

## Section A: Introduction

### 1.0 PURPOSE OF AN OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN

An Official Community Plan (OCP) is one of the key policy documents adopted by City Council. It is developed through a collaborative process that includes the participation of people that live and work in the community. As a result, it is a document that expresses the community's vision for the future. As a long-range blue-print for growth, the OCP is used by Council when considering issues relating to: residential, commercial, and industrial development; the provision and maintenance of parks and recreation amenities; the natural environment; transportation infrastructure and the orderly provision of utilities. Specific content and process requirements associated with the development of a new OCP are defined in Provincial Legislation called the *Local Government Act*.

#### 1.1 Relationship to Other Regulations

Once the community plan is adopted by Council as a bylaw, it has “official” status. At this point, all future land use decisions made by Council must be consistent with the objectives and policies outlined in the Plan. However, an OCP is strictly a policy document. In order for an OCP to be effective, several tools are required to implement the policies and objectives. This includes the use of regulations or guidelines such as those contained in the zoning bylaw, development permit areas, capital expenditures planning, and subdivision control. These bylaws and regulations must be consistent with the Plan.

#### 1.2 The OCP is a Dynamic Document

An OCP is intended to be a “living” document that reflects new trends within society and responds to changing circumstances within the City. As such, following careful consideration by Council, policies and land use designations in an OCP may be revised through adoption of an amending bylaw in accordance with the provisions of the *Local Government Act*. Community plans typically involve a 20 year planning horizon and are reviewed at least once every five years to assess whether the goals and objectives and subsequent policy direction remains valid for the community.

## 2.0 THE PLANNING PROCESS

The consulting firm of UMA was retained to undertake a review of the Official Community Plan. The review process began with an initial meeting with a number of key groups, the City's Advisory Planning Commission, and City Council. This entailed discussion concerning some of the key planning issues that currently affect the community. Based on input received through this process and a review of relevant City technical reports, a background report was prepared and provided to the City. The report covered a range of information such as Port Alberni in the regional context, the demographic, employment, housing, commercial, and industrial profiles, population projections, environmental characteristics, and identification of major planning issues. This phase was a precursor to the consultation phase which together forms the foundation for the new Official Community Plan.

### 2.1 Community Input

In order to ensure that the community plan is a document that accurately expresses the community's vision for the future of Port Alberni, it is essential that the people who live and work in the community have the opportunity to provide input. A number of opportunities to provide comments and observations were provided. The first was a newsletter and questionnaire that was mailed to each household in the community. The newsletter included general background information pertaining to the community, and identified the planning process and procedural information. The questionnaire was intended to provide residents with the opportunity to document their opinions on a number of issue areas. An on-line version of the newsletter and questionnaire were also provided.

The second major opportunity for input involved a public open house that was held at the Echo Center. This involved the presentation of key information pertaining to specific issue areas affecting the community including residential, commercial, industrial, waterfront, parks and open space, and the road network. Additional questionnaires were provided to capture people's input. The City's staff Planner and two members of the consulting team were in attendance to discuss issues and answer questions. Over 125 people were estimated to have attended and a total of 76 questionnaires were returned by the conclusion of this phase of the public participation process. A summary of the questionnaires was prepared and provided to the City in June 2004.

The third stage in the public input process involved a second public open house which was again hosted at the Echo Center. This event included a presentation of the goals and objectives of the draft Community Plan and the introduction of some representative key new policies from a range of policy areas. The event was well attended and approximately 30 submissions were made by the public. These were summarized and provided to the City. This same presentation process was

undertaken with a number of key stakeholder groups in order to solicit specific input on key new policies. Due to significant debate related to long term land use along the Johnston Road Corridor, additional public consultation occurred with respect to this. This included a public open house May 4, 2005 and a related mailed out survey.

### 2.1.1 External Agencies

The second component of the consultation phase involved input from key groups and external agencies. The groups identified for this process were those whose jurisdiction, plans, or actions could have implications for day-to-day business and/or long term planning within the City.

**Key groups included in the consultation process are:**

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| ● <b>Ministry of Transportation</b>                  | ● <b>Hupacasath First Nation</b>        |
| ● <b>Ministry of Lands, Water and Air Protection</b> | ● <b>School District #70</b>            |
| ● <b>Fisheries and Oceans Canada</b>                 | ● <b>Port Alberni Fire Department</b>   |
| ● <b>Agricultural Land Commission</b>                | ● <b>Chamber of Commerce</b>            |
| ● <b>Port Alberni Port Authority</b>                 | ● <b>Real Estate Board</b>              |
| ● <b>RCMP</b>  | ● <b>Merchant's Association</b>         |
| ● <b>Central Vancouver Island Health Authority</b>   | ● <b>The Coulson Group of Companies</b> |
| ● <b>Regional District of Alberni-Clayoquot</b>      | ● <b>Weyerhaeuser</b>                   |
| ● <b>Tseshah First Nation</b>                        | ● <b>Norske Canada</b>                  |
| ● <b>Community Futures Development Corporation</b>   |   |

The groups represent diverse interests and include governmental bodies/ agencies, First Nations, as well as major local businesses and business organizations as listed in the table above.

## 2.2 Key Planning Issues

A number of planning issues were identified through initial meetings with Council, City staff, key groups, and the Advisory Planning Commission. Although the issues tend to be fairly diverse in scope, they can be fitted into two broad themes. These include enhancing the liveability of Port Alberni and access to and within the City. The range of issues largely reflect the principles of building “complete communities” or “smart growth” and touch on ways to make Port Alberni a better place to live, work, and visit.

Key issue areas were identified as follows:



### **2.2.1 Demographic Changes**

- The community is mirroring a trend toward an aging population which could have implications for services and housing choice.

### **2.2.2 Commercial Development**

- Economic and social vitality in the Southport area needs to be enhanced.
- There is no one main street shopping district in the City. The quality of the shopping experience should be improved by increasing density in the key commercial areas and improving the aesthetic quality making it more pleasant to walk around and visit. The adoption of design guidelines, through implementation of Development Permit Areas, can improve the physical form of these areas as they redevelop.

### **2.2.3 Economic Development**

- There is a need to diversify the local economy so that it is more vibrant and sustainable in the long term.

### **2.2.4 Residential Development**

- The City offers a good housing mix. However two emerging trends could have implications for development of future housing stock: increasing demand for extended care housing due to an aging population and, demand for housing stock with amenity value such as waterfront multi-family housing.

### **2.2.5 Recreation**

- The City provides well developed recreation infrastructure. However, there is a need to improve trail connectivity throughout the community.

### **2.2.6 Tourism**

- There is great potential for development of the local tourism industry based on quality regional attractions. It is important that tourism infrastructure is properly developed so as to capitalize on the potential.

### **2.2.7 Transportation**

- There are some natural impediments to mobility within the City such as the Roger Creek ravine. Improved overall connectivity would benefit the community.



- Industrial traffic has posed challenges on Third Avenue, Anderson Avenue and Redford Street. A designated truck route might reduce conflict.
- Improved access to the Island Highway could increase economic activity.

### 2.2.8 Waterfront

- The community would benefit significantly from an improved connection to the waterfront such as a waterfront walkway or strategically located waterfront oriented public spaces.
- There is a need for increased moorage, day floats, and a fuelling dock to supplement the existing facility in the harbour.
- There are several key properties, such as the former plywood site, that could contribute to the vitality of Port Alberni if sensitively developed or utilized.

## 2.3 Relevant Studies

A number of studies have implications for long range planning and community development. The following provides a brief synopsis of some of the more relevant studies.

#### Background studies for the OCP include:

- 1981 – Alberni Valley Road Network Study
- 1995 – Sewage Lagoon Upgrading & Impact of Additional Loading from Leachate & Surimi Effluent
- 1995 – Alberni Valley Regional Water Supply
- 1998 – Alberni Valley East Side Bypass Study
- 2000 – The Port Alberni Shoreline Master Plan Review
- 2003 – Alberni Valley Aluminum Smelter Community Impact Assessment
- 2003 – Somass Estuary Management Plan
- 2003 – Liquid Waste Management Plan – Stage 2
- 2004 – Strategic Sign Plan
- 2004 – Harbour Road Pre-Design Study
- 2004 – City’s Strategic Plan
- Regional Solid Waste Management Plan



### **2.3.1 Alberni Valley Road Network Study**

In the 1981 Alberni Valley Road Network Study, a bypass route is identified. The proposed location is north of Port Alberni, roughly at the location of the tourism bureau at the Redford/Johnston intersection, bypassing the community and the Tseshahst Indian Reserve to the west, and connecting with Highway 4 at the approximate location of Great Central Lake Road. Although the bypass is shown on Ministry of Transportation mapping, the probability of construction is very low given other Provincial priorities for network improvements coupled with the relatively low volumes of traffic on Highway 4. Furthermore, there are necessary improvements on Highway 4 that would likely be higher priority such as the section of road between Sproat Lake and Kennedy Lake, and the section between Port Alberni and Parksville. Finally, construction of a bypass route would reduce traffic flow into the City and would likely have negative implications for the local economy. As such, the new OCP has eliminated it as a future possibility.

### **2.3.2 Alberni Valley Aluminum Smelter Community Impact Assessment**

The Impact Assessment was undertaken in order to assess the overall impacts of a smelter on the City of Port Alberni. Although the site identified for the potential development is situated in the Regional District, it is close enough that it would dramatically impact the City. The report accounted for an associated workforce of approximately 2,600 people (with a corresponding overall population increase of between 5,000-7,000 people based on an average household size of 2.5) at the operation stage, and a construction workforce of approximately 2,500. The impact of these numbers on the existing City infrastructure and capacity is assessed and deficiencies identified. This project is not proceeding, but the impact of a development of this magnitude clearly has significant implications.

### **2.3.3 Strategic Sign Plan**

The Plan is intended to inform visitors of amenity districts within the City such as Northport, Southport and Echo, and features of the City such as Harbour Quay, the historic steam train, and the First Nations Cultural Centre. The goal is to increase awareness of City amenities and thus promote tourism. The Plan will have implications for OCP implementation.

### **2.3.4 The Port Alberni Shoreline Master Plan Review**

This document is a review of the 1991 Master Plan and was a joint undertaking by the Port Authority and the City. It involves the foreshore area from Clutesi Marina at the north end of the City to the Polly's Point area to the south. The Plan provides a detailed vision for long term planning and development. As such, some of the goals and objectives are reflected in the new OCP.