

Electoral Area 'H' Official Community Plan Review

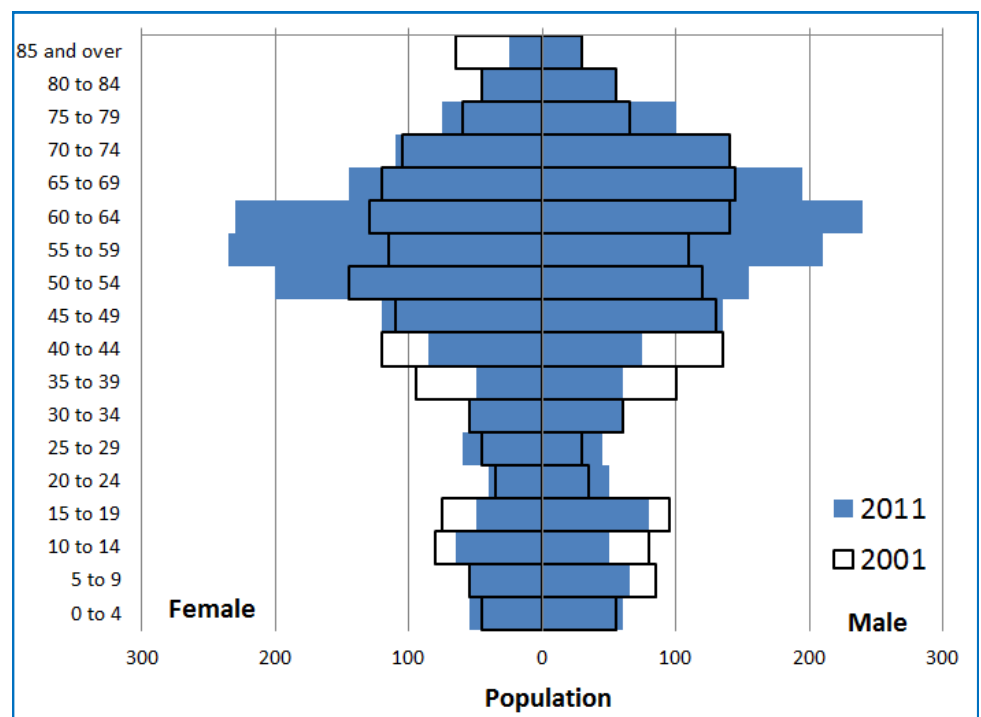


Working Group Pre-reading

A Community of All Ages

The median age in Electoral Area 'H' is rising, with most of the population growth in recent years in the 50-70 age groups. While the community would like to see more service and activities for seniors, there is also concern that the younger population will continue to drop and businesses are reporting that they cannot find enough workers to fill their positions. Community members have said more is needed to attract and keep younger people.

One of the Community Values in the OCP is "promotion of a mixed community providing economic opportunities, affordable housing, and services for all residents"



What the Community Said

- **Provide options for aging in place** such as: smaller houses in higher density, central areas close to services, and removing barriers to renovating existing homes for "granny suites".
- **Increase services and activities for seniors**, such as: a medical centre, community/seniors centre, swimming pool, and outdoor pickleball courts.
- **Attract and keep younger people in the community** by creating more jobs, and marketing the area.
- **Provide supports to families with young children** such as childminding to allow parents to be more involved in the community.
- **Create better transportation options for children and youth**, including a safer route between the school and Magnolia Court as an alternative to the highway.
- **Provide more and improved amenities for children and youth** such as a skateboard/BMX park, a park in Bowser Village, and improved parks and basketball courts.

What the Official Community Plan Says

- Focus future growth into Village Centres in order to minimize rural sprawl
- Provide 40 units of seniors housing in Bowser Village Centre by 2020
- Ensure that the needs of children, youth, families and seniors are considered in planning and programming recreational spaces and programs.
- Have a children's play area incorporated into a central outdoor gathering space near Magnolia Court by 2015
- Secondary dwelling units are supported in all residential areas in Bowser Village Centre
- In addition to the OCP, the zoning bylaw allows secondary suites in most residential zones

Implementing the OCP often relies on private development occurring. For example the RDN has permitted secondary suites, but the market conditions have to be right before homeowners construct them. The OCP can designate areas for seniors and affordable housing, but the RDN does not construct or own these facilities.

Little has changed in Bowser since the Bowser Village Centre Plan was adopted in 2010. How can the OCP change to encourage development in Bowser and other Village Centres in order to achieve the vision of a "mixed community providing economic opportunities, affordable housing and services for all residents"?

Reference to current Official Community Plan:

- ⇒ Community Values Statement #18 and 19
- ⇒ Section 5—The Development Strategy

Bowser Village Centre Plan:

- ⇒ Guiding Principle 4
- ⇒ Goal 3—Be more inclusive and accountable

Challenges

- This is a rural community with a relatively small population, so providing a breadth of services for any age group is financially challenging for the RDN.
- The RDN does not have a housing function which limits what the RDN can do to encourage seniors or affordable housing.
- Electoral Area 'H' is located approximately a 40 minute drive from the larger employment centres of Courtenay and Nanaimo which makes a long commute for working-age people.

Opportunities

- The RDN has a lease of Crown land in the Bowser Village Centre for seniors supportive housing.
- Bowser Elementary School is located in the community and with the recent addition of grades 6 and 7 has a healthy level of enrollment.
- The OCP Review project includes budget for an Active Transportation Plan that is a step towards infrastructure improvements for non-motorized transportation.

Current Initiatives

Affordable Housing Action Plan (2010): An RDN board-endorsed document that is being implemented. Allowing secondary suites in 2014 and developing and distributing information about affordable housing are two action items that have been accomplished from the Plan.

[Click here for the Plan...](#)

Further Reading:

- [RDN Housing Affordability Study Phase 1](#)
- [RDN Housing Affordability Study Phase 2](#)
- [Regional Growth Backgrounder on Affordable Housing](#)
- [Age Friendly BC](#) website
- [Age Friendly and Disability Friendly Official Community Plans](#)