

Salt Spring Community Alliance

May 28, 2018

After folks grabbed their favourite hot beverage, a sweet treat, and their seat, each attendee (over 40) introduced themselves and briefly told the group why they had come. Although reasons varied greatly, some areas of interest and concerns were:

- Water,
- Affordable housing,
- Learning more about the Alliance
- Achieving sustainability,
- The role of non-profits,
- Improving governance,
- How can we move forward to accomplish needed projects?

And. . . How can I help?

Samantha presented a brief financial report, indicating that, with the generous help of Country Grocer for the refreshments, and donations at each meeting, our assets, including a sound system, are only slightly less than our our debts. (*See full accounting at end of this report)

Presenters

Donald Gunn: Donald is the architectural design consultant for a number of affordable housing projects, including Dragonfly, Norton Road, and Murakami Gardens. He spoke of the “Perfect Storm” that is buffeting Salt Spring in which complex issues, especially water and sewer, are stalling projects despite the will and funding needed to move forward.

He believes that if we can balance the need for due diligence and protection of our precious resources with a less risk-adverse attitude, we can make significant progress on the existing projects in the next year to 18 months.

Challenges that have plagued projects range from not enough water - and the need to forge new territory by using grey water and catchment - to the overwhelming complexity and expense of becoming a water utility.

What can Salt Springers do to help? We can advocate for a full-time, experienced affordable housing planner. With this individual, projects will proceed more seamlessly and lessons learned can be applied to other projects rather than having to begin over again with each new initiative. We can also learn to conserve water. Although the province believes 1,600 liters of water is needed for every household, we know we can do so much better.

Rhonan Heitzman

Rhonan Heitzman: Chair of the Alliance Affordable Housing Working Group and owner Salt Spring Water Company, Rhonan spoke passionately about his vision of housing more people with less impact on the environment by introducing technical innovations, lifestyle adaptation, and creative planning. Although each of us face different water situations, we all get rain. Rainwater harvesting is a solution that can be applied everywhere to offset the stress on our lakes and groundwater and, with enough storage, can be prime source of water. The era of unlimited water is over, and it is Rhonan's estimate that a family can live comfortably on 400 liters a day, 1/4 the required amount.

The effort to limit densities has resulted in a strong tendency toward rural sprawl, with large lots, long roads, and driveways carving up the natural wilderness. Why should a 600 square foot cottage require the same density as a 6,000 square foot home with 10 bedrooms and eight bathrooms? The result of this planning model is that the vast majority of new homes are on large lots, unaffordable to most Salt Springers.

What can we do? We need to promote legal ways to encourage more smaller homes, nestled among existing subdivisions and using roads, driveways, and buildings that already exist. This would require a re-evaluation of our assumptions about density. Although adequate water supply and safe waste management are necessary requirements, we can do this by exploring other options, possibility even offering density bonuses for greener buildings that blend better into our rural landscape.

** For Rhonan's full presentation, please see the end of this report.

Discussion:

The response from Community Alliance members was enthusiastic and innovative. Conservation was an important topic with discussion of more water-wise education as well as metering.

A great deal of information was shared about the issues faced by a variety of affordable housing projects on Salt Spring and their approaches to overcoming obstacles. The challenges faced by North Salt Spring Water were discussed. The large water needs by agriculture and fire suppression were also considered as component of the challenges that must be faced and resolved. It was suggested that if everyone had a tank that captured 3,000 gallons of rainwater, there would be plenty of water on Salt Spring. It was noted, though, that, although rainwater harvesting seems to make a great deal of sense, Vancouver Island Health Authority is proceeding cautiously.

There was a call echoed throughout the room to get all the players in one room to sort out challenges. There seemed to be consensus that locally elected officials should organize a meeting to bring all agencies together.

Action Plan:

After a break, the group reconvened to discuss possibilities that would allow us to move forward.

It was agreed that provincial and federal policies need to change and that a good way to begin would be to get all local policy-makers in a room to address the complex issues stalling affordable housing on Salt Spring.

Darryl Martin agreed to work to bring the players together.

Also, Salt Springers need to be better at conserving our precious water. As the meeting ended, there was excitement about getting the players together to make things happen as well as working one-on-one throughout the community to better conserve one of our most precious resources -water.

Next Meeting:

The Governance Working Group has been hard at work analyzing options to improve governance on Salt Spring Island. They have created an evaluation criteria and rated various options available to Salt Spring.

Please come to the Lions Hall on June 25, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. to add your voice to the conversation about improving governance on Salt Spring.

Because. . . .

Together, we can make Salt Spring even better

***SS COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FINANCIAL STATEMENT
August 2017 to May 15 2018**

INCOME

Meeting donations	\$1,526.62	
Personal donations	\$ 311.25	
Country Grocer		Gift cards (value \$500)
Positively Forward	\$ 382.00	
Sound rental	\$ 75.00	

TOTAL INCOME \$2,294.87

EXPENSES

Hall Rental	\$ 575.00
Sound	\$ 300.00
Refreshments	\$ 419.57
Supplies	\$ 13.41
Printing	\$ 174.62
Other	\$ 100.71 (Hornby Travel)
Bank Charges	\$ 2.50

TOTAL EXPENSES \$1,585.81

NET **\$ 709.06**

Assets:

Sound System	\$550.57 (Purchased by G.&H. Baker)
Sound rental	-75.00
Paid on a//c	\$100.00
Balance o/s	\$375.57

**** A Transcript of Rhonan's Full Report:**

Water supply on this island is indeed a serious issue and we must be very cautious about protecting our limited surface water and groundwater resources. However, water on Salt Spring is not one unified pool that everyone draws from. It is varied across a complicated geographical landscape. Some areas have ground water that is very stressed and fragile, other areas are blessed with incredible quality and abundance.

But one thing is true across the whole island, we are subject to consistent annual rainfall in the winter months. Rainwater harvesting is a technical solution that can be applied everywhere to offset the stress on our lakes and groundwater and indeed be a prime source of water with enough storage capacity and life style innovation. When water supply is limited, people adapt and use water more efficiently and with technical innovation and life style changes, our water supply can serve the needs of a growing population in a way that was not imagined when our planning model was established.

The 1970's was the era of 20 litres to flush a pee, overhead sprinklers to keep the lawn emerald green throughout the year. 20 minute showers daily, wash the car at the slightest sign of dust and washing machines that guzzle the stuff....water saving fixtures? Science fiction.... And yet now we are still beholden to rules based on consumption habits of those times, needing to prove 1600 litres per day for a small house hold, (say 2 adults and 2 children) when it has been shown that people can use as little as 40 litres per person. That works out to 10 times less than the required amount. I have found through my work that a conservative average estimate for a small family is a hundred gallons a day, that is 400 Litres, ¼ of the currently required amount, and I have observed that can be easily cut in half by people paying attention and is a good estimate on average. Keep in mind that this is for indoor use, and irrigation requirements is another calculation depending on intended plantings.

There is a distinct need for the amount of water required to be proven to be re-evaluated to allow innovative solutions and lifestyles to thrive.

So our planning model correctly identified limited water supply as one of the criteria for imagining a maximum population. There is also the general effect of population on the environment through transportation, development and human activity. We live in a special and unique ecological area that needs to be protected from the ravages of human activity. But how

do we go about creating those protections? Sometimes the tools available to local government are limited, so we use the means available that seem to make sense at the time, but sometimes there are unintended consequences. Here, there has been an effort to protect the environment by controlling population by limiting the number of “densities” or dwellings permitted to be constructed on a given size lot in a given zone. Also to preserve the “rural character”, minimum lot sizes for subdivisions have been established. But the result has been a strong tendency toward rural sprawl, with large lots, long roads and driveways carving up the natural wilderness. These large lots are increasingly only affordable to the wealthy who often build large houses, with varying degrees of respect for the natural environment. Some developers clearcut vast areas and then subdivide, selling the cleared lots.... Other property owners choose to clear large areas of their lots to make way for the large homes, driveways and lawns, and despite a stated ideal to preserve and protect, there is little the local government can do to prevent this environmentally destructive development, because it falls within the permitted rules. Yet many creative ways of living and building that can house more people with much less destruction of the environment do not currently have a legal pathway to be achieved.

Consider why does a house with a 6000 ft² footprint, with 10 bedrooms and 8 bathrooms equal the same definition of density as a 600 sq.ft cottage? Because they each only have one kitchen. Which building destroys more of the environment to allow for its footprint, consumes more resources to construct and energy and water to operate?

So the result of our planning model is that the vast majority of new residential development are large houses on large lots, unaffordable to any household earning less than 80-100 000 per year to purchase or rent. Note it's not just low income people affected but all the way to upper middle income class. So the percentage of housing stock available to the working class is shrinking even as the island population is growing and the need for people to serve the thriving economy is growing yet there is not enough people available to fill those jobs because there is nowhere to live. We are on the precipice of a rapid collapse of the service industry and the stress on the community is palpable.

So what is the solution?

By recognizing that a healthy community will have enough housing available to young families that serve a diverse economy less dependent on tourism and vacation homes and more reliant on serving each other, education, green business, food production, arts, music and creativity; planners would adopt a creative and proactive model to recognize this need and not only allow but promote legal pathways to encourage more smaller homes, nestled in among existing developed subdivisions, using roads, and driveways and indeed buildings that already exist. This would require a re-evaluation of the meaning of a density and a dwelling, accepting that they do not all have an equal environmental footprint and that more, smaller densities that are lighter on the land should actually be encouraged. This can be made possible by technical innovation and lifestyle adaptation. Proving adequate water supply and safe waste

management are necessary requirements, but innovative ways of achieving this must be encouraged. Buildings can be greener, blend naturally into the rural landscape all the while allowing for more efficient transportation sharing as we transition away from a fossil fuel economy.

Fortunately planners do not have to reinvent the wheel. A report written for the Islands Trust in 2003 describes "**Options for Affordable Housing: New Solutions to the Housing Crisis in the Islands Trust Area**" Yes, solutions to the housing crisis were already identified 15 years ago, and some have been sparingly implemented here but not in the proactive way necessary to create a new way of doing things.

There are some very interesting examples describing many pathways available to planners to help promote smaller, more affordable homes. One idea that relates to my example about re-evaluation of the definition of density is by measuring density as a percentage of total square feet per lot. An average house size footprint could be identified, let's say for the sake of discussion 2000 sq.ft. This could be distributed creatively allowing for multiple dwellings on a lot or multiple dwellings in a single building. Say 1000 sq ft footprint, and a 600 sq ft cottage and 400 sq.ft cabin. By allowing the use of the second story this becomes three modest homes for families of varying size.....it would allow people to pool their resources to purchase a property and build or would allow for a property owner to get rental income by renting out the cottages long term. This can allow older citizens to stay on their property longer by creating a small community around them.

Another tool mentioned is the idea of density bonuses, these are usually thought of in terms of larger development or subdivisions as a reward for preserving a large portion of the land in covenant for example, but they could also be used on a smaller scale to reward innovative ideas, let's call them eco-credits. Additional secondary cottages or suites can be awarded to a creative property owner by creatively fulfilling a certain number of potential eco-credits. Again, adequate water supply and safe waste management are a pre-requisite, but let's say a candidate must also show an ecologically sensitive development plan, for example minimal clearing and driveways....They must achieve a certain number of eco-credits from a list of potentials like: Rain water harvesting, greywater recycling, composting toilets, reed bed filtration, ecological building materials, local building materials, recycled materials, repurposed buildings, passive solar design, net zero energy, increased insulation, solar thermal and solar energy, permaculture food production and landscape design.....there are more but you get the idea. There could be varying degrees of achievement standards, perhaps resulting in varying size of additional square footage.

This would spawn a culture of innovation and creativity. Our community would become experts in achieving these ecological features, creating a thriving economy serving each other locally, and providing the opportunity to be a leader in innovation and education.

Add this to innovations in alternative transportation like electric cars, vehicle sharing, electric transit with increased service, bicycles, e-bikes flatten those hills.... We might actually become a profoundly green and innovative place, a visionary model for others to come and learn from. The key is proactive and creative planning to allow for this innovation to occur, and of course for all of us to support and participate in these initiatives!

Link to the report, see page 12 for Cottage and Cluster Housing

<http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/223639/Options%20for%20Affordable%20Housing%20New%20Solutions%20to%20the%20Housing%20Crisis.pdf>

Some links to related ideas:

The Living Building Challenge: <https://living-future.org/lbc/>

In the highlands in Victoria: <https://eco-sense.ca/>

<https://rainwaterbc.com/>