

## **Farmers' Input into Gabriola Official Community Plan Changes**

*Based on individual conversations Sibyl Frei had with Alexa Bolton, Graham Bradley, Aaron Dewarle, Pollen Heath and Simon Nattrass from June 21-27, 2025, followed by a group zoom on July 2, 2025.*

"If farmers are told what, how and when to farm by government, good farmers will stop doing it, and we'll end up with farmers good at paperwork and audits but not good at farming."

– Alexa Bolton

### **Zoning**

- Anything that LTC can do through zoning in the OCP to encourage active farming is a value.
- In terms of land use, we need flexible enough land use policies that help farmers stay in business.
- Allow agri-tourism such as a farmland store, little café/restaurant, bed-and-breakfast, and other opportunities for mixed use.
- Establish a new "enterprise" zone for light industry/small processing such as breweries (not called "industry" or "light industry" to avoid NIMBY).
- For properties in the AG and RR zones that are good farmland, change the current rules for those properties to allow farmers to do more than currently allowed, including incorporating what is allowed in the ALR.
- Establish the right to farm; it is difficult on 0.5 acres that you are only allowed 6 chickens; what is the minimum parcel size in terms of when you can have livestock; even a one acre cut off is unreasonable; should let people farm anything they can farm – we are in a rural place.
- Want commercial zoning for agi co-op property at 465 South Road.
- Allow agi co-op to open a store or something else that helps farmers sell their product.

### **Housing**

- Allow year-round farm worker secondary housing; there is farming stuff to do year round.
- Look at how to have housing year round without ending up with trailer parks, but don't want to have someone for six months, have to kick them off and then have to find someone new – this is a problem.
- Right now, on agricultural land, we can have a house and a secondary house; however, that means we can't form a farmers' co-op and buy land together and be able to live there, including some people living there who don't farm but contribute the cost of the land and farming i.e. we need greater density mixed use housing.
- If you have an 80-acre property, you are only able to have 2 houses but if you have 20 5-acre properties you can have many more houses that could all be concentrated on one acre.
- Like idea of tiny homes, where you can own one and get a lease to put it on someone's property; should allow tiny houses on wheels.

### **Farm status**

- Can the Gabriola LTC or Islands Trust have any influence on who gets farm status?
  - Establish two different tax exemptions, one for people who are actually farming, and a lower one for people who are only cutting hay.
  - Look at how to stop people from having one alpaca and getting farm status.

### **Water**

- Make it easier to dig a pond.
- Is there any way to ease access to groundwater for farmers (beyond the what is in BC legislation)?

### ***Composting and biochar***

- We believe we have the right to compost and we need that.
- Include biochar and compost selling in AG zone, with a limit in terms of how long the biochar activity can take place in a year. (Note that a bio char pilot project on Salt Spring with only lawn clipping failed i.e. they had to add \$\$; need to figure out how to do bio char cost effectively.)
- There is lots of garbage and plastic in the compost we can get from Nanaimo; if we had good clean community compost, farmers would be interested.
- Composting and biochar should be considered separate from industrial activity; it should be much easier for farmers to use and sell these products.

### ***Temporary Use Permits***

- End repeated renewal requirements and fees for Temporary Use Permits on rental accommodations for active farmers; instead require a farmer to show farming revenues at a certain minimum on their income taxes, such as \$10,000 annually.
- Change TUP for markets to have more opportunity to sell our products.
- Need easier rules on individual market stands to make farming possible.

### ***Farming leases***

- Incentivise landowners with farmland to offer farming leases if they aren't farming, such as allowing more housing to be built and offered to farmers their leased land.

### ***Farm covenants***

- Encourage agricultural landowners to put covenants on their property.
- Offer easy, no cost, pro-farming covenants.
- Need to make covenanting more attractive, since it means giving up some of the value of the land in terms of kids and inheritance, etc.; need to join restriction willingly, and get some benefits.
- Set up covenants so that, if kids want the land, they get first access.

### ***Subdivision***

- Consider restricting subdivision of agricultural land, yet keep in mind the demand for food in the community, and the need for farmers to have an asset to pass on to children in the future.
- The effectiveness of the ALR is that those properties cannot be subdivided and therefore the land is devalued, making it more affordable for someone else to buy it and farm.
- Not supposed to be able to subdivide in the ALR, but there seem to be some landowners in places like Nanaimo and Parksville who can afford to hire a team of lawyers to find way around those rules, subdivide and sell.

### ***Agricultural planning***

- Develop an agriculture plan for Gabriola that does not get shelved as has happened on other islands (e.g. Denman); how does such a plan stay useful and relevant, more business like.
- Involve the BC government's Extension Services to help identify what could be good to grow on which specific properties.