

Sometimes, I wonder what on earth I might come up with for the next Scribbler article, but so far, by the time the deadline nears, there always seems to be something that needs discussing. This month it's all about subdivisions and the requirement of the subdivider to provide land or "cash-in-lieu".

This comes your way compliments of the Saturna Parks and Recreation Commission who asked me to do a presentation at their CRD Parks and Recreation Commission's Commonality Meeting which brings together all the Southern Gulf Island Commissioners twice yearly. This time the meeting was on Saturna and as we currently have a subdivision proposal before us, they wanted to know what influenced my decision when it came to the 5% cash or park land requirements when a new subdivision is made and what I saw as the role of a Parks and Rec Commission in that process.

As I have not yet walked through a subdivision as a Trustee, I had to do a lot of learning before I could do any speaking! So, I started where I always start when facing something like this, with my Planner as he actually went to school to learn these kinds of things and has since been through many, many subdivisions.

That led me to the Local Government Act, formerly called the Municipal Act, reworked and renamed because there are many more types and layers of local government than just municipalities. The Act contains many, many rules, regulations and guidelines that apply to Local Governments in B.C. and which are laid out in 323 chapters. If you are interested, simply google "B.C. Local Government Act" and you will have the opportunity to do a lot of reading.

Part 26: Division 11 – Subdivision and Development Requirements (938 – 946), of the Act, under 941: Provision of park land, says (and rather than quote the Act word for word, I am going to paraphrase); when a subdivision of three or more lots is being made, and as long as the smallest lot is not larger than 2 hectares, the developer must give the community either land or the cash equivalent of that land. The amount of land required must not exceed 5% of the land being proposed for subdivision. Hence the basic formula of either a piece of land not larger than 5% of the proposed subdivision, or a cash amount equivalent to the cost of that land – aka the sometimes-infamous 5% cash-in-lieu.

Who gets to decide if it is park land or cash-in-lieu? Time for a little more civics. Our Official Community Plan (OCP) has a section called Open Space, which is an overlay designation and includes conservation areas, ecological reserves, parks, wilderness recreation areas, trails, viewpoints and foreshore access points. It's objective is to identify the location of lands recommended as suitable for future acquisition as public open space. It has several policies including a Parks Plan. It also has a map of Saturna attached to it, which shows what we already have, i.e. existing parks, waterfront accesses and trails. It also what we would like to have, sort of a wish list of proposed parks, conservation areas, public waterfront accesses and bicycle pathways. The Saturna Island Parks and Recreation Commission has a Parks Master Plan and it also has a Saturna map with present and proposed parks, trails, etc. on it.

If one of these proposed parks or trails or any of the other designations on those maps is in, or partially in the proposed subdivision, then your Trustees get to decide if we want to claim land or cash from the developer. If there are no proposed parks or trails, etc. on that land, then the developer gets the choice of deciding if they would rather give land or cash-in-lieu. Of course, it is not always this clear-cut as there other details that can come into play, but this is the gist of it.

If we end up with land, it becomes community park land and the CRD holds the title and our Parks and Recreation Commission manages it. If we end up with cash, it goes into a CRD reserve fund established for the purpose of acquiring park lands. However, and this is a very big however, that money does not have to be spent on Saturna or even in the Southern Gulf Islands. In the past, it was thought that the money would be earmarked for Saturna; unfortunately that is not the case.

Now that we know this, it might make more sense to lean towards land. Maybe, if it's not going to make a great park, it can be left as green space. Green space on Saturna seems like a better deal for us than a Community Park in Sooke or Langford or some other CRD community. But then, I have never served on Parks and Rec, so I don't know what's actually involved when managing Community Parks, even if they are just left as is and called "green spaces".

So, if the decision does fall to your Trustees, how do we make that decision? With help from our Planners and a lot of input from Parks and Rec, the APC and you, that's how.

And now for something completely different... at our next Local Trust Committee meeting (Thursday, November 8th, 12:30 - 3:30) we will be presenting a Stewardship Award to.... drum roll please.... the Saturna Island Ecological Educational Centre! The Islands Trust Community Stewardship Awards recognize individuals or groups for programs or actions that have made a significant contribution towards the objects of the Trust.

SEEC benefits visiting high school students from all over southwestern BC by teaching them ecological concepts using the unique ecosystems of the Gulf Islands, along with community values and skills. The people who collaborated to make the centre possible worked with determination, enthusiasm, trust and vision.

Join us for refreshments as we celebrate the achievement of building an ecological school on Saturna. The agenda hasn't been set yet, but if you don't want to come to the whole meeting, check on the Saturna page of the Islands Trust website and by the time this Scribbler is in your hands, there should be an agenda posted. Or send us an email or give Paul or myself a call. We hope to see you there.

