

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC VISION DOCUMENT FOR OTTER POINT AND SHIRLEY/JORDAN RIVER

What Is a Strategic Community Vision?

- A strategic community vision is a document that outlines the major goals that a community sets for itself for a 5-15-year period and identifies key strategies for achieving those goals.
- The community goals normally reflect the community's priorities and can focus on diverse issues including: governance, public services (water, fire protection, communications, transportation, etc.), taxation, economic development, socio-cultural progress, environmental preservation, etc.
- The strategies to achieve such goals are generally broad and inclusive, link to a wide range of groups and organizations both within and outside the community, and may include timeframes for initiating certain activities.
- In some respects, the process of developing a strategic community vision can be more important than the document developed if it brings community residents, groups and elected leaders together in a process to clarify what they want for their community and how to pursue those goals.

Why Develop a Strategic Community Vision for Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River?

- Neither Otter Point nor Shirley/Jordan River has community goals or strategies. The closest document either has are proposed Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaws, which are legislatively required and focus narrowly on ensuring an adequate supply of land for housing and setting land use zoning standards.
- Although the Capital Region District Board, which includes an elected regional director, functions as the local government for Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River, the CRD concentrates its energies on larger, region-wide planning issues. The lone regional director faces significant challenges in identifying let alone seeking to achieve diverse community goals in the six distinct Juan De Fuca electoral area districts. Local government bylaws and regulations for both Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River are largely determined by elected officials who neither live in the community nor are electorally accountable to it for their decisions.
- The economic base of Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River is changing. The traditional fishing, agriculture and logging industries are becoming less significant as employers, while home-based businesses and the tourism and retirement industries continue to grow in economic importance. Population growth is largely based on immigration of retirees or commuting workers. Young adults often leave these communities for educational and employment opportunities elsewhere.

- Southern Vancouver Island is experiencing long-term population growth and, with it, demands for more housing, infrastructure and services. As land becomes more expensive and limited in Langford, Colwood and Sooke, increasing pressure for housing and commercial development in Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River is anticipated. A large-scale land developer recently purchased substantial forest tracts in Otter Point (with similar purchases in Shirley/Jordan River likely to follow) and is currently exploring ways to convert the land into profitable housing developments and settlement areas.
- By a wide margin, residents of Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River recently rejected amalgamation with the municipality of Sooke. In public meetings dealing with their respective draft zoning bylaws, many residents of both districts have spoken in support of maintaining a largely rural, low housing density pattern of development. The Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River Governance Committee has called on the CRD to support a study looking at local governance options. Other community organizations are actively lobbying for the creation of public parks and trails.
- Common forums to identify community goals and strategies to achieve them do not currently exist in Otter Point and Jordan River. Unfortunately, if the residents of Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River do not find a way to develop and support a common vision of future community development, future change and development may well be determined by non-residents with competing and conflicting visions and interests.

How Can a Strategic Community Vision Be Developed?

- The first step is to see if the members of OPSRRA are supportive of the idea of developing a strategic community vision. If so, the next step would be to contact other community groups and organizations to see if they were also supportive of such a project.
- If there is sufficient community support for the idea, a small planning committee could be established with participation from interested groups with a mandate to draft recommendations for developing a strategic community vision document over the next 1-2 years. The recommendations should include ways of obtaining wide community involvement, possibly through the use of evening/weekend workshops, public meetings, a community survey, and the assistance of a non-profit facilitator organization such as SmartGrowth BC.
- If, the recommendations brought forward by such a planning committee find community support, a steering committee could then be established to obtain the necessary funding/support commitments and manage the visioning process.
- If there is a will to develop a strategic community vision, a way can certainly be found to do it.

How Can the Strategic Community Vision Document Be Used?

- The strategic community vision document will be widely shared with community residents, community organizations and relevant government officials in the Capital Region District and the provincial government.
- The vision document will be the first public document developed by community residents through an inclusive process to outline broad community goals and related strategies to achieve them. The process of developing the vision document will be as important as the document itself.
- Community organizations and relevant government officials will be able to use the document to build support and cohesion around shared goals and objectives.
- Community residents will be able to use the document to increase knowledge about their community and as a basis for ongoing dialogue about desired changes in their community over the next 5-15 years.
- The strategic community vision document should be periodically reviewed, evaluated in regard to the achievement of community goals, and amended to reflect changing community values and circumstances over time.