

Choosing a Building Site on your Lot



Islands Trust

Where you build on your property will have an impact on your energy use, water retention and flow, and on the plants and animals that make up your environment. While it is up to you, the property owner, to decide where you choose to site buildings, within the constraints of the Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaws, you will find it useful to consider the environmental impacts of development on a site for both aesthetic and practical reasons.

Consider your land

Plan ahead: walk the land with your contractor and a local biologist to find environmental benefits *and* cost savings. Clustering buildings and planning short driveways helps the environment *and* saves money.

- Identify environmental and archaeological values, including habitat for threatened or endangered species and First Nations sites, *before* planning access, site clearing and design.
- Locate development — your driveway, septic system, house and outbuildings — away from areas with high environmental values like shorelines, streams, rare plants, and wildlife trees. Place natural buffers between the development and sensitive features.
- If possible, cluster development in one area of the property to minimize site disturbance.
- Consider granting a covenant on your property if there are ecologically valuable areas that you want to protect in perpetuity. *Conservation covenants* are registered on title and protect the special aspects of the land that you wish to preserve. They can also give you significant tax benefits.

Think about your trees

Very few old growth cedar or fir remain on the islands. The islands' few Garry Oak trees have both heritage and ecological value. Standing dead trees provide important wildlife habitat; leave them standing unless they pose a hazard. Removing trees can result in increased runoff and stormwater damage to properties below. You can create views by limbing taller trees rather than removing them. If you feel trees must be removed to open up a view, cut trees selectively to create a viewscape framed by trees.

- Minimize tree cutting and soil disturbance. Our islands' trees and soils have ecological value and are important to birds and wildlife.
- Are there any eagle, heron or other raptor nests on your property? These nest trees are protected by B. C. government legislation. Section 34 of the BC Wildlife Act prohibits interference with nesting trees of raptors (including bald eagles, ospreys and peregrine falcons) whether or not the nests are active.

Safe water is essential

Good water management means capturing winter rains to recharge groundwater supplies, lakes and ponds. Forested slopes, fractured bedrock, and deep organic soils hold moisture. Bare rock

and pavement do not. Ensure sufficient topsoil remains on the property and that soil is not left compacted after construction.

Plan stormwater retention ponds, drainage swales and wetlands to retain stormwater on site, and maintain existing drainage patterns.

- Observe the way water flows over your property and design your landscaping and development to promote conservation.
- Plan to store rainwater on site by constructing a cistern, pond or wetland.
- Ensure your drinking water is not contaminated by a malfunctioning septic system, phosphorus release from soil disturbance, runoff and erosion, or fuel and chemical spills. Design your project to minimize risks to water supplies.
- If your property has a stream or wetland, protect trees and vegetation near the water.
- For oceanfront property, permits are required to construct docks, boat ramps and breakwaters or to place fill. Plan to site buildings well back from the high water mark, and to retain native trees and vegetation near the ocean. Consider the impacts of heavy winter storms when siting buildings or removing or planting trees or other vegetation.

Landscape makes a difference

Avoid establishing non-native plants that might spread into and alter our natural ecosystems. The settlers who brought gorse and broom to the islands simply admired their beauty and had no idea they might one day become a hated pest – many garden flowers today are capable of the same kind of damage if we're not careful.

If turf is to be installed, reduce the area as much as possible. Consider using ground cover other than turf grass which requires summer watering. Pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers decrease the biological diversity of the soil and are counter-productive to a healthy landscape. Many plant problems can be addressed by feeding the soil with organic material such as compost.

- Landscape with native, drought hardy vegetation rather than lawns and water-demanding ornamentals.
- Minimize impervious surfaces and plan to use permeable paving rather than conventional asphalt or concrete.
- Avoid the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers



Islands Trust

Preserving **island** communities, culture and environment

Victoria Office

200-1627 Fort Street
Victoria BC V8R 1H8
Telephone 250.405.5151

Salt Spring Office

1-500 Lower Ganges Road
Salt Spring Island BC V8K 2N8
Telephone 250.537.9144

Northern Office

700 North Road
Gabriola Island BC V0R 1X3
Telephone 250.247.2063

www.islandstrust.bc.ca