

Shoreline Protection and what that means to property owners and residents.

Our coastlines are one of the most iconic features of the Southern Gulf Islands (SGIs) and two aspects of the coastal area of South Pender are mentioned in some detail within our Official Community Plan (OCP). The first is the need to protect the marine environment, the shoreline itself from erosion, and the sensitive ecosystems. The second speaks of the development along our shoreline and how that affects the scenic and aesthetic qualities of the natural environment. The shoreline's ecosystem is regarded as the most sensitive environment yet given its high value as real estate, it has the highest density, and in many cases, the most development. It is, at times, our most public space for residents and visitors alike. So how do we balance the public interest, the private interest, and the environment interest, while ensuring the natural character and resources of the shoreline is protected?

If shoreline protection is discussed these days, it is usually about the threat of climate change causing a rise in sea level and an increase in the number of intense weather events. The concerns are usually centered on how to best protect structures and the shore from erosion by these accompanying storm surges. If the discussion has to do with threats to the environment and marine life, those concerns focus upon potential pollution from expanding human activities or unsustainable harvesting of marine life.

All of these issues are important but given the mix of jurisdictions it is virtually impossible for one agency to effectively protect the shoreline by itself. Aside from climate change, the greatest threat to ecosystems is development and human activity. Unfortunately trustees have limited authority and limited methods of achieving all the goals of our OCP. One instrument we do have available through the OCP's direction is a Development Permit Area (DPA): *v) The Local Trust Committee may consider implementation of a Development Permit Area for land alteration and development in those areas identified as having environmentally sensitive area. A DPA can also be implemented to identify hazard areas. The DPA can not prohibit development but can specify certain ways for development to take place to protect the ecosystem and direct development away from hazard areas.*

The SGIs are home to remnants of the endangered Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem. This ecosystem supports a number of species of trees and vegetation within this climatic zone. Climate change is threatening this ecosystem and we must try to protect it from further degradation. We see the cedars being lost to drought, the arbutus to black mold, and many Garry Oaks are struggling. To say development is the primary cause is unjustified but the clearing and altering of the shoreline for development is certainly playing a role. As our OCP instructs:

- *protect significant individual trees and, where practical, avoid disturbances to representative examples of sensitive ecosystems or habitat by avoiding the development of specific areas or undertaking mitigatory measures in those areas where development is undertaken;*
- *avoid, where practical, or minimize development in areas of vegetation vulnerable to disturbance.*

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s important as this land based ecosystem is, coastal and marine ecosystems can store up to ten times the amount of carbon per unit area compared to terrestrial forests. This makes it obvious that we shouldn't protect one without protecting the other if we are serious in our efforts to adapt to climate change. We owe that much to future generations.

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Our task is to determine how we can develop our properties in a manner that doesn't adversely impact fragile ecosystem and the character of our shoreline. Protecting the coast from ourselves also protects us from the unpredictability of climate change. We don't want to place too many restrictions on properties but if we are to avoid risk to the shoreline then we must take steps not to increase the risk. That may require limiting the size and scale of development. We will also need to assess erosion risks to establish site-specific setbacks.

One consideration in designating a DPA along our shoreline, would be a 15 M (50 ft) setback as recommended by Transportation and Highways for new development. That may result in a number of existing structures to be legal non-conforming, a designation which has raised concerns by some property owners. However, it is important to remember that the majority of considerations open for discussion are for the protection of the shoreline which limit changes that can be made to the shoreline's natural features including limiting tree cutting, prohibiting construction of stairs on steep terrain, and increasing erosion control. If we go forward with this initiative, every attempt will be made to affect as few properties as possible. Should a legal non-conforming structure be destroyed by fire, a provision will be included in the bylaw that will permit the structure to be rebuilt to the same floor area, on the same footprint, as the original. None of these provisions will be rigid and open to an application for a "Variance" to accommodate changes on a site specific basis.

An informal community gathering with one South Pender Trustee to discuss this topic will be held on Saturday, October 16th at the South Pender Fire Hall beginning at 10:30 am. Masks are required throughout the meeting and socialdistancing will be practiced where possible.

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Dated October 13, 2021