



Survey Results Summary

Gabriola Island: Reimagining Growth

Engagement Period: September 8 to October 1, 2025

Report Date: March 19, 2026

Introduction

As part of community engagement on the Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw Review Project, the Gabriola Island community was invited to complete a survey designed to gather community input on topics relating to density. This report summarizes key themes, concerns, and priorities expressed by community members. It reflects what we heard, not decisions or final outcomes.

About the Survey

The anonymous survey asked three questions designed to collect input on three central approaches used to manage growth: subdivision, rezoning, and secondary dwelling units.

It was completed by 156 respondents and took, on average, 5 minutes to complete with a 95% completion rate. Only comments directly related to the survey questions were considered. Off-topic comments or unrelated feedback have not been included or responded to. All responses were reviewed, and any content that is defamatory, profane, or inappropriate for a general audience was removed.






How input was collected:

- Online survey available on the Islands Trust website
 - Paper copies of the survey at the Islands Trust office on Gabriola and the Gabriola public library
 - Promotion through social media and subscriber lists
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Key Themes We Heard

1. Subdivision Potential

Question 1 described the existing zoning and subdivision potential on Gabriola Island, which could result in up to 45 new lots and up to 90 new dwelling units, and asked respondents to indicate which, if any, of the listed options they support.

Answer Choices ↓	Percentage ↓	Responses ↓
 Limit subdivision to only suitable areas (minimal impact on environment, groundwater, cultural heritage, and close to the village)	58.44%	90
 Limit subdivision for new lots except in limited instances (e.g., to support affordable housing initiatives)	30.52%	47
 Continue with current subdivision rules	18.83%	29
 None (please explain)	11.04%	17
 Unsure	1.30%	2
Show comments		
Total		154

As displayed in the table above¹,

- 89% of respondents were in support of limiting subdivision in some form:
 - 58% want to see subdivision limited to areas deemed to be suitable, and
 - 31% want subdivision of new lots limited to specific instances such as for affordable housing.
- 19% wish to see the current subdivision rules continue
- 11% did not support any of the response options
- 1% were unsure







While there was support for increasing the supply of affordable, flexible housing options, respondents placed strong emphasis on the need to protect ecosystems and water, and to limit growth. Comments in favour of affordable housing expressed support for smaller lots and subdivision to meet housing needs, and there was a suggestion to create incentives for owners to build on existing vacant lots. The need to provide for active transportation, services and amenities in planning for additional housing was also raised. Others were not in support of increasing density, citing concerns about groundwater availability and continued environmental degradation.

Appendix A includes the full list of comments from respondents grouped by theme.

2. Rezoning

Question 2 listed options for rezoning that could be enabled through the updated Official Community Plan and asked respondents which ones they would like to see.

¹ Responses of 0.5 and higher are rounded up the next highest percentage and responses below 0.5 are rounded down to the lower percentage.

Answer Choices ↓	Percentage ↓	Responses ↓
 Small Unit Clustered Housing - Small units (including mobile homes and tiny homes on wheels) clustered on a lot with shared facilities	59.09%	91
 Density Bonus for Conservation/Restoration - Permitting additional units in exchange for land protection	50.65%	78
 Flexible Housing - Multiple units allowed on a lot with a maximum combined floor area	48.70%	75
 Cluster Housing - Homes grouped close together on one lot to minimize impact to land	46.10%	71
 None (please explain)	15.58%	24
 Unsure	3.90%	6
Show comments		
Total		154

As displayed in the table above²,

- 59% of respondents were in support of small unit clustered housing
- 51% supported permitting additional units in exchange for land protection
- 49% supported allowing multiple units on a lot with a maximum combined floor area
- 46% were in support of homes grouped close together on one lot to minimize impact to the land
- 16% did not support any of the options provided
- 4% were unsure

Feedback in this area reflects a tension between the desire to respond to housing needs and environmental preservation priorities. While there is some openness to new housing approaches, that support was often conditional on having strong environmental protections and infrastructure to support the growth. Many respondents are concerned that proposed changes will increase population density beyond what the island can handle.

Several respondents expressed a desire for more clarity in the policy distinctions, including examples of what could be permitted. Questions were raised about how conservation measures would be enforced and concerns for long-term compliance. Others would like to see adaptive policies that respond to specific contexts, rather than rigid rules.









Appendix B includes the full list of comments from respondents grouped by theme.

3. Secondary Dwellings

Question 3 listed options relating to secondary suites and secondary dwelling units that could be enabled through the Official Community Plan update and asked respondents which ones they support.

² Responses of 0.5 and higher are rounded up the next highest percentage and responses below 0.5 are rounded down to the lower percentage.

While the majority of respondents indicated support for increasing density through allowing additional units, 16% do not want to see an increase in secondary or accessory dwelling unit allowed, and 3% were unsure.

Answer Choices ↓	Percentage ↓	Responses ↓
 Permitting 1 secondary dwelling unit on smaller lots (1ha-2ha) only in suitable areas (proximity to village, impacts to environment, water, Indigenous cultural heritage considered)	36.84%	56
 Permitting 1 secondary dwelling unit on all smaller lots (1ha-2ha)	35.53%	54
 Increasing flexibility for residential units accessory to a non-residential use	28.95%	44
 Permitting secondary suite and accessory dwelling unit on lots that are 2ha or larger in suitable areas (proximity to town and impacts to environment, water, Indigenous cultural heritage considered)	27.63%	42
 Permitting secondary suite and accessory dwelling unit on all lots that are 2ha or larger	23.03%	35
 No increase in secondary or accessory dwelling unit allowances	16.45%	25
 Permitting 1 secondary dwelling units on smaller lots (1ha-2ha) - only on lots close to the village.	4.61%	7
 Unsure	3.29%	5
Show comments		
Total		152

Appendix C includes the full list of comments from respondents grouped by theme.

What Happens Next

Input received through this survey and through on-island engagement sessions 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/

Questions?

Contact Trustees:

Tobi Elliott, Gabriola Island Trustee

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

T: 1-250-268-7434

Contact staff:

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

Susan Yates, Gabriola Island Trustee

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

T: 1-250-247-8086

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 BOKÉCEN, Cowichan Tribes, Da'naxda'xw, K'ómoks, Lummi, Lyackson, MÁLEXEŁ, Qualicum, scəwáθən, səl' ilwətał, SEMYOME, shíshálh, Skwx̓wú7mesh, Snaw-naw-as, Snuneymuxw, Songhees, Spune'luxutth, SĀÁUTW_, Stz'uminus, łaʔəmen, Tlowitsis, Ts'uubaa-asatx, Wei Wai Kum, We Wai Kai, W_JOŁEŁP, W_SIKEM, Xeláltxw, Xwémalhkwu, Xwsepsum, and xʷməθkʷəy'əm First Nations.

Appendix A: Respondent Comments to Question 1

1. Currently, 16 residentially zoned properties on Gabriola Island have the potential to be subdivided into multiple lots. Based on existing bylaws, these subdivisions could result in up to 45 new lots. The existing zoning, which allows secondary suites and additional dwelling units, reflects the potential for up to 90 new dwelling units if the subdivisions were realized.

Each new lot could result in significant impacts on the land, water supply, and cultural heritage. While these impacts can be assessed during the subdivision application process, the community has an opportunity, through the OCP review, to consider the costs and benefits of allowing further subdivision.

Which of the following do you support?

- Limit subdivision for new lots except in limited instances (e.g., to support affordable housing initiatives)
- Limit subdivision to only suitable areas (minimal impact on environment, groundwater, cultural heritage, and close to the village)
- Continue with current subdivision rules
- Unsure
- None (please explain)

Comments by Theme

Support for Environmental Protection: 11 responses

- “Depends on environmental impacts.”
- “Please consider total impact of humans on environment, regardless of where they live.”
- “Densifying in areas with existing development will preserve natural environment (e.g. trees) and be in proximity to existing services, e.g. transportation, trails which will reduce municipal's cost.”
- “We don't need to increase density beyond what the bylaw currently permit. Gabriola is already overdeveloped. Increasing overall density beyond current rules means more environmental degradation.”
- “There is NO WATER near the village. Wells in the area are drying up and recharge areas have been developed.”
- “Minimal impact needs to be defined, emphasizing ground water criteria.”
- “Stick to current densities. Subdivide only if groundwater supports it.”
- “I don't support further division without any effort to encourage building on existing empty lots. I do not want more lots without bylaw limiting cutting trees down. I do not support new subdivision where water is limited.”
- “You are ruining our isl - what ever happened to Preserve and Protect”
- “An island our size, tiny really, is not the place to solve the housing issue. We have finite resources that need to be protected above the bigger problems that we just won't be able to solve here.”
- “Limit subdivision to only suitable areas (environment, groundwater).”

Support for Affordable Housing that Minimizes Environmental Impacts: 4 responses

- “We need affordable housing on Gabriola. I support housing small footprint (max. 1000 square feet) homes in any part of the Gabriola where owner can supply adequate water

and sewage collection. Each unit must have a metal roof and collect its own water. New builds should also include heat pumps. However, housing density must be addressed together with transportation. High population areas must support active transportation with a speed limit or 30 km/hr wherever there are no sidewalks and cycle paths. The Islands Trust needs to protect the land, water and each other using the indigenous lens of seven generations and all my relations.”

- “This housing crisis needs to be addressed with as few limitations as possible. I strongly support 1-2 hectare lot subdivisions and flexible housing options that create a sustainable environmental impact. i.e. on lots with sufficient water.”
- “Limited, ecologically sound, allows for low income housing, does not have to be close to the village as transportation for all should also be a consideration.”
- “I am okay with smaller lots (e.g. 4 hectare) being able to subdivide considering environmental impact with parameters (e.g. housing agreements) to address housing needs. However, I prefer options listed in the next questions.”

Incentivizing Affordable Housing: 1 response

- “We have many unbuild densities now. Create an incentive for owners to build or sell, like a vacant density surtax.”

Infrastructure to Support Increased Density: 1 response

- “You can’t increase density without the supporting infrastructure. You can’t have a proper OCP with the exclusion of infrastructure and public lands including traffic control, public amenities and services. Businesses continue to close that also support a community.”

Cultural Heritage Protection: 1 response

- “Especially no subdivision on or around heritage areas.”

Ferry Concerns: 1 response

- “Our ferry system is crumbling with the existing Gabe population.”

Concern for Property Rights: 1 response

- “Retroactive removal of property owners rights is not fair.”

Neutral/Mixed/Unclear: 4 responses

- “Do you mean limit completely or partially? I think somewhere in between what we are currently allowing for and partial limits with exceptions for housing.”
- “Unable to decide as- first option: what do you mean by "limit subdivision"? is this about reducing the minimum and average lot size for subdivision? Is so then say that and identify it as what it is: “down zoning”. And is the "except in limited instances" to be carried out by a provision that the average or minimum lot size is somehow waived if the new lot(s) created is solely for affordable housing? Regarding the second option- is “limit subdivision to only suitable areas” mean all other areas have subdivision potential removed? How many of the 16 subdividable lots would this apply to? “Limit subdivision to suitable areas” means what- what is currently possible or are you referring to increased subdivision potential? Clustered dwellings will most likely require a water license and septic management may become an issue depending on the size of the lot. Is there to be a minimum lot size for clustering? Is the clustering to be that of rental units, fee simple ownership, strata or a co-op? Or does clustering include secondary suites

within a dwelling unit? The broad stroke description omits points the public should be aware of if they are going to support the ideas proffered.”

- “Where are these 16 lots situated? kindly provide map.”
- “What about all of the current empty lots that eventually will be built on?”

Appendix B: Respondent Comments to Question 2

2. Which of the following options related to rezoning should OCP policies enable? (Select all that apply)

- Cluster Housing – Homes grouped close together on one lot to minimize impact to land
- Small Unit Clustered Housing – Small units (including mobile homes and tiny homes on wheels) clustered on a lot with shared facilities
- Flexible Housing – Multiple units allowed on a lot with a maximum combined floor area
- Density Bonus for Conservation/Restoration – Permitting additional units in exchange for land protection
- Unsure
- None (please explain)

Comments by Theme

Concerns about Density and Overcrowding: 6 responses

- “Small Unit Clustered Housing will cause too many people. Unsure of the options, depend on where on the Island.”
- “Increasing the number of dwellings on a lot is increasing density.”
- “Is cluster the new Trust buzz word- forget the options - the Gulf Island are Full and - get rid of the Trust.”
- “More density in an area equals more water and sewage problems. The reason a lot of us came to Gabriola was to have some space around us, not to look into each others windows, and be trucking in water every month.”
- “Until roads are made safe for all users no new builds of any size should be approved in high population areas. Ferry overloads already reveal we are over capacity on vehicles.”
- “Do not re-zone anything.”

Affordability and Diverse Housing Needs: 4 responses

- “This is a crisis. I think trailer parks are needed for low income. Then they can be regulated.”
- “Additional units only in suitable areas.”
- “All of it to support diverse housing types, where appropriate, as the land is able.”
- “Permitting diverse housing types enables prioritize affordable housing options and supports the needs of the marginalized population.”

Desire for more Clarity/Implementation Concerns: 3 responses

- “I think the last change to allow secondary suites should be promoted. If you do the conservation bonus what will you do if in ten years after they build a home they change their mind about the conservation? Make them tear the house down and evict and tenants?”

- “I would be afraid that with the density bonus that the percentage conserved would be lost when the property has a new owner. If the requirement is legally attached to the property in perpetuity it should also be considered.”
- “Am unable to respond. The first 3 options appear to be the same in that they are describing allowing more than 1 primary dwelling on a lot with the only distinctions being whether clustered in options 1 and 2 and option 3 only refers to a maximum floor area. Also, the first and second option differences appear to be size and shared facilities. So if one chooses the first option does that mean size and a combined floor area maximum is no longer a factor? The intent of the fourth option is somewhat clear but it would help if number of densities permitted were linked to some size of the conservation area and some example as to what is meant by "for conservation/restoration"? Is it a permanent dedication and how could/would it be done? How would you effect the "conservation" or "restoration"? Not enough clarity provided.”

Conditional Support for Increased Density: 2 responses

- “Density bonus a good incentive but only if the result truly benefits the community and most importantly, the natural environment.”
- “These are better options than subdivision but I am also in favor of 1–2-hectare subdivision.”
- “I might support these if they were density neutral, but since you don’t specify that I can’t signify support.”

Environmental Protection and Conservation: 2 responses

- “Conservation should be a prime reason for additional density allowance.”
- “What about covenants to protect areas that should be preserved? or Lot Coverage?”

Need for Flexible Policies: 2 responses

- “There are potential benefits to all of the above but it very much depends on the circumstances. The wording should be general enough to be adaptable, there may be other possibilities that haven't been thought of yet. Flexible Housing may be a general enough term to cover the other options.”
- “I support cluster housing if it’s for seniors only and further defined. I do not support trailer parks here. Ever. I do not support any rezoning without limits on tree removal. I do not support rezoning that increases residential without encouraging existing empty lot owners to build.”

Appendix D: Respondent Comments to Question 3

3. On Gabriola, a secondary suite or Accessory Dwelling Unit is permitted in the Small Rural Residential Zone (SRR), Large Rural Residential Zone (LRR) and Agricultural Zone (A) on lots that are 2 hectares (4.94 acres) or larger. There are approximately 667 residential lots over 2 hectares. In the ALR, a manufactured home for immediate family or farmworker housing, and one secondary suite is permitted.

Which of the following options related to secondary dwelling units should OCP policies enable?

- Permitting 1 secondary dwelling unit on all smaller lots (1ha-2ha)
- Permitting 1 secondary dwelling units on smaller lots (1ha-2ha) - only on lots close to the village.
- Permitting 1 secondary dwelling unit on smaller lots (1ha-2ha) only in suitable areas (proximity to village, impacts to environment, water, Indigenous cultural heritage considered)
- Permitting secondary suite and accessory dwelling unit on all lots that are 2ha or larger
- Permitting secondary suite and accessory dwelling unit on lots that are 2ha or larger in suitable areas (proximity to town and impacts to environment, water, Indigenous cultural heritage considered)
- Increasing flexibility for residential units accessory to a non-residential use
- No increase in secondary or accessory dwelling unit allowances
- Unsure

Comments by Theme

Secondary Suites and Housing Flexibility: 8 responses

- “People want to have secondary suites for family, or hired caregivers, and this should not be restricted anywhere on the island.”
- “Please look at allowing more secondary suites on all types of housing.”
- “I think it is not effective to forbid secondary suites but allow houses to be any size with any number of people. People should have the flexibility to live together and have some privacy. The blockage is not allowing two kitchens in a house. Multigenerational and non standard families cohabiting also addresses the theme of connecting people.”
- “Also, please allow secondary suite in homes that are not the landowner's primary residence. This rule is easy to change. I support secondary suites everywhere.”
- “Increase flexibility of accessory units for a non-residential use but not vacation rental.”
- “All secondary dwellings should be affordable/attainable, and not revenue units (e.g. Airbnb).”
- “Enabling 1 secondary suite on all properties with appropriate groundwater management.”
- “First of all, the listing of zones where secondary suites are permitted is incomplete. There are 5 more zones that permit a secondary suite. These are: Forestry (F), Resource (R), Resource Residential 1 (RR1), Resource Residential 2 (RR2), and Local Commercial 2 (LC2). The current 2-hectare limit is fine and adding a unit to the commercial zones is reasonable. Question 2 is about adding more than 1 principle dwelling unit on a lot presumably in support of reducing "rural sprawl" but question 3 is about secondary suites which if increased would run contrary to that objective unless they are limited to

"proximity to town" which I assume means the Village area or possibly the ferry terminal (ie town=Nanaimo). Is that assumption about "town" correct?"

Environmental and Resource Considerations: 7 responses

- "Because we have no TPS specifying measurable limits to environmental impact."
- "So much depends on water availability, and I don't mean via truck delivery."
- "Number of secondary dwelling units should be dependent on the capacity of the existing sewerage system, setback distances to sensitive areas, slope type, and minimum soil type as per the Subdivision Guidelines."
- "Assuming water, environment, and Indigenous impacts are considered in all cases...?"
- "Every human has an environmental impact."
- "Consider water availability aspects when permitting 1 secondary dwelling units on smaller lots (1ha-2ha) - only on lots close to the village."
- "Again there is no water and cluster house would require wastewater treatment systems not septic systems."

Infrastructure and Transportation: 3 responses

- "There are already plenty of secondary dwelling units on half-acre lots. I am aware of it. The problem is traffic - not the people who live in those units."
- "Transportation options need to be considered rather than focussing the density."
- "No doctors, increasing traffic, ferry fiasco-we've created Disneyland."

Other Comments:

- "Do not increase density."
- "So many domino effects, needs a great deal of careful planning."