

Options for Affordable Housing:
New Solutions to the Housing Crisis in the
Islands Trust Area

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Why undertake affordable housing initiatives?

The communities within the Islands Trust area present a unique circumstance in the discussion of affordable housing initiatives. Unlike urban centers where the majority of such developments are located, the islands do not experience the extensive homelessness or large special needs populations that many cities do. Although the islands are more characteristic of typical rural communities, they are unique in possessing high property values, a generally higher median population age, and significant limits on current and future development.

These attributes of the Trust area result in communities that are often less diverse and less accessible than would be desired. The Islands Trust Policy Statement dictates that we should “address the community’s current and projected housing requirements (5.8.8)” and states that “people of differing age groups and income levels should continue to have the opportunity to reside in island communities (5.0).”

The islands generally possess a market appeal that serves to maintain high property values, which can be attributed to their accessibility to urban centres, among other factors. Combined with a lack of rental housing, this often renders them inaccessible to low-income families and individuals. Concerns have been raised about the resulting situation by those interested in the creation of balanced and inclusive communities, as well as those who see that local service workers and other low-income earners have trouble procuring housing to fit their needs.

Who defines Affordable?

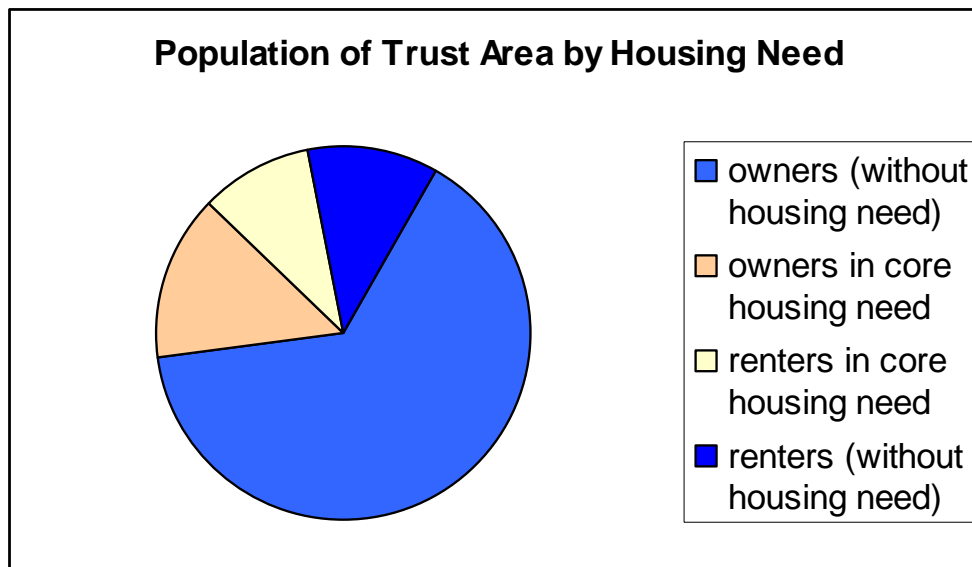
- ④ The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation define housing affordability as a situation where no more than 30% of gross household income is spent on housing. This standard of approximately 30% is common to virtually all definitions of affordable housing, including rentals and home ownership.
- ④ A household is considered in core housing need “if they cannot find somewhere to live that is in reasonably good condition and is big enough for their household without spending more than 30% of their income.”
- ④ The target population for affordable housing providers is generally those individuals earning 80% or less of the area median income. According to one source, “the private building industry cannot provide housing affordable for households earning below this threshold.”¹
- ④ According to the 2001 Census, over 2600 households within the Trust area spend more than 30% of gross income on housing costs. This equates to approximately 25% of all island households.²

An overview of island demographics

The Islands Trust area is home to approximately 23,000 residents in over 10,000 dwellings. Demographics on each island are unique and reflective of individual island cultures³; however, overall trends in housing needs and provision can be drawn for the trust area as a whole.

Of the total occupied dwellings captured in the 2001 census, 21% were rental households as opposed to the majority (79%) of owned households. Some islands, such as Denman and Hornby, have relatively higher percentages of renters, but tenancy rates generally fall between 20% and 30%. Of total tenant households, approximately 46% are paying more than 30% of their gross household incomes for rent (see chart “Percentage of residents in core housing need” on next page). For the purposes of this discussion, we will assume that these households do not have access to more affordable housing that meets their needs: thus, this segment of the population can be considered as experiencing core housing need.

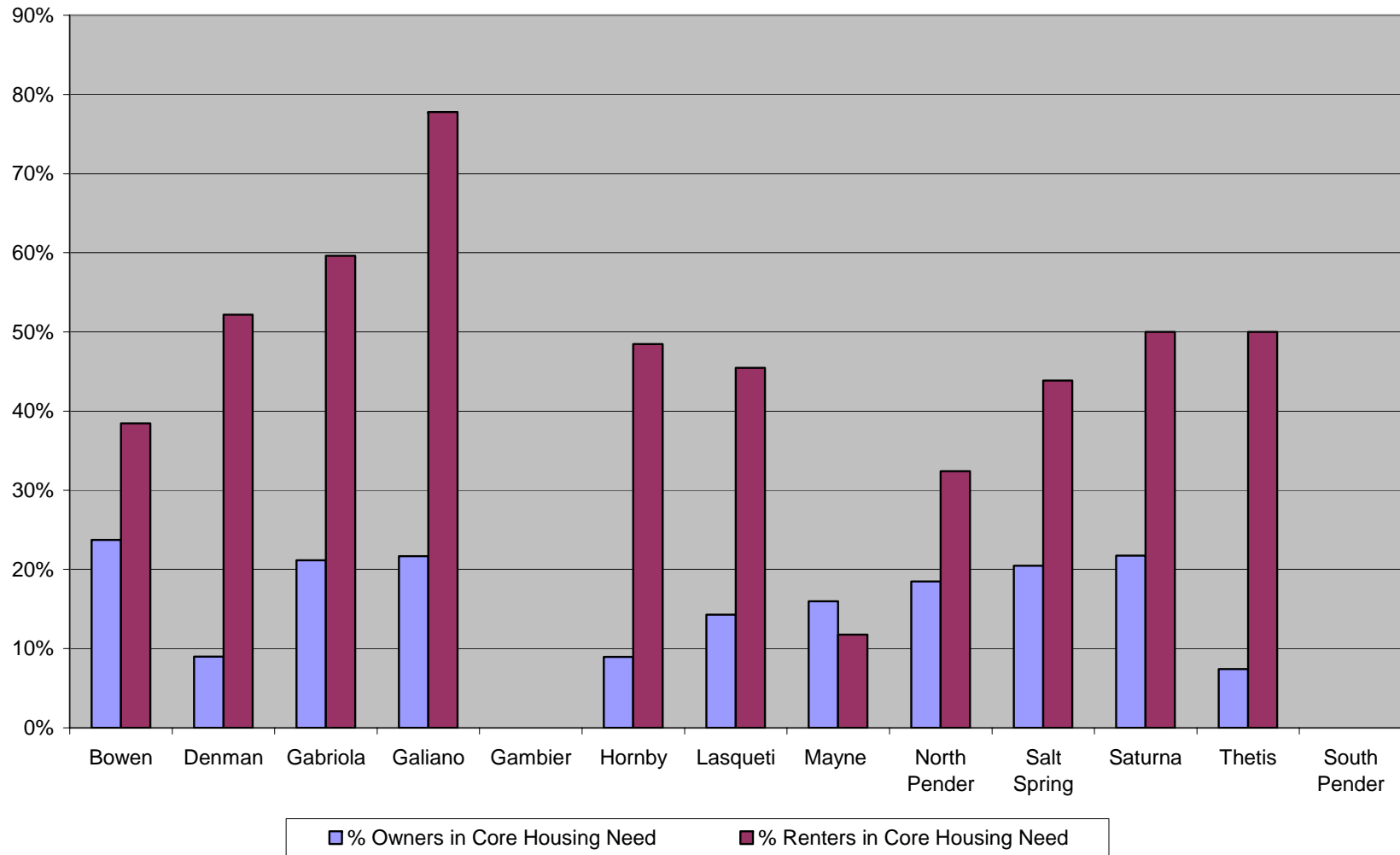
Similarly, 19% of owned houses pay over 30% of income for housing costs or are in “core housing need.” A breakdown of trust area households is illustrated in the following graph.



How can we address the lack of affordable housing?

In the process of addressing affordable housing, a number of tools have been developed by communities throughout North America. They range from tax shifts and subsidies to land trusts and co-housing. While many of these tools are available to the Islands Trust, others require the input, leadership, or assistance of a number of other key players, such as the provincial government, crown corporations, non-governmental organizations, and/or private members of the community.

Percentage of residents in core housing need



*Data for Gambier and South Pender Island has been suppressed due to small sample size

Each island within the trust area poses a unique challenge in the provision of affordable housing, so any number of these tools may be utilized in a future which includes adequate and affordable housing for all members of the island communities. A brief description of some of the major approaches to affordable housing follows.

Affordable Housing Complexes

Probably the most familiar context for affordable housing, municipal and non-profit housing complexes offer rental units to low-income individuals, families, and special needs populations. Rents are often geared to income levels, and units are awarded on the basis of need. National occupancy standards dictate the size and type of units suitable for a given household: between one and two people are to be housed per bedroom, with couples in one room, and dependants not sharing a bedroom with a parent or opposite sex sibling.⁴ These types of guidelines determine who is eligible to apply for a given type of housing.

Many non-profit agencies provide housing to specific populations through affordable housing complexes. Developments geared toward aboriginal housing, single-parent families, or women escaping abusive relationships are all examples of population-specific housing. On the islands, accommodation for seniors is provided in certain communities and has, in some cases, included housing agreements designed to maintain affordability of units.

Affordable housing complexes require intensive management on the part of the housing provider, and are often overburdened with applications from qualified, high-need applicants. They are traditionally located in high density urban areas, where access to amenities, public transit, and schools is readily available, providing a social context that allows residents to fulfill day to day obligations without a car. An urban setting also allows households to secure non-housing related support, such as childcare, employment and personal counseling, and education.

The infrastructure which supports the social as well as physical needs of low-income and special needs residents in the city is not available in the rural communities of the islands, raising many questions as to the suitability of such developments within the Trust area. In addition, there is no infrastructure within the Islands Trust to support the initiation and management of affordable housing complexes. Islands lying within the Capital Regional District's jurisdiction, however, may have the benefit of administration and support from CRD housing programs. The CRD is able and apparently willing to undertake the administration and management of affordable housing projects located on these islands, although they are not able to generate new projects themselves. If a non-profit or other non-governmental organization were to undertake a large scale complex of this nature, many steps should be taken to ensure that the appropriate social and physical context was selected for its location.

Co-op, Mutual, and Cohousing

Differentiation between these labels is somewhat vague, and definitions shift from source to source. Generally, the term co-op housing is the most familiar, and is applied broadly to groups of citizens who pool money and resources to procure land, buildings, subsidies, etc. in order to provide housing for themselves and other prospective co-op members. In some cases co-op housing may be formed under the umbrella of non-profit organizations which cater to the given population in need of housing. According to one source, a more narrow definition of co-op housing allows “a number of people to pool their meager (or substantial) resources and own a house collectively.”⁵

Conversely, co-housing refers to a co-operative in which members purchase a parcel of land collectively, but each member owns their own housing unit on that land. A typical example of co-housing would include a community house, kitchen, meeting rooms or other shared central resources and no interior streets. Co-housing can be regarded as a type of intentional community, in which members hope to form relationships that extend beyond mutual economic support. A group on Denman Island is currently working on proposals for a co-housing project which closely mirrors these criteria.

The issues which lead to core housing need, however, often preclude the ability for one to invest capital into a project such as cohousing. Renters are faced with the challenge of obtaining housing which meets their needs on incomes which are usually insufficient to allow for the purchase of a home. In addition, renters in the Trust area are met with the added challenge of finding accommodation which is available year-round at a reasonable monthly rate (the issues of tourism and seasonal accommodation play a key role in the housing crisis on the islands, and will be explored in further detail later.)

In the United States, a number of Mutual Housing Associations (MHAs) have been formed to provide renters with stable, affordable housing. They are non-profit organizations providing housing to low-/middle-income members of the community, and may procure funding from any number of sources. Each resident pays one third of their income in rent, and is entitled to a life-long lease and a stake in decision making. Similar situations may exist in Canada, operating under different titles but providing the same services.

The types of housing discussed here are, for the most part, grassroots and community-based initiatives. British Columbia’s Strategy for Affordable Housing defines an equity co-operative as “a type of housing co-operative that is completely funded by its member residents, without any government assistance.”⁶ Of all the housing strategies to be discussed, these provide the greatest level of autonomy to residents next to private home ownership; even in the event of outside funding, decisions affecting residents are made by residents, lending a sense of self-sufficiency and pride in the home.

Land Banks and Community Land Trusts

In many cases, local government agencies are able to take a proactive role in the provision of affordable housing in their community. Instead of waiting for projects to be generated by the community, agencies can provide land, capital, and/or resources towards the creation of affordable housing projects. A case in point would be the formation of land banks or land trusts which accumulate land (or cash for the purchase of land) that will ultimately be used for the construction of new, affordable housing units.

The specifics of land banks and their administration vary from place to place, and numerous models apply. Generally, the capital or land is acquired through additional taxation, or regulatory tools associated with land use planning. Land or cash in lieu may be required of developers when applying for new development, redevelopment, subdivision, rezoning, etc.; or, provision of density bonuses may be exchanged for voluntary donation to the land bank.

The Islands Trust already has the legislative capacity to introduce the provision of density bonuses in exchange for donation to a land bank, or the provision of on-site affordable housing units. This capacity has been used on Saltspring Island in the form of affordable housing for seniors, and may be applied in a number of other situations. In order to pursue regulations such as mandatory donation with subdivision, legislative changes must be granted at the level of the provincial government.

Nevertheless, current provincial legislation regarding parks allows Regional Districts to receive similar land donations (or cash in lieu) for parks upon subdivision.⁷ There is also legislation allowing mandatory land donation for schools, although the Islands Trust has not taken advantage of this ability up to date. These two pieces of legislation have created a template for future bills which may introduce donations for affordable housing and other public amenities, thereby rendering the creation of land banks or trusts a more valid and compelling option for the future of affordable housing.

This has already been the case in other areas. In Washington State, a bill has been enacted applying exclusively to San Juan County that will permit taxation for the support of affordable housing. Residents of the San Juan Islands are now able to vote on the taxation of real property throughout the county, with up to a .5% tax on the purchase price of property sales to be earmarked for affordable housing. According to one report “this local tax source has proven effective in the County’s Land Bank program... through which hundreds of acres have been preserved as resource lands, critical habitat, and open space with development restrictions.”⁸

Community land trusts operate in a similar manner as land banks, although they are generally non-profit, non-governmental organizations that emerge from within the community. Like a land bank, acquired land may be earmarked for affordable

housing, ecosystem preservation, agricultural or resource use, etc. For example, in Boulder, Colorado, an organization called Wrenn is one of many that own land on which affordable homes are built for sale.⁹ Other land trusts may own land and lease homes for renewable periods of 99 years. The goal of the land trust is often to create permanently affordable housing, while allowing residents to build equity. Thus, formulas for resale value and other clauses can be written into the lease.

Many examples of community land trusts closer to home are available as well. On Cortez Island an organization called Linnea Farm Society includes affordable housing in its objectives; the San Juan Islands are also home to a number of community lands trusts. The Lopez Community Land Trust, OPAL Community Land Trust, and San Juan Community Home Trust all aim to provide housing for low- or moderate income residents of San Juan County. Although each has its own unique mandate, they also seek to provide stability and economic diversity within their communities. The Lopez Community Land Trust has proved quite successful, completed three housing projects for a total of 22 affordable homes within the small village core of the island. The OPAL Community Land Trust on Orcas Island has also experienced considerable success, creating 50 new homes on three main sites, purchasing existing homes on separate lots to ensure long-term affordability, and developing an apartment/office complex in four small buildings which preserves the heritage nature of the lot.

The experiences of these nearby land trusts will be invaluable in the formulation of plans for affordable housing, should community land trusts emerge within the Trust area (even now, an organization on Saltspring Island is working towards this goal). The variety of approaches used, from rural cluster housing to mixed use development, also provides models for strategies that could be implemented in the Trust area.

Planning Tools

Whereas affordable housing initiatives are generally land, capital, and labour intensive, other options are available to create affordable living spaces through slight density increases across a broad range of privately held properties. A number of tools exist that can encourage the creation of affordable housing through regulations and zoning, which enables land owners and residents to house additional households within their residential parcel.

Allowing increased density on rural and residential parcels across the trust area does raise concerns about the nature of island communities, the ability of the islands to support larger populations, and the resultant increase in total overall density before buildout is reached. On the other hand, the trends of raising property values, off-island purchases of second homes, vacation rentals, etc. have considerably decreased the potential housing stock for permanent, on-island residents; particularly those with low-incomes, as illustrated in the overview of island demographics.

The following list of possible zoning changes illustrates the diversity of accommodation types that could be provided through this approach:

- ④ Permit full-time secondary suites in residential zoning areas
- ④ Permit rental of secondary cottages as full-time residences, with rent controls
- ④ Density bonuses on residential zoning for provision of low-cost accommodation (i.e. permit duplex in lieu of single family home)
- ④ Zone for cluster housing in rural residential areas (small nodes of single family dwellings/low density attached housing on large rural parcels)
- ④ Permit cottage housing (i.e. measure density by floor space ratio rather than number of dwellings)
- ④ Zone for mixed commercial/residential developments

Secondary suites/cottages

Perhaps the most readily available, and inexpensive, source of rental housing stock would be that created within existing buildings and residences on private land throughout the islands. As in larger or more urban communities (where legalization of suites is becoming more popular), secondary suites, garden suites, garage apartments, and the like are a way to increase human density without increasing development pressure on the land or requiring additional infrastructure. As opposed to large scale developments, stratas, and other mainstream forms of affordable housing, secondary suites do little to change the character of residential neighborhoods. In fact, some studies suggest that renters in secondary suites hold similar values and lifestyles to the residences' owners. Suites are also created and maintained at the discretion of homeowners, and should therefore experience minimal public opposition (or the NIMBY phenomenon) if Local Trust Committees chose to legalize them.

While the ease of legalizing the full time occupancy of secondary suites, cottages, and other variations of private suites may appear as a simple option for affordable housing, the question of whether or not this approach will be successful remains. The demographics of the islands are considerably different from other communities where secondary suites have been used to provide affordable housing.¹⁰ Although homeowners are given the option of renting out existing cottages and suites, some may choose not to for personal reasons, such as a desire for privacy, occasional personal use of space, or preferring to rent on a short term basis. The issue of short term vacation rentals is closely linked with that of affordable and long-term housing in the Trust area; availability and legalization of one type of rental may strongly affect the other. Surveys of vacation rental owners could reveal underlying biases against long-term rentals, but at this point only anecdotal evidence exists to create a link between the two.

Water use also proves a difficult issue when addressing the possibility of increased residential density through any means, including the use of secondary suites and cottages. The supply of freshwater is precarious and an issue of

contention on most islands. Many residents fear that as the islands attract more and more visitors and residents, water tables will plummet and on-island water supplies will be reduced or contaminated. In some areas water levels in wells are already lowering and neighbors are likely to oppose any increase in use, negating the possibility of additional residential density.

For owners of single family residences without existing suites or cottages, the motivation to create affordable housing may also be outweighed by financial disincentives. The cost of creating a legal secondary suite or cottage which meets building codes is considerable; the rent received for an affordable long-term rental unit may take many years to provide a return on such an investment. For this reason, other economic rewards can be created to support the creation of affordable housing through secondary suites. Tax incentives coupled with housing agreements (ensuring affordability of units) are one option which could be pursued through provincial legislation, enticing participation in much the same way that tax reduction under natural areas protection or the forest land reserve currently does. In addition, funding may be procured to provide grants to homeowners who choose to build secondary suites for the provision affordable housing.

The discussion of tax shifts and other financial incentives raises the option of secondary suites from a strictly planning function to a broader regulatory change. In order to implement a program of tax shifts for the creation of private, idiosyncratic affordable housing, changes are required at not only an Islands Trust level, but must include regional district cooperation and legislative changes from the provincial government.

Density Bonuses

A tool that does lie in the hands of the Islands Trust is that of awarding density bonuses for the provision of affordable housing (or other community amenities): local governments in BC, including the Trust, have been granted legislative authority for this task. A very low cost alternative, this option could be easily implemented by Local Trust Committees on a case by case basis. It also serves to provide developers with additional revenue through increased density, thus providing its own incentive and not requiring additional tax breaks. Its one major drawback, however, is the localized nature of the resulting increase in density. The role of larger developments in island communities is questionable, and it is expected that considerable resident opposition could be mounted against proposals for multifamily dwellings in which only a portion of units were to provide affordable housing.

While density bonuses are generally associated with large scale developments, their use could be considered for smaller scale applications as well. For example, a small residential lot that would normally accommodate a single family dwelling may be permitted to house a duplex or triplex under the same size and square footage limitations for the lot. In much the same way as secondary suites, this

option allows a number of households to be housed on a single lot without creating an additional footprint on the land; it increases affordability of housing as the cost of land is shared between households; it may, in fact, help to reduce sprawl by encouraging a form of infill suitable to the rural villages of the islands. As opposed to secondary suites, it also allows residents to build equity through small-scale home ownership if units are provided for non-market purchase.

Non-market purchase ensures that units are provided to residents in need of affordable housing, rather than being purchased as vacation homes or having their value increase on the market. Housing agreements can be placed on any development of this type to ensure long-term affordability of units, and will be discussed in greater detail as a tool for affordable housing.

Cluster and Cottage Housing

One of the key challenges to providing affordable housing in the Trust area is the nature of island land and zoning. The rural aspect of island geography is a valued and integral part of the islands' life and communities. It also helps to protect the rare and fragile ecosystems found on the gulf islands, which are becoming all the more valuable as development pressures eradicate similar ecosystems in surrounding areas on the mainland and Vancouver Island.

As communities, conservationists, and the trust work to protect undeveloped areas on the islands, and lot sizes remain relatively large, land cost have risen dramatically due to increased demand. Individuals who may be able to afford a modest sized house and lot are unable to access housing within their price range because of a lack of options. In order to increase diversity in the housing market and provide options to households with steady, low- to moderate incomes, the Trust may consider innovative zoning and land use approaches.

For example, subdivision of large rural parcels into individual lots of affordable size may be contrary to official community plans, and contribute to sprawl and the destruction of undisturbed tracts of forest, agricultural land, or open spaces used by the community. In order to accommodate greater numbers of people at a more affordable price on this land, cluster housing may offer an alternative to subdivision. A rural parcel that normally permits a limited number of single family dwellings could be allowed to house additional families in a number of clustered, detached dwellings. Conversely, low-density attached dwellings may be scattered in micro-villages over a parcel.

These options have been examined in the context of rural housing in North Cowichan, and individual coops and cohousing arrangements already mimic this style of planning. If Local Trust Committees were to provide for cluster style housing within their OCPs, perhaps more proposals for cohousing type arrangements would be generated. It would also present a viable option for the creation of affordable housing through land trusts, and may even entice private

developers to enter into the affordable housing market rather than going through the processes of subdivision and rezoning.

To a certain extent, cluster housing can be considered a density bonus as it will ideally allow more dwellings per lot than traditional zoning. On the other hand, density may be measured in a different way to house more people without necessarily creating more or larger dwellings. Cottage housing would allow Local Trust Committees to determine density based on maximum square footage per lot, without limiting the number of individual dwellings. Instead of allowing large “trophy” houses to be built, a number of smaller dwellings may be accommodated within the same or less total square footage, creating modest, affordable housing for local residents. Similarly, attached housing can be treated as a single family dwelling, with a number of households occupying one building of similar size to comparable single family dwellings. The only quantitative change to regulations would be the approval of multiple kitchens within the building, while limiting its maximum square footage.

Of course, to avoid exploitation and an explosion in rural densities, housing agreements and other limitations should be placed on these and other affordable housing solutions. Rather than providing smaller, cheaper vacation accommodation and second homes, or indirectly allowing gated communities to emerge, these tools are designed to be inclusive and affordable; our aim is to increase diversity within the community. A brief explanation of housing agreements follows.

Housing Agreements

Housing agreements are a tool which allows local governments to ensure that development which is intended for a specific housing population, in this case those in core housing need, remains permanently available to that population (instead of returning to the general market). They are, in effect, a type of covenant which is placed on the title of a property, and the statutes of the agreement are binding to current and future owners of the land.

Section 905 of the Local Government Act awards local governments, including Local Trust Committees, the power to enter into housing agreements for the purposes of affordable and special needs housing. These agreements may specify the occupancy of housing units regarding form of tenure (e.g. rental or leasehold), the class of person to which the housing is available (e.g. seniors or special needs), administration of the units, and price of housing. The agreement may also determine the rate at which rental, lease, sale and share prices increase over time, according to a formula or predetermined levels.¹¹

A new bylaw must be passed specific to each agreement, and they are limited in that they may not vary the use or density determined by existing bylaws. Therefore, in order to make housing agreements a useful and relevant tool in a strategy for affordable housing, amendments to OCPs and Land Use Bylaws

must allow for specific cases in which affordable housing may receive special consideration.

Nevertheless, housing agreements offer a broad, flexible, and powerful tool in determining availability of affordable housing. Rather than acting as a planning tool, they are a support for whatever strategy is undertaken by Local Trust Committees, from density bonuses to the creation of a land trust. An approach to the housing crisis which utilizes strategic planning and an emphasis on the creation of affordable housing will enable and encourage the development of relevant solutions.

Discussion

Up to this point we have discussed some of the major tools in the provision of affordable housing throughout North America, and how these tools might apply to the Trust area. At this point we will readdress some of the key issues which exist on the islands, and evaluate our current options in light of the unique situation faced by the Islands Trust.

Overview of Issues

The islands of the Trust area are caught between the development pressures caused by increased visitor and residential demand, limits imposed on growth by regulatory bodies such as the Trust, and finite resources with which to support their burgeoning populations. There is no need at this point to provide an explanation for the situation of the gulf islands, yet island communities are faced with increasingly difficult decisions as to how to mitigate these pressures.

The Housing Market

For many, the status quo represents an ideal that should be preserved as long as possible; as long-term residents seek to maintain peaceful and integrated communities, different ideals emerge. Many are opposed to short-term rental of private residences to tourists and visitors, while others see rentals as a way to maintain their lifestyles on islands where incomes are low and economic diversity lacking. Both owners of vacation rentals and those who provide services to renters benefit from the additional money infused into the economy by outsiders. However, low-income residents of the islands may find their ability to procure long-term rental accommodation is compromised by the high rates which owners can charge tourists during the summer months. Nine or ten month leases are common, and renters are faced with the instability of moving several times a year, or being unable to procure accommodation during the summer at all.

This situation is very specific to low- and middle income earners on the islands, as most are unable to afford a home due to the high cost of building and property. As illustrated in the section “An overview of island demographics,” approximately 25% of islanders are in core housing need, and a huge proportion

of renters fall in this category. So the question emerges: does this population require the provision of stable, affordable rental housing? Or does it reflect a larger affordability issue, which requires that more affordable homes are available for sale?

These questions cannot be answered through conjecture, but require community consultation and the performance of housing needs assessments, discussed later. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the ability of all segments of the population to gain equity for their investments, regardless of their income levels. The trend of increasing property values on the islands creates a disparity between those who can afford homes and those who cannot, rendering these communities microcosmic reflections of societal trends separating the rich and the poor. Long-range plans for the Trust area must take into account these market trends, and the decreasing ability of even current residents to maintain homes while land values and taxes skyrocket.

Communities

Preservation of authentic, rural communities is also an issue to be considered, which is closely tied to increased demand and demographic changes. Residents who choose to make the islands their home often share values, emphasizing close-knit communities and peaceful rural lifestyles. These values can be threatened by any number of factors, including the transient nature of vacation rentals, incomplete communities with many unoccupied vacation homes, and homogenous populations excluding youths, young families, and workers in a variety of fields.

Issues of density become less clear when discussing the need for heterogeneous, full-time populations to sustain vibrant communities. Although some islands are approaching “buildout,” the point when further subdivision and development is prohibited according to current bylaws, they are lacking year-round populations and amenities to support a sense of community. In order to attract diversity to the islands, and especially to provide an environment for families with children, affordability needs to increase; and because the Trust has no control over market factors, other options for housing these populations must be explored.

Resources

Different approaches to density have and will be explored in this paper, which may grant flexibility to development limits without violating the Islands Trust’s mandate to “preserve and protect the Trust area.”¹² The footprint of development on the land and environment may be reduced through innovative approaches to zoning and building; however, there are certain resources on the islands which are scarce and may be overburdened even at current population levels.

While forest cover, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and groundwater recharge areas may ideally be preserved at current levels, potable water itself continues to be an issue of contention on the islands. As discussed earlier, many neighborhoods may oppose innovative zoning tools and the use of moderate density increases (such as secondary suites and cottages) based on the increased pressure these changes would place on local ground water supplies. This is a valid concern, and serves to remind us of the fragile nature of island ecosystems and the finite amount of exploitation which they can support.

Overview of Options

In response to these major issues, this paper has roughly outlined some of the major directions which can be taken for the creation, provision, and protection of affordable housing in the Trust area. To recap, these include:

- ④ Affordable housing complexes;
- ④ Coop, Mutual, and Co-housing;
- ④ Land Banks and Community Land Trusts;
- ④ Secondary Suites/Cottages;
- ④ Density Bonuses;
- ④ Cluster and Cottage Housing;
- ④ Other zoning changes; and
- ④ The use of housing agreements.

While many of the options may not be immediately feasible for the Trust, they are not mutually exclusive either. Making small changes such as legalizing secondary suites and dwellings can have many fringe benefits: it can set a precedent in the use of housing agreements, make room for the enactment of larger changes, and encourage the more efficient use of local resources as they are shared between more people. Zoning changes can also serve as an interim measure while legislative changes are sought for the creation of land banks and selective tax shifts.

In consideration of the Islands Trust's mandate and functions, it seems unreasonable to expect that this organization - primarily focused on land-use issues - should begin to address social concerns such as affordable housing on a large scale. However, the Trust does serve as the most immediate form of local government for most of the Trust area, and may be the only party in a position to facilitate the changes necessary for affordable housing to be put in place. The Trust is in the unique situation of having contact with the community and the provincial government. At the same time, it lacks the funding, tax base, or staff resources to undertake affordable housing initiatives on its own, at least using the models implemented by other rural municipalities.

In light of the unique situation of the Trust, we must also ask what courses of action might be appropriate to the nature of island communities. Some of the options outlined above are methods used, as mentioned, largely in urban centres. Whether or not the Trust is able to provide capital, or some other

organization may undertake the implementation of a large-scale housing project, such projects may or may not be beneficial to the overall community of an island. Community consultation may gauge resident support for any given development, but further research must be undertaken for each isolated community to truly understand how housing issues may best be addressed.

Next Steps

From this point forward, the Islands Trust and Local Trust Committees may undertake a number of initiatives in order to proactively support affordable housing in island communities. These steps may be broken down into major groups of actions that will lead to further developments on the housing front.

First, the aforementioned community consultation must take place in order to ensure that development is appropriately geared towards individual communities, and that residents will support the actions that are undertaken. This consultation may take a number of forms, including standard community information meetings, discussion forums, working groups, and housing-specific committees. Hornby Island, for example, has formed a committee of volunteers that are exploring possibilities for affordable housing on their island.

More formal measures could also employ housing needs assessments and surveys, designed to evaluate the existing need for housing within the community, and the possible market for affordable housing that may be created. Surveys could also gauge the interest from possible housing providers, such as polling residents to ascertain to what extent private housing stock may be created through the legalization of secondary suites.

Another level of changes the Trust can pursue as a whole lie in the legislation that is necessary for certain policies to be put in place. Trust Council can advocate for legislation that permits mandatory land donation for affordable housing purposes, as discussed earlier, which could be placed in a land bank or used by local land trusts.

The Trust may also advocate for changes to tax structures, which would allow incentives to be put in place for the provision of affordable housing by property owners and developers. Both the legislative changes and taxation structures discussed could be modeled after existing programs, such as natural area protection tax exemptions, and mandatory park donations for new subdivisions. Effectively, these existing programs and legislation create a template which should ease the challenge of obtaining cooperation from the provincial and other levels of government.

Lastly, individual Local Trust Committees can begin to make changes in the Official Community Plans and Land Use Bylaws which will permit a greater range of housing options to develop on the islands. For example, current bylaws

prohibit the use of secondary suites as a separate dwelling unit, or the full-time use of accessory cottages. Local Trust Committees may decide that this untapped stock of housing may prove valuable to the community, if legalized with certain restrictions (such as the use of housing agreements to ensure affordability).

On a larger scale, Official Community Plans may begin to make provisions for more flexible or alternative forms of land use that improve affordability. At this point, the creation of cohousing or cooperative communities is rendered very difficult by restrictive land-use bylaws. These bylaws tend to support the traditional single-family home, which remains financially inaccessible to the populations we are trying to address in this discussion. LTC's should review their bylaws in an effort to make innovative choices in land-use planning, that will serve the needs of the community without violating the Trust's preserve and protect mandate.

Conclusion

In closing, this paper was designed to discuss the need for affordable housing in the Trust area, and to provide a review of the options that may be available in pursuance of this goal. Although a discussion of this nature is unable to address the complexity and barriers to implementing those options, it does provide some vision for where the Trust *may* choose to go in the future.

Most importantly, this report may serve as a focal point for the exploration of housing that takes place in the future. Individual communities and Local Trust Committees may be able to borrow from each others experiences, and reference the same basic ideas that were initially presented here. It is my recommendation that a database be created within the Trust offices to track further research and activities related to affordable housing, so that the efforts of individual islands can be coordinated for their mutual benefit.

¹ "Housing Trust Funds: their nature, applicability and potential in Canada." Housing Affordability and Finance Series, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

² Derived from: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Islands Trust Area

³ See Appendix 1: Trust area demographic tables

⁴ Making Room: the human face of housing affordability in BC's capital region, October 2003, released by the Community Council.

⁵ "Affordable Housing" by Mark Fearer, The Boulder Weekly, Nov. 2, 1995

⁶ British Columbia's Strategy for Affordable Housing, Province of British Columbia

⁷ Park donation is required in specific cases of subdivision, with guidelines such as number and size of lots determining when such donations are required.

⁸ San Juan County, Washington, USA; Long Range Planning, Affordable Housing

⁹ "Affordable Housing" by Mark Fearer, The Boulder Weekly, Nov. 2, 1995

¹⁰ See The Cochrane, Alberta, Community-Based Affordable Housing Initiative, Planning and Engineering Services Department, Town of Cochrane, Alberta

¹¹ An example of a housing agreement implemented by the Trust is attached as Appendix 2

¹² Islands Trust Policy Statement, Part 1