

ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT REGIONAL DISTRICT

ALBERNI VALLEY BACKGROUND STUDY

CREATING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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ALBERNI VALLEY

BACKGROUND STUDY

CREATING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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1. PURPOSE & PROCESS

The Alberni Valley Background Study is a foundation document to serve as a basis for the review and update of the four existing Official Community Plans (OCP), which serve the areas of Beaufort, Beaver Creek, Cherry Creek, and Sproat Lake. These four areas are located in the Alberni Valley within the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD).

The Background Study has been a consultative process involving the Planning Department of the Regional District; the local Advisory Planning Commissions for each of the four communities; and members of the public.

This Report is the first of its kind in the Regional District and has been undertaken to alleviate duplication during the OCP updating process. This document contains information pertaining to the four planning areas within the Valley and includes topic areas such as History, Demographic Characteristics, Development Characteristics, and topics of recent interest including, but not limited to home industry; secondary suites; and conservation design, which have been consolidated into this one document for ease of reference and comparison.

Content for this document was compiled using various sources including Statistics Canada, ACRD building statistics, consultation with area representatives and residents, as well as other jurisdictions in British Columbia and North America.

Using this document as a foundation, the Regional District of Alberni-Clayoquot, in consultation with stakeholders, will review and update the four existing OCPs in the Alberni Valley.

2. HISTORY

The earliest inhabitants of the Alberni Valley were the Hupacasath and Tseshahit tribes of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Nation, peoples who have lived in the area for generations. Numerous archeological sites throughout the Valley bear witness to the extent and longevity of their settlements.

European settlement, by contrast, dates only from the 19th century. The earliest recorded contact came in 1856 when Adam Horne's expedition entered the Alberni Valley overland from what is now Qualicum. Permanent European settlement occurred from the late 1880s onward. From the earliest days, the forest industry assumed the dominant role in the area's economy, which it retains today. Early settlers worked in the logging industry or cleared land to farm, supplementing their income with employment on government road projects.

Lumber, pulp, and paper have been prominent industries in the Alberni Valley since the late 1800's. In 1891, the British Columbia Paper Manufacturing Limited's paper mill was constructed on the southern edge of Beaver Creek next to the Somass River. Several other

sawmills were built in the early 20th century, including the Bainbridge Mill (1917), Mclean Mill (1926), Sproat Lake Mill (1926) and the Great Central Lake Mill (1925).

Settlement of the Alberni Valley was encouraged by the completion of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway in 1911, which improved access to the rest of Vancouver Island. Residential development in Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek began as an extension of the outward growth of the old town of Alberni. Initial growth took place along Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek roads and spread northward as roads were improved and more property was developed. As development continued, similar activity took place on the side roads as more area was divided up.

As Beaver Creek Road began to assume a higher profile as the major access route to the north end of the Valley, the Beaufort area developed as a primarily agricultural area. The farms not only served the growing communities of Alberni and Port Alberni, but also the surrounding areas and logging camps in the Valley. Camp One, operated by the Alberni Pacific Lumber Company, was supplied by farmers in the Somers Road area during the 1930s.

Residential development in Sproat Lake has followed a somewhat different path. There was a sawmill and town of around 350 people established on Great Central Lake in the mid-1920s and early development around Sproat Lake was predominantly recreational cabins. It wasn't until the 1950s that Sproat Lake started to attract a significant number of permanent residents as road access was improved.

Today, the Alberni Valley is changing. The forest industry is not as dominant as it has been in the past and the focus is shifting towards tourism and recreation. Heritage resources such as the Mclean Mill and parts of the E & N Railway have been developed as tourism attractions while Sproat Lake continues to be a recreational hub during the summer months.

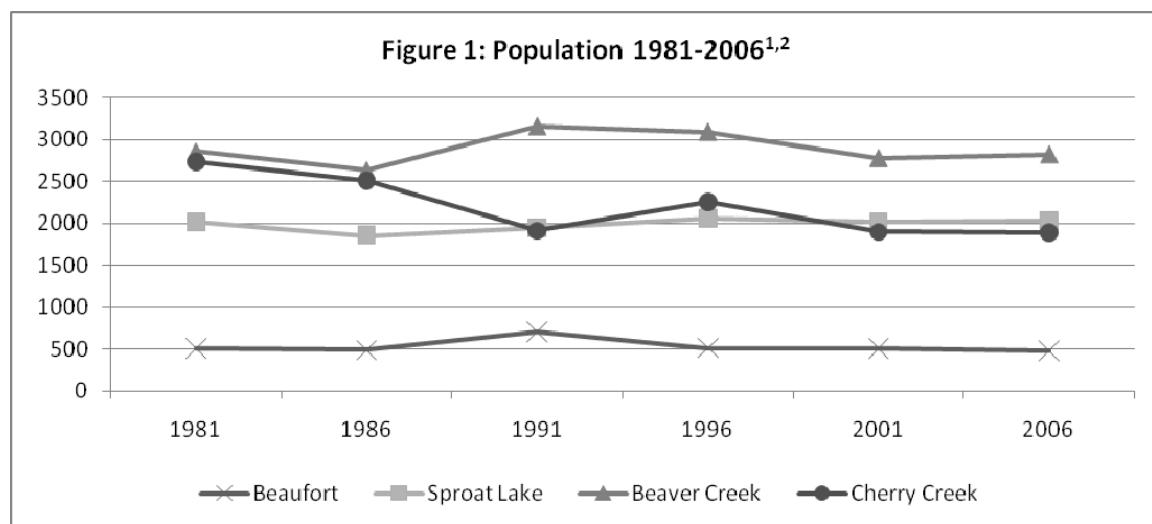
3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic characteristics of rural areas in the Alberni Valley are changing. The rural population is declining despite continued construction of new dwellings. The population is ageing, which translates into a greater demand for seniors' services and a decreased demand for schools and recreation facilities for the younger generations. Industry is also changing with resource-based industries no longer dominating employment in the region and other industries, such as construction and business services, becoming more prominent.

3.1 POPULATION

Census data indicates that the rural areas in the Alberni Valley (Beaufort, Beaver Creek, Cherry Creek, and Sproat Lake) have experienced low growth rates or decreased population numbers over the past 25 years (Figure 1)^{1,2}. The population is also ageing: people aged 65 years or older comprise 16.1% of the population, which is up from 11.7% in 1996.

The low growth rate is indicative of the economic downturn in the region as fewer people are moving to the Alberni Valley for employment while many young families are leaving in search of better employment opportunities. The changing population characteristics will result in an increase in the need for services and facilities for seniors and a decrease in those needs for children. Most health and long term care, recreational and educational facilities are located in the City of Port Alberni so these issues will need to be addressed on a valley-wide basis.



3.2 EMPLOYMENT

Employment characteristics are also changing in the Alberni Valley. In 1996, agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 17.7% of the labour force in rural areas of the Valley. In 2006, those industries accounted for 9.5% of the labour activity (Table 1). Making up the difference were increases in employment relating to construction, transportation and storage, health and social services, and business services. Despite the employment drop in resource-based industries, the Alberni Valley remains largely dependent on the forest industry, as evidenced by the continued strength in the manufacturing sector.

¹ Census data provided by Statistics Canada and BC Stats.

² Prior to the 2001 census, First Nations reserve statistics were included in the same subdivision districts as the Electoral Areas. Statistics from the Tsahahesh 1, Ahahswini 1, Klehkoot 2 and Alberni 2 reserves have been removed from the 1981-1996 totals to allow for accurate comparison.

Table 1: Most Prominent Industries in the Alberni Valley^{3,4}

	1996	2006
	Percent of Labour Force	Percent of Labour Force
Manufacturing	17.1 %	17.8 %
Health Care and Social Assistance	10.9 %	11.8 %
Retail trade	12.4 %	11.7 %
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	17.7 %	9.5 %
Construction	6.9 %	8.3 %
TOTAL	65%	59.1%*

* Totals do not equal 100% because these industries are only the most prominent in the Valley. However, the difference in the totals from 1996 to 2006 is indicative of the reduced number of people who are working in those same industries.

4. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Development in rural areas of the Alberni Valley has experienced steady growth over the past decade, particularly in the years 2005 to 2008, despite decreasing overall population. In recent years, building permit and subdivision applications have both increased throughout the Alberni Valley. This increased rate of development in the region is propelled by a healthy real estate market and an ageing population that is subdividing property for younger family members or retirement estates.

4.1 SUBDIVISIONS

In rural areas of the Alberni Valley there were a total of 122 subdivision applications made between 1998 and 2008 (Table 2, Figure 2). 80 of these applications were approved resulting in 113 new lots being created⁵. Subdivision applications jumped considerably during 2005 to 2008, peaking at 27 total applications in 2006.

³ Census data provided by Statistics Canada and BC Stats.

⁴ Prior to the 2001 census, First Nations reserve statistics were included in the same subdivision districts as the Electoral Areas. Statistics from the Tsahaheth 1, Ahahswinis 1, Klehkoot 2 and Alberni 2 reserves have been removed from the 1981-1996 totals to allow for accurate comparison.

⁵ Number of new lots created as of September 8, 2009 due to active applications still under review

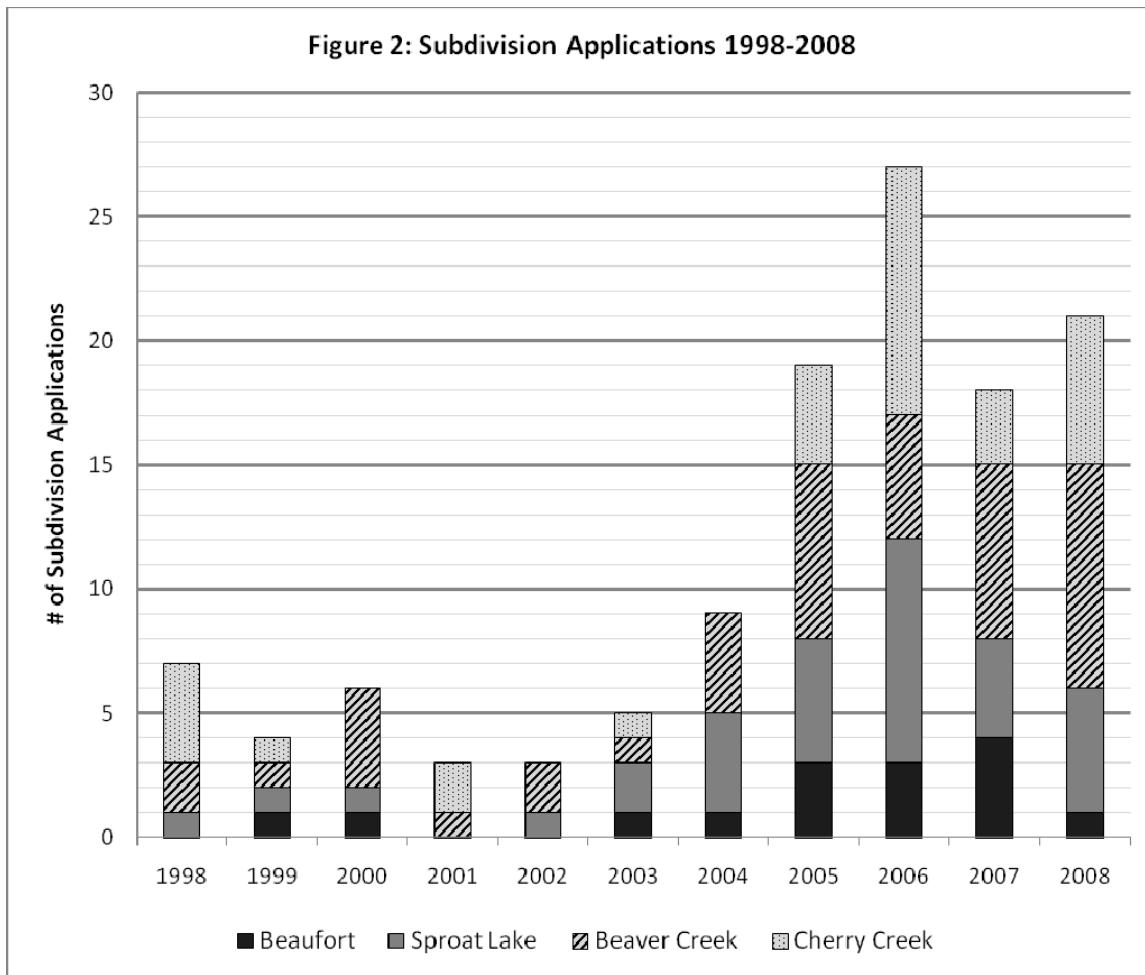
While approved subdivisions were located throughout all areas, the principal areas of development were along the waterfront in Sproat Lake and a few major subdivisions in Beaver Creek. However, the increased rate of subdivision is not indicative of incoming residents. The total population in rural areas of the Alberni Valley dropped from 7,908 in 1996 to 7,207 in 2006, while the number of occupied private dwellings also fell from 3,036 to 2,964 during that same time period.

Table 2: Development in the Alberni Valley, 1998-2008

Year	Building Permit Applications	Rezoning Applications	Subdivision Applications	New Lots Created ³
1998	57	4	7	4
1999	61	4	4	1
2000	61	2	6	2
2001	71	1	3	0
2002	61	3	3	2
2003	69	3	5	3
2004	95	6	9	4
2005	116	15	19	37
2006	121	10	27	30
2007	126	16	18	22
2008	122	12	21	8
Total	960	64	122	113

Out of the 113 new lots created by subdivision 17 lots (15.0%) are located within the Agricultural Land Reserve. Many of these subdivisions were completed with the intention to provide retirement properties for older generations of farmers who are passing the operation of the farm to younger family members. Agricultural subdivision for retired farmers helps ensure that the future of agriculture remains strong in the Alberni Valley.

There were also a total of 64 rezoning applications made from 1998 to 2008.

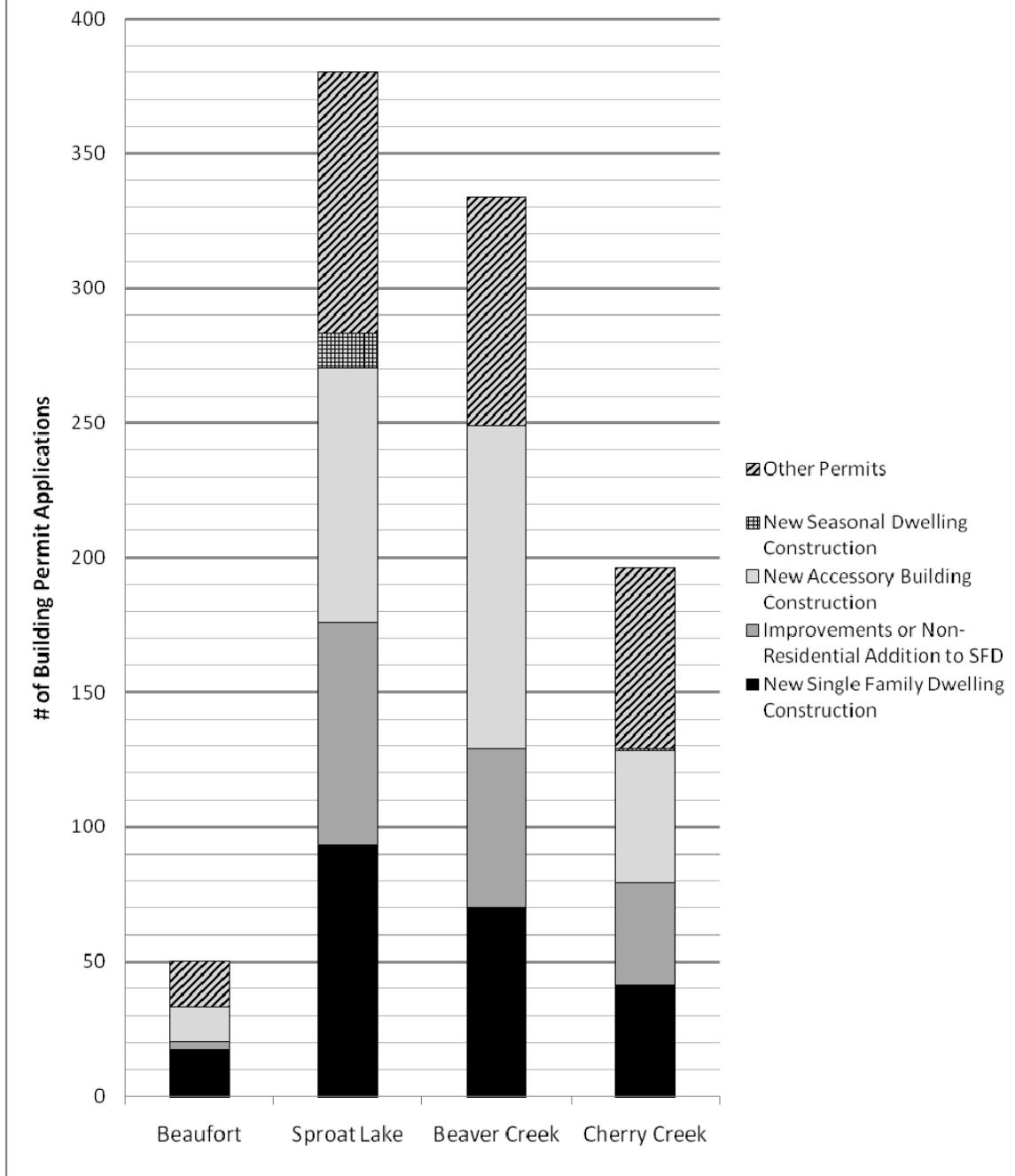


4.2 BUILDING PERMITS

There were 960 building permit applications made from 1998 to 2008. A detailed breakdown is provided in Figure 3. This large number of building permits also correlates with the rise in subdivision applications. The bulk of permits came from Sproat Lake and Beaver Creek, which is also where the majority of new lots were created.

The decreasing population over the same time period (1998 – 2008) suggests that the increased rate of construction has more to do with the strong real estate market than a need for more housing. There were 221 applications for new single family dwelling construction, from 1998 to 2008, despite declining population and occupied private dwelling numbers. This could imply that there is more housing being built for seasonal residency and/or that there has been a rise in vacant housing in the region.

Figure 3: Building Permit Applications 1998-2008

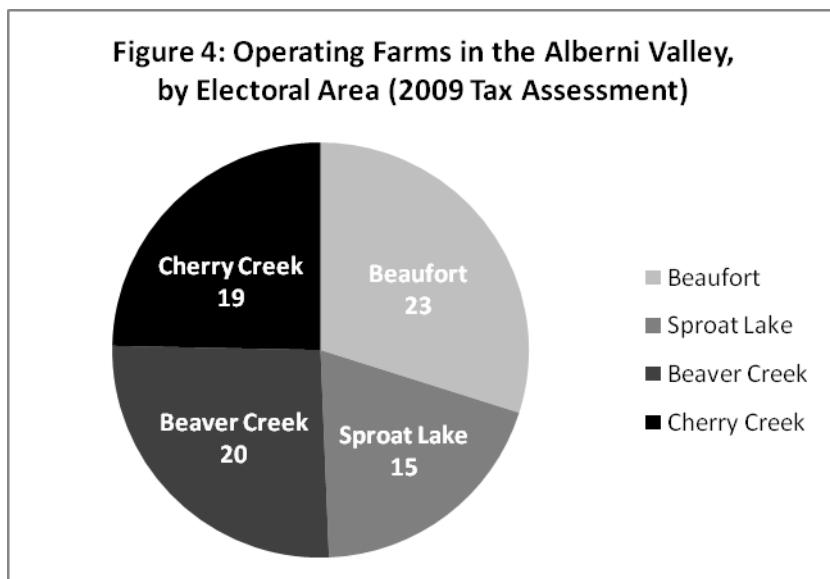


5. EXISTING LAND STATUS

5.1 AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

There are 77 tax exempt agricultural operations in rural Alberni Valley according to the 2009 tax assessment. This represents a decline in operations since 2005 when there were 82 in the valley. This small decrease is more indicative of changing farmer demographics rather than non-farm development of agricultural land.

The farms are spread throughout the Valley, but the greatest number of operations is found in the Beaufort area (Figure 4). Grain & Forage and Beef production are the two most prominent types of agriculture in the region with operations in each electoral area. The majority of Dairy farms are located in Beaufort while all of the Poultry operations are found in Beaver Creek. There is also a large contingent of mixed use farms, which indicates that many farms in the area have diversified to generate a greater range of agricultural products.



5.2 COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

There are 45 properties in rural Alberni Valley zoned for commercial, mixed accommodation commercial, or marina commercial use (Table 3). The bulk of commercial properties are situated along the highway corridor through the Valley, but other areas are also commercially zoned like along Beaver Creek Road and tourist and campground facilities around Sproat Lake. A future comprehensive development is planned for the eastern end of Great Central Lake which would include increased commercial activities.

In addition to the properties zoned for commercial use, the OCPs in the region delineate areas intended for commercial operations. The Cherry Creek OCP delineates additional commercial opportunities along the Port Alberni highway corridor that are adjacent to properties currently zoned for commercial use. The Sproat Lake OCP also demarcates

additional Tourist Commercial land around Boot Lagoon, on Great Central Lake, that is not included in the Comprehensive Development zoning district.

Table 3: Commercial properties in rural Alberni Valley, Oct. 2009

Zoning District	Beaufort	Sproat Lake	Beaver Creek	Cherry Creek
C1 - Local Commercial	0	0	4	0
C3 - Service Commercial	0	0	3	1
C4 - Highway Commercial	0	2	3	7
C6 - Tourist Commercial	0	7	1	5
C7 - Recreation Commercial	0	1	1	1
C8 - Campground Commercial	0	3	1	1
MAC - Mixed Accommodation Commercial	0	2	0	0
MAR1 - Marina	0	1	0	0
MAR2 - Marina	0	1	0	0
CD1A - Fishing Lodge & Assoc. Cottages	0	1	0	0
CD1B - Marina Centre	0	1	0	0
Electoral Area Totals	0	18⁶	13	14⁶

5.3 INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES

There are 43 properties in rural Alberni Valley zoned for industrial or storage use (Table 4). Primary industrial areas are located along Dundalk Avenue and Sherwood Road in Cherry Creek and the Hector Road area in Sproat Lake.

There is a fairly even mixture of properties zoned Industrial Park, Light Industrial, Heavy Industrial and Industrial Open Storage. The Industrial Park and Light Industrial zones are concentrated in Cherry Creek while Heavy Industrial and Industrial Open Storage zones are primarily located near Hector Road.

Official community plans can also designate areas intended for industrial use. The Sproat Lake OCP designates a block of land adjacent to the Alberni Valley Regional Airport for future industrial use.

⁶ Properties with multiple commercial zoning designations are only tallied once

Table 4: Industrial properties in rural Alberni Valley, Oct. 2009

Zoning District	Beaufort	Sproat Lake	Beaver Creek	Cherry Creek
M1 - Industrial Park	0	0	0	8
M2 - Light Industrial	0	1	1	8
M3 - Heavy Industrial	4	4	0	3
M4 - Industrial Open Storage	1	7	0	1
M6 - Industrial Foundry	0	0	0	1
M7 - Sawmill	0	1	0	0
M8 - Gravel Extraction	1	0	0	0
SW1 - Storage Warehouse	0	1	0	1
Electoral Area Totals	6	14	1	22

5.4 CROWN LAND

There are a total of 2,736 Crown Provincial parcels in rural Alberni Valley. The majority of the parcels are small townsite lots in Cherry Creek that were originally created in the early 20th century. These lots equal approximately 94 hectares and are currently designated as forest use in the Cherry Creek OCP. The remaining bulk of Crown land is located in Sproat Lake and Beaufort; 3,593 hectares and 1,244 hectares respectively (Table 5).

Table 5: Crown Provincial Parcels in rural Alberni Valley, Nov. 2009

	Parcels	Area (ha)
Beaufort	87	1,244
Sproat Lake	68	3,593
Beaver Creek	19	16
Cherry Creek	2,562	690
Total	2,736	5,542

5.5 VACANT PARCELS

There are 3,497 vacant parcels in rural Alberni Valley, totaling 58,425 hectares (Table 6). Vacant parcels are classified as such by BC Assessment as having no-improvements. The following is the breakdown of vacant properties by land use:

- Residential, less than 2 acres: 0.12% (68 ha)
- Residential, 2 acres or more: 4.97% (2,901 ha)
- Civic, Institutional & Recreation: 9.71% (5,663 ha)
- Commercial: 0.002% (1.4 ha)
- Industrial & Forestry: 84.18% (49,590 ha)

- Agriculture: 0.35% (203 ha)

Vacant residential lots are of particular importance as that is where the majority of new development will most likely occur.

There are 216 vacant residential lots (each less than 2 acres in size) that could potentially be developed, totaling 61 hectares⁷. By Electoral Area, 96 are in Sproat Lake, 55 in Cherry Creek, 54 in Beaver Creek and 11 in Beaufort. Many of the smaller vacant properties in Sproat Lake are located along the waterfront. There are also a number of vacant lots in Beaver Creek due to recent subdivision activity on Darnley Road and Grandview Road. Beaufort has a shortage of small residential vacant lots due to the rural and agricultural character of the area.

There are 163 vacant residential lots (2 acres or more) that could potentially be developed, totaling 1,248 hectares⁷. By Electoral Area, 49 are in Beaufort, 45 in Sproat Lake, 42 in Beaver Creek and 27 in Cherry Creek. Beaufort has the greatest number of vacant lots over 2 acres in size, due in part to recent subdivisions on Cameron Road and Smith Road. While Beaufort has more lots, Sproat Lake has a greater total area of vacant land in large lots; 683 hectares compared to 231 hectares in Beaufort. Sproat Lake has large tracts of privately-owned forest land in the area, especially near Great Central Lake.

It should be noted that the large inventory of vacant land in the Alberni Valley is not an automatic precursor for development. Development plans are subject to the Zoning Bylaw and Official Community Plans as well as provincial laws and regulations. However, it is important to note where build out can occur without rezoning or subdivision.

Table 6: Vacant Properties by Land Use in rural Alberni Valley, 2009 Tax Assessment

		Beaufort	Sproat Lake	Beaver Creek	Cherry Creek	Total
Residential Less than 2 acres	Properties	16	99	59	61	235
	Area	6 ha	28 ha	19 ha	14 ha	68 ha
Residential 2 acres or More	Properties	57	74	44	35	210
	Area	253 ha	2,066 ha	264 ha	317 ha	2,901 ha
Civic, Institutional and Recreation	Properties	112	79	24	2,600	2,815
	Area	1,166 ha	3,646 ha	60 ha	791 ha	5,663 ha
Commercial	Properties	0	0	1	2	3
	Area	0	0	0.1 ha	1.2 ha	1.4 ha
Industrial	Properties	56	90	0	52	198
	Area	5,818 ha	30,900 ha	0	12,871 ha	49,590 ha
Agriculture	Properties	9	6	13	8	36
	Area	129 ha	10 ha	9 ha	55 ha	203 ha

⁷ Vacant residential lots that could potentially be developed were derived by excluding properties owned by the BC Transportation Financing Authority, provincial and federal governments, forestry companies and conservation trusts.

The following sections are topic areas that were discussed with each Alberni Valley Advisory Planning Commission and were brought forward for public comment. The following sections describe the topic areas and include provisions or guidelines that the Regional District is looking at for public comment if looking to include in the future Official Community Plans once they are reviewed starting in the fall of 2010.

5.6 PARKS

There are approximately 626 ha of parkland in the Alberni Valley. Provincial parks account for 493 ha of the total while the balance rests in regional and local parks owned by the Province, Regional District, City of Port Alberni and one park operated by the Beaver Creek Improvement District. This total does not include the 25 ha China Creek Marina which is owned by the ACRD or the 580 ha Mt. Arrowsmith Regional Park which is located in the Regional District of Nanaimo but owned by the ACRD.

BEAUFORT

The 327 ha Stamp River Provincial Park is located primarily on the east side of the Stamp River in Beaufort and is an amalgamation of the former Stamp Falls and Money's Pool Provincial Parks.

SPROAT LAKE

Sproat Lake is home to Fossli, Taylor Arm & Sproat Lake Provincial Parks. These parks all front onto the Lake with Fossli Provincial Park located on the south side of Stirling Arm and Sproat Lake and Taylor Arm Provincial Parks located on the north side of the lake.

There are a number of local parks in the vicinity of Sproat Lake including Cougar Smith, Faber and Sander as well as Seaton Park along the Sproat River and Somass Park along the Somass River. There is also a crown-owned park reserve on Taylor Arm located in Windy Bay.

BEAVER CREEK

In Beaver Creek, Evergreen Park is a local park owned and operated by the Beaver Creek Improvement District. Parkland was also acquired by the Regional District via subdivisions on Karen Place and Darnley Road. The park on Darnley Road and Highland Drive serves to protect a natural watercourse. Paper Mill Dam Park, which is owned by the city of Port Alberni, is located along the Somass River near the southern boundary of Beaver Creek.

CHERRY CREEK

There is only one park in Cherry Creek, which is the Maplehurst trail system located on crown land surrounding Kitsuksis Creek. Maplehurst Park is accessed off Willow Road.

Several properties in the Alberni Valley are zoned for Park and Public Use (P2). The majority of these properties accommodate public services, utilities, and other community services. In addition to the Zoning Bylaw, the Official Community Plans in the Valley designate areas of interest for potential future parks or open space. These areas of

interest are designated along portions of the Sproat and Stamp Rivers as well as an area surrounding Hal Creek in Beaufort.

Requiring development permits in natural hazard and environmentally sensitive areas surrounding creeks can ensure that these areas are protected. The Regional District can encourage the protection of environmentally sensitive areas through parkland dedication as large parcels are developed in the future. Consideration should also be given to ensure recreational access to the lakes and rivers in the region, which can also be accomplished through parkland dedication during the subdivision process.

5.7 TRAILS

Trails are vital in maintaining the rural character of the Alberni Valley. They provide hiking, horse riding, and bicycle riding opportunities, which can be a major feature of rural life. There are a number of dedicated trails in the region, as well as many others without official status. The following are some of the more prominent trails:

- The Log Train Trail runs along an old railway grade from Mozart Road in Cherry Creek to Woolsey Road in Beaufort.
- The Greenmax Anglers Trail is a riverside trail on the west side of the Stamp River, starting from Coleman Road.
- The Stamp Long River Trail is located in the Stamp River Provincial Park and follows the river from the south end of the park to the end of Barker Road near Money's Pool.
- The Maplehurst Trail system is a series of trails near Kitsuksis Creek, off the end of Willow Road in Cherry Creek.
- Proposed Inlet Trail is a proposed trail currently being developed from Shipcreek Road to China Creek Marina on the Bamfield Road.

Official Community Plans are a useful tool in delineating future trail corridors. The Beaver Creek OCP designates a former logging railway grade as a potential trail linking the end of Grandview Road with the Stamp River. However, this right of way was sold to adjacent property owners and is no longer available for such a use. The Cherry Creek OCP encourages the development of a 50m Horne Lake Trail corridor to be considered as a historic trail as a way of protecting an important heritage resource. The Sproat Lake OCP encourages the development of a Sproat Lake trail system that includes a series of trails such as a link from Somass Park to Seaton Park and beyond, as well as backcountry trails to Ward Lake and the Gibson-Klitsa Plateau. Trail development on private land is subject to trail use agreements.

The Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek OCPs also support the development of a safe, off-highway trail system paralleling major traffic routes. Multi-use paths would encourage more pedestrian and bicycle traffic along busy routes, such as Highway 4, Beaver Creek Road and Cherry Creek Road.

When considering trails in the Alberni Valley, emphasis needs to be placed on linking key recreational areas through trail corridors. The Alberni Valley Trails Planning Study was completed in 2006 in cooperation with the Friends of the Log Train Trail Society. The study cites the Log Train Trail, the Stamp and Sproat Rivers as priority corridors within the region. It also names the southern section of the Log Train Trail and a connection between the Kitsuksis Dyke and Maplehurst Trails as potential regional trail links with the city of Port Alberni. The Official Community Plans need to further encourage the development of the regional trail system with emphasis placed on linking trail corridors.

6. DEVELOPMENT PERMIT AREAS

Development Permit Areas (DPAs) are an important tool in shaping new development and can help protect environmentally sensitive areas and agricultural lands. They can also be used as a means of regulating form and character of new development in high visibility corridors and in multi-family residential, commercial and industrial areas.

In the ACRD, the Official Community Plans delineate DPAs. While each OCP outlines policies for protecting environmentally sensitive areas, there are significant variations between communities. The South Long Beach OCP contains very specific and clear Development Permit requirements while the Beaufort OCP makes no mention of requiring Development Permits.

The following needs to be considered when looking at establishing Development Permit Areas in all OCP areas:

- 6.1 Riparian Setbacks
- 6.2 Protection of Agricultural and Forestry Land
- 6.3 Natural Hazard Areas
- 6.4 Form and Character of New Development
- 6.5 Greenhouse Gas Reduction
- 6.6 Official Community Plan Expansion

6.1 RIPARIAN SETBACKS

An example of the variations between plans is the disparity in the width requirements surrounding riparian areas and building setbacks around watercourses (Table 5). Along the Stamp River alone there are two different setback requirements in relation to what side of the River the property is located. The west side of the river is within the Sproat Lake OCP and it requires a riparian setback of 30 metres. The east side is within the Beaver Creek OCP, which requires a building setback of 60 metres. In Beaufort, the riparian setback from the Stamp River is 15m. The South Long Beach OCP follows the recommendations of the Provincial Riparian Areas Regulation. While this regulation has

not yet been applied to the ACRD, it does provide a useful guideline and should be considered for other areas.

It should also be noted that the ACRD Zoning Bylaw states that no building shall be constructed within 7.62m (25 feet) of the natural boundary of a lake or within 30.48m (100 feet) of any other natural watercourse. The 7.62m setback from lakes differs greatly from the 30m setback requirement for Sproat Lake and Great Central Lake as described in the Sproat Lake OCP.

Table 5: Building setback distances where a Development Permit is required, by Official Community Plan

OCP	Building setback from watercourse
Bamfield	10m
Beaufort	15m
South Long Beach	30m
Sproat Lake	15 - 60m
Beaver Creek	15 - 60m
Cherry Creek	100 - 150m

6.2 PROTECTION OF AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY LAND

Agricultural lands can also be protected through Development Permit Areas, which is currently underutilized. DPAs can be used to maintain buffers between agriculture and residential land use. This is particularly important in Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek where farm operations share the area with relatively large residential populations. Creating DPAs adjacent to actively farmed land can require building and vegetation setbacks which will minimize negative impacts towards farms and residential properties. A similar DPA could be created for areas adjoining large forestry blocks

6.3 NATURAL HAZARD AREAS

Development Permit Areas should also be established to protect natural hazard areas. The South Long Beach and Bamfield OCPs contain guidelines for tsunami hazards. Similar DPAs should be considered for the portions of land along the Somass River in Beaver Creek and Sproat Lake, which fall within the 20m Tsunami Inundation Zone. The Cherry Creek OCP also requires Development Permits in areas prone to flooding. See Chapter 7 – Natural Hazard Areas.

6.4 FORM AND CHARACTER OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

South Long Beach, Bamfield, Sproat Lake and Cherry Creek currently have Development Permit Areas in commercial, industrial and transportation corridors to regulate form and character of new development. These help regulate character in key areas such as the Bomber Base Mixed Use area in Sproat Lake and the Highway 4 and 4a transportation corridor in Cherry Creek. This should be considered when determining possible DPAs in Beaver Creek and Beaufort.

6.5 GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION

Bill 27 (Green Communities) amends the British Columbia Local Government Act and requires all local governments in BC include greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets, actions and policies in their Official Community Plans. This requirement must be met by May 31, 2010. Some municipalities are considering creating Development Permit Areas to encourage increased efficiency for new and existing development. These DPAs could cover the entire plan area or key areas where development occurs and would be included in the future ACRD GHG reduction strategy.

6.6 OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN EXPANSION

Another aspect to consider is expanding the Cherry Creek OCP boundaries to include the areas around Cox Lake, Bainbridge Lake, Cameron shops and the China Creek Marina. This would allow Development Permit Areas to be established to protect agricultural and forestry operations, as well as natural watercourses and lakes in the area. Bainbridge Lake is of particular importance as it is part of the water supply for the city of Port Alberni.

7. NATURAL HAZARD AREAS

Residents of rural Alberni Valley face a number of potential natural hazards. These risks include, but are not limited to:

- 7.1 Tsunami
- 7.2 Seasonal Flooding
- 7.3 Steep/Unstable Slope
- 7.4 Earthquake
- 7.5 Forest Fire

7.1 TSUNAMI

Several properties in Beaver Creek and Sproat Lake are within the Tsunami Inundation Zone due to their proximity to the Somass River. A number of these properties can have buildings that meet the required building setbacks of the ACRD Zoning Bylaw from the River but still fall within the inundation zone. The areas most at risk are those properties along Ferguson Road in Beaver Creek and along Shoemaker Bay Road, Hector Road and Vista Road in Sproat Lake.

The South Long Beach and Bamfield Official Community Plans contain guidelines for tsunami hazards which should be incorporated into the Beaver Creek and Sproat Lake OCPs.

7.2 SEASONAL FLOODING

Seasonal flooding presents a risk for many areas of the Alberni Valley. The ACRD Zoning Bylaw requires that no building shall be constructed within 30.48m (100 feet) of any natural watercourse or less than 0.609m (2 feet) above the 200 year flood level.

The Official Community Plans contain varying setback distances from watercourses where development permits are required. The Cherry Creek OCP designates Natural Hazard Development Permit Areas around all creeks at a varying distance between 100-150m. DPAs not only protect future development within those areas, but also sensitive stream ecosystems. The Province has provided mapping of the 200 year floodplain for Somass River which can be used in creating Natural Hazard Development Permit Areas in Beaver Creek, Sproat Lake and Beaufort.

7.3 STEEP/UNSTABLE SLOPES

Development near steep or unstable slopes also poses a hazard risk. In Cherry Creek, the properties along Desmond and Tahlen Road that lie north of the Log Train Trail right-of-way are within a Natural Hazard Development Permit Area due to their location at the foot of the Beaufort Range. The OCP requires all permanent structures be sited away from areas which may be subject to sloughing or slippage. A similar Development Permit Area such as this could be created in Beaufort to protect areas adjacent to the Beaufort Range especially since recent logging on the slope has made some areas unstable.

Another soil related natural hazard that should also be considered is subsidence due to natural removal of underground materials. Subsidence can be prevalent in wet climates where water erosion can remove silts and limestone producing depressions in the ground. This is especially a concern on land adjacent to any river, stream, creek or other water feature.

7.4 EARTHQUAKE

Vancouver Island lies within the Cascadia Subduction Zone where the Juan de Fuca tectonic plate is subducting (sliding) beneath the North America plate. This raises the possibility of a major earthquake in the region that could result in damage to buildings and soil liquefaction (solid turning to liquid). Damages from a major earthquake event could be minimized if areas with soils prone to liquefaction were included in Development Permit areas due to the unstable soil conditions.

7.5 FOREST FIRE

Forest fires are a concern due to the hot and dry summer months experienced in the Alberni Valley. This danger can be mitigated by planning new development in a way that reduces the risks associated with forest interface fires (fires within a zone of transition between developed areas and undeveloped wilderness) and which provides fuel-free zones for fire protection.

The South Long Beach OCP encourages a 10m buffer between buildings and forested areas in new subdivisions adjacent to forest land of 20 hectares or more. Requiring buffers between residential development and forestry operations is a simple way of

alleviating the dangers associated with wildfires and should be included in all OCPs in the Valley.

The Zoning Bylaw also contains requirements for properties zoned Industrial or Forest Rural requiring nothing be done which is a nuisance to the surrounding properties, including generating a fire or explosion hazard. The intent here is to prevent the occurrence of wildfires originating from industrial activities.

8. SECONDARY SUITES

Many local governments allow legal secondary suites in areas where single family dwellings are permitted. Secondary suites can be beneficial in many different ways: providing affordable housing for renters; allowing home owners to generate additional “mortgage helper” income. Secondary suites also provide a way for local governments to increase the density of urban residential neighbourhoods without allowing multi-family development.

Secondary suites can be managed in many different ways. Typically suites are permitted within a single family dwelling and may include, but are not limited to, the following conditions:

- Not more than one secondary suite per dwelling;
- One secondary suite is permitted on a lot with one existing principal dwelling;
- Secondary suites are not permitted within mobile homes.
- The principal dwelling must be owner occupied.
- The secondary suite shall be for residential use only.
- The secondary suite must have a separate entrance/exit from the principal dwelling.
- The maximum size of the secondary suite shall not exceed 60-90 m² or 35-40% of the floor area of the principal building, whichever is less.
- The minimum allowable area of the secondary suite shall be 40 m².
- The secondary suite shall have no more than 2 bedrooms.
- The secondary suite shall have a minimum of 2 rooms, which must include a kitchen and bathroom.
- A minimum of one off-street parking space shall be provided, in addition to the off-street parking spaces required for the principal dwelling.
- Secondary suites shall not be rented out to boarders, lodgers or roomers.

- The secondary suite cannot be strata-titled; meaning it cannot be sold separately like a condo unit can be.
- Secondary suites will only be permitted where no additions and limited exterior changes to the dwelling have occurred for a period of 5 years before installation of the secondary suite.
- The building exterior shall be consistent with the character of single family dwellings in the neighbourhood.
- A hard-wired, inter-connected smoke alarm system must be installed in both the principal residence and the secondary suite.
- The secondary suite must comply with the standards of the British Columbia Building Code.

Secondary suites may also be permitted within accessory buildings. The City of Nanaimo permits suites in accessory buildings where no secondary suite exists within the principal dwelling and where the lot is a corner lot, accessed by a laneway or greater than 1,000 m² in area.

9. HOME OCCUPATIONS

The ACRD Zoning Bylaw defines Home Occupations as the following:

“Home Occupation means any homecraft, professional practice, or other livelihood which may be conducted in accordance with the provisions in subsection 6.7 and which is clearly incidental both to the use of a dwelling unit for residential purposes and to the residential use of a lot occupied by a dwelling.”

The provisions set out in subsection 6.7 of the Zoning Bylaw are as follows:

- The home occupation shall involve no internal or external structural alterations to the dwelling.
- There shall be no exterior indication, apart from a sign, that the building is being utilized for any purpose other than that of a dwelling.
- The home occupation shall not involve the use of mechanical equipment apart from the scale typically used for recreational hobbies.
- The home occupation does not include manufacturing or any other light industrial use.
- The home occupation shall not produce noise, vibration, smoke, dust, odour, litter or heat other than that normally associated with a dwelling.

- The home occupation shall not create or cause any fire hazard, electrical interference or traffic congestion.
- No part of the premises shall be used primarily as a warehouse or retail outlet.
- There shall be no exterior storage of materials, containers or finished product, except for the temporary storage of harvested crops.
- One person who is not a resident in the dwelling may be employed in the home occupation.
- The operation of a kindergarten, daycare or preschool shall only include a maximum of eight (8) children at any one time.
- The operation of a boarding, lodging, or foster home shall only include a maximum of four (4) boarders/lodgers/foster children at any one time.
- The operation of a dance school shall only include a maximum of eight (8) students at any one time.

Home occupations are permitted in a number of Residential, Cottage Residential and Acreage Residential zones as well as the Mixed Accommodation Commercial zone. Zones that permit home occupations have minimum lot sizes that range from 0.165 acres (Single Family Residential) to 10 acres (Forest Rural).

The Official Community Plans in the region support the idea of home based occupations. The Beaver Creek OCP states that home occupation regulations should be reviewed in cooperation with the Advisory Planning Commissions in the area to ensure that scale of development, traffic and nuisance issues are adequately addressed. The Cherry Creek and Sproat Lake OCPs encourage less stringent guidelines in the Zoning Bylaw to allow for broader home occupation options.

A review of the home occupation regulations in the Regional District is important to ensure that the parameters meet the needs of the population while also considering traffic, scale of development, nuisance, safety and environmental issues. Consideration should be given to the following possible requirements for home occupations:

- Limiting the maximum floor area devoted to a home occupation.
- Limiting the sale of items to only those produced on the premises.
- Allowing more than one home occupation per lot provided that the combined usage meets the regulations set out in the bylaw.

9.1 HOME INDUSTRY

The Zoning Bylaw contains regulations regarding home based occupations, but currently states that a home occupation must not include manufacturing or light industrial uses. Allowing home industry uses on larger parcels would provide an opportunity for rural

residents to try out new business ideas that are larger than home occupations, but smaller than most commercial/industrial uses from their primary residence.

Contrary to the Zoning Bylaw, the South Long Beach OCP encourages home industry as a way of generating household income. The OCP states that a home industry can be established on a minimum 2.0 hectare (4.94 acres) lot with up to four full time employees, two of which must be occupants of the residence.

Home industry uses would be subject to adequate buffering, screening and setback requirements. Suggested permitted uses include:

- Arts and crafts.
- Food processing.
- Wood processing, including furniture manufacturing.
- Repair of non-motorized vehicles.
- Storage of construction, marine or fishing related equipment.

Other local governments on Vancouver Island support home industry. Three such areas include:

Capital Regional District: The '*Sooke Land Use Bylaw, 1992*' contains provisions for home industry on lots over 1.0 hectare provided there is a 15 metre setback from lot lines if housed in an accessory building or, if unhoused, a 30 metre setback from lot lines in conjunction with landscape or solid fence screening. The Bylaw also allows for the limited use of a portable sawmill as a home industry, but limits the number of days it may be operational over a 12 month period, depending on lot size.⁸

Comox Valley Regional District: The '*Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw, 2005*' supports domestic industry, but limits the maximum permitted area for this use to 200 m² within an accessory building and 75 m² for a designated outdoor work area. The designated outdoor work area must be screened from adjacent properties and roads and is limited to three pieces of equipment and a maximum of two fuel tanks. Two additional pieces of equipment, including trucks and trailers, are permitted on lots larger than 2.0 hectares. All goods sold through domestic industrial use must be manufactured on site and a maximum of four persons, at least one of whom resides on the lot, may be employed by the operation. The Regional District also requires those intending to operate a domestic industry to obtain prior written approval.⁹

Strathcona Regional District: The '*Quadra Island Zoning Bylaw, 1990*' includes regulations regarding home industries. The Regional District allows home industrial uses on

⁸ Sooke Land Use Bylaw, 1992. Capital Regional District. <http://www.crd.bc.ca>

⁹ Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw, 2005. Comox Valley Regional District. <http://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca>

parcels greater than 0.99 acres and allows a home sawmill on parcels 9.88 acres or larger, subject to 30 metre setbacks from all lot lines. The home industry may employ two persons in addition to immediate family residing on the property. Similar to the Comox Valley requirements, all articles sold through a home industry must be manufactured on site with the exception of goods not manufactured on site but directly related to other site activity.¹⁰

The policies relating to home industry are separate from the requirements for home occupations. These include policies relating to form and character, nuisance, safety and traffic issues. As the economic situation in the Alberni Valley changes, more people are looking at self-employment as a viable option. Allowing limited home industry on larger parcels could help in the diversification of the local economy.

10. CONSERVATION DESIGN

Conservation design, or cluster development, refers to the practice of concentrating development on one part of a property while leaving the remainder largely undisturbed or rehabilitated. It is an alternative to the typical “cookie-cutter” style of subdivision and is beneficial in the protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

Under the conservation design method, the first stage of a development application would be a site assessment to determine the portion of the parcel that is most suitable for development. In a conservation design scenario, the developer is permitted to increase density in areas appropriate for development in exchange for setting aside the remaining land for environmental protection. This would result in the same number of lots, only smaller in size, with less road surface, and more public green space. This type of subdivision commonly results in higher property values due to the increased amount of protected green space included in the development for the enjoyment of property owners.

As rezoning and subdivision applications occur, staff could create site-specific Comprehensive Development zones designed for specific properties. This would allow for specific requirements regarding vegetation retention, riparian setbacks, wildlife corridors and any other regulations designed to preserve environmental amenities.

There are several examples of the application of conservation design in new development:

The District of Highlands, in the Capital Regional District, addresses most development applications through unique zoning. An example of this kind of development is the subdivision of a 190 hectare property at Scafe Hill. Previous zoning on the property permitted its subdivision into 15 lots with a minimum lot size of 12 hectares. Due to environmentally sensitive areas and the cost of building roads, spot zoning was brought in to encourage cluster development. As a result, 26 lots were created, averaging 1.5 hectares in size while 145 hectares were added to an adjacent regional park. The land

¹⁰ Quadra Island Zoning Bylaw, 1990. Strathcona Regional District. <http://www.strathconard.ca>

owners, municipality, and a conservation trust also registered joint conservation covenants on the newly created lots in order to protect smaller environmental features. This resulted in approximately 90% of the original property remaining in its natural state.¹¹

The City of Nanaimo allows clustered subdivision where existing zoning provides for large lot residential development. For example, an application for a fourplex development in a neighbourhood zoned for single family residential incorporated clustered housing in order to protect a watercourse on the property. This resulted in no increased gross density and allowed for the 15m watercourse setbacks to be maintained.¹¹

Strathcona County, Alberta promotes more compact development with the intent to lessen encroachment onto agricultural and environmentally sensitive land. The Deer Mountain Estates is a 53 lot development with a minimum parcel size of 2 hectares. Due to the application of conservation design, 43% of the property was preserved as open space. Conservation easements were used to create wildlife corridors around the perimeter of the development resulting in each lot containing a 50m conservation covenant and a 7.8 hectare marsh area was protected as a Public Utility lot.¹²

The use of conservation design principles for new development could be a great benefit for the Alberni Valley. New development in key areas such as the Sproat Lake waterfront and along the Somass and Stamp Rivers would see improved environmental protection with cluster development. Potential subdivision of farm land would also be less detrimental to agriculture in the valley if development was clustered on less productive portions of the property while maintaining the rest for active farming.

¹¹ West Coast Environmental Law, Smart Bylaws Guide. <http://www.wcel.org/>

¹² Land Stewardship Centre of Canada, Green Communities Guide. <http://www.landstewardship.org/greencommunities.asp>

11. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives were established through planning consultations in the initial stages of the development of the Alberni Valley Background Study.

11.1 GOALS

- i. Encourage economic investment in the Alberni Valley by attracting new businesses and residents.
- ii. Protect areas adjacent to water courses, water features and environmentally sensitive areas.
- iii. Facilitate and encourage the continued operation of agricultural farms in the Alberni Valley and encourage new farming and related opportunities to establish.
- iv. Promote and maintain livability of the Alberni Valley by encouraging a range of services and amenities that allow residents to maintain health, wellness and overall good quality of life, while also preserving rural function and aesthetic character of the Valley.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

Agriculture

- a. Encourage agricultural uses and local food production.
- b. Encourage the diversification of agricultural products in the Valley.
- c. Facilitate the protection of clean water for agricultural operations.

Residential

- d. Implement a minimum lot size for residential lots in the Alberni Valley to ensure consistency throughout.
- e. Maintain rural character and encourage a range of residential accommodation options.

Industrial

- f. Encourage the growth and diversification of the Valley's economic base by supporting the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the establishment of new businesses.

Recreation and Trails

- g. Encourage subdivision applicants to take into account the future development and maintenance of pedestrian, equestrian, and bicycle paths as part of the transportation system.
- h. Ensure public access to and along Sproat Lake, Great Central Lake and the Stamp and Somass Rivers is maintained.

- i. Ensure residential, commercial and industrial use of the foreshore does not preclude public access.
- j. Encourage the provision of ‘neighbourhood’ parks in all areas of the Alberni Valley.
- k. Promote the development of an integrated trail and park system in the Alberni Valley, and develop a park system which minimizes recreational/residential and agricultural conflict and prioritizes environmental protection in park design, management, and use.

Development Permits

- l. Strive to protect watersheds and groundwater recharge areas from degradation.
- m. Enhance water quality by placing development permit areas adjacent to sensitive features such as surface water, natural hazard areas and aquifer recharge areas.
- n. Protect and encourage vegetated buffers surrounding all water features and other environmentally sensitive areas to minimize erosion and protect animal habitat.
- o. Encourage new and redevelopment to be of consistent form and character so that it is in keeping with adjacent and neighbouring developments.

Subdivision

- p. Encourage the preservation of natural features such as streams, lakes and wetlands when property owners go through the subdivision process.
- q. Promote land use patterns which do not compromise the ecological integrity and rural character of the Alberni Valley.
- r. Encourage development and accompanying road systems to be constructed in a manner in keeping with the natural environment.
- s. Ensure storm water drainage of future development is such that there is no increase in the peak rate of run-off from the site after development, as compared to that which occurred before the development took place.

Home Industry

- t. Allow property owners to operate small scale businesses on their residential lots without having to rezone to a commercial, manufacturing or industrial zone, provided the properties can meet specific requirements such as lot size, buffering, and storage limitations.

Secondary Suites

- u. Encourage affordable and safe living and housing opportunities in residential homes or residential accessory structures.

12. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

A questionnaire was developed to get feedback regarding topic areas that the Regional District felt are common areas of interest at this time based on feedback received from the public through telephone and front counter enquiries.

The results are summarized as follows:

1. Area of Residence

Question: In which area of the Alberni Valley do you live?

Electoral Area	
Cherry Creek	The majority of the responses that have been received are from residents of Cherry Creek.
Beaver Creek	Followed by Beaver Creek.
Beaufort	Beaufort and Sproat Lake are tied.
Sproat Lake	
Unknown	A small number of respondents chose not to reveal where they reside.

2. Home Industry

Question: Do you agree with allowing light home industry occupations (i.e. woodworking, small equipment repair, etc.) on residential properties?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Stiff guidelines/requirements must be established and enforced (especially regarding noise and aesthetics).
- Allowing home industry uses will foster diversity.
- It's a way for property owners to supplement their income.
- Business licenses should be required.

Question: What other types of home occupations or home industries should be permitted in the Valley?

Most common answers included: *

- Food preparation (i.e. bakery)

- Office work
- Computer oriented businesses
- Bed & breakfasts
- Crafts
- Dressmaking/tailoring
- Organic gardening
- Non-noise polluting uses

* There seemed to be a lot of confusion surrounding this question based on the answers and comments we received. Uses such as office work, dress making / tailoring, computer oriented businesses are already permitted within the Regional District as home occupations, provided the uses meet bylaw requirements (e.g. can take place completely within the residential structure.)

The Regional District envisions the definition of a home based industry to include uses such as carpentry, metal working, electrical, radio/television/or other electronic appliance repair, live bait supplier, bakeries (no onsite sales), but does not include auto repair, paint shop, or furniture stripping uses. These uses will be conducted in whole or in part in an accessory structure and will have larger lot size requirements than residential structures (e.g. 5 acres).

3. Secondary Suites

Question: Do you agree with allowing secondary suites in residential dwellings?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Help supplement incomes.
- More low cost housing is needed in the Valley.
- Provides housing alternatives for family members.
- As long as environmental/health/safety standards are set and met.

4. Recreation

Question: How do you feel about existing recreational opportunities on Sproat Lake and the Stamp and Somass Rivers? Is current public access adequate and properly maintained?

Most common comments/concerns are:

- Many public accesses are unusable as they are unknown.
- Access is okay.
- More access is necessary.
- There is very little public access to the Lake.

- Do not use.

Question: Do you agree with providing better access to recreational opportunities through an improved park and trail system?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Tourism will be encouraged.
- Access should be limited – no quads/motorbikes, etc.
- Encourages healthy communities and residents.
- Such amenities suit all demographics.
- What we have should be maintained.
- Extend Lakeshore Trail as shown on Map 4 of the Sproat Lake OCP.

5. Development Permits

Question: Do you want to protect the Alberni Valley's lakes and streams by requiring a development permit for all building and land clearing activity in riparian areas within 30 metres (100 feet) of a watercourse or water feature?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Watercourses must be protected.
- Encourage wildlife.
- Preserves the local environment.
- Preserves visual quality and aesthetics.
- Riparian areas should be increased from the suggested 30 metres.

Question: Do you agree with requiring development permits for all building activity in natural hazard areas?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Safety and environmental concerns will be dealt with by requiring development permits.
- Good to implement because later on the government and/or community always end up paying.
- It doesn't work / don't need it.

6. Agriculture

Question: Do you agree with allowing some subdivision of agricultural land into 5-10 acre lots to provide opportunities for small-scale farming?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- It will open up new opportunities.
- Small-scale farms will be encouraged.
- Promotes self-sufficiency.
- Need more rules and standards before it's finalized.
- Facilitates the 100-mile diet.
- It's too expensive to clear new land.

7. Economic Development

Question: How can the Regional District encourage or stimulate economic development in the Alberni Valley?

Most common comments/concerns are:

- Give tax breaks.
- Encourage smaller acreage/niche farms.
- Have flexible rules.

8. Subdivision

Question: Would you consider developing your property with conservation design in mind?

The majority of respondents answered **YES**.

Why: Most common comments/concerns are:

- Saves natural areas from being turned into lawns.
- It's a good idea.
- No answer.

13. NEXT STEPS

This document will be used as a guiding document to help the Regional District draft Official Community Plans for each of the four electoral areas of the Alberni Valley beginning in the fall of 2010.

The Official Community Plans themselves will build on all of the previous topic areas and contain more detailed requirements specific to each electoral area.