

# 12/12

2014

## Grow Up, Not Out

October

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Environment Commission



Twelve months. Twelve big ideas for a strong, resilient community.



# Introduction from the **CVRD** **Environment Commission**



Our Region is blessed with incredible natural assets: water to drink, air to breathe, soil to grow food, and a rich and varied landscape. Properly protected, our ecosystems provide the raw materials for an enviable quality of life. As members of the CVRD's Environment Commission, it's our job to keep an eye on which assets are threatened, or in need of repair, and to develop advice for the CVRD Board so that our Region can lead the way in the responsible stewardship of our natural environment. But we also know that real change only happens when we all work together.

This newsletter tells the stories of the many people of our Region and the myriad ways that our communities are working toward a better future. We hope it will also weave and strengthen the social ties that will lead to even more positive change. We hope you enjoy these stories and find helpful information and inspiration along the way.

*Janna Jorgensen*  
*Environment Commission*



## What's in a Commission

We believe we must start right away to strengthen our environment and community by growing in smart ways, repair the damage we have done to our natural assets and preserve them for future generations. And we believe that local government must lead the way in this effort.

We are the Environment Commission, a group of 15 community members and politicians appointed by the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board. We were formed in April 2007 by the CVRD to provide recommendations to the Board on a variety of environmental issues and concerns in an integrated, systematic way across the region. Volunteer members sit on the Commission for a two-year term which can be renewed.

Our mandate is to provide advice on policy, regulations and issues related to the environment and recommend to the CVRD Board adaptive strategies to meet the present and future. We also serve an important community function by monitoring three important plans – our solid waste, central sewage system and our drinking water protection plans.



# Imagine living in a community where...

...jobs are plentiful, business and industry are thriving, families are healthy, the air is fresh, the water is clean, birds and animals can maintain healthy populations, and food is plentiful.

Sound too good to be true? Well it isn't. This is what the Cowichan can look like if we work hard to protect our natural assets and link them more effectively to how we live, work and play.

Now imagine living in a place with droughts, fires, failed crops, and severe water restrictions in the summers, and flooding, power outages, violent winds and colder, wetter weather in the winters. This is what the Cowichan could look like in the coming years, thanks to climate change.

Sound too scary to deal with? It doesn't have to be. All we have to do is adopt a new way of thinking about the environment. If we look to the environment as the key to our community's resiliency (that is, its ability to adapt to new situations and challenges), we have a better chance of living in the first part of this picture, while dealing with the second.

In other words, we have to think about our regional environment as the backbone of our community, as the source of support and stability that will allow us to weather any kind of natural or economic storm.

We have come up with 12 big ideas that describe the kinds of

decisions we have to make - and actions we have to take - in the coming days, months and years to achieve this vision for community sustainability and resilience.

The bad news is that climate change and other pressures are already fundamentally changing our regional landscape and have the potential to kill traditional economies, and harm communities and ecosystems.

The good news is that our environmental backbone is in fairly decent shape, so there is still hope. We just need to do things differently, starting today.

Now is the time to come together as a region and decide whether we value our natural assets – forests, rivers, plants, animals, land, air and water – enough to invest in them over the long term. Investing doesn't mean raising taxes, it means changing how we think, plan, act and live today and into the future in order to balance both biodiversity and growth.

On a personal level, it means committing to new habits that recognize and value the environment as the backbone of our work and home lives – like carpooling, and reducing water and energy use.

On a community level, it means supporting our local government to put in place policies and regulations that create greater regional self-sufficiency and manage our natural assets in a sustainable way.



# 12 BIG ideas

If we carry on thinking for today and not thinking about tomorrow, we run the risk of losing some of our natural assets forever. This is why we put together our list of big ideas for making our region more sustainable. This list is made up of small, medium and large decisions we need to make and actions we need to take to build a strong, sustainable Co-

wichan. Here are our 12 big ideas on which to build a sustainability plan for the Cowichan region, and some examples of what our big ideas would look like 'on the ground'. Some of these things you could do personally and some we could do together as a community and through local government.

## 1 Lead the Way

by making real change at the personal and local government levels.

Lead the Way by making real change at the personal and local government levels. We all have role to play in creating a sustainable Cowichan, including encouraging government to embed a sustainable future in every rule and regulation and supporting them to make real changes. You can help by joining a committee, volunteering or donating toward environmental stewardship, and voicing your concerns and priorities.



## 2 Be Energy Smart

and conserve wherever possible.

We have to get smarter about how we generate and use energy in our region, in order to ensure that our demand does not outweigh our supply. We can do this by lowering thermostats, shutting off and unplugging electronics, switching to low energy street lights, using industrial and household waste to produce power, supporting geothermal, wind and solar projects and developing a regional energy plan.



## 3 Audit and Protect our Assets.

We need to figure out what we have so we know what to protect and how quickly we have to act. This means documenting and assessing things like sensitive areas, species at risk, wetlands, watercourses and air and water quality. It also means undertaking a connectivity analysis to ensure we protect and allow for species migrations.



## 4 Revive Biodiversity

We need to immediately start restoring and protecting valuable habitat and ecosystems. We can do this by getting rid of invasive species, allowing only low impact or restorative development (where no critical habitat is destroyed), acquiring or protecting ecologically significant tracts of land, building birdhouses to reduce support native species, working with and supporting stewardship groups and working with forestry operators to better manage operations in concert with community values and ecology practices.

## 5 Eat Local

because food security matters.

We have some of the best agricultural land anywhere! Let's maximize this potential and establish food security for our region. We can do this by supporting small-scale agriculture, and our regional agriculture plan as well as developing creative support tools and mechanisms to assist local agriculture production.

## 6 Get Up to Speed

on the new green economy.

We need to quickly change how we do business in our region by promoting green business development (agro-forestry, alternative energy, eco-tourism), consuming less and applying full cost accounting to determine the true costs of products and services.





## 7 Don't Hog

the water so there is enough for all, and replenish our groundwater.

We need to make sure there is enough water for everyone and everything, including other species and ecosystems. We can do this by measuring and pricing water accordingly to ensure conservation, locating industry and development away from the aquifer's sensitive areas, using drought resistant landscaping, using low flush toilets, and encouraging 'green infrastructure' development that takes the natural water cycle and rain water into consideration.



## 8 Get Real

about climate change and the impact it will have on our region.

Some of the ways we can do this are: by planning for the uncertainty ahead; protecting infrastructure and communities from increased winter rains, summer drought and violent winds; and developing a comprehensive drought plan for the region.



## 9 Be Carbon Neutral

We can achieve carbon neutrality by doing things like ensuring our homes are as efficient as possible (and lowering our costs) increasing the efficiency of our own personal and community transportation systems (light rail, bike lanes, more buses), making recreation carbon free, and reforesting our communities and watersheds to capture carbon and create jobs.

## 10 Grow Up Not Out

by putting people, jobs, and transportation closer together.

We need to lower our development footprint and live in denser, more compact communities. This means doing things like enforcing urban containment boundaries (no more 'sprawl'), developing creative ways to get added natural values within this boundary (like ecosystem pockets, trees for shade and birds, rain gardens, etc.), and adopting a green building code.



## 11 Clear the Air

to reduce carbon emissions.

We need to immediately reduce our local carbon emissions by doing things like planting carbon fixing vegetation, upgrading wood burning stoves, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, passing air quality bylaws, and monitoring and enforcing our air quality.



## 12 Get Serious

about zero waste.

We need to rethink how we handle our sewage, garbage, and other waste to make use of unused resources and minimize their impact on the environment. We can also do this by saying no to plastic, avoiding excessive packaging and exploring 'cradle to cradle' opportunities.



# October's big idea

## Grow Up, Not Out

Good planning is an alternative to urban sprawl, traffic congestion, disconnected neighbourhoods, and urban decay.

Sound planning principles can chart a course that will lead a community toward a sustainable future.

Good long term planning can result in healthy, sustainable communities by providing future opportunities for complete, vibrant village areas, with opportunities to live, work and play within the same community.

Resilient and complete rural communities are centred around pedestrian and bicycle friendly villages or town centres where a diverse variety of small scale commercial retail services, institutional uses, and residential uses are clustered. These centres function as community focal

points and play important economic, social, cultural, and recreational roles in the life of these areas.

At the same time, the rural lands surrounding the community are preserved for this and future generations – resource lands remain unfragmented, environmentally sensitive areas protected, and less pollution is generated by way of automobile dependence, not to mention lower costs associated with services deliveries into rural areas.

An aerial view of the Cowichan Region shows our wide agricultural and natural areas, dotted with small communities and villages. By concentrating development and housing in these higher density areas, we preserve open space for food production, natural resources, and wilderness.



# Paying the Price for Our Popularity



A century and a half ago a wave of newcomers transformed life and landscapes in the Cowichan—with profound consequences for the Hul'qumi'num people living here already. Newcomers still flock to our region—and if we don't learn from the past, none of us may like the result.

The number of people living in the Cowichan region grew by 7% between 2001 and 2006, and that trend is forecast to continue into the future. But according to the first-ever check up of our region's environmental health, it's not the number of people moving here that should cause us concern. Rather, it's how we're making room for new neighbours.

Mostly, our communities are spreading out. And as the CVRD Environment Commission's 2010 State of the Environment Report documents, our sprawling settlement pattern is exacting a heavy price on our natural wealth.

Ecologically productive forest and farmland is turning into urbanized landscape—at a steep loss in biodiversity and resilience.

'Soft' surfaces, the natural areas where rainwater is captured for slow release or collection in underground aquifers, are being 'hardened' as buildings, streets and parking replace vegetation. 'Hard' landscapes don't absorb water and replenish aquifers. If not properly planned and designed, they increase the strain on storm sewers, raise the risk of flooding, erode slopes and injure aquatic wildlife, all while absorbing less water to recharge our aquifers.

Every extra mile we drive from home to work or to shop not only costs us more money for gas, it increases the amount of climate-altering carbon we release into the air. In fact, vehicle exhaust is one of the largest GHG contributors in the region.

By contrast, social research confirms that compact, 'walkable' communities with car-free access to services and amenities, improve people's health, mood and sense of connection with neighbours.

Other areas have tackled their sprawl. Some have sharply limited areas zoned for development. Others have left zoning in place, but let landowners in certain rural areas 'retire' development rights by selling them to urban property owners, who may apply them to create extra-dense development there. Yet another option might be to use the property tax that all landowners pay to create incentives for more focused development.

It's no wonder people keep moving to the Cowichan. We enjoy some of the world's best weather, amenities and natural beauty. But if we want to preserve our quality of life for our children as well as future newcomers, we need to act now to create more focused communities.

Sprawl is the single biggest factor contributing to the decline of environmental indicators surveyed in the 2010 State of the Environment Report. Your CVRD Environment Commission is advising to the CVRD Board on policy, regulations and issues to bring about positive change in the Cowichan Region.

Follow what we're doing here or online, and let us know what you think at [12things@12things.ca](mailto:12things@12things.ca).

\* In 2009, residents of the CVRD overwhelmingly endorsed the '12 Big Ideas' vision for a Cowichan region that will support a growing population, adapt to a changing climate, and preserve its natural wealth for future generations.

*Chris Wood*

# mayor thinks **BIG**



The October Big Idea is to Grow Up, Not Out. As our communities grow, we have the ability to determine what they will look like. Historically, in the Cowichan Valley, we have allowed a significant amount of suburban sprawl. That kind of development has several major impacts. It requires more impermeable services such as roads and driveways, uses up more land per person, is much more costly to service than a dense urban development and generally has a far greater negative environmental impact.

As we look to the future, we can benefit greatly from growing up rather than out. That means avoiding large lot subdivisions and encouraging dense residential and commercial development in our designated urban growth centres. We should anticipate taller buildings and key services clustered in core areas such as Duncan, Chemainus, Crofton, Ladysmith and Lake Cowichan as well as exploring options for mixed retail/residential developments such as the award winning “Tuscan Village” in Saanich.

As we densify our communities, the benefits are huge. We preserve land outside the core that can provide ecological, agricultural and natural resource opportunities. Within the core, services become much more efficient, less costly and are less harmful to the environment. Transit, for example, is very costly and inefficient in a rural setting. In a city core, it can operate at a high level of customer convenience and result in far fewer vehicles on the roads. Less land is needed for parking, fewer greenhouse gases are produced and there are lower costs for riders. These social and environmental benefits are even greater for those who can cycle or walk during their daily life.

The same advantages generally apply to all the other services we count on, from policing to libraries, from health care to food and clothing supply, from home or district heating to recreation centres.

With your support, local government can ensure through land use bylaws and good decision-making, that your community grows up, not out. Support denser communities and we can reap environmental, social and economic rewards.

Thank you.

Mayor Jon Lefebure







Suterbrook Village in Port Moody, BC combines medium density housing with local shops and amenities- so residents are within walking distance of work, errands, and play.

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## CVRD Environment Commission Call for members 2014-2015

### Big vision - little footprint

The Cowichan Valley Regional District is now accepting applications for those interested in serving as a volunteer member of the CVRD's Environment Commission. This is an exciting opportunity to help guide the ongoing development of local government's environmental efforts throughout the region by working with the Commission in providing strategic recommendations to the CVRD Board on environmental management within the region.

**Interested?** Further information is available through the CVRD website at [www.12things.ca](http://www.12things.ca). Please send a supporting resume of relevant background and an application letter with full contact details to the CVRD Environment Commission, address below, c/o Kate Miller, Manager, Environmental Initiatives, outlining your qualifications and interests, history of community involvement, and why you wish to be on this committee.

Or send by FAX to: (250) 746-2543

Or by email to: [12things@cvrdenvironiro.com](mailto:12things@cvrdenvironiro.com)

For further information please contact Kate Miller at:  
(250) 746-2509

Applications must be received by  
4:30 pm Friday, November 22, 2013.

Please note only successful applicants will be notified.

## Stay Informed Upcoming meetings

### CVRD Environment Commission meetings:

Thursday, November 27, 6:00 pm

### Duncan Environment Committee meetings:

Thursday, November 27, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

### North Cowichan Climate Action Committee:

Thursday, November 27, 2:30 pm

## Stay Tuned In the next issue: Clear the Air

Sign up for the “12 Months of 12 Big Ideas” e-newsletter  
and find more information at:

**[www.12things.ca](http://www.12things.ca)**



Share your feedback, email [12things@12things.ca](mailto:12things@12things.ca)

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