

What's Been Happening on the Commons

It seems that the Cob Wall on the Commons has become the new tourist attraction on Gabriola! It's also a visible sign that things are happening behind the hedge and out on the land.



The original Steering Committee mandated to “birth” the Gabriola Commons has blossomed into a number of committees and teams exploring issues ranging from community ownership and financial security to farm management and infrastructure needs.

Careful steady progress is leading to a sense of mounting excitement on all levels:

- A non-profit society, the **Gabriola Commons Foundation, (CGF)** was incorporated with the mandate to hold the land in trust in perpetuity for the community of Gabriola Island. Its immediate goal is to fund-raise toward full mortgage-free ownership of the 26.5 acre property. Charitable status has been granted. In the interim, the community's support of a monthly donors drive has bought precious time! Thank you to all who responded so generously!
- A **memorandum of understanding** on the transfer of ownership has been signed between the GCF and AGES (whose gift of their equity in the property has made the Commons possible). The moment of transfer to full community ownership is drawing near!
- A **“commons” covenant** is being written, to be held by TLC The Land Conservancy. This will preserve the vision of the Commons through pro-

tection of an ecological reserve, recognition of the working agri-cultural landscape and preservation of our community cultural values.

The **Gabriola Commons Charter** will be enshrined in the covenant.

- As part of the work on the covenant, a **“Base-line Report”** is being compiled, with community involvement through seasonal photo-scans of the whole property.

Regulatory issues are progressing through the relevant channels: The Agricultural Land Commission will be assessing our second “Progress Report on our Agricultural Path”, before giving final approval to all potential projects described in our “Land Use Proposal” of January 2006. An application to the Islands Trust for a Land-use bylaw amendment – Phase 1 is undergoing planning staff study, with a public hearing as a next step.

The Importance of achieving Charitable Status

Anyone making a monetary donation to the Gabriola Commons will be able to receive a receipt for the donation permitting a reduction in income taxes.

Having charitable status widens enormously the field of foundations, endowments etc. offering grants to organizations like ours for funding of a wide variety of projects.

Being granted charitable status confers a status which is respected by the "outside world". (Charitable status is not granted easily.)

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- Approval of the proposed land uses by the Islands Trust will permit us to engage in renovations of the existing buildings, particularly the goat barn, the cheese plant, and the workshop to permit community use of the facilities. The “**Sharing the Commons**” Team is exploring how best to achieve full collaboration with the community on potential projects.
- The Gabriola Commons Charter emphasizes the importance of sustainability as we approach community projects on the Commons. The **Infrastructure Team** is mandated to plan sustainably for a wide range of needs, from the Constructed Wetland required by expanded bathroom facilities to building and renovating with alternative energies and green technologies in mind.
- The **Farm Management Team** was one of the first action teams in the early days of the Commons. After two years, an amazing trans-formation has taken place on the land, with the creation of:

- a **community garden**

This is shared with PHC and includes the Dragon’s garden for seniors and Aurora garden for home-schooled children. Last summer saw a number of small plots allocated to committed gardeners as part of an experiment in land use. This was remarkably successful, bringing a constant smiling community presence to the Commons.

- an “**experimental**” garden

Filled this last summer with 19 varieties of heritage potatoes, this garden is intended to furnish Commons events with fresh vegetables and berries as well as carry on research. (We’re trying peanuts next!)

- a **potato and squash co-op**

Down in the southeast quadrant near Redwood Road, this will become next year a **community allotment garden project**, with space for 32 large plots.

- two **orchards** planted in 2007

Plums, almonds and hazelnuts (plus one fig and one walnut tree) circle the lawn to the south of the house. The other orchard, of apples and pears, lies further south in the centre of the property.

- a **blueberry** project of 120 plants

This has just been completed as an extension of the apple orchard.

Future projects include sowing grains such as Red Fyfe Wheat, and scything hay in the shallow soil of the grassland.

- Finally the desire to inform and engage the Community led to the creation of three teams: **Communications**, **Volunteer Coordination**, and **Special Events Planning** (the latter involved in seasonal celebrations including, for the third year, the Fall Fair at the Commons).

Once a month, the **Commons Coordinating Council** meets to report on and discuss all of the above! This is a public meeting with everyone invited to attend on the first Tuesday evening of the month at 7 pm. Consult our website at www.gabriolacommons.ca.

The Infrastructure Team

Mandate

Develop sustainable solutions to infrastructure needs on the Commons, in cooperation with all the other Commons teams, and conduct applied research in alternative energies and building technologies, that will also serve as a demonstration of sustainable living for the broader community.

Objectives

- Establish guidelines for sustainable infrastructure and building design
- Research alternative sources of energy, and sustainable building technologies and practices
- Manage infrastructure projects as required

- Recommend design solutions
- Prepare cost analysis
- Oversee projects through to completion



Regulatory Factors

1. Current application with the Agricultural Land Commission (for permission to engage in non-agricultural projects)
2. Current application with the Islands Trust for Phase 1 of a Land Use Bylaw amendment
3. Requirement to submit building plans to the Regional District of Nanaimo for approval (i.e. respecting the BC Building Code)

Strategic Tasks

- Determine the scope of potential infrastructure needs on the Commons, with regards to: water, waste management, energy, buildings, and roads, in order to engage in overall strategic planning
 - Establish areas of research
 - Develop guidelines for sustainable infrastructure and building design
 - Establish infrastructure priorities in consultation with all Commons teams
 - Determine criteria and guidelines for specific projects
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Farm Management

After a long winter break we're ready to prepare for the year ahead

with orchards and blueberries to care for



the new allotment gardens in Commons South to shepherd along

working on irrigation with the Infrastructure Team and

VOLE control high on the priority list.

Have a look at the visible tunnels they have dug everywhere!



We'll be planning the upper garden (leaving a space for peanuts)

At the first Solstice celebration on the Commons, conversation with a gentle man named Charles Silva took some unexpected turns. Originally from the Azores, he was comparing agricultural practices and crops and asked if we could grow peanuts here (peanuts being a crop he knew well from his childhood.)

Intriguing idea which provoked a little internet research . . . But other projects surged forth and Charles became known for his willingness to take part in all kinds of volunteer projects in the Community Garden. As potatoes became the crop of the year the idea of growing peanuts faded.

Then a few weeks ago Charles appeared with a handful of peanuts in a bag. Special peanuts, organically grown, sure to germinate. Back we go to the internet with a new determination! Five months to grow mature peanuts with no frost! We can do this (especially if we start them in peat pots indoors). So now the Farm Management Team has a new crop for the Experimental Garden: Peanuts! Hmmm

may look at growing grain (with the prospect of a cob oven in the future).

PROPOSED USES OF THE LAND AND BUILDINGS

- House:**
- Host or rent space for public meetings/gatherings
 - Host or rent space for nonprofit social services agencies offering community services (food depot and programs, employment services etc.)
 - Emergency reception area and emergency accommodation
 - Day care/senior drop-in
 - Office space for community nonprofits (Gabriola Recreation Society, GESS)
 - Educational courses/programs
 - Craft fairs/flea markets
 - Exhibition - art, museum displays
 - Weddings
 - Church services
 - Private parties
 - Potential for single family residential use maintained (from AG zoning) either in main house or in separate location
- Workshop**
- Maintenance and repair shop for operating and managing the lands and buildings
 - Storage of owner tools and equipment
 - Rental storage for community nonprofit groups
 - Educational courses and workshops
 - Social enterprise initiatives by owner/society
 - Long-term rentals
 - Pottery/art workshop addition
- Cheese Plant**
- Community and commercial kitchen
 - Educational classes and workshops
 - Community kitchen projects & concession
 - Emergency response food relief
 - Large-scale food storage
 - Food processing (includes cheese-making, creating Gabriola Brand)
- Goat Barn**
- Performances
 - Rehearsal space
 - Movies
 - Large venue public meetings
 - Church services/weddings
 - Exhibition space
 - Educational classes/workshops/forums
 - Storage space (stage sets etc.)
 - Rentals for all of the above
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PROPOSED USES OF THE LAND AND BUILDINGS continued

- New infill** (between kitchen workshop, goat barn) - Bathrooms (to Code for Assembly etc. occupancies)
- Storage
- Small-scale conservancy for horticulture, community dining, meeting space, classes
- Land adjacent to Goat Barn & Cheese Plant** - Exhibition space
- Outdoor gatherings
- Concerts (with bandshell)/dances/performances/movies
- Teaching
- Craft/demonstration fair
- Picnics/play area
- Skateboard park
- Farmgate sales
- Land around Main House** - Public and private gatherings
- Rentals for above
- Overnight camping/accommodation for participants in farm/workshop events
- Pathways** - Public wheelchair-accessible footpath linking Redwood Road and FolkLife Village
- Redwood Loop boardwalk at Goodhue Creek
- Constructed Wetland** - Treatment of effluent from Commons and adjacent properties (in accordance with BCOSSA guidelines and relevant codes.)

Part of our documenting of the "Commons As Is" includes the visit last April of a team of scientists from Victoria, headed by Dr. Purnima Govindarajulu. Invited to Gabriola by GROWLS to assess the frog populations in various wetlands and ponds, they were able to make an extensive survey of the pond on the Commons (in spite of an unseasonal snowfall). The scientists were able to confirm the existence of a frog on the "threatened" list - the red-legged frog - in the pond at the Commons. This finding is key to our establishing with the Agricultural Land Commission the need to set an ecological reserve around the pond. (During their visit the scientists commented on the necessity of leaving such ponds in their wild, unmanicured state in order to preserve a shrinking natural environment.)



Commons Wish List

Office volunteer: Someone to keep track of files, both physical and on the computer, and to help set up some sort of organizational systems for the multiple uses of the office, so that it can be both tidy and functional.

Grants Coordinator: Someone to seek out and keep track of grant opportunities and make sure they are applied for ahead of deadlines.

Membership Person: someone to keep track of all the incoming new members, making sure that the list is kept updated.

Volunteers - for monthly special work bees, to do things together, like windows, repair roof, make a cement path, weeding the house beds, putting new flooring in bathrooms and office ----

Back-up bookings co-ordinator --- Louise is doing a fantastic job, and is willing to continue, but she would love someone to fill in when she is away or otherwise unable to do the job.

•Working generator.

•Tractor with backhoe.

•Flooring for office.

•Propane or kerosene heater.

•Snow removal.

•Bicycle rack



•Driveway gravel.

•Cement for sidewalk.

•Barn roof repairs.

UpComing Events

General Property Management Work bees will be held once a month when needed: First work bee of 2009 will be on February 28th. 9:30 to noon Call for details: Heide or Raymond 250-247-7384.

Farm Management Team

Monday Feb. 2 at 7pm New members welcome

Commons Coordinating Council

Tuesday Feb . 3 at 7 Public welcome

Infrastructure Team

Wednesday Feb. 18 at 7 pm New members welcome

Winter into Spring Celebration at the Commons -- Equinox March 21 -- potluck, etc.

Also lantern making that day or the week before. Look for more announcements.
