



File No.: 6500-20
Gabriola Housing Options and
Impacts Review Project

DATE: July 29, 2021
TO: Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee
FROM: Sonja Zupanec, RPP, MCIP
Local Planning Services
SUBJECT: Housing Options and Impacts Review Project Next Steps

1. That the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee request staff to prepare a DRAFT business case for LTC consideration, for submission to the Islands Trust Financial Planning Committee by September 2021 for a new multi-year land use planning program based on the June 7, 2021 outline by the Housing Advisory Planning Commission, to replace the 'Housing Options and Impacts Review Project' with "Biocultural and Housing Diversity Program" specifically designed to increase the island's biodiversity, housing diversity and freshwater protection over the next 10 years with the following elements:
 - a. A lead planning consultant supported by the establishment of a temporary roundtable to co-design the framework and objectives of the program with input and/or membership from the Housing Advisory Planning Commission members, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Regional District of Nanaimo and Islands Trust Conservancy;
 - b. Eventual replacement of the Housing Advisory Planning Commission with a Joint Task Force with membership from key partners and agencies to advise the LTC and lead planning consultant on prioritizing project work, securing grants and collaborating on inter-governmental initiatives and opportunities.

REPORT SUMMARY

In June 2021, the LTC deferred consideration of the above noted recommendations until the July 2021 regular business meeting. No new information is being presented in this report that was not already included in the June 2021 agenda package, to support these staff recommendations.

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis of specific Housing Advisory Planning Commission (HAPC) recommendations presented in the April 2021 report by Gabriola Housing Matters: ["A Strategic Approach to Affordable Housing, Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation on Gabriola Island – A Community-Informed Process"](#). The HAPC endorsed all 26 recommendations in the report and have provided supplemental information in this report requesting the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee (LTC) design and develop a multi-year partnership to enact the suite of recommendations under a strategic land use planning program. This report outlines the staff recommendation for the LTC to develop a business case for a new multi-year program to increase Gabriola Island's biodiversity, housing diversity and freshwater protection over the next decade.

ANALYSIS

Issues and Opportunities

The following issues and opportunities are discussed below for LTC consideration:

1. Analysis of estimated time commitments and process options to implement HAPC recommendations
2. Proposed overview of a new multi-year program to increase biodiversity and housing diversity

Each of these issues is presented below with staff analysis to support the staff recommendations found on page 1 of this report.

1. Analysis of time commitments and process options to implement HAPC recommendations

The LTC requested staff to conduct an analysis identifying the actions in the Gabriola Housing Working Group’s Gabriola Housing Matters report that are possible to conduct in the short, medium and long term. The following Table 1. categorizes the HAPC recommendations for policy and regulatory changes into approximate timeframes. It also assigns an estimated budget.

Table 1 Categorizing and resourcing recommended policy and regulatory changes

HAPC Recommended Actions and Estimation of Project Time	Estimated Total Budget	Potential Impact Areas
SHORT TERM (~1 year)		
Voluntary density reduction program and donation to density bank	~\$4,000 depending on # of participants	Housing Diversity, Freshwater Conservation and Biodiversity
Water Conservation Public Education	~\$4,000	Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation
POLICY: Strengthen multi-dwelling affordable housing criteria	<\$4,000	Housing Diversity
MEDIUM TERM (~2 years)		
POLICY: review requiring new rezoning approvals resulting in subdivision to contribute to affordable housing units	Minimum ~\$5,000 - \$50,000 depending on number of policy and regulatory amendments included in a project and whether	Housing Diversity
POLICY AND REGULATION: review of minimum lot sizes for subdivision and alternative subdivision regulations/proof of water requirements		Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation
POLICY: Prioritize parkland dedication that results in Coastal Douglas Fir protection		Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation
POLICY AND REGULATION: requirements for rainwater harvesting and collection for all new construction		Freshwater Conservation

HAPC Recommended Actions and Estimation of Project Time	Estimated Total Budget	Potential Impact Areas
POLICY: Required BC Energy Step Code compliance for all new construction as part of a rezoning application	consultants are needed	Freshwater Conservation
POLICY: Set affordable housing targets		Housing Diversity
POLICY AND REGULATIONS: Review secondary suite regulations and consider expanding to smaller lot sizes with conditions.		Housing Diversity
LONG TERM (~3+years)		
POLICIES AND REGULATIONS: Coastal Douglas-fir forest and watershed protection on private properties and Development Permit Areas	>\$15,000	Biodiversity and Freshwater Conservation
POLICIES AND REGULATIONS: groundwater monitoring requirements for commercial, institutional and multifamily development		Freshwater Conservation
POLICIES AND REGULATIONS: develop flexible zoning for targeted needs		Biodiversity, freshwater and housing
POLICIES AND REGULATIONS: increase number of residential densities permitted on commercial/institutional zoned lots and stipulate minimum # to be used as rental or affordable housing units		Housing Diversity

Under the current Local Planning Services structure, the LTC can immediately initiate a short term project and use up to \$4,000 of project funds that are currently earmarked for the ‘Housing Options and Impacts Review Project’. The LTC can also request Trust Council approve a larger project budget in the 2022-2023 fiscal budget and that the Islands Trust Regional Planning Team and/or a consultant undertake a medium-long term project. The next section of this report details the rationale for the staff recommendation to the LTC, to proceed with one short term project using the existing project budget, and develop a business case for a pilot multi-year program.

The LTC requested staff to report on options for the LTC to pursue the following HAPC recommendations:

- a) *promoting voluntary dedication of densities;*
- b) *the extent of possible Planning Commission;*
- c) *restricting subdivisions;*
- d) *secondary accommodation availability; and*
- e) *appropriate flexible zoning.*

Each of these options above is discussed in general terms below and ranked in Figure 1. according to the amount of resources that may be required to complete the work, compared to the impact the work may have on increasing biodiversity and/or housing diversity. Based on this diagram, the least resource dependant projects with possible

positive impacts on housing and biodiversity are a) restricting short term vacation rentals; and b) promoting voluntary dedication of densities. Each option is discussed below in more detail.

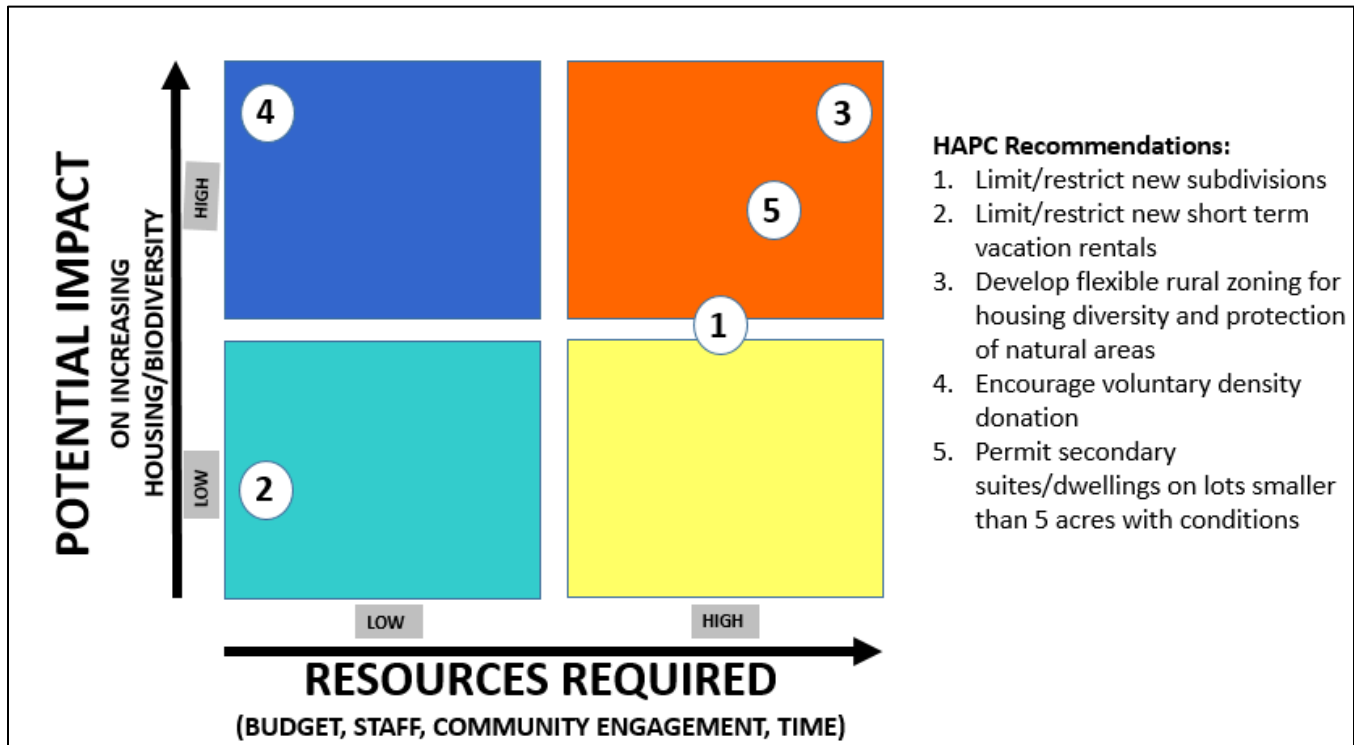


Figure 1. Ranking of LTC identified potential projects/actions

a) Promoting voluntary density donations:

In June 2021, the LTC endorsed an \$8,000 project budget to advance this short term project for the remainder of the fiscal year (ending March 31, 2022). Additional project funds to cover legal fees such as covenant registration may be required in the 2022-23 fiscal once the total number of properties participating in the program are identified.

b) Extent of possible planning commission

In April 2021, the HAPC recommended the LTC consider establishing a “Housing Affordability and Managed Growth Planning Commission” made up of commissioners appointed by the LTC and supported by a paid consultant and planning staff. The Commission was described as being responsible for overseeing the implementation of the four strategies (growth management, biodiversity, freshwater conservation and housing affordability). The HAPC report outlined specific recommendations for Commission responsibilities and necessary funding to resource the work. The LTC requested additional information on this recommendation prior to further consideration.

The HAPC was recently re-established in May 2021 for a two year term and six members were re-appointed. The HAPC members have voluntarily prepared a summary document for the LTC’s consideration (Attachment 1) which is a revised and more detailed strategy than what was proposed in April. The HAPC is recommending LTC support of a business case for a multi-year partnership pilot program to address biodiversity, freshwater protection and housing diversity called “Biocultural and Housing Diversity” for Gabriola Island. This unique land use planning program is proposed to leverage the Islands Trust Conservancy Regional Conservation Strategy

goals; align with ongoing reconciliation work with Snuneymuxw First Nation and build on the rural growth management and freshwater protection work of the Regional District of Nanaimo. A detailed overview of this potential approach is provided in Attachment 1.

The existing structure of the HAPC could play a strong role in a new multi-year land use program by participating in the design stage and eventually being replaced by a joint task force which would provide support to the LTC and planning lead (consultant) by reviewing draft project charters, program objectives/priorities and future draft policies and regulations.

The HAPC is recommending a roundtable comprised of the partners be created to inform the content of the business case, therefore key partners would be consulted with PRIOR to the drafting of a business case to be presented to the LTC, the Financial Planning Committee, and if endorsed, the Trust Council for approval. Management has advised that at this time there is no staff capacity in the Northern Office to support this exercise in conjunction with a short term project as recommended on page one of this report. Although staff agree that early input from the Snuneymuxw, Islands Trust Conservancy and Regional District of Nanaimo would be critical in the development of the business case, the budget and time to conduct this work do not exist unless the LTC decides to not proceed with the short term 'density donation outreach' program.

Staff are recommending the LTC request staff prepare a draft business case for LTC consideration, based on the HAPC suggested framework in Attachment 1, with the roundtable being built into the first phase of the program, if approved.

c) Restricting Subdivisions:

The Gabriola Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw set out the policy and regulatory framework for subdivision of land including minimum and minimum average lot size requirements, sewage disposal, parcel dimensions and minimum road frontage. The LUB defers to the provincial standard for proof of water requirements to support an application for subdivision. Currently the volume of water required to be proven is 2500 litres per dwelling per day.

The majority of Gabriola Island's 3315 existing parcels are under 5 acres in size (2766 lots) with **2313 of those lots (69% of all lots on the island) less than one acre in size**. The parcel sizes on the island are predominantly small suburban sized lots that typically would not be approved in a rural subdivision when supported by groundwater and standard sewage disposal systems. This pattern of subdivision on Gabriola Island has resulted in very traditional road and lot layouts that do not appear to respect topography, ecology, natural contours, drainage or archaeological or heritage protection. Although this has been acceptable in the past, it may be undesirable to perpetuate this pattern of settlement in light of Gabriola Island being situated in one of nine [crisis ecoregions in Canada](#).

The 2021 Development Potential Map for Gabriola Island currently shows approximately 53 parcels with subdivision potential, which if subdivided would result in 143 new lots. The recent community engagement work by Gabriola Housing Matters, highlighted strong support for limiting the number of new parcels created by subdivision; reducing fragmentation of ecological systems and encouraging more sustainable forms of subdivision that does not degrade the environment or potable water sources.

The LTC can address the further subdivision of land on Gabriola Island by:

- Reviewing and amending the OCP and LUB to stipulate a larger parcel size for each zone where subdivision potential exists, or eliminating subdivision potential entirely thereby reducing the number of potential future lots; OR

- Amending the OCP and LUB to require clustered rural developments and require a portion of each lot set aside for use as private open space/ecosystem protection/agriculture etc., either through enhanced land use and subdivision regulations or a Development Permit Area or a combination of both.

Either of these options would require a medium to long term commitment of LTC project resources and should be completed in tandem with a review of secondary suite regulations; flexible rural zoning options and the establishment of mandatory rainwater collection regulations. There are no short term project solutions to address subdivision regulations, without a substantial bylaw amendment process that would trigger the need for comprehensive public consultation. The LTC does not have authority under the *Local Government Act* or the *Land Title Act* to refuse to process a subdivision referral application, defer decision on or delay a decision on a subdivision referral application if all information has been provided and the application meets the subdivision and zoning regulations enacted by the LTC.

d) Secondary accommodation:

The HAPC recommended the LTC ***“...explore the implications of reducing the upper limit to allow secondary suites on properties of 1 hectare to 1.99 hectares in size. To address ecosystem and freshwater conservation conditions, all building permit applications must meet water, sewage and energy conservation objectives.”***

Amendments to the OCP and LUB to permit a secondary suite (or second dwelling unit) on a smaller parcel with conditions is a medium-long term project best completed in tandem with a review of flexible rural zoning options; establishment of mandatory rainwater collection regulations and energy conservation requirements. There are no short term project solutions to address secondary suites/accommodation without an OCP bylaw amendment process and comprehensive public consultation.

e) Appropriate flexible zoning

The HAPC recommended the LTC ***“Explore flexible zoning to meet targeted housing needs in residential zones. Flex zoning could be a way of creating increased capacity to provide caregiver and family member housing and had strong conditional support in the survey.”*** Flexible zoning provisions can support the community’s desire for a more environmentally sensitive way of undertaking rural development and permit more diverse housing options. Amendments to the OCP and LUB to permit such zoning is also a medium-long term project best completed in tandem with a review of secondary suite provisions, mandatory rainwater collection and energy conservation requirements.

Rationale for Recommendation

Staff recommends the LTC develop a business case for Trust Council for the HAPC’s innovative approach to a land use program on Gabriola Island that focuses on the key elements of the LTC’s jurisdiction: cooperative land use planning to increase biodiversity, housing diversity and protect freshwater resources.

NEXT STEPS

Should the LTC concur with the staff recommendations, staff will begin work on the business case development for future LTC consideration.

Submitted By:	Sonja Zupanec, RPP, MCIP - Island Planner	July 7, 2021
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Concurrence:	Heather Kauer, MPA, RPP, MCIP, AICP Regional Planning Manager	July 8, 2021
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ATTACHMENTS

1. HAPC Correspondence June 7, 2021 – Biocultural and Housing Diversity Program

Gabriola Island Biocultural and Housing Diversity Project Proposal

*by: Dyan Dunsmoor-Farley & Tobi Elliott
on behalf of the Housing Advisory Planning Commission
June 7, 2021*

Background

The Gabriola LTC passed a resolution in April 2021 requesting further clarification on the Gabriola Housing Matters Working Group's (HMG) proposed recommendation for the establishment of a governing body that would “oversee the implementation of a suite of actions to manage growth, achieve biodiversity and freshwater conservation objectives, and ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing” for Gabriola Island. This paper offers a broad overview of how a new multi-year, inter-governmental program might work in order to meet the following objectives:

- To ensure that growth on Gabriola is managed and gradual, balancing human and environmental needs to ensure long-term sustainability
- To ensure the recovery and long-term sustainability of our endangered Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem
- To ensure the protection and sustainable management of freshwater resources, and,
- To ensure a timely supply of affordable, appropriate housing that meets the needs of Gabriolans in a way that minimizes impacts on biodiversity and freshwater sustainability

In addition, mindful of the Islands Trusts' protocol agreement with First Nations, the high priority the Trust has placed on reconciliation, and that reciprocal relationships must be embedded in work within unceded Indigenous territories, the HAPC suggests the program outlined below should also have the following objective:

- To meaningfully engage with Snuneymuxw First Nation at every stage of program design, from strategic goal-setting and implementation, to monitoring and reporting, to the level that the Nation is willing to engage, and in a manner that honours the Nation's priorities, and that the Trust leverages sufficient budget to create capacity for a sustained engagement.

Gabriola Island Biocultural and Housing Diversity Program (BHDP) - An Overview

The Gabriola Island BHDP would be a unique program designed to bridge the historical divide between the community's housing needs and the urgent need to preserve and protect the sensitive ecology of Gabriola Island. The suggested program name builds upon the LTC's

objectives stated in the Housing Options and Impacts Review Project Charter. The term “biocultural diversity” is an emerging approach coming from the fields of anthropology and biology (typically describing the relationships between indigenous culture and biology) and addresses the intersection of cultures, communities and biologically-diverse spaces through a systems lens. A more detailed description of this term is provided on pg. 4 of this paper, but literature suggests this concept application to non-Indigenous communities and lands should be extended, and that it can be a powerful policy-making tool. “Housing diversity” means the types and forms of housing that suits the diverse needs of the island population, without being limited to strictly affordable housing.

Through this program, the LTC would receive advice, resourcing, capacity and/or guidance from Sustaining Partners such as: Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN), Island Trust Conservancy (ITC), and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) - Area B. As well, the program would be supported by a Joint Task Force on Increasing Gabriola's Biocultural and Housing Diversity. Seats on the task force would include specific sectors reserved for ~2yr terms. There could be 8-12 voting members (reps from all Partners and key community groups) and 2 - 3 non-voting members (paid program consultant, Island planner, minute taker) that support the overall program and provide advice to the LTC. The “joint” nature of the Task force is key, ensuring that the program can be focussed on the three fundamental issues that no single agency or government has been able to address holistically: housing options, biodiversity and freshwater protection, and meaningful engagement with First Nations.

Collaborative and Strategic Action between Four Partners

The RDN, SFN, LTC and ITC would work collaboratively to execute the program objectives over multiple terms, through several smaller short-term projects that also address each agencies' own strategic goals. Sustaining Partners would collaborate to set strategic goals for action, secure funding, supply staff/resourcing, guidance and some capacity components. For example, the program might access the ITC’s tools for quantifying biodiversity retention and loss, use its mapping, data and monitoring technology, and in return, the Project could make actionable their top priority projects in their regional conservation strategy to preserve biodiversity, turning a wish list into reality. Other agencies, such as Gabriola Community Economic Development (Chamber of Commerce) may also play a part, both in securing funding and providing input, research and assisting to implement the program’s goals.

The program would be mandated by the Gabriola LTC, financed through budget request to Trust Council, with support from grants through the RDN and the Province and other sources. The Trust could dedicate a percentage of staff time for this program - Island Planner, Communication Specialist, Regional Planning Manager, admin staff (minute taker, team assistant) - and an annual program budget for the consultant, task force meetings, SFN capacity funding, etc. The Consultant would be responsible for supporting the task force and executing

the workplan deliverables, in cooperation with the Island Planner. The ITC may wish to dedicate some staff time to ensure its Regional Conservation Strategy goals for Gabriola are incorporated or dovetailed into the program's workplan, and possibly participate in the task force. The RDN and SFN could either designate staff to participate on the Task Force or assist in leveraging access to grants to support the program's smaller projects. The LTC could provide capacity funding to SFN. The program would create significant benefits for each body by leveraging existing research, resources, opportunities for public engagement and collaborating on monitoring progress.

Project Design & Potential Initiatives

The HAPC strongly urges that the Gabriola LTC invite the Sustaining Partners to contribute their ideas at the design and development stage, to scope out the program objectives and opportunities as early in the process as possible, to inform the business case to be presented to Trust Council. This would also assure partners who wish to remain non-partisan that their mandates – particularly respecting the Indigenous perspectives and traditional knowledges about land – will be embedded into the project's values and core from the start.

The program could address a range of initiatives, including, for example:

- working with the RDN to research building codes for tiny or small moveable homes, and green and STEP code building regulations, and implementing recommendations from the RDN's alternative forms of rural development project from the Regional Growth Strategy,
- collaborating with the Islands Trust and Conservancy to set targets for voluntary initiatives to protect the environment on private lands, monitoring island biodiversity and freshwater protection,
- working with SFN on community priorities that could be addressed through a land-based learning initiative, and promote Snuneymuxw traditional knowledges and cultural heritage in specific areas.

These initiatives could be adopted by Trustees and resourced by either the regional planning team for the Islands Trust or the current planning team, or the projects could run concurrently and independently under the Joint Task Force's pre-determined mandate to address housing and biodiversity targets at the local, community and regional level. The program's primary directive would be strategic and collaborative action on all the inter-related and complex issues that require a high degree of collaboration, joint effort and strategic resourcing.

Biocultural Lens

The key learning the HAPC has taken away from the Gabriola Housing Working Group's (HWG) consultation with the community is that the protection of Gabriola Island forests and waters is as highly valued and prioritized as is the need to protect the diversity and wellbeing of

the communities that live here. Highly diverse biological realms are known as healthy spaces, and a diverse population is no less integral to a healthy community. These dual priorities speak directly to the findings of the community research undertaken by HWG, but also have been clear from the decades of unsatisfying tug of war attempting to balance the needs of the community and the ecosystems, a global struggle that is not at all unique to Gabriola. And so we believe this Joint Task Force must use a holistic scientific lens that honours both these priorities, as well as enabling meaningful engagement and collaboration with SFN, allowing us to promote values that are responsive to Snuneymuxw and Coast Salish nations' priorities.

Currently, biologists and social scientists who work at the intersection of biological and human sustainability are trending toward a scientific approach called “biocultural diversity”. This denotes the “inextricable link” between biological diversity and the indigenous and traditional peoples that inhabit them (Cocks, 2006). Coming from the field of biological anthropology, the concept has shifted “towards an emphasis on the tight interlinkages between human societies, particularly their cultural sphere, and the natural and biophysical environment in which they exist” (Hanspac et. al, 2020). Biocultural diversity marries the complex interconnected worlds of social, spiritual, ecology, resource-use, knowledges and cultural aspects of land use. “By acknowledging the inseparable link between nature and culture, the concept has a deeply ingrained systems perspective at its core, thus making it an inherently social–ecological systems view (Liu et al., 2007, as cited in Hanspach et al., 2020).

Cocks (2006) argues that “culturally-conscious programs for conservation of biodiversity” should be extended to rural, urban and non-indigenous communities to “ensure an increased understanding of the role of wild resources in the lives of all users, as well as to identify new approaches to link the continuation of multifaceted cultural practices relating to the use of wild resources with biodiversity conservation.” We believe the Program must be designed through this lens of biocultural diversity. And it could be a very powerful tool in the pursuit for sustainability, “precisely because of its ability to bridge diverse knowledge systems and policy” (Merçon et al., 2019; Sterling et al., 2017, as cited by Hanspach et. al. 2020).

These findings are supported by recent research on Gabriolans' attachment to place in the face of the encroachments of globalization (Dunsmoor-Farley, 2020). These attachments extend beyond an attraction to the physical space to encompass visceral attributes associated with a sense of “sanctuary”, a “bounded space” in which one is “in nature” and understanding the community as a “protective enclave”.

We are not only in a housing crisis, but we are also in a period of eco-crisis exacerbated by rapid climate change. We urge the LTC to take the lead in developing a scientific and culturally-responsive approach with a strong, non-partisan intergovernmental biocultural and housing diversity program, in order to address the challenges and opportunities of both.

References

- Cocks, M. 2006. Biocultural Diversity: Moving Beyond the Realm of ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Local’ People. *Hum Ecol* 34, 185–200. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/10.1007/s10745-006-9013-5>.
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- Hanspach, J., Hader, L.J., Oteros-Rosas, E., et. al. 2020. Biocultural approaches to sustainability: a systematic review of the scientific literature. *People and Nature* 2. 643-658. <https://besjournals-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/share/46ZXUYDA39FSCMYD5WAG?target=10.1002/pan3.10120>