

"Density Transfer" — what it means and how

The term "density transfer" has been around for quite awhile. It is commonly employed by land use planners when presenting or explaining the possible relocation of one kind of permitted land use (e.g., residential, or commercial, or industrial, etc.) from one location to a different location. As an example, one could point to the transfer of industrial land uses over the last 25 years from the Coal Harbour and False Creek areas in Vancouver to more appropriate locations outside the inner city, and in return the zoning for higher residential densities in the city core.

It is common (and understandable) that, over time, public planning objectives change, such that the transfer of allowed land uses from one location to another may become desirable.

However, the processes of density transfers, which may appear quite straightforward and simple on a theoretical level, in practice tend to be

complex and very time consuming. The reasons are two-fold: 1) Different values apply to different land uses, and these different values need to be negotiated and agreed to between the many parties that make up the mosaic of contributing and receiving landowners. 2) Within the same time frame, the public process of rezoning for both the contributing and the receiving lands has to conclude successfully. It may be understandable why density transfers by all accounts are neither fast nor easy. Therefore they are normally initiated and conducted by local governments which have the necessary resources of staff, money, and time.

Two questions then arise: 1) Why are we as independent developers suggesting such a complex undertaking? The "why" is fairly easy to answer. We are willing to volunteer

our proposal because in this case we are both the contributing and the receiving parties; therefore we expect that most of the complexity and expensive delays in the process can be avoided. If it wasn't for this special situation, we wouldn't dare suggest a density transfer as proposed.

2) What is in it for us (to put it bluntly)? This answer is not as easy because it will depend on the terms and conditions of the rezoning for the contributing and the receiving lands (the terms and conditions are unknown at this time). Obviously, we would not want to go through a time- and money-consuming process if we would risk suffering a major loss. But we hope that we will (at least in the end) do okay. Since we know that the potential for a major gain is very slim indeed, other good reasons have to exist for us to proceed. One reason is that we consider that under the density transfer the proposed alternative uses simply reflect better planning, especially in light of our hope for an enlightened Snug Cove plan in the future. Another reason is our expectation that it will help lead to a successful transformation of Bowen Island from an unsustainable bedroom community into a vibrant, living community. Since the time line for the combined build outs of Cates Hill and Cowan Point will exceed 15 to 20 years, any improvement to the quality of life on Bowen Island during that period provides enough reason for us to get excited.

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Cates Hill

Cowan Point

If, in 10 to 15 years, Bowen Islanders collectively look back to 2010 with a strong sense of universal civic pride about having participated in the process of transformation, then we will happily celebrate that occasion as a great mutual gain for us and for the community.

How do we think that can be accomplished? With honesty, intelligence, and energy — which, if called on, are available on Bowen Island. The first step would be to start serious research about which new activities and businesses would have a good chance to be viable on Bowen Island. The next step would be to invite and welcome new entrepreneurial ideas and energy, ideally in a social and political climate with the will and mandate to enable and encourage the seeds of a sustainable local economy to flourish on fertile ground rather than to starve on barren land.

Our own initial research has convinced us that Bowen Island is uniquely positioned to play a very special role in the development of a vibrant culture of art and related education close to Vancouver. Comparable models of prosperous arts- and culture-related communities can be found around the globe (with a prominent presence throughout Europe and especially in Germany), where the combination of art and education over time has expanded to include health, recreation, and hospitality. Those five pillars have helped to create and maintain sustainable communities since the late 1800s.

Our "vision" or "dream" or "hope" — or whatever term may come to mind — is to assist in the creation of a similar sustainable community here on Bowen Island. We are certain that once Bowen Islanders become familiar with the prospects of such a transformation, they will get increasingly comfortable with it and in the end will embrace it wholeheartedly.

To get the process underway, we propose to make sites available on the ±20 acres of Parkview Slopes on Cates Hill to accommodate:

- A mixture of affordable and alternative rental housing ranging from studio to 1- and 3-bedroom units.
- Live/work buildings accommodating workshops on the ground floor and employee housing on upper floors.
- A cottage court with micro-homes (750 to 1,100 square feet) on lease lots for singles or couples without children using a special European form of lease for 99 years with no up front lease payments, but quarterly/semi-annual payments instead.
- A small compound for institutional uses (i.e., the teaching of arts, crafts, and skills for holistic living), including the current Tirnanog Theatre School building.
- A new community building.

All of these uses are considered "non-market," a term that describes uses which are urgently needed to maintain or restore an equilibrium of

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it could help toward the goal of sustainability

supply and demand. Unfortunately it is nearly impossible to build or create such spaces without massive public subsidies and/or land that can be provided at very little or zero value. By transferring the existing zoning for single-family residential use away from the Parkview Slopes area onto the Seymour Landing area on Cowan Point, we hope to achieve a cost base for the remaining land in Parkview Slopes which is low enough to enable the creation of the aforescribed special uses.

At Seymour Landing, the situation is quite different, since the infrastructure already in place (i.e. roads, sewer, water, hydro, etc.) is vastly over built relative to the number of units allowed under the current zoning, and can easily accommodate higher density without incurring substantially more costs. A higher density at Seymour Landing will not only allow a greater diversity of housing forms, but also considerably lower property costs per unit which in turn will provide more affordable mar-

ket housing prices. Seymour Landing will require substantial investments in the next 2 to 10 years for the creation of amenities for public benefit (i.e. upgrade and stabilization of the waterfront at Seymour Bay Beach, construction of a landing facility for a passenger ferry to Vancouver, community clubhouse, and additional recreational facilities), many of which would not be feasible nor justifiable without the proposed density transfer.

Preliminary conceptual plans have been created by James W. Tuer over the last 12 months. They will be available for presentation and review at the public meeting on Saturday, October 17, 2009 at Cates Hill Chapel on Carter Road from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

We hope to see you there.



Visual Concept — Lane on Parkview Slopes