

# GABRIOLA OCP REVIEW

## TOPIC-FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT

September 2025



Islands Trust

# What We Heard

## Engagement Summary Report

### A Community-Guided Process

In 2024, the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee launched the Gabriola Visioning 2050 engagement process as an opportunity for island residents to discuss and define community vision and values. The Gabriola Vision 2050 engagement activities were an opportunity for Gabriola residents to tell Islands Trust elected trustees what is special about this place, and how they envision the future of this community. The results of this engagement process led to the identification of topics important to Gabriola residents: housing; the economy; environmental protection; climate change; waste; water; and cultural heritage.

**The Gabriola Visioning 2050 - What We Heard From the Online Survey report is available [here](#).**

The Gabriola Official Community Plan (OCP) Review Topic-focused public engagement included focus groups and an online survey which ran from September 18, 2024 to May 15, 2025. During this time, 590 people responded to the survey. Discussion guides on the following topics were created to support respondents as they provided feedback on topics identified as important to Gabriola residents during the last round of engagement:

- Connectivity
- Economy
- Environment
- Housing
- Resource Stewardship
- Water

June 2025

## Key themes

Across all topic areas, a few key ideas were consistently echoed through responses to the survey and the focus groups.

- Water sustainability and groundwater protection remain top priorities
- Clear, measurable, and enforceable policy language is needed in the updated OCP
- The community supports housing diversity, but density should align with available water resources
- Environmental protection and ecological integrity must be prioritized across all policy areas
- A desire for balance between conservation and resilience — especially in forestry, agriculture, housing, and economic policy

## Focus Groups

Topic-focused conversations were held from March to April 2025 on select themes. A maximum of 12 participants with different lived experiences were present in each focus group.

### Connectivity

Focus group participants emphasized creating a safer, more accessible Gabriola — especially for youth, seniors, and people using mobility aids. Trails and parks are seen as vital for both recreation and transportation. The importance of supporting a healthy and active community was emphasized.

### Parks and Trails

Focus group participants prioritized safe, active mobility for all ages and abilities. Steps to achieve this include continuing to develop a comprehensive island-wide trail map in collaboration with the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) and Gabriola Land & Trails Trust (GaLTT). It was emphasized that parkland contributions from developers should be high-quality and flexible, and that playing fields should be considered a community amenity.

### Transportation

Reduced car dependency by improving multi-use trails and roadside lanes was emphasized. The lack of road safety was a major concern, and there was particular focus on the need to work with the Province on reducing speed limits and introducing other traffic calming measures, particularly around the school zone, at the ferry terminal, and near the village. The focus group also suggested that pedestrian access should be considered in development applications.

## Economy

The focus group highlighted the desire for a resilient local economy that supports small businesses, young farmers, and working residents while preserving the island's rural character. Focus group participants emphasized: the need for affordable workforce housing close to amenities and workplaces, improved bike paths for tourism and commuters, reliable internet for remote work and emergency response, and support for small-scale commercial and light industrial activity. They also recommended more commercial nodes and limiting short-term rentals to principal dwellings.

## Environment

Focus group participants emphasized the need to protect Gabriola Island ecosystems through stronger land-use tools, updated mapping, and public education. They supported expanding Development Permit Areas to protect sensitive habitats and groundwater, using science-based mapping, and integrating Indigenous knowledge and stewardship into the OCP. Restoration alongside preservation and landowner education were seen as key priorities.

## Housing

In housing discussions, focus groups emphasized affordability, flexibility, and ecological sustainability, calling for creative solutions within environmental limits. Participants supported a range of housing types—including co-housing, multi-family units, tiny homes, and secondary suites—and suggested allowing clustered housing near services and transit. They recommended policy shifts to permit multiple small units per lot within a shared maximum coverage. Water access was identified as a key constraint, with calls to require potable rainwater collection for new homes and to align housing policy with existing infrastructure such as septic systems, water availability, and transit access.

## Resource Stewardship

Focus group participants emphasized stewardship as a shared, ongoing, community responsibility, particularly in response to wildfire risk and climate change. They supported fuel-load management, fire safety education and wildfire resiliency planning, while recognizing that forestry can be used as a tool for wildfire resilience. Sustainable resource management was also identified as a priority, with calls to encourage low-impact forestry, local firewood and lumber production, and the active use of agricultural land through incentives.

## Water

Water emerged as a central concern across all focus areas, with focus group participants calling for stronger protections, public education, and nature-based solutions. They emphasized the need to safeguard aquifers, recharge zones, and areas at risk of saltwater intrusion.

Recommendations were also made to require rainwater collection for new buildings and to use Development Permit Areas to manage water-related impacts of development. Participants also stressed the importance of water education, water monitoring, robust information on impacts to water resources in applications, tracking surface cover changes, improving public awareness of seasonal water availability, and providing clear definitions for water systems.

Members of the Gabriola farming community, unable to attend the focus group, self-organized to provide written feedback on OCP agriculture policies. They emphasized the need for flexible regulations that allow farms to thrive, including support for secondary uses such as agri-tourism, opportunities to sell farm products, and sufficient housing to accommodate year-round farmworkers. Their input also expressed support for restricting subdivision of farmland, improving water availability, permitting composting, and developing a clear agriculture plan for Gabriola.



## Online Survey

The online survey ran from September 18, 2024 to May 15, 2025.

### Environmental Changes Noticed

Survey respondents were asked if they have noticed any environmental changes on Gabriola Island that they think may be linked to climate change. The following key themes were consistently highlighted:

- Tree die-off and forest stress
- Lower groundwater levels
- Hotter, drier summers
- Increased erosion

Significant natural areas named for protection included: Brickyard Beach, Honeysuckle Woods, Paisley Place Forest, and intertidal zones.

## Development Permit Areas (DPAs)

Survey respondents were asked what they thought could be protected by Development Permit Areas (DPAs). The top areas identified for protection were:

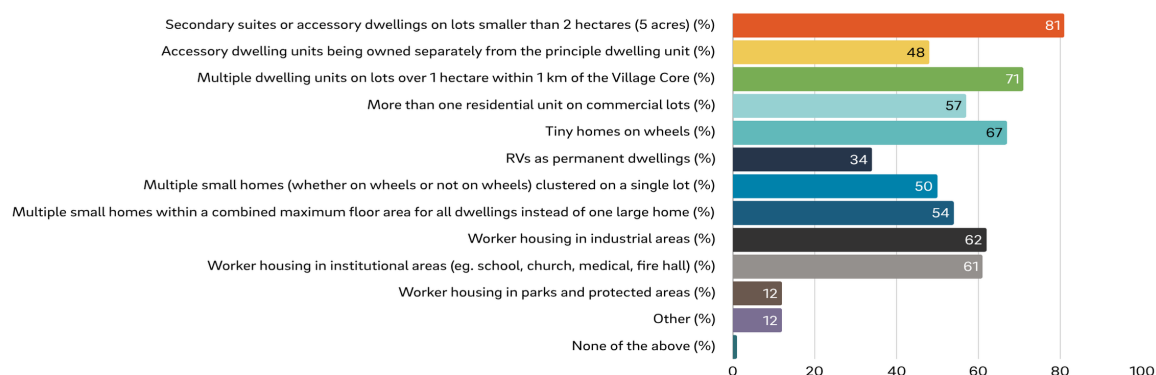
- Shorelines and marine areas
- Groundwater recharge zones
- Wetlands
- Habitat for endangered species

Additional suggestions included protection for cultural sites and wildlife corridors.

## Housing Options

Survey respondents expressed strong support for expanding housing options, provided there is adequate water and minimal environmental impact. Of the respondents that answered this question, 99% expressed support for at least one housing option, with 1% not supporting any housing options. Priorities included housing types such as secondary suites (81%), tiny homes (including on wheels) (67%), multiple small homes clustered on one lot (50%), worker housing above shops in industrial areas (62%), and increased density within 1km of the Village Core (71%). There was broad interest in townhouses, apartments, co-housing, and other affordable multi-family housing forms and increasing density on existing lots, such as allowing multiple small units with maximum floor area limits (54%), and locating growth in areas best suited to handle it. Respondents also expressed the need for rainwater collection and groundwater protection.

**Assuming there is enough water and minimal environmental impact, which of the following housing options would you support?**



## Commercial, Industrial and Resource Lands

Survey respondents were asked if more than one residential dwelling could be permitted on commercial properties as well as what options for additional residential density they would support on agricultural land.

A majority of survey respondents (64%) supported allowing multiple residential dwellings on commercial properties although concerns about groundwater availability were common. When asked about adding residential density on agricultural land, respondents selected all the options they supported:

- Allowing density equivalent to what is permitted by the Agricultural Land Commission (47%)
- Additional units for workers (61%)
- Where adequate freshwater water exists, opportunity for multiple small units with a combined maximum floor area (60%)
- Additional units when land is located close to the village core (33%)
- None (7%)

## Water

The most common months for water shortages are reported to be August (13%), September (12%), July (5%), and October (4%), with no more than 1% of respondents indicating they run out of water in any other individual month. 27% reported running out of groundwater at some point in the year, with 64% of those relying primarily on groundwater. 41% of respondents relied on water delivery at some point in the year.

Common themes emerged across all categories included:

- Support for requiring rainwater collection for new developments
- Interest in exploring clustered, low-impact housing
- Need for preservation of forest cover
- Desire for improvements to walkability and transit options
- Elevated protection of watersheds and ecological corridors
- Education on wildfire preparedness, habitat conservation, and invasive species

## Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Perspectives

Survey respondents were asked what questions they have about Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Perspectives related to Gabriola Island. Respondents asked thoughtful, forward-focused questions. Key themes included reconciliation, increased Indigenous visibility in public spaces, cultural education, and stronger relationships between First Nations and Islands Trust.

Some questions relating to these key themes include:

- How can the community further support Indigenous reconciliation?
- What is being done to prevent further damage to heritage sites?
- How can Gabriolans become more aware of Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Perspectives?
- Are there any opportunities to include Indigenous art, perspectives, culture, traditions, and language on Gabriola Island?
- What are the First Nations current feelings, perspectives, and connections to Gabriola Island?

Through the OCP review process, Islands Trust staff are actively collaborating with Snuneymuxw First Nation staff to better understand their interests and ensure these are meaningfully reflected and integrated into OCP policies.

## Next Steps

This input will help guide draft policy updates and recommendations for the Gabriola Island updated Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw. Future phases will include opportunities for public feedback on draft policies. For more information and updates, visit:

[www.islandstrust.bc.ca/island-planning/gabriola/projects/gabriola-ocpreview/](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/island-planning/gabriola/projects/gabriola-ocpreview/)

## Questions?

### Contact Trustees:

Tobi Elliott, Gabriola Island Trustee

E: [Trustee Elliott](mailto:Tobi.Elliott@islandstrust.bc.ca)

T: 1-250-268-7434

Susan Yates, Gabriola Island Trustee

E: [Trustee Yates](mailto:Susan.Yates@islandstrust.bc.ca)

T: 1-250-247-8086

### Contact staff:

E: [Northern Office Information](mailto:Northern.Office@islandstrust.bc.ca)

T: 1-250-247-2063

## Land Acknowledgment

Islands Trust and Islands Trust Conservancy respectfully acknowledge that the lands and waters that encompass the Islands Trust Area have been home to Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. We are committed to reconciliation and to working together to preserve and protect this ecologically, culturally, and spiritually significant region in the Salish Sea. The Islands Trust Area is located within the treaty lands and territories of the BOKEĆEN, Cowichan Tribes, Da'naxda'xw, K'ómoks, Lummi, Lyackson, MÁLEXEŁ, Qualicum, scəwəθən, səlilwətał, SEMYOME, shishálh, Skwxwú7mesh, Snaw-naw-as, Snuneymuxw, Songhees, Spune'luxutth, STÁUTW, Stz'uminus, łəʔəmen, Tlowitsis, Ts'uubaa-asatx, Wei Wai Kum, We Wai Kai, W JOŁEŁP, W SIKEM, Xeláltxw, Xwémalhkwu, Xwsepsum, and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm First Nations.





Learn more  
about next  
steps in the OCP  
review process



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