

Ucluelet's Approach to Sustainable Development Planning

Using zoning tools, alternative development standards, density innovations and win-win development negotiations, Ucluelet has cultivated a community that is continually working towards sustainability.



Ucluelet is a small rural community located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, BC. Once solely dependant on a resource-based economy (forestry and fishing), the “resort municipality” is now strategically using its growing tourism industry to diversify its economy, while at the same time creating a dynamic community for its current and future residents. Using Smart Growth policies, green building requirements, new development approaches and fostering partnerships with Vancouver Island University (formerly Malaspina University-College), Ucluelet is now in the forefront of small-town planning and resort tourism development.

Key Players

There are many key players involved in Ucluelet's sustainable development planning. Planning staff continue to bring ideas forward to Council that support different development strategies. The citizens also show their support for “greener” choices and actively get involved in many citizen-driven processes.

Developers are very keen to develop land in Ucluelet and as such, the municipality can convert development pressure into sustainable design initiatives. For example, density bonusing has been successful. The municipality exchanges density for amenities or parkland, having raised \$11 million in cash and parkland, fee-simple land, and amenities such as skateboard parks and basketball courts. Support from Council and the developers has helped bring these innovative techniques to fruition and set precedent for future practices in Ucluelet and across BC.

Ucluelet continues to participate in a partnership with the Vancouver Island University (VIU). The partnership began in the summer of 2002 after a meeting between Felice Mazzoni, the planner for the District of Ucluelet and Dr. Dave Robinson, a professor at VIU. As the partnership continues, Director of Planning, Felice Mazzoni visits as a guest lecturer to VIU and Dave Robinson directs students to visit the community to see on-the-ground results. Also, starting in 2004, Felice began hiring assistant planners from the school for work terms to help with community consultation and policy building. Ucluelet, VIU and the Planning Institute of British Columbia will be working in partnership to create a certified planning curriculum for VIU in the near future.

Using a Smart Growth Strategy



French drains.

Ucluelet's Smart Growth strategy involves

- Undertaking development in a compact fashion;
- Supporting mixed use development;
- Promoting Alternative Development Standards (ADS), which include French drains, narrower and winding roads and Green infrastructure storm water management;
- Alternative subdivision design, such as cluster housing, pedestrian pathways and linkages, and Integration between social equity, environment, and economy;
- Protecting sensitive environmental areas;
- Reducing (eliminating) detrimental economic, environmental, and social effects of development; and
- Promoting multi-modal forms of transportation and Integrating open space into daily living.

The municipality also uses the following planning tools

- Mixed use Zoning
- Density Bonusing - The density chart and implementation is unique to Ucluelet and has drastically improved the social and physical infrastructure of Ucluelet.[2]
- District Energy Audit
- Implementation of LEED guidelines - LEED Silver minimum for all new tourist commercial and multi-family developments
- Waterfront Public Access – 100% pedestrian access (policy)
- Riparian Area Regulations
- Bear Smart Policies
- Phased Development Agreements
- Housing Agreements
- Development Cost Charges (http://www.ucluelet.ca/District/departments_variances.php)

Ucluelet's Vision for Sustainability



The vision for Ucluelet's future is outlined on page 20 of the Official Community Plan (OCP) which includes, the desired Ucluelet is “an attractive, safe, healthy, friendly, vibrant, ecologically sound maritime community contained by nearly 40 kilometers of waterfront, greenbelt, and natural environment”. Guidelines for sustainability and Smart Growth principles are included in the OCP.

On August 21st, 2007, the Council of the District of Ucluelet passed a unanimous resolution to require that all new Hotels, Condominiums, Multi-family and Commercial developments (public and private) meet or exceed the Official LEED “Silver Standard” as a minimum standard for sustainable energy efficient construction in Ucluelet. Ucluelet was the first community in North America to institute a LEED standard for all new construction. [2]

Policies Applied to Development



Smart Growth Policies were adopted into the OCP in preparation of new development and redevelopment of existing properties. During the past 3 years, Ucluelet has seen more new construction than the previous 20 years combined.

Planning staff continue to develop new strategies to encourage sustainability. The direction and support of Ucluelet Mayor and Council in terms of policy approvals allow staff to exercise innovative planning techniques and create flexible options for both developers and Council. The collaboration between Council, staff, citizens and developers is the key that makes the development environment in Ucluelet function efficiently and responsibly.

Wild Pacific Trail

The Vancouver Island University (VIU) Research Alliance has identified and developed policy and planning strategies for the municipality's sustainable growth and has created knowledge sharing opportunities for the faculty and students of VIU and the residents of Ucluelet. Funding for this initiative has come from a variety of sources, including the VIU cooperative education department, federal grants, and District of Ucluelet and VIU research grants. This funding has allowed two students to be hired on co-op work terms for the past 5 years. The placement students have had a direct influence in designing and implementing the public input process for the community planning initiatives and work on other community planning issues.

Barriers and Breakthroughs

Challenges within government included

- Ensuring that all staff/Council, at time of decision-making, were reminded of how the new policies and vision from the OCP effects their actions;
- Working around (not through) the Local Government Act and existing legislation;

- Acquiring credibility and trust between Council, staff, and the public through implementation;
- Gaining support and awareness of the idea of sustainability; and
- Learning a new language and set of terminology, educating the public on new techniques and initiatives.

Challenges outside of local government included

- Hitting the limit of legislative ability given to local municipalities (LGA);
- Working with deficient or “innovative-less” development applications and taking the time to help “enlighten” applicants in order to improve their concepts;
- Trying to implement new practices that have no precedent to.

This project is an ongoing process and is continually being refined and improved upon. The Official Community Plan is reviewed approximately every 5 years and this is where any gaps or failures are addressed.

Results



Ucluelet is now often used as an example of innovation and planning for other local governments. By actually implementing a number of sustainable planning initiatives, Ucluelet has been able to ground truth various techniques and improve upon them. Other communities can benefit from this work and use it to their advantage.

Using alternative design standards has allowed Ucluelet to see the following results:

- Lower operational costs (e.g., French drains)
- Increased pedestrian and bicycle friendly neighbourhoods (e.g., multi-use paths)
- More liveable communities (e.g., mixed-use zoning, creating live-work-play environments)
- Less disturbance to ecological resources (e.g., compact communities, narrower road widths)
- Reduced CO2 emissions
- Lower housing and development costs

New subdivisions have 40-60% green space retention through Ucluelet’s unique and locally created riparian area regulations.[2]

Density Bonusing has provided the community with cash and amenities it would not have received otherwise; for example, in 2004, Ucluelet had an operating surplus of only \$60,000. To date, the community has received approximately \$12 million in combined cash, parkland, and amenities such as a new skateboard park, basketball court and tot-park as well as contributions towards a new community centre and multi-purpose sports field. Implementation of Ucluelet’s Density Bonusing system has also contributed to average net green space retention of 40-60% of the total natural green space area of development properties, as compared to the provincial minimum subdivision requirement of 5%.[2]

Residential Affordability

- 20% of all new multifamily, condo and hotel units are affordable and/or staff housing
- 50% rental/50% ownership
- Managed and administered by an affordable housing committee
- Built and paid for by developers
- Affordable as defined by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) & the Ucluelet Affordable Housing Committee
- Planning policies supporting small lot sizes, variety of residential development

Subdivisions

- Protect character and create a “sense of place”
- Rural design methods for subdivisions
- Alternatives for storm water management (French drains)
- Road design (less wide)
- LEED-ND (neighbourhood design)
- Wild Pacific Foreshore Trail (legacy)

Since the original District of Ucluelet/VIU partnership, Felice Mazzoni and Dave Robinson have helped to raise the profile of planning through VIU by creating a Community/University Planning Research Alliance with VIU’s Tourism and

Recreation Department. The alliance promotes the sharing of planning knowledge, resources and expertise between the school and the community.

Ucluelet won the "2006 FCM-CH2M HILL Sustainable Community Award" for sustainable community planning.

Current Initiatives

- 3 VIU students (one from the green building technology program)
- Heritage tree bylaw
- Carbon Offsetting Project
- Energy audit
- BuildGreen (amending building bylaw and creating a building package)
- Integrated water management policies
- Electric car initiatives
- LiveSmart-Ucluelet (affordable housing retrofit program)
- Complete Third Corporate Energy Audit

At its 2008 AGM, The Union of BC Municipalities named Ucluelet as the winner of a Community Excellence Award for small communities in the leadership and innovation category.

(<http://www.westcoaster.ca/modules/AMS/article.php?storyid=5181>)

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