

Section 14

REGIONAL CONTEXT STATEMENT

Introduction

A Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) for the Capital Regional District was approved by the CRD Board in August, 2003.

Provincial legislation requires that each Capital Regional District member municipality prepare, as part of its Official Community Plan (OCP), a Regional Context Statement which illustrates the policy links between the OCP and the RGS.

The RGS is divided into sub-strategies under the following headings:

Managing Balance and Growth

1. Keep Urban Settlement Compact
2. Protect the Integrity of Rural Communities

Environment and Resources

3. Protect Regional Green and Blue Space
4. Manage Natural Resources and the Environment Sustainably

Housing and Community

5. Build Complete Communities
6. Improve Housing Affordability

Transportation

7. Increase Transportation Choice

Economic Development

8. Strengthen the Regional Economy

Local Context

The District of Central Saanich was incorporated as a municipality in 1950. Central Saanich separated from the Municipality of Saanich to protect its rural heritage. The creation of the Agricultural Land Reserve in 1972 assisted in maintaining the agricultural character of the municipality. Approximately 65% of the District is designated ALR.

Central Saanich has four main areas for urban settlement (residential, commercial and/or industrial): Brentwood Bay, Keating Industrial Area, Saanichton and Tanner Ridge. Most of the development in these areas occurred prior to 1990. At this time, there are few developable tracts of land left in the District. New residential development is usually in the form of residential infill and densification by subdivision or rezoning. There is significant light industrial/business land that may be developed when the Butler Brothers' gravel extraction operation is completed. Essentially, the existence of the Agricultural Land Reserve limits growth and development within the District.

Specific RGS Strategic Directions

Managing and Balancing Growth

1. Keep Urban Settlement Compact

The OCP Schedule A Land Use Plan map designates four Residential-Settlement Areas (Brentwood Bay, Tanner Ridge, Saanichton and Lochside Drive) which serve as the District's urban containment boundaries. The Residential-Settlement Areas are consistent with the Regional Urban Containment and Servicing Policy Area indicated on Map 3 (Growth Management Concept Plan) in the Regional Growth Strategy. These areas are serviced and developed for a mixture of residential, commercial and institutional uses.

The OCP suggests that residential growth should not exceed one percent annually (approximately 70 new residential units per year), nor should residential growth exceed the capacity of the Unified Treatment Plan. The OCP further defines low or gradual growth in Section 1: gradual, low impact growth is supported provided it is at a rate which does not place an undue burden on the existing utility infrastructure and community services, and will not result in substantial increases in the municipal tax rate. Infilling of existing residential areas (to about 95 percent of development potential) will be required prior to extension of services for residential purposes to undeveloped areas.

In order to maintain the integrity of this urban containment area, the District is guided by Section 4.2.2. (Policy 1) of the OCP which states that the major portion of residential and commercial growth shall be confined to the Residential-Settlement Areas. It is recognized that more intensive land use and higher overall densities may be needed in the Residential-Settlement Areas to maintain the containment boundaries. Municipal Council has displayed a willingness to amend OCP and zoning regulations to allow increased densities and a variety of housing options. Further to this, Section 11 states that as a general principle, water and sanitary services will be available in areas designated as Residential-Settlement Area and Industrial on Schedule A, Land Use Plan.

The Residential-Settlement Areas are subject to zoning and permit guidelines that encourage modest growth, redevelopment, minor subdivisions, infill housing and multifamily housing options. The District has two local area plans, the Brentwood Bay Area Plan and the Saanichton/Keating Ridge Area Plan. These plans provide comprehensive land use guidelines on local land use issues, area preservation and development densities policies that are specific to the community. The OCP states that a more specific settlement containment boundary will be considered at the area planning level (sec. 4.2.2.).

2. Protect the Integrity of Rural Communities

The residents of Central Saanich have expressed strong support for preserving the agricultural and rural land, which is reinforced by the OCP. Sixty-five percent of the land base in this District is part of the Agricultural Land Reserve, which is recognized on the Central Saanich Community Plan,

Schedule A Land Use Plan map. The designated agricultural land is consistent with the Renewable Resource Lands Policy Area (Map 3, Growth Management Concept Plan) found in the Regional Growth Strategy.

A key objective of the OCP is to ensure the sustainability and economic viability of the District's agricultural community as an integral part of farming on the Saanich Peninsula. There are policies in place that support: drainage, stormwater management and irrigation projects that improve farm productivity; farm gate marketing; and new crops. The District does not extend urban services such as the sewer and water system into the rural or agricultural areas. Additionally, developable land abutting ALR land is to include a buffer strip. The District supports the Peninsula Agricultural Commission in addressing farm issues, landowner conflict and to implement the objectives of the "Agricultural Strategy for the Saanich Peninsula" (1997).

The preservation of agricultural land is demonstrated through support of the Agricultural Land Commission's objective to retain agricultural parcels of land in as large parcels as possible. In the event of any significant changes to the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve legislation, the District intends to maintain and protect those areas designated in the OCP as agricultural land. The OCP also states that the designated rural lands are for rural purposes rather than being considered as a reserve for future residential, commercial or industrial purposes (sec. 3.3.2).

The Capital Green Lands are recognized as Parks and Open Space on Schedule B map Parks and Open Space Plan. These are consistent with RGS Map 3. Section 6 of the OCP refers to the Parks and Open Space Master Plan and the CRD's Regional Green/Blue Spaces Strategies as key companion documents to the OCP in managing green space in the District. Capital Green Lands areas are protected through the zoning bylaw and the OCP states in Section 6 that there is no support for the disposal or sale of park space without full public hearing and debate in each case.

Overall, the OCP is consistent with the "Renewable Resource Land" and "Capital Green Land" policy areas designated on Map 3 and 4 appended to the RGS.

Environment and Resources

3. Protecting Green and Blue Space

The OCP recognizes the Green and Blue spaces indicated on RGS Map 4 (Green/Blue Spaces System) on the Schedule B Parks and Open Space Plan and Map 7 Sensitive Environments. In terms of Green spaces, a main OCP objective is to develop a system of parks and open spaces that meet the existing and future needs of the residents of all ages and abilities consistent with the policies of the Central Saanich Parks and Open Space Master Plan (1999). The OCP provides direction to secure additional Green space through innovative means such as: subdivision, rezoning, purchase or donation (sec. 6.2.4).

The development of a comprehensive system of trails (pedestrian and/or cycle paths) is part of Section 6 of the OCP. The Schedule B Parks and Open Space

Plan map delineates existing and future regional and municipal trails. This map is consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy's Map 4: Regional Green/Blue Spaces System.

The Unprotected Green Space Policy Area indicated on RGS Map 4 is not specifically recognized in the OCP mapping. However, these areas are protected by the Soil Protection Erosion Area (tree cutting) regulations, as well as zoning. The areas in question are zoned Rural Estate and Agriculture. Under these zoning categories, there is minimal residential development allowed. Additionally, the District encourages sustainable practices and encourages covenants to protect sensitive areas (sec. 8.2.2 and sec. 8.2.3). Specifically, the OCP states in Section 8 that the District will take a leadership role in educating people about the value of protecting land and water resources of ecological significance and will facilitate partnerships among the public, private and not-for profit sectors for the conservation and stewardship of these resources. The District will also investigate the establishment of a permissive municipal property tax exemption policy for land owners who establish a conservation covenant to protect sensitive ecosystems.

The OCP places equal importance on Blue spaces protection. Saanich Inlet is considered to be an important and sensitive ecosystem, highly valued for its aesthetic, cultural, spiritual and environmental attributes. Similarly, Haro Strait has regionally significant parks and beaches. In the OCP the District has resolved to minimize impacts on shoreline and marine environments through zoning and the shoreline development permit process. Additionally, in Section 8, it states that the District will use available powers through provincial legislation, to protect and conserve sensitive land and water environments in Central Saanich.

4. Manage Natural Resources and the Environment Sustainably

The OCP supports the principles of sustainability as defined in this section of the RGS. Section 8 outlines policies regarding the protection of ecologically significant areas, the preservation of water quality and quantity and regulating development in environmentally sensitive areas. As stated previously, urban development is limited to the Urban Containment boundaries. All other development in rural and agricultural settings is governed by zoning, permit and OCP policies.

Through this Regional Context Statement, the District recognizes the value of monitoring: the assimilative capacity of the natural environment in terms of waste; and the depletion rates and consumption of natural and scarce resources. The District also recognizes that decision making should give priority to options that maintain ecosystem health and support the ongoing ability of natural systems to sustain life.

Housing and Community

5. Build Complete Communities

This section of the RGS supports the development patterns that allow residents to undertake a wider range of daily activities closer to home. This objective is supported in Sections 4, 5 and 10 of the OCP. These sections indicate strong support for a wide variety of housing opportunities with

particular consideration for multifamily, supportive/care housing and multifamily developments located within walking distance of commercial areas. There is a priority placed on reducing the use of private vehicles. Additionally, there is support for home based businesses and to increase opportunities for public transit.

6. Improve Housing Affordability

A key objective identified in the OCP is to support the development of diverse housing types to accommodate the various housing needs of existing as well as future residents, and to meet the changing needs of the various age groups of residents (sec. 4.3.2.). In 2000, the District completed a Housing Needs Assessment to identify housing needs, gaps and to develop a list of priority development proposals. Support for housing that is affordable, rental based, family oriented and/or allowing seniors to “age in place” are given priority. Particular consideration will be given to multi-family rental housing proposals, supportive housing and multi-level care facilities. The District encourages alternative housing tenures (i.e. co-housing, non-profit and cooperative housing), the retention of rental housing and transitional housing. Section 4 of the OCP also discourages the conversion of rental housing to strata ownership. In Council’s consideration of residential redevelopment proposals, the Residential Evaluation Guidelines are provided to developers to ascertain the affordability component of the project. Secondary suites are also currently permitted in agricultural and specified residential zones. The District will undertake a process of reviewing this policy to determine if permitting secondary suites in all residential zones should be allowed.

Transportation

7. Increasing Transportation Choice

The OCP supports a comprehensive local and regional transportation system which includes driving, cycling and walking. Section 10 states that there is priority placed on reducing dependence on the use of private vehicles over time and that there is support for the development of additional bus shelters and information signage to increase ridership. As well, there is support for car share co-operatives and for investigating smaller buses to operate within Central Saanich. There continues to be support for improving sidewalks, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths, including the Regional trail system as funds permit.

Economic Development

8. Strengthening the Regional Economy

The OCP’s fundamental principles guide decision making regarding a sustainable economy. Section 1 states that: there is support for economic development and diversification in Central Saanich, including agricultural and home based businesses; this will help balance the number of jobs and residents. There is continuing support for the well-established, pedestrian oriented commercial centres in Saanichton and Brentwood Bay, as well as support for the commercial and industrial activities in the Keating Business Park. Section 5 of the OCP addresses economic development more specifically

defining direction for economic planning, arterial commercial, tourism and recreation, light industry, gravel extraction areas, home based employment and the agricultural economy. Through this Regional Context Statement the District acknowledges the importance of encouraging the development of a sustainable economy.