

OCP review charts course for community's future

by Doug Holmes

The most proactive way to help shape your community's future is to participate in the process to update the Official Community Plan (OCP), which is currently underway in Summerland.

The OCP is an overarching document that establishes a sustainable long-term vision of the community and outlines the objectives and policies to guide local planning and land use decisions. New provincial legislation requires that municipalities identify in their OCPs areas for future residential development to meet current and anticipated housing needs over 20 years (rather than the previous 5 years).

Policies in the OCP must now allow for increased density and address a wider range of housing types, such as affordable housing, rental housing, family housing, etc.

The Province wants every municipality in BC with a population of more than 5,000 to review and update their OCP by the end of this year, and again every 5 years to ensure housing needs are being met on an ongoing basis.

It has been 10 years since Summerland last updated its OCP. The community has experienced change and growth since then so it's probably time for a refresh.

Besides housing and development, the OCP looks at the community's infrastructure, transportation, parks, economic development, and the natural and social environment. The Plan sets the course for our future and therefore public participation in the review process is essential.

Community visioning has started with an open house on Feb 18 and a public survey open until Feb 28, and engagement will continue throughout the year with surveys, open houses, pop-ups at local events, and outreach to community groups and Indigenous nations.

Initial consultation focuses on the current OCP and the core values and priorities that should guide future growth. Later, in the Spring, we will turn our attention to the urban growth boundary (UGB), also known as an urban containment boundary, which is a line drawn on the map to distinguish the 'urban' and 'rural' parts of town. While lands within the containment area are expected to be developed or redeveloped to higher intensity uses to accommodate future growth, lands outside the boundary are not intended to be further subdivided and developed. In this way the UGB can help limit sprawl and control infrastructure costs, and also preserve agricultural land and natural areas.

Typically, to be within the growth area, a property needs to be able to connect to the municipal sewer system, which itself requires the capacity to handle the ultimate build out as envisioned in the Official Community Plan. The same can be said for roads and other infrastructure. All the District's master plans and other planning documents must align with the OCP.

In the Fall, the District will publish a first draft of an updated OCP and another round of public engagement will be held to provide a final opportunity for residents to make their voices heard and ensure the policies in the draft reflect the community's values and aspirations.

All feedback will be analyzed and a second draft will be brought to Council for consideration and formal adoption by the end of the year, as required by the provincial government.

For information on how to get involved, visit: www.summerlandocp.ca

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