

WHAT WE FOUND

F-3 REGIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION OBJECTIVES

The Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) includes the municipalities the Town of Gibsons, the District Municipality of Sechelt, and the Sechelt Indian Government District. However, more than half of its population lives in rural areas, in the unincorporated electoral districts of Elphinstone, Egmont/Pender Harbour, Halfmoon Bay, Roberts Creek, and West Howe Sound.

The last major planning document produced by SCRCD that had a regional scope was *Sunshine Coast 2020: Planning for Our Future* (1990). Through a public consultation process, seven themes were identified as community concerns or issues, including economic development and the environment. The 2020 initiative aimed to evaluate the roles of different levels of government and to develop a vision and policies for setting future direction the region. To address concerns about economic development, the 2020 document called for local governments to encourage the development of cultural services, tourism, cottage industry, higher value-added wood processing, etc. With respect to the environment, the report called on senior levels of government to implement more stringent air pollution regulations and legislate requirements for sewage holding tanks on salt water vessels, etc. Given the age of the document and the absence of an effective co-ordination mechanism/ political will to address issues on a regional basis, the 2020 document does not directly inform current policy directions at either the local or regional levels of government. Rather, the SCRCD works towards economic and environmental objectives through the Official Community Plans (OCPs) of its unincorporated areas.

The current Elphinstone Official Community Plan was revised in 1995 by consolidating the original 1986 plan together with subsequent bylaw amendments. The Plan area covers 2600 hectares of land located to the west and north of the Town of Gibsons. The OCP identifies basic goals, or guiding principles for growth and development, for the Elphinstone community. The OCP goals reveal the dominance of economic and environmental concerns on the public and regional agenda. Three of the ten goals relate to economic activity: 1) protection of the long-term potential for agriculture and agricultural activities; 2) provision for resource-based activities such as forestry and gravel extraction; 3) allowance for commercial and industrial activities that are compatible with existing facilities and the rural residential character of Elphinstone. Five of the goals touch on some aspect of environmental policy: 4) minimisation of pollution; 5) protection of visually and ecologically important areas; 6) usage of land in a pleasing and environmentally responsible way; 7) provision of parks; and 8) maintenance of the existing rural residential character of the community¹.

The policy approach of SCRCD is to refine general community goals by stating specific objectives in an OCP and implementing these objectives through bylaws, provincial legislation, and liaison with relevant provincial ministries. For example, Mount Elphinstone is an integral part of the local landscape and its lower slopes lies within the Elphinstone OCP area. The OCP identifies as objectives both the protection of fish and wildlife habitats and visual resources, and the protection of development from hazardous conditions. However, Mount Elphinstone is addressed in implementation policies only in terms of the latter objective. The OCP delineates the base of Mount Elphinstone as one of four Development Permit Areas, in which environmental concerns must be met before development permits are issued for buildings or subdivision registration. Because of "Natural Hazardous Conditions", the issuance of development permits is contingent on: 1) the land under question being set back 15 meters from the high water level of any creek ravine mouths; and 2) the completion of an

¹ Sunshine Coast Regional District, *Elphinstone Official Community Plan*, February 1995.

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PIECES OF THE PUZZLE...



The SCRCD does not have a function for effective planning for economic and ecological objectives on a regional basis. Rather, the SCRCD works through individual Official Community Plans developed for the unincorporated, rural areas within its boundaries. The Elphinstone OCP communicates residents' desire to maintain the existing rural character of the community.



"Regional" policies, as articulated in Elphinstone's OCP, do demonstrate some common interests (tourism) and co-ordination of local land use planning (one commercial industrial centre) with the wider region, namely the neighbouring Town of Gibsons.

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engineering report pursuant to Section 976(8) of the *Municipal Act*. Most of the permit area is Crown owned land within the Sechelt Provincial Forest, so the OCP also calls on the Regional District to encourage the Ministry of Forests to adjust timber harvesting in order to maintain the wooded state of hiking trails on the mountain slopes. The ecological value of the area is not addressed and the means of implementation is noted simply in the OCP as, "Liaison with Ministry of Forests and Lands".

OCPs and bylaws also provide the principal means through the SCR D sets and works towards economic development objectives, particularly since its Economic Development Commission was disbanded in 1994. Community values placed on the rural character of Elphinstone are reflected in the commercial and industrial objectives of the OCP. The OCP recognises the commercial industrial area around the Highway 101/Pratt Road intersection and allows for infilling. But an additional objective is also to "confine the designation of land for commercial industrial activities to land already zoned for this purpose, thereby facilitating the development and viability of the existing zoned properties both with the Town of Gibsons and in the plan area." The Elphinstone OCP acknowledges the importance of tourism by designating an area of Chaster Creek for tourism related commercial activities and calling for an analysis of the potential for bed and breakfast places. Under current zoning bylaws (June 2000), bed and breakfasts have been permitted as an auxiliary use in designated residential, rural use, and park and assembly zones.

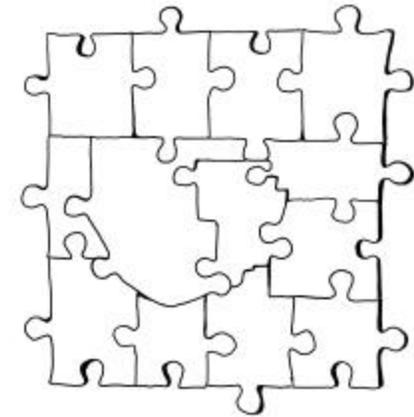
The intertwining of local and provincial interests is a reoccurring theme in an analysis of ecological and economic policies affecting the Sunshine Coast. Again drawing on the example of Mount Elphinstone, the area contains rare mushrooms, old growth forests, and recreational opportunities that are of wider provincial value. In 1996, the Lower Mainland Regional Public Advisory Committee submitted a report to the Land Use Coordination Office (LUCO), which oversees land use planning in British Columbia. Amongst its commendations, the report called for the designation of 150 hectares of Mount Elphinstone as protected areas, and for the implementation of a Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Sea to Sky corridor, including the Sunshine Coast forest district.

Provincial policies, in particular the inclusion of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), also impacts on the economic development objectives of Elphinstone. Objectives in the OCP include supporting the Agricultural Land Commission (now the Land Reserve Commission) in protecting agricultural land and agricultural opportunities through appropriate zoning and regulation of parcel size. However, the OCP also identifies an area north of Highway 101 as land that should be excluded from the ALR because of poor soil quality, though the land would continue to be subject to the Agricultural Land Commission Act until exclusion was approved.

The processes for identifying and implementing of regional economic and ecological protection objectives may soon be affected by political restructuring. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs is expected this year to appoint a committee to examine the desirability of reshaping local government in the unincorporated areas of SCR D.

WHAT WE SEE

...BUILDING A FULL PICTURE



Local initiators of policy – the Town of Gibsons and SCR D acting for the Elphinstone area – fit into a larger policy picture of provincial legislation and land and resource management planning processes.

F-4 PUBLIC OPINION AND DEBATE

Since its beginnings as a tiny coastal village, Gibsons has undergone significant transitions. The regional context, including Vancouver's rapid growth and the increasing popularity of the Sunshine Coast, has transformed the role that Gibsons plays in south-western British Columbia. Traditional economic engines of the community are shifting as resource industries shrink and the high tech and service sectors becomes the new financial flavour of the month. Demographic shift is apparent as retirees arrive and young people leave in search of education, employment, and adventure.

These changes provoke a variety of responses from local residents, and become catalysts for public opinion and debate. While the policy directions outlined above attempt to cope with the ecological and economic implications of this changing context, public opinion is far from unanimous in providing visions for the future. Although their voices sound cacophonous at times, local residents have informed concerns that should not be ignored or belittled. To better understand these concerns, a few key points can be highlighted.

- Most residents enjoy living in Gibsons, and have made personal choices, if not sacrifices, to stay. Many are determined to maintain the quality of life they associate with Gibsons, and have clear ideas about right and wrong directions for managing the changes implied by future growth and development of their municipality.
- Local people have been vocal participants in a number of issues, and have helped to influence policies and projects in their municipality. Examples include proposed improvements to Franklin Road, the development of a Master Plan for the harbour area in Lower Gibsons, a proposal for building a video game arcade, the Charman Creek drainage plan, and the design and funding of a new public space on the waterfront known as Winegarden Park.
- As indicated in the Town of Gibsons Official Community Plan and in Regional District publications, the natural environment remains an almost unanimous concern for citizens of the Sunshine Coast. Following discussions with residents in Gibsons, however, it is difficult to capture the various ways in which environmental quality is defined. For many, scenic views, accessible (by car) green spaces, and a waterfront setting constitute "the environment". Others have more detailed concerns relating to salmon habitats, water supply, transportation, and waste disposal.
- People value the authentic feel of the working harbour in Lower Gibsons. Although this is ostensibly an aesthetic concern, it has economic implications. Put simply, a working harbour needs work to work. Population, money and industry are prerequisites for a lively atmosphere of the downtown waterfront.
- Although some residents have developed a "no-growth" or "drawbridge" mentality in response to perceived pressure for population expansion and local development, most people are willing, if not eager, to accept growth as inevitable.



Alternative imaginations for the future of Gibsons: Urban growth; Pull up the Drawbridge; Quaint seaside village; The rural good life.