

# Community Values and Housing Policy - Bylaw 1352 Revisited

Dear Mayor & Council,

The following comments pertain to recommendations given in the Staff Report of 2 September, 2015 entitled *Area 1 & 2, and Affordable Housing Review*.

Staff are proposing that the lingering effects of Bylaw 1352 be revisited utilizing a three phase approach costing an estimated \$100,000 overall. The three phases are proposed to be:

1. Phase 1 - goals and community values survey
2. Phase 2 - Area 1 & 2 review (these areas were an outcome of the earlier and contentious CTQ Report)
3. Phase 3 - Affordable Housing Policy (undertaken subsequent to the completion and consideration of two external housing status investigations currently underway)

The lingering matter of a possible full OCP review is also raised as being an unresolved public question.

My observations are these:

1. In my opinion, **a full OCP review is not warranted**. The only aspects of the OCP that have come under scrutiny lately have been those elements which pertain to housing policy. And those requests were prompted primarily as a response to pressure from the development community to operate outside the OCP rather than pressure from the residential base itself to change the OCP.

I think it is safe to say that the fundamental definitions of the North Saanich character and its future evolution within the CRD, are not materially different from those visions as currently stated.

**The proposal in the current Staff Report, with the provisos noted below, should adequately update the OCP in those areas where it is perceived to be wanting.**

2. While the three phases of the currently proposed investigation adequately target the problem, **Phases 2 and 3 are definitely in the wrong order. In the absence of Affordable Housing Policy, it is not logically possible to review Areas 1 and 2.**

Areas 1 and 2 were "solutions" to housing problems that were never fully defined. That definition must now be provided.

At this stage, we should not prejudge what the future affordable housing policy proposals might look like. When screened against those anticipated policy statements, Areas 1 and 2 may or may not have any relevance as areas suitable for implementing those, as yet unknown, policy directives.

In my opinion, **the current Phase 2 should be repositioned as Phase 3** (to follow the creation of affordable housing policy) and be renamed Affordable Housing Policy Implementation. At that point, Areas 1 and 2 can be put into the frame, possibly along with other areas of the Municipality, to discover how, and to what extent, the policy created in Phase 2 can be implemented anywhere within the District.

**This approach is effectively alluded to on page 2 of the report where it is suggested that assessing the current OCP values, goals and objectives could be undertaken prior to reviewing Areas 1 and 2.** This would be a good approach and would not necessitate a full OCP review.

3. Throughout this report, the housing policy topic is only ever discussed within the context of North Saanich itself. Despite our significant presence within the CRD, described and quantified in the RGS/RSS and our proximity to major neighbours, the context for this discussion seems to remain largely within the Municipal boundaries.

**For me, it is vital that North Saanich housing policy always be formulated while recognizing the very important regional context in which we reside.** All municipalities should emphasize and develop the areas in which they have a comparative advantage. This inventory of strengths is, or should be, described in the RGS/RSS and should always form a prominent backdrop to any planning activity.

North Saanich enjoys a high comparative advantage in rural, agricultural and marine shoreline attributes.

**If North Saanich succeeds in safeguarding those amenities in which it holds a comparative advantage, that storehouse of unique values becomes not just a local municipal asset but a regional asset available to all within the CRD.**

Perhaps this Staff Report does assume a regional context in all of these deliberations, but it is not overtly stated and should be.

4. With regard to Phase One, **the importance of a robust, comprehensive and defensible process of public consultation cannot be overstated.** It is vital that the process of public opinion measurement be placed in the hands of professionals in that field from the outset. If the chosen consultant for Phase One is not highly proficient in this area, **then that phase of the project should be contracted to a professional polling firm with impeccable credentials.**

Many will recall the highly flawed public opinion polling effort undertaken by CTQ Consultants during the term of the last Council. Those flaws were so evident to ordinary citizens that they contracted with Dr. Brock Smith of the University of Victoria to review the CTQ survey. Due to the extent and magnitude of those survey design problems, Dr. Smith advised against using those results in formulating public policy.

As with the previous study, public opinion measurement is the bedrock upon which the balance of the process rests. At all costs, we must avoid such an expensive debacle this time

around.

With this currently proposed initiative, our Municipality has a great opportunity to fill in the gaping holes in housing policy that were deliberately left by the previous Council. However, great care must be taken in formulating the guidelines, terms of reference and order of operations for the steps in this process.

In summary I would like to suggest the following considerations relating to the proposed housing policy initiative:

- there is no need to consider an OCP review. Those elements of the OCP that require modernization can be adequately addressed with this initiative.
- Affordable Housing Policy should be created prior to reviewing Areas 1 and 2.
- The temptation to forge a "made in North Saanich" solution to problems that are actually regional or even provincial should be avoided. To offer another slogan, we should "stick to our knitting". Our role in the CRD is defined by the RGS/RSS; we should always be guided by that when formulating local policy.
- Ensure that the public opinion polling process of Phase One is designed and executed to the highest possible standard. The subsequent policies and recommendations can never be better than the foundation data upon which they rest.

Thank you for your attention, sincerely, Spring Harrison, North Saanich