into the village core would help rebuild a stronger sense of community connection while easing pressure on transportation infrastructure across the island.

Summary

The emerging themes show strong community support for a holistic and coordinated approach to growth and development. Residents want an approach that meets housing needs, preserves the natural environment, strengthens economic resilience, and acknowledges the limitations of existing infrastructure. This early engagement highlights where respondents share common priorities and where more discussion and collaboration will be needed as the work continues.

Feedback also shows the importance of broad and inclusive participation. These early insights help identify which perspectives were well represented and which groups should be invited more actively into future stages of the planning process.

Broad engagement is recommended in future phases to ensure that the next phases of policy development reflect the full range of community experiences and expectations moving forward. It is recommended that additional supplemental engagement be carried out in Phase 1 to build on what we learned in this initial phase, and that future stages of the process seek to engage a wide range of voices and community perspectives.

APPENDIX A

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