

September 20, 2021

To: **Mayne Island Advisory Planning Committee (APC)**
Mayne Island Local Trust Committee (LTC)

Please find below a summary and discussion of our concerns with the Mayne Island Housing Society's proposal to sub-divide and develop the property at 375 Village Bay Road. We would be happy to clarify or discuss further any of the points we make below or in our previous letters to the LTC. We would also be happy to meet with you on our property to discuss.

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[REDACTED]

A. Wrong project, Wrong location, Wrong site plan

Wrong project: This affordable housing model is designed for areas that are more populated and have a higher percentage of renter households than Mayne Island.

Our 2nd and 6th letters to the LTC (November 2020 and May 2021) demonstrate that the proposed rental rates are geared to Mayne Islanders who earn \$40k or more per year, whereas a good portion of Mayne Island renters (estimated 73%) earn less than that. This proposed rental model does not fit what most people would consider an amenity for Mayne Island.

Mayne Island should focus energy on improving existing housing stock and finding new rental and ownership opportunities amongst Mayne Island residents. There are several LTC projects past and future that are working to improve this, and our 6th letter to the LTC lists several alternative solutions.

Wrong location: If it is determined that a 10 unit cluster housing cul-de-sac is what Mayne needs, then why not find a more suitable area that is already cleared and preferably zoned for this density?

Our letters 1, 2, 4 and 6 all describe the environmental value of the proposed property, and the damage that would occur if the project were to proceed. We discuss forest fragmentation, saving veteran trees and their surrounding regenerating forest, surface water flows, aquifer recharge, Coastal Douglas fir ecosystem values, and impact on neighbouring property owners' environmental objectives.

We understand that this property is being considered due to the land donation offer by Sean McHugh. However, if LTC is willing to allow a 3 parcel subdivision in exchange for donation of one of the parcels to affordable housing, then why not see who else on the island might be interested in a similar deal? The LTC may find it has several proposals to choose from.

Wrong site plan: If it is determined that the project is to go forward at the proposed location, the site plan needs to be adjusted to provide a buffer to neighbours, and a more compact site plan should be developed to limit damage to the regenerating forest on the site.

We have identified the lack of a buffer in the proposed site plan in all our letters, beginning in July 2020. Our 3rd letter provided examples from other islands and pointed to Ministry of Agriculture guidelines. Our 5th and especially 7th letter directly addressed site planning and how our (and other neighbours) property, farming methods and forest restoration work would be seriously impacted by the clearing and hardscaping required to build the proposed development.

In September 2020, MIHS redrew the site plan to be closer to our property. In May 2021 we tried to engage MIHS to discuss alternative site plans with an improved buffer and they indicated no change was possible and that they had heard and "addressed" all neighbours' concerns.

We encourage APC and LTC to not support this rezoning application.

B. More detailed summary linked to Official Community Plan

Below is a summary of concerns with the proposed project organized based on Mayne Island's Rural Zone objectives, Rural Zone policies and Amenity Zoning Guidelines.

1. The proposed rezoning/subdivision does not conform to the minimum/average lot size requirements (Rural Zone policy 2.1.4.4, 2.1.4.5, 2.1.4.6).
 - a. Together, these policies encourage affordable housing and enable developments of up to 10 units on a parcel. They also provide clear parcel size minimums and averages for any subdivision in the rural zone. The intent of the policies is to enable the development of affordable housing in rural zoned areas while adhering to minimum and average lot sizes.
 - b. These policies aim to support affordable housing within the rural zone in a manner that is consistent with Rural Zone Objectives.
2. The parcel proposed for rezoning/subdivision currently provides a valuable contribution to rural zone objectives
 - a. Mayne has highest level of land conversion from a natural state and second lowest percentage of protected areas in the Islands Trust (State of the Islands Report 2020).
 - b. The subject property hosts sensitive ecosystems according to the Islands Trust, and these values have been affirmed by the Mayne Island Conservancy, the biologist and the wetland specialist contracted by the MIHS (supports Rural Zone Goal 1 and Goal 3).
 - c. The subject property is one of a handful of rural zoned properties that comprise a contiguous forested corridor along Village Bay Rd that stretches from Mt Parke to the Ocean. The corridor is valued by residents, visitors, and wildlife. It is a forested buffer and relief from fairly dense subdivisions within Miners Bay and Village Bay. It supports compact developments within existing community clusters and discourages sprawl (supports Rural Zone Goals 1,2, 3, 5).
 - d. The rural zone along the corridor provides groundwater protection and regulation of surface water flows by limiting development in an important recharge/discharge zone (supports Rural Zone Goal 4).
3. The proposed development would undermine the ability of the subject property and neighbouring properties to contribute to rural objectives by increasing forest fragmentation, contributing to sprawl along the corridor, undermining efforts of neighbours to protect and restore valued forest ecosystems, increasing the level of risk to groundwater quality and contributing to greater flood risks on downhill properties.
 - a. Subdivision of the parcel into three lots increases development pressure on all three lots.
 - b. The covenants proposed for lot 2 and 3 will be difficult to enforce and the constraints they will place on landowners create a significant risk of non-compliance.
 - c. The panhandle shaped lot 1 along with the road easement will lead to concentrated future development in an area that is very close to neighbouring residences.
 - d. About half of lot 3 will be cleared and that clearing will open a forest edge along all remaining forested areas on the lot and the neighbour property abutting the development footprint. This clearing will compromise proposed environmental/ecosystem objectives on lot 3, lot 2 and the neighbour's ecosystem protection/restoration efforts to the west of the property.
 - e. Proposed development plan for lot 2 compromises the wetland restoration plan/surface water management plan.

4. The proposed development is not consistent with the Amenity Zoning Guidelines.
 - a. MIHS does not currently have the means to deliver on the promise of creating the amenity of affordable housing and the quality of the offer (certainty of delivery) is insufficient to warrant rezoning/subdivision approval.
 - b. The OCP does not define “affordable” housing, but MIHS and the community more generally have identified affordability for lower income people (i.e., people earning less than \$30k) as the priority need. In contrast, the proposed development targets both low and moderate households with a high risk that Mayne Island households in greatest need will be under-served. Most renter households have low incomes and the proposed housing model is prone (under current eligibility criteria) to focusing on moderate income households due to the high operating costs and the need to maintain relatively low operating deficit to remain attractive to funders.
 - c. The development is not concentrated on the degraded/heavily compacted areas of the property as recommended by the biologist and encroaches upon most of the tree root zones of significant trees identified by the biologist.
 - d. The development will adversely impact neighbours, and many risks and potential impacts have not been considered:
 - i. Wildfire risks are not addressed and the impacts of a wildfire management plan on neighbours and ecosystem objectives have not been determined.
 - ii. Root zone protection of neighbour trees of significance is not being considered.
 - iii. Agriculture interface conflicts have not been adequately considered and are likely given current site plan and the regenerative farm practices and ecosystem restoration efforts that the farm operation has invested into over the last 8 years.
 - iv. Erosion of neighbour capacity to manage for ecosystem values on all sides of the property is likely.
 - v. Development is too close to western neighbour’s future house site and will have a large financial impact and effectively down-zone the property.
 - vi. Stormwater run-off impacts of development have not been identified in the wetland restoration plan and there is a high risk that stormwater flows will increase given the scaled back wetland restoration plan, and the level of hardscaping and clearing on the subject property. Plans are not in place to stop increased surface water flows into neighbour properties. Neighbours currently have storm water run-off problems attributed to drainage ditches and clearing on the 10 acre property and more generally, the steep slope and soil conditions in the discharge zone. One neighbour is concerned that a proposed pond close to their property line will increase water flows over their septic field.
 - vii. Proposed setbacks and location of road infrastructure are insufficient based on emerging normal subdivision practices on other gulf and northern gulf island affordable housing developments. In these rural settings, a 35 metre or greater setback for roads and buildings is more typical. This may be a useful standard in considering what sort of buffers and setbacks are needed to avoid adverse impacts. Typically, such developments have site plans that aim to maximize the distance between the development and neighbours.

C. Looking Ahead – A Practical Approach to “Preserve and Protect” Mayne Island

A range of ideas about how affordable housing might be pursued on the island has also been presented through the application process to date.

The subject of rezoning a rural parcel along the Village Bay Road should be part of a broader discussion on the role of Mayne Island’s remaining green infrastructure, where it needs to be retained and enhanced, and the zoning policies needed to do that. At the same time, areas need to be identified where increased density can be accommodated without compromising the flow of benefits that valued green infrastructure provides. The one-off approach taking place through proponent driven applications does not serve the applicant or the community – especially as the Island approaches “build-out”.

- The rezoning/subdivision will increase development pressures all along the corridor and there should be a broader community forum to determine whether the corridor is valued more as a forested corridor, or as an area where future density increases would be more appropriate.

Beyond that, there needs to be a broader discussion of how density increases in a rural parcel (through rezoning or subdivision) within the policy framework of the rural zone should occur. Ultimately, a set of principles and guidelines should be developed that draw from other work like the Edge Planning Guidelines to manage agriculture/subdivision interface conflicts, the current guidance on designing Open Space Subdivisions in Mayne Island’s OCP, and the emerging better practices and design standards emerging in other affordable housing developments on other islands.

- The guidelines should aim to create a set of principles and practices that ensure that a rezoned/subdivided property properly considers the contribution that neighbouring properties make to zone objectives and if that contribution is significant – safeguard it. This role – if it is compromised – should be considered an adverse impact. There should be an upfront coarse filter that assesses the potential for conflict and approvals should be made in areas where one community amenity or objective is not being pursued at the cost of another. A net gain should always be the outcome.

Finally – more on the ground research is needed to define affordability in a Mayne Island context, determine where the priorities for improving affordability on the island are, and efforts should be made to identify policy and by-law options to improve affordability in priority areas.

The housing model proposed is a big city solution that works where average renter household incomes are higher and people of moderate incomes are encountering affordability problems. Mayne Island’s affordability challenges need a small town solution that improves affordability for low income renter households which make up most renter households. Private sector solutions should be sought that address the needs of the small number of moderate and above income households. Mayne Island historically has had the lowest percentage of renter households of all Gulf Islands. The loss of one rental unit likely has a greater impact on Mayne due to the small number of renters but it also means that solutions are likely to be more small scale and different than the big city solution funders are currently advancing.

Mayne Island and the Islands Trust could be stronger advocates for affordable housing programs that are appropriately scaled and designed to meet the challenge of providing affordable housing to the typical renters in gulf island communities rather than large urban areas like Vancouver, Victoria or Nanaimo.