

District of Saanich  
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File: 2330-25

December 12, 2023

Via email: kmorley@crd.bc.ca

Kristen Morley  
General Manager, Corporate Services/  
Corporate Officer  
Capital Regional District  
625 Fisgard Street  
Victoria BC V8W 1R7

Dear Ms. Morley:

**RE: PROPOSED UPDATED OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN (REGIONAL CONTEXT STATEMENT)**

This letter confirms that at their meeting held December 11, 2023, Saanich Council considered the Report of the Director of Planning dated December 1, 2023 regarding the proposed updated Official Community Plan and resolved as follows:

"That:

1. Council refer consideration of first reading of Official Community Plan Bylaw, 2023, No. 10000 to the December 11, 2023 Special Council meeting;
2. **Council direct staff to refer the Official Community Plan Regional Context Statement to the Capital Regional District for acceptance in accordance with the *Local Government Act* (s. 448);**
3. Council direct staff to prepare a report to Council for consideration of the proposed Official Community Plan in conjunction with the financial plan and applicable waste management plans in accordance with the *Local Government Act* (s. 477 (3)(a));
4. Council direct staff to refer the proposed Official Community Plan to the Agricultural Land Commission in accordance with the *Local Government Act* (s. 477 (3)(b)); and
5. A Public Hearing be called to further consider the proposed Official Community Plan."

As well, Council gave First Reading to Official Community Plan Bylaw, 2023, No. 10000.

Please find attached the Report of the Director of Planning and a copy of the Regional Context Statement for your consideration in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.

Should you have any questions, I can be reached at 250-475-5501.

Sincerely,



Sharon Froud  
Deputy Corporate Officer

Attachments

cc: Brent Reems (CAO)  
Lindsay Chase, Director of Planning  
Bob Lapham, Strategic Advisor – Housing Supply  
Cameron Scott, Manager of Community Planning  
Amber Walker, Senior Planner



## 16.0 Regional Context Statement

As a one of the core municipalities within the Capital Regional District (CRD), Saanich works collaboratively with 12 member municipalities and an electoral area to achieve regional objectives. The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), adopted by the CRD Board in March 2018, provides a framework to achieve a regional vision for growth and change that enhances quality of life, sustainability and social well-being.

The RGS framework specifies ten interconnected objectives supported by principles, policies and 2038 targets to achieve regional sustainability:

1. Keep urban settlement compact;
2. Protect the integrity of rural communities;
3. Protect, conserve and manage ecosystem health;
4. Manage regional infrastructure services sustainably;
5. Create safe and complete communities;

6. Improve housing affordability;
7. Improve multi-modal connectivity and mobility;
8. Realize the region's economic potential;
9. Foster a resilient food and agriculture system; and
10. Significantly reduce community-based greenhouse gas emissions.

As required under Sections 446 and 447 of the "Local Government Act", CRD member municipalities collectively support the RGS by preparing regional context statements identifying the relationship between the OCP and RGS. The following demonstrates how the Saanich OCP aligns with and achieves the objectives of the RGS.

## Objective 1: Keep Urban Settlement Compact

The land use characteristics and development patterns in Saanich are largely influenced by its central location in the region and its unique context with both urban neighbourhoods and rural agriculture lands. Within this context, Saanich plays an important role in the Capital Regional District as the municipality with the highest population and the largest area.

Saanich has adopted growth management policies and strategies in the OCP aimed at limiting urban sprawl while creating opportunities to develop more complete, compact and sustainable communities with access to a range of housing choices, close to employment, amenities and services. The OCP supports concentrating growth within the Urban Containment Boundary as a principal tool of growth management which contributes to the RGS target of accommodating 95% of new dwelling units within the Containment Area by 2038 (see Policy 7.1.2).

Given that Saanich is a well-established community with a strong commitment to sustainability, growth for the most part will come from redevelopment and infill. The majority of future growth is focused on walkable, mixed use Primary Growth Areas with opportunities for new multiple family residential, commercial, institutional and civic development (see Section 7.3). Residential infill in established neighbourhoods within the Urban Containment Boundary will also continue to take place to increase housing options for residents. The OCP contains infill development policies supporting secondary suites, garden suites, houseplexes, multi-family residential and mixed-use development (see Section 7.4).

The OCP population and housing supply projections, described in Section 2.2, are generally consistent with the RGS sub-regional core area population projections. The Saanich projected short-and- long-term population growth is 136,800 people by 2031 and 152,000 people by 2046. To support this population growth an additional 15,400 net housing units will be needed by 2046.

## Objective 2: Protect the Integrity of Rural Communities

Rural Saanich is valued for its natural beauty, diverse environments, high biological diversity, agriculture, forested lands and rural lifestyle. Policies and environmental protection measures in the OCP help retain the character of rural communities, maintain the health of its natural systems and demonstrates Saanich's commitment to the preservation and strengthening of rural areas. Future development is expected to be consistent with the rural scale and character, contributing to the RGS goal to limit new dwelling units to a maximum of 5% outside of the Urban Containment Policy Area and within the Rural/Rural Residential Policy Area (see Section 7.7).

Containing and concentrating growth within the Urban Containment Boundary is key to better protection and retention of rural, agriculture and environmentally significant lands. Furthermore, limiting urban sprawl and the extent of rural development and subdivision is achieved through policies to maintain farming, food production and rural residential as predominate land uses. Large lot sizes are appropriate for these land uses. Most of the parcels are designated A-1 and A-4 Rural Zones which require a minimum lot size of 2.0 and 4.0 hectares, respectfully, which is reinforced through policy in the OCP (see Policy 7.7.3). The OCP also aims to minimize conflicts between rural and urban uses through the clear delineation of land uses and buffering rural and agricultural lands from adjacent urban residential development as part of redevelopment and subdivision proposals, where appropriate (see Policy 12.1.9).

Infrastructure services in rural areas includes on-site services which is in keeping with the rural character and helps limit development to the scale, form and density consistent with the intent of the rural land use designations. The OCP also limits consideration for a Sewer Service Area extension outside the Urban Containment Boundary, only as a means to resolve current health problems if no reasonable alternative is feasible or for public facilities or parks, where there would be significant community benefit (see Policy 10.2.2).

### Objective 3: Protect, Conserve and Manage Ecosystem Health

The RGS aims to protect the landscape character, ecological integrity, and biodiversity of the Capital Region. Saanich's OCP reinforces the RGS by emphasizing the importance of preserving, protecting and managing its diverse natural environment and ecosystems for the well-being of the community and the region. Saanich's natural environment is comprised of designated environmentally sensitive areas, urban forests, watersheds, water courses, floodplains, parks, open space and trails (see Maps 1, 15 and 16).

Regionally significant parks, identified in the RGS as Capital Green Lands, represent a diverse range of recreation and natural areas and include PKLOS (Mount Douglas Park), Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, Rithet's Bog Conservation Area, Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Parks and Francis King Regional Park. Additional regionally significant parks are found throughout the municipality in both urban and rural areas (see Map 15).

Saanich's OCP supports policies related to protecting and restoring habitat and ecosystems; connecting environmentally sensitive areas and green spaces with "greenways"; promoting conservation of existing and additional tree cover; requiring restoration plans as a result of disturbance; and, prioritizing condition assessments for streams, riparian and wetland areas (see Sections 6.1-6.3).

Ongoing stewardship is seen as a foundational and fundamental tool for preserving and enhancing Saanich's natural heritage. Policies encourage habitat creation and biodiversity improvements, focus on principles of Naturescaping and landscaping that utilizes native species and climate resistant plants on both public and private public lands (See Policy 6.1.9). Policies in the OCP recognize the importance of partnerships with CRD, First Nations, local and senior governments and other stakeholders to promote stewardship of our watercourses, groundwater and marine environments, and education initiatives (see Section 6.5).

Through partnerships to improve source control and reduce contamination entering our watercourse and marine environment as well as policies that support an integrated planning approach to restoration of and management of watercourses, surface water, drainage and

groundwater, the OCP supports the RGS objective to protect, conserve and manage ecosystem health (see Policies 6.3.1 and 10.3.1).

Through comprehensive environmental master plans and implementation tools that inform land use decisions, such as the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and the Urban Forest Strategy (both in progress), Saanich is equipped to maintain the integrity of the natural environment. Development Permit Area (DPA) Guidelines provide guidance on land use issues in and around sensitive ecosystems and within hazard areas such as flood plains and areas susceptible to wildfires (See Schedule B). DPAs also provide guidance on conservation of water and energy, improvements to storm water management, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In particular, the Streamside and Floodplain DPAs are significant contributors to addressing the protection of environmentally sensitive landscapes during development and support the RGS target to reduce contaminants in water bodies. Within rural Saanich, environmentally sensitive areas and green spaces are better protected by focusing growth within the Urban Containment Boundary (See Policy 7.1.2).



## Objective 4: Manage Regional Infrastructure Services Sustainably

In order to accommodate the anticipated population increase in the region, the RGS supports long-term sustainable planning and management of regional infrastructure services that take into consideration the conservation of land, water and energy resources and the impacts of climate change and natural hazards. Regional infrastructure services include drinking water, liquid and solid waste while services in Saanich supplement this infrastructure with collection and distribution systems.

The OCP supports the RGS target of preparing long-term capital plans for CRD utilities that are cost-effective and efficient to serve. Section 7.9 of the OCP also supports the development and implementation of an asset management strategy for the District to guide the effective stewardship of assets and to provide satisfactory and sustainable levels of service to the public.

Saanich growth management strategies promote efficient and cost-effective infrastructure planning and management through compact land use patterns, concentrating growth in Primary Growth Areas. This allows investments to be directed towards maintenance and improvements to existing infrastructure, rather than on new infrastructure (see Policy 7.3.1). This is also supported through policies that restrict major infrastructure extensions (see Sections 10.2 and 10.4).

Buildings themselves also have a profound effect on the environment and health, as they consume large quantities of energy, water, and materials, and emit significant levels of greenhouse gases and generate other waste. These impacts can be significantly reduced by encouraging zero carbon and sustainable building practices. For example, the OCP includes policies and implementation tools for future development, requiring building and site design to reduce impervious surfaces and incorporate features that will encourage ground water recharge through methods such as green roofs, vegetated swales and pervious paving materials (Section 7.8).

Other policies contribute to sustainable infrastructure by: 1) encouraging reduced consumption of non-renewable resources; and 2) by supporting CRD initiatives to reduce solid

waste and develop efficient and environmentally acceptable long-term waste disposal solutions, working towards Zero Waste generation (see Section 10.6).

Within rural areas, OCP policies emphasize low impact and low-density development approaches that help conserve environmentally significant lands and reduce public infrastructure needs with requirements for on-site services (see Section 7.7).

The OCP limits consideration for a Sewer Service Area extension outside the Urban Containment Boundary, only as a means to resolve current health problems if no reasonable alternative is feasible or, for public facilities or parks, where there would be a significant community benefit (see Section 10.2). The OCP also limits consideration of water extensions outside the Urban Containment Boundary to those that are in keeping with RGS principles and that address pressing public health and environmental concerns, provide fire suppression, or service agriculture (see Section 10.4). Additionally, the OCP supports opportunities to improve water quality and enhance environmental features through retaining open-channel stormwater drainage system comprising of watercourses, ditches, flood plains and other water retention and detention features (see Section 10.3).

## Objective 5: Create Safe and Complete Communities

The OCP emphasizes the importance of building complete communities with access to a diverse range of housing types and tenure, employment options, shops, services, community amenities, and public open spaces (see Section 7.0). As part of the 2023 update, Saanich incorporated the 15-minute community concept into its planning approach which builds on the complete community approach in the 2008 version (Section 7.0, Objective F and Strategic Land Use Directions). An important element in the development of complete communities is to provide mobility options that support walking, cycling and transit, and foster healthy lifestyles and safe neighbourhoods (Policy 9.1.3).

A key tool to creating complete communities is to focus future growth in mixed use Primary Growth Areas within the Urban Containment Boundary. Through the integration of transportation planning, land use and urban design, “Centres”, “Villages” and “Corridors” of various scales and levels of completeness help to establish vibrant places to live, work, and enjoy (see Section 7.2). These are supplemented by small-scale Hubs to support Saanich’s transition to a 15-minute community.

Centre, Corridor, and Village Plans provide a policy framework to implement the vision of the OCP and guide growth and change for neighbourhoods and Primary Growth Areas (see Section 1.2). Policies in these plans help retain neighbourhood character and a sense of place by capturing issues unique to each area and provide a higher level of detail in articulating how the broader OCP vision is implemented at the local level. OCP policies further support developing a sense of place through promoting community connections and social interactions within safe, diverse and inclusive communities (see Section 13.0).

Development Permit Guidelines (Schedule B) contribute to the development of complete communities by providing direction on how to design buildings and developments that are sensitive to the existing character of an area and add to the community through improved streetscapes, pedestrian mobility, and quality open spaces (Section 7.8). In addition, Development Permit Guidelines can minimize risk and provide guidance on land use issues in and around sensitive ecosystems, and within hazard areas such as floodplains and areas susceptible to wildfires.

Additional policies in the OCP address public safety through building community awareness and taking action. Supporting public education on emergency and disaster preparedness, the development of transportation safety infrastructure, and the implementation of crime and fire prevention programs are some examples of the means by which the OCP works to improve public safety (see Section 13.6).

## Objective 6: Improve Housing Affordability

A variety of affordable housing policies (see Section 8.0) in the OCP seek to address the RGS targets to increase the supply of more affordable housing; reduce the number of people in core housing need; and, reduce the number of people who are homeless.

The OCP recognizes there is a significant need in the community to increase affordable housing across the housing spectrum to improve quality of life, community health, and support the economy.

Policies in the OCP aim to increase the diversity of housing by type and tenure, thereby helping to ensure residents have access to housing suitable and desirable to their life stage and income, and to prioritize and incentivize those housing types that are most needed according to the District's Housing Needs Report (see Sections 8.1 and 8.4). Policies supporting residential development in Primary Growth Areas as well as residential infill in neighbourhoods, allow for increased housing diversity and supply in a way that complements the District's equity and sustainability goals by ensuring transit access, services and amenities are within walking distance and that neighbourhood areas serve a broad range of housing needs (see Sections 7.3 and 8.1).

The OCP also supports housing affordability through policies aimed at retaining, renewing, and developing all forms of rental housing across the housing spectrum and leveraging the development process as a way of gaining affordable housing units (see Section 8.2 and 8.3).

The OCP provides direction for the District of Saanich to work collaboratively with partners from the Capital Regional Housing Corporation, BC Housing, the Federal Government, non-profits, and other agencies to support the construction of supportive housing projects within Saanich and to address both immediate and long-term homelessness issues (see Section 8.5).

The District's Housing Needs Report, Housing Strategy, and Affordable Housing Fund provide a comprehensive approach to implementing the District's housing goals by providing strategies for achieving a healthy, diverse, and affordable housing supply for Saanich.

## Objective 7: Improve Multi-Modal Connectivity and Mobility

The RGS supports the development of a balanced and sustainable transportation system providing residents with reasonable and affordable multi-modal transportation choices that enhance the overall regional quality of life. From a regional perspective, the OCP recognizes the importance of working with the CRD and member municipalities to implement the regional transportation plan which outlines priorities for a regional multi-modal network (See Policy 9.1.1).

Increasing population growth in Saanich and throughout the CRD will continue to place increasing pressure on Saanich's transportation system. OCP policies seek to support a multi-modal transportation and mobility network for the community that will help create safe, convenient, effective, and sustainable mobility choices to move around the community (see Policy 9.1.5 and Maps 4 and 8-10). Transportation and mobility networks that encourage and promote a range of active travel choices, such as walking and cycling, present opportunities for significant quality of life, health, safety and economic benefits.

Land use and development patterns play a profound role in shaping how sustainable, convenient, safe and attractive active transportation is. Integrating well-designed land use and transportation systems can positively affect several factors that relate to establishing more sustainable communities with people who drive less to meet their daily needs, participate more in cost-effective and active ways of moving around the community, and actively engage in social connections. Focusing growth around well-designed Primary Growth Areas defined through formal land use planning processes, is another important contributor to making active mobility more viable (see Section 7.0).

The many actions taken by the District to promote multi-modal connectivity are backed by strong policies in the OCP (see Section 9.0). Saanich's Active Transportation Plan is an implementation strategy that establishes a vision, goals and targets to improve active transportation and to ensure that walking and cycling are accessible, comfortable, and convenient transportation choices for people of all ages and abilities. Targets set in this OCP are generally consistent with the RGS target to achieve a transportation system that would see 42% of all trips made by walking, cycling, and transit by 2038.



## Objective 8: Realize the Region's Economic Potential

As the population grows in the region, realizing diverse and economic opportunities to improve the region's economic potential is vital to achieving a sustainable economy (see Section 14.0). Comprehensive economic development policies integrated throughout the OCP, support a balanced economy by encouraging a broad range of commercial, service, research, high-tech and industrial uses and contribute to achieving the RGS target of 0.6 for the jobs to population ratio within the Core Subregion.

Policies in the OCP support focusing the majority of employment growth and mixed-use development in Saanich's Uptown Core and in other designated Primary Growth Areas. These locations prioritize access to active mobility options, promote improved access to jobs and services close to home, and create a network of vibrant, livable communities connected by an efficient transportation system (See Sections 7.3, 14.1, and 14.3).

Protecting the region's industrial land supply is imperative to accommodate the growing economy and employment. People and businesses depend on local industrial services, such as production, distribution, and repair. Industrial areas are protected and supported by OCP policies to accommodate the growing economy and employment (see Section 7.6 and 14.2). In addition, policies encourage improved utilization and intensification of industrial areas for industrial activities and ensure that the zoning and regulatory controls respecting industrial areas continue to encourage and support their economic viability (see Section 7.6).

Other major employment areas provide opportunities for increasing jobs and the economy. The OCP supports providing opportunities to new advanced technology and knowledge-based businesses by supporting expansion of Vancouver Island Technology Park, and research related activities at the University of Victoria, Camosun College, Royal Roads campuses (See Policy 14.2.6).

Within rural areas, policies encourage market diversification of agriculture by supporting specialty agri-tourism businesses on commercial farms, which are in keeping with the scale and character of rural Saanich (see Policy 14.2.7).

## Objective 9: Foster a Resilient Food and Agriculture System

Saanich has a long history of farming and retains a significant amount of agriculture and arable land within its rural areas. Applying to agricultural land in both rural and urban areas, agriculture and food security policies in the OCP (see Section 12.0), recognize agriculture as a significant contributor to the region's landscape, identity and economy.

Key tools that have assisted in protecting agricultural land for current and future generations in rural Saanich are the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the Urban Containment Boundary and the Sewer Service Area. Established by the Agricultural Land Commission, ALR designated land helps to preserve agricultural value and encourage farming (see Sections 7.7 and 12.1). Focusing future growth in compact, complete and sustainable urban Primary Growth Areas helps to limit urban sprawl, protect agricultural land from the pressure of urban development, and support the protection of the Renewable Resource Lands Policy Areas (see Section 7.0).

Land use regulations and education can help protect agricultural land and increase awareness and understanding of farm operation requirements for those living adjacent or near farms while managing potential conflict between farm operations and neighbouring landowners. The OCP supports buffering rural and agricultural lands from adjacent urban residential development as part of redevelopment and subdivision proposals, where appropriate (see Policy 12.1.10). In addition, partnerships with surrounding municipalities, the CRD, non-profit organizations, and community groups, have been and will continue to be vital in enhancing agriculture and food security in Saanich and the region.

The following OCP policies for agriculture and food security (see Sections 12.1 and 12.2), directly contribute to increasing the amount of land in crop production for food by 5,000 ha by 2038, an RGS target for municipalities: 1) supporting efforts of farm operators and other agencies to enhance farmland and increase crop yield, by improving water supply and undertaking drainage improvements and improving soil capabilities, while considering environmental impact; and 2) supporting the development and operation of specialty crop farms to diversify farm production, increase economic development, increase local food production, and improve farm income.

## Objective 10: Significantly Reduce Community-Based Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In addition, opportunities for increasing food production in urban neighbourhoods are supported in the OCP (see Section 12.2). The OCP supports local sustainable agriculture by promoting urban farming initiatives that make use of private and public green spaces to produce an inexpensive, safe, and nutritious food supply. For example, the parks and open space policies consider opportunities to incorporate food producing community gardens into parks and other public open spaces, where appropriate (see Policy 11.1.6). Community gardens on private or public land can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and stability, strengthen community bonds, provide food, and create recreational and therapeutic opportunities.

The Agriculture & Food Security Plan provides a coordinated approach for implementing OCP policy directions, supporting agriculture and improving food security in Saanich.

Comprehensive policies integrated throughout the OCP address strategies to protect the community, improve Saanich's quality of life, support a diverse economy, and reduce local and global risks associated with a changing climate. The RGS emphasizes the importance of reducing community greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to address the effects of a changing climate.

Section 4.0 of the OCP reinforces the RGS objective of reducing community-based greenhouse gas emissions through the adoption of a guiding framework and policy lens that emphasizes sustainable development. Supporting OCP policies that encourage reducing GHG emissions include: reducing impacts from public and private buildings through green building design, energy efficiency technologies, renewable energy sources and efficient energy distribution systems; creating compact and complete communities within urban areas that encourage alternative transportation options that lead to reduced vehicle emissions; and, protecting and managing the natural environment, environmentally sensitive areas, urban forests, and aquatic habitat (see Sections 6.1-6.5, 7.1-7.4, 7.8, 9.1, 9.3- 9.5, 10.1).

The RGS set targets to reduce Community Green House Gas Emissions by 33% (from 2007 levels) by 2020, and by 61% by 2038. Saanich has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions with OCP targets that align with those of the RGS (see Section 5.3). One of the key implementation strategies, the *Climate Plan: 100% Renewable and Resilient Saanich*, adopted in 2020, seeks to implement more accelerated targets including:

- Reduce community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50% of 2007 levels by 2030;
- Achieve net-zero GHG emissions by 2050;
- Become a 100% renewable energy community by 2050; and
- Prepare for a changing climate.

These comprehensive targets are implemented through prioritized actions established in the *Climate Plan: 100% Renewable and Resilient Saanich*; the OCP integrates both these targets as well as policies to support reaching these targets.