



February 26 2008

Bowen Island Mayor and Municipal Council Members,
Municipal Hall,
Bowen Island, BC, V0N 1G0

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

Island Planning

I wish to draw to your attention an extract from the opening of the "A pattern language", the second volume in the seminal trilogy on architecture and planning by Christopher Alexander and his colleagues at the Center for Environmental Structure" at U. California, Berkeley.

On page 3, the authors write:

"We begin with that part of the language which defines a town or a community. These patterns can never be "designed" or "built" in one fell swoop -- but patient piecemeal growth, designed in such a way that every individual act is always helping to create or generate these larger global patterns, will, slowly and surely, over the years, make a community that has these global patterns in it.

The first 94 patterns deal with the large-scale structure of the environment: the growth of town and country, the layout of roads and paths, the relationship between work and family, the formation of suitable public institutions for a neighborhood, the kinds of public space required to support these institutions.

We believe that the patterns presented in this section can be implemented best by piecemeal processes, where each project built or each planning decision made is sanctioned by the community according as it does or does not help to form certain large-scale patterns. We do not believe that these large patterns, which give so much structure to a town or of a neighborhood, can be created by centralized authority, or by laws, or by master plans. We believe instead that they can emerge gradually and organically, almost of their own accord, if every act of building, large or small, takes on the responsibility for gradually shaping its small corner of the world to make these larger patterns appear there."

It is my strongly held opinion that the current approach to planning the island, and in particular, planning the village area, is in direct opposition to this gradualist, organic and sustainable approach to planning.

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I am convinced that grand plans suffer from many flaws not least of which are:

- (1) The attempt to decide everything at once instead of allowing development to follow need and opportunity resulting in flawed results.
- (2) The attempt to foresee the unforeseeable.
- (3) The inevitable temptation to force unpalatable measures through as part of a “package” that includes desirable items—a form of coercion.
- (4) A tendency to keep procrastinating because a plan that tries to deal with “everything” is never agreeable to enough of those affected to achieve consensus.
- (5) A fundamental offence against the wide experience of some of the best, most successful, and most widely acclaimed planners in the world.

Please reconsider. Allow the village to develop organically, in manageable “bites”, and according to the principles espoused by Alexander and his colleagues—as has actually happened to some extent in the past (for example, some of Wolfgang Duntz's contributions). Perhaps most importantly, do not try to combine the patterns of “village” and “ferry marshalling”. It is analogous to trying to incorporate the bathroom into the kitchen when building a house.

Yours sincerely,

David R. Hill, P.Eng.

Copies:

Michael Rosen

Brad Hawthorn