

Submission from Paul Grignon in regards to the proposed first Town Hall meeting.

Potential agenda planning for the first Town Hall meeting: "It has been suggested that an initial focus could be to determine the carrying-capacity of Gabriola. Our discussion would consider some of the aspects of carrying capacity, such as water supply, waste water, grey water, transportation, air quality, ecosystems and natural areas, energy (and climate change), and food supply."

My response to this suggestion is that the best reason to have a Town Hall meeting on this subject is to put this fallacy and waste of energy to rest once and for all.

The idea of the "carrying capacity" of Gabriola was a hot topic during the Weldwood crisis and apparently is making a comeback. At that time the rationale was that we needed to know how many people Gabriola could sustain, the island's "carrying capacity" so we could use the rules at our disposal to limit the population to that amount, with the hope of blocking Weldwood's 368-lot proposal.

My first comment is that Gabriola has never been a self-sufficient economic unit. In my role building the Nanaimo Museum's feature exhibit on the local indigenous way of life and later as president of the still-to-be Gabriola Museum, I commissioned professional research projects into many of the practical aspects of indigenous life in this region and the one point most relevant to this discussion is that everyone in the entire region, all the way to Tofino, were dependent on the Fraser River salmon runs for a significant portion of their annual food. The first white settlers were certainly more self-reliant than we are but never satisfied all their needs from the island itself. So, if we modern Gabriolans ever achieved total food self-sufficiency it would be a first. That said I endorse the goal to whatever extent it can be achieved and remind everyone of the February 16 Food Forum at the Community Hall that my wife organizes for our island food producers every year.

The second point I want to make is that determining carrying capacity as a rationale for limiting population growth is not only a practical impossibility but entirely **unnecessary**. The Islands Trust legislation, unlike that of all other municipalities in BC, does NOT obligate the local authorities to accommodate growth. If we don't want any more residences than we already have, we don't have to create them. We don't need to justify it with some artificial "carrying capacity" argument.

But ... this "carrying capacity" idea is coming back because of the inevitable consequences of doing so in a market economy. Escalating property values squeeze out the young people and leave us in a pension cheque ghetto of greyhairs. So now we have calls for "affordable housing", in other words, an increase in population to bring young

people here as well as to allow seniors to downsize. This was all foreseen in the 1980's by some of us who were looking ahead, which is why we liberalized our home business regulations at the time, hoping to make it easier for younger working people to make a living on Gabriola.

We also have to live with the fact that Gabriola is already zoned and subdivided to legally accommodate a population of about 11,000 at 2.3 persons per residence. Given the number of illegal suites and cottages, the potential population could be much more than that. So that will lead to the usual question is there enough water for that many people?

Back in the contentious Weldwood days much was made of the only "professional" assessment ever made of Gabriola's total groundwater storage potential. The figure arrived at was touted as a limit beyond which the total population must not be allowed to grow. It took me writing in the Sounder to point out that the margin of error, itself just an estimate, was an order of magnitude either way. Order of magnitude is the term used for a factor of 10. So if the estimate of total groundwater for Gabriola was given as 10 whatever's in the report, the author himself said that it was nothing but a "best guess". The real number could be anywhere from 1 to 100 whatever's. It's amazing to me that people get paid for this kind of thing. Even more amazing is that people tried to make political hay with such worthless data.

In the 1990's I wrote a huge set of articles in the Sounder on island groundwater that was later posted on the BC Ministry of Environment website and was for a while illustrated on a sign at the Nanaimo end of our ferry. Let me just say that it is IMPOSSIBLE to determine how much total groundwater Gabriola can store and it is irrelevant to water supply in practical terms anyway. This is due to the highly fractured nature of the geology. My hydrologist consultant told me he had drilled 7 wells on his 5-acre property and the water in each well was unique in its dissolved minerals, temperature and Ph. That means that just under his 5 acres alone there were at least 7 different aquifers totally isolated from each other. The same applies to the entire island. In addition those areas separated by the major fault zones are entirely isolated from each other because once the groundwater flows into a fault zone it is headed for the ocean by the path of least resistance.

Total storage doesn't mean anything in practical terms anyway. For the reasons described above it is perfectly normal that one well can go dry next door to one pumping 20 gallons a minute without fail. We got here in 1973 and the newspaper headlines were ferry overloads and summer water shortages when only 800 people lived here. The problem is uneven distribution and access.

I hope I have made it clear that any money spent doing research into our groundwater storage with the aim to use this data to limit population is just *wasted money*. The practical thing to do is spend money to increase water capture both individually and cooperatively. As far as the politics of water is concerned it has been my publicly expressed opinion that those who sell water should only sell water that would otherwise have run off into the ocean. A million gallon reservoir such as the one at Berry Point Orchard fills quickly if located on even a small winter stream. If we had a million gallon reservoir on every stream we could *export* water. So water supply is irrelevant to the concept of carrying capacity as a rationale to limit population. It is a solvable problem.

As for sewage disposal there are many practical solutions that turn effluent into usable and in some cases, potable water. So this solvable problem is also irrelevant to the concept of limiting population to “carrying capacity”.

As for transportation, the more our goods come to the island in large delivery trucks the less we have to take individual vehicles to town. That means that the more retail and the more on island employment we have the less we need to take the ferry. Paradoxically, the more people that live here the more self-sufficient we have the potential to become in regards to potential transport efficiency. In my study of Salt Spring that I did for the Sounder, the ‘need never leave the Island for anything’ state was achieved when the population reached 8,000. Looking at all the services available on Gabriola now compared to 1973 would blow the minds of recent arrivals, as would the outrageous prices in the two tiny grocery stores we had back then. We hippies had to organize our own food coop to bring affordable bulk foods to the island.

And finally, in regard to preserving natural areas, my 1990s proposal to pro-actively make amenity zoning offers in our Community Plan to take large areas of land out of development potential was adopted by those who initially opposed it and, as a result re-named “density transfer”, we now have hundreds of hectares of land preserved to recover and be enjoyed in its natural state. Before density transfer, the **ONLY** large park on Gabriola was Drumbeg’s 20 hectares. To that I say well done!!

To conclude, I hope you do decide to have a Town Hall meeting on “carrying capacity”. I volunteer to be one presenter. Discussing why it is a simplistic and mostly irrelevant concept is the educational task I would be happy to take on. I would also introduce local money creation as another aspect of self-sufficiency, one that is not on the list above.

Paul Grignon

