Table notes from Gabriola Talks Water event – July 23rd 2026

There were approximately 40 people in attendance. Following opening remarks, a reconciliation statement, and a brief explanation of some of the issues behind our water supply, the participants divided themselves into seven groups and focussed their discussions on the four topics (in blue below). The "Gabriola Talks Water" document provided some context for the discussion topics. About 12 minutes were allotted for discussion of each question. At the end a spokesperson for each group provided a brief summary of their response to each question. Participants were also invited to express their hopes and fears about the draft OCP in general and its implications for our water supply.

The table notes below are provided verbatim from the notes taken by the seven groups. The summaries (in red) were written by the Gabriola Talks organizers.

(1) Discuss what limits should be placed on flexible housing to protect our groundwater supplies.

Summary of responses: There needs to be a way to limit the number of people rather than the floor area. There is concern that having multiple small dwellings will require more tree removal and habitat destruction than a single larger one.

Table 1 (Dyan, Mary, John, Andrew, Charlotte)
i) water consumption is per capita, not per household. If we increase pop. density even with water collection it won't be enough
ii) flex housing will only work with a reliable, viable well
iii) more small houses mean cutting more trees
iv) restrict no. of properties with flex housing
v) restrict lot coverage

Table 2 (Cathy, Neil, Bob, Bob, and Pat)
(Quick survey of household water supplies: C: well & r/w, N: r/w, B: well & r/w, B: well & r/w, Pat: r/w)
i) bring your own water, bring water by barge (?)
ii) should be limits on water use, reduction of roof area a concern
iii) more engineering of rainwater systems
iv) a water-supply system would be prohibitively expensive for island

Table 3 (no names)
i) Need to meter wells* for reliable local data before we can make okays for expansion
ii) Establish water usage for 1/2 acres before and after building permitted
iii) rainwater collection for residential housing
* not made clear if this meant meter water use or monitor standing water levels

Table 4 (Howard, Peter, Susan, Arlene and Penelope)
i) no. of people per lot is what matters
ii) proven g/w to get building permit
iii) a common septic system, or a septic for each dwelling?
iv) 1 large house damages the tree canopy less than several smaller ones

Table 5 (no names)
i) tiny homes are not the solution
ii) no. of people is the most important parameter (not floor area)
iii) control the amount of habitat destruction on private property
iv) where we put houses affects the g/w

Table 6 (no names)
i) maximum occupancy (not floor area)
ii) design with water collection in mind
iii) build in cisterns

Table 7 (Alix et al.)[i]
i) moratorium on development in FF High Hazard areas and recharge areas
ii) Flexible housing must be limited even better eliminated entirely- 1 house per lot as stated in the current OCP.
iii) limits must be placed on population
iv) water must be measured per capita and not household: stats can average on Gabriola is 2 people per household, if you allow 5 tiny homes on that same lot you will increase the septic effluence and water consumption by 10
v) data driven restrictions on groundwater and surface water demands must be in the OCP
vi) Impact of increased population and climate crisis must be factored into any density increase policies in the OCP
vii) protection for the ecosystem groundwater, forests, creating new forested areas must be the major focus of the OCP and new zoning must be created to accomplish this

(2) Discuss whether all new residential and institutional construction should be required to have both water storage and rainwater collection systems.

Summary of responses: Yes to both water storage and rainwater collection, especially in high water-stress areas. There should be grants to cover the extra cost of a rainwater system. It is important to distinguish between potable and non-potable rainwater systems. Education on efficient water use is critical.

Table 1 (Dyan, Mary, John, Andrew, Charlotte)
i) yes, but also require wells
ii) extreme cost of concrete in-ground cisterns
iii) need to find ways to encourage r/w collection given the cost
iv) impact of air pollution and pollen on water collection
v) everyone isn't equally able to do this

vi) create communal water supply (707, divert runoff)

Table 2 (Cathy, Neil, Bob, Bob, and Pat)
i) yes

Table 3 (no names)
i) yes, depends on the area
ii) hazardous areas would require to have 100% r/w and cisterns
iii) new wells only allowed in acceptable areas
iv) higher cost (cistern cost) = smaller houses
v) Vacation rental and commercial needs special considerations

Table 4 (Howard, Peter, Susan, Arlene and Penelope)
i) Yes dammit!
ii) we should be collecting data on how many people have: wells, delivered water, r/w, yr. round well water
iii) realtors should be providing water information

Table 5 (no names)
i) yes +++
ii) need to specify potable vs non-potable wherever r/w is considered
iii) new construction must have potable r/w collection
iv) funding is needed to encourage r/w collection retrofits

Table 6 (no names)
i) design with water collection in mind
ii) build in cisterns

Table 7 (Alix et al.)
i) Yes, all new builds should collect rainwater
ii) rainwater collection is not an affordable option for everyone
iii) you have to have a very large roof area to provide adequate collection and then many tanks to store the collection (ie.3000 square foot home single story roof collection and 10 x10,000liter cisterns) may just be enough to last through a 6 months dry period.
iv) new build owners and visitors to the island need to be educated on water conservation

(3) Discuss whether density should be frozen in areas under high water stress.

Summary of responses: Yes, density should be limited in high water-stress areas. Impact of septic systems on wells needs to be considered.

Table 1 (Dyan, Mary, John, Andrew, Charlotte)
i) freezing density in specific areas
ii) no subdivisions
iii) [Islands Trust should] buy up unbuilt lots (for parks)
iv) no prohibition – requirement for r/w catchment

Table 2 (Cathy, Neil, Bob, Bob, and Pat)

i) focus development in areas with readily available water
ii) use carrying capacity of humans on land
iii) septic system issues

Table 3 (no names)
i) if 1 & 2 can be achieved 100% cisterns
ii) Composting toilets, pay attention to septic

Table 4 (Howard, Peter, Susan, Arlene and Penelope)
i) not as much urgency if r/w collection is used
ii) septic systems impacting wells
iii) density should be weighted in proportion to demonstrated availability of water

Table 5 (no names)
i) yes, use freshwater hazard map as a reference
ii) waterfront lots should have frozen density
iii) prevent habitat destruction
iv) need SFN stewardship
v) public education is imperative

Table 6 (no names)
i) fire risk hazard with small homes (?)
ii) minimum removal of trees
iii) not urban model

Table 7 (Alix et al)
i) zoning and land-use bylaws to place a moratorium on increased density in High Hazard and critical groundwater recharge must be established
ii) zoning and land-use bylaws drafted to protect the forests that resupply the critical recharge area; limit all tree cutting and development in these areas
iii) there needs to be more directive water policies to protect the island ecosystems

(4) Discuss whether on-island water suppliers should be required to report their groundwater withdrawals and whether we should be monitoring imports of water to Gabriola

Summary of responses: Yes, on-island water producers should be required to report their groundwater extraction and we also need to collect data on water imports to Gabriola. The Islands Trust should be responsible for acquiring water import and groundwater extraction data and providing annual reports.

Table 1 (Dyan, Mary, John, Andrew, Charlotte)
i) yes to water-haulers to report withdrawals
ii) concern about imposing expense on island businesses
iii) Islands Trust should monitor water shipments to Gabriola [through FOIs?]

Table 2 (Cathy, Neil, Bob, Bob, and Pat)
i) yes and yes

Table 3 (no names)
i) all commercial water suppliers report. gw data is necessary

Table 4 (Howard, Peter, Susan, Arlene and Penelope)
i) yes and yes
ii) the more information we have the better we are able to solve our problems
iii) water suppliers have the information
iv) monitor it, but word it in such a way that its not a lack of trust – we need the data for the collective good and scientific monitoring
v) reports annually

Table 5 (no names)
i) yes
ii) water meters on every home
iii) monitoring/reporting would only be effective if there is enforcement and licensing

Table 6 (no names)
no notes on Q. 4

Table 7 (Alix et al)
i) we support the guidelines but do not think guidelines are going to deal with the problems of excessive groundwater extraction.
ii) courts have already ruled that groundwater can be extracted and sold, but they do not define limits or set regulations or requirements for metering
iii) OCP must set limits and require metering for commercial extraction and businesses
iv) Guidelines appear inadequate: OCP needs directives to address the issue of overextraction of groundwater in a zone
v) regulations established and provisions made for the enforcement of regulations that meter and limit groundwater extraction by businesses
vi) climate change and data need to be the baseline for groundwater extraction and protection policies

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[i] The notes for Table 7 were edited by Alix Hodson Deggan. We are not sure how representative they are of the voices at the table.