

Bye the Bye: Island Trustee Report

By Paul Brent

We've had an interesting summer on Saturna as we progress our work plan items that began in 2012 – namely proposed bylaws that would legalize secondary suites on Saturna, establishing guidelines for Short Term Vacation Rentals (STVRs) that are operated on temporary use permits and making some amendments to our existing Community Amenity Density Reserve (CADR).

There has been much recent activity and interest in these bylaws. A letter in the *Islands Tides* suggests that we trustees would have discretion to use our CADR to allocate new density (for a community amenity) without a public process. This is indeed very worrisome, or would be were it accurate. But it isn't accurate. The proposed bylaws result in a full public process, with community consultation and feedback. And the CADR is not a new thing. It is part of Saturna's Official Community Plan, and it (the CADR) is unique to Saturna – no other Islands Trust island has one.

The *Islands Tides* article also suggests that the proposed bylaws that Saturna's local trust committee have been working on for the last couple of years would be precedent-setting for the entire Trust area. Well, the CADR is unique to Saturna, so that could hardly be precedent-setting. And the bylaw amendments proposed for STVR's and secondary suites are almost identical to those on Mayne that were approved by the Islands Trust executive earlier this year. And STVR's and secondary suites are already legal in other Trust areas, with some having much greater flexibility, so it would appear that Saturna's draft bylaws would be more precedent reaffirming than precedent-setting.

There are concerns from some that legalizing secondary suites would result in a large increase in our population, with a potential doubling of density. While this is theoretically possible, reality is different, and the reality is the market on Saturna. Our market is dormant at best. We expect a slow take-up, with a few people building a suite to house an elder relative or friend, or perhaps a new build as a mortgage helper. Where areas on island have been identified as having groundwater issues, the proposed bylaws (for secondary suites and STVR's) specify groundwater cannot be used to service these units; alternate sources must be.

STVR's are available under existing Saturna laws to anyone on the basis of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) right now, assuming that the TUP is granted.

However, there are no pre-existing guidelines for STVR's (these could include parking provisions, noise control, pet control, having on-island contacts, etc.). We thought it would be smart to establish guidelines, and to actually encourage people who are operating STVR's outside of existing laws.

A few people have mentioned that in their view, adopting bylaw changes without first reviewing existing studies of such changes is irresponsible, and would result in undue risk to our island. The reality is there are no existing relevant studies. Firstly, very few studies occur regarding highly specific changes like incorporating STVR guidelines under Temporary Use Permits. And if there were studies done elsewhere, our circumstances are so unique that no conclusion could be reached. We are a small, isolated community, with large time and financial barriers to access (the ferry to our island), a median age 20 years older than the provincial average, almost 50% of the island designated to Parks, a large non-resident property base and almost no full-time employment. Without comparable circumstances, such studies would serve no purpose, other than to mislead.

So without studies what do we do? Well, we employ common sense, make minor changes to these areas and then assess what impact may occur over the next few years, such that we encourage a few secondary suites and that some of the STVR's that are currently operating outside our laws begin to comply using a TUP with guidelines. And perhaps some initiative might come forward that provides an innovative community amenity that could stimulate employment, education opportunities, recreation, more affordable housing options or other such community enhancing values.

In the highly unlikely event the proposed bylaw changes lead to large numbers of homes built or rebuilt to include secondary suites, that bylaw could be constrained, with just those suites having been issued building permits to proceed. And if the STVR guidelines under TUP's create an issue, well, they are temporary and can expire. And there is a fulsome community consultation process for any proposed request for an additional density – checks and balances are inherent in the process.

We have a beautiful island, but our demographic is not a healthy one and does not bode well to maintain a healthy rural character. We need to share our paradise with the next generation, and to help them experience the beauty that is Saturna to maintain and enhance vibrancy. These proposed bylaw revisions are a very small step in that direction. The public hearing regarding these bylaws will resume on September 18th at 12:30 at the Community Hall.