

## **Strait Talk, Donna Shugar, September, 2010**

At the Sunshine Coast Regional District, careful planning is given high priority. Some plans are at a high level, like the 2-3 year strategic plans which provide the philosophical context for our actions. More operational plans direct how we manage solid waste, water services, transportation infrastructure, green house gas emissions, land use and so on. Planning is important because it provides the framework for decision making. Most planning processes rely upon extensive community participation so that decision makers remain in touch with the public's wishes. It is equally important that plans remain vital and dynamic so they are relevant and continue to reflect public sentiment.

Official Community Plans (OCPs) are the documents which guide land use decisions. They include a community driven long term vision for each area and provide the Regional District Board with the framework for decisions about zoning, subdivision, parks, trails, public facilities, special housing infrastructure and green house gas controls. OCPs set out the approximate location, amount, type and density of residential development required to meet anticipated housing needs over at least five years as well as the approximate location, amount and type of commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses. The Local Government Act also requires us to locate sand and gravel deposits suitable for future extraction; place restrictions on the use of land that is subject to hazardous conditions or is environmentally sensitive; and identify the approximate location and phasing of major road, sewer and water systems.

There are 7 OCPs in the SCR D's rural areas. (Municipalities are responsible for their own land use planning.) Each electoral area has one with the exception of West Howe Sound which has 3 to reflect its unique mix of residential and industrial lands. OCPs are meant to be reviewed as frequently as every 5 years. However, because the community engagement necessary for the development and review of OCPs takes time and resources, it has been more practical to use a longer time horizon. The Elphinstone OCP was reviewed and adopted in 2008. Roberts Creek and West Howe Sound OCPs are currently under review and Halfmoon Bay's review is just beginning. The Egmont/Pender Harbour plan is newer and will be updated after some of the other processes have concluded.

Citizen advisory committees undertake the development and review of OCPs. These volunteers are assisted by Planning staff and serve with a passion and dedication to their community. They meet regularly for as long as 2 years to discuss every aspect of their community and its future. At the beginning of the process they look to the community at large for guidance regarding the vision that will inform the rest of their decisions. When a draft plan is ready, they bring it back to the community for comment. There may be several revisions before there is consensus that they have captured what the majority of the community wants. After adoption, the OCP is a bylaw of the Regional District and all zoning decisions must be consistent with it. All the SCR D's OCPs can be viewed on the website under the planning tab: [www.scrd.ca](http://www.scrd.ca).