



Courtenay Official Community Plan Common Questions & Answers



1. What is the difference between land use designations and zoning regulations?

Every parcel of land in the City of Courtenay has a specific land use designation and specific zoning. In addition, a number of land use related policies, mostly contained within the Official Community Plan, inform decisions about land use and zoning. The land use designations provide a direction for a given area of land, while the zoning is what is currently allowed on a parcel of land.

- A policy is a set of statements of intent. Policies provide a context for decision-making.
- Land use designations are about the future. The land use designations (and map) show the long-term vision of land uses over the timespan of the Official Community Plan to accommodate expected community growth.
- Zoning is about what is allowed today. Zoning is how land can be used and what can be built on a property today. Zones are specific and give clear guidelines about the kinds of uses, densities, and the physical characteristics of structures allowed on a property (maximum height, setbacks, parking requirements, etc.).

2. Who can initiate changes to the zoning regulations?

Zoning changes can be initiated by either the local government or a development applicant. Following adoption of the Official Community Plan, the City of Courtenay will initiate a comprehensive review of the Zoning Bylaw to ensure zoning regulations support the OCP vision for community growth.

This does not mean that all Zoning Bylaw zones will pre-authorize the land use designations. A local government may decide to not zone properties to their land use designations in order to ensure that additional public consultation occurs through a site-specific rezoning application, and to negotiate community amenities as part of a rezoning application package proposed by a development applicant. Regardless of how the zoning change is initiated, zone changes must align with the land use designation.

3. Population projections are based on 2016 Census data. What if the population projections are too low?

The national 2021 Census was conducted while the new OCP was being drafted. The population results were released on February 9, 2022, during this OCP consultation phase. The 2021 Census data shows that Courtenay is growing slightly faster than projected in the draft OCP. For example, the OCP population projections were conducted in 2020 (based on 2016 Census information) and predicted a Courtenay population of 27,200 residents for 2021. According to the Census, there were 28,400 in 2021. In other words, there are 1,100 more people than forecasting had indicated as of last year and the growth rate is closer to 2% these past 5 years, rather than 1.2% which was projected. Population forecasting as an estimation provides a general sense of what demographic changes to expect for our community.

The OCP has conducted growth modelling for approximately 4,500 more residents predicted to arrive or be born in Courtenay by 2030. The City will monitor or commission population estimate data to understand how Courtenay's demographics are changing, and can initiate the next OCP review earlier than 2030 if Courtenay is growing much faster than expected.



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4. How is affordability considered in the plan?

Affordability is an important and complex topic that guided policy decisions in the OCP alongside other identified community goals. A few highlights of how affordability is considered throughout the OCP are:

- **Cost of municipal services.** Municipal asset management studies show that compact and focused forms of community growth are less costly in the long run because costs for municipal services can be shared among a greater number of users. To learn more on the connection between land use planning and municipal asset management, consult the Land Use Planning and Asset Management Sustainable Service Delivery Primer, 2019 provided by Asset Management BC: www.assetmanagementbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Land-Use-Planning-and-Asset-Management.pdf
- **Cost of housing.** The 2020 Comox Valley Regional Housing Needs Assessment shows that a wider variety of housing options and forms are required in all communities of the Comox Valley, including Courtenay. Single residential dwellings are the dominant form of housing in Courtenay and the report concludes that even with more supply of this form of housing, it will not be affordable for many households in the future. Find more information on the Regional Housing Needs Assessment including a Courtenay-specific profile at: www.courtenay.ca/assets/Departments/Development~Services/OCP~Update/HousingNeedsReport%20-%20Courtenay-table%20edit.pdf
- **Cost of transportation.** Personal vehicle ownership is the second-greatest household cost for most Canadians after housing. Any options to reduce dependence on a personal vehicle can significantly lower household costs. More compact and focused community growth and development can make more transportation options viable such as convenient transit services, cycling, and walking. The Canadian Automobile Association has a Driver Costs Calculator to learn more about the fixed and operational costs of vehicle ownership: www.carcosts.caa.ca. In addition, roads, parking, and bridges that prioritize vehicles is more expensive for a local government to provide per trip than walking, cycling, and transit infrastructure.
- **Cost of energy.** Carbon intensive energy such as natural gas, diesel, and gasoline will increase in price in the coming years in part because the Federal and Provincial Governments have committed to placing a price on carbon pollution. Operational energy costs can be reduced by promoting compact and focused forms of development that allow people to get around without a vehicle, as well as high energy performance buildings.
- **Costs of externalities.** Full cost accounting is an important policy goal of the OCP to consider costs more holistically. This means that external costs associated with climate change, impacts, air pollution, motor vehicle collisions, and other health and sustainability impacts are factored into the policies and in the future will be better accounted for in decision-making. Full cost accounting also recognizes the role that municipal natural assets play in providing 'free' services to a community (such as flood control, rainwater management, and cooling urban environments). Another example of full cost accounting is considering the costs of other public agencies funded by the single 'tax payer'. For example, the City could work with Island Health and School District 71 on specific mandates and budgets where there are mutual benefits and efficiencies. Using active transportation as an example, school districts wish to see kids come to school with some exercise, and cut down on bussing costs and the safety concerns in the parking lot drop off and pickup. Island Health supports increasing physical activity in our daily lives to address emerging chronic public health concerns that dominate public health challenges today outside of Covid.



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- **Costs of inaction.** Studies are showing that the cost of not reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change will be much more costly than not taking action. See Natural Resources Canada report on the costs of climate change to Canada: www.nrcan.gc.ca/simply-science/new-report-adapting-climate-change/23765

5. How will new development be held accountable to the policies in the plan?

Development regulations must be consistent with the OCP. Some key development-related regulations will have to evolve, such as the Building Bylaw to require higher BC Building Code standards (higher 'steps' in the Step Code) or the Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw to permit green infrastructure. Until those are formally changed through a Council adoption process, the regulatory bylaws of the day apply.

Development Permit Areas are specific and detailed development regulation tools. A local government may establish Development Permit Areas to ensure high standards of form and character for commercial, multi-residential, industrial and infill developments, protection of the environment, farming and hazardous areas, as well as greenhouse gas emissions and water conservation. These Development Permit Area Guidelines would be adopted within the Zoning Bylaw at the same time as the OCP. View the draft Development Permit Area Guidelines: www.courtenay.ca/assets/Departments/Development~Services/OCP~Update/Development%20Permit%20Areas%20Guidelines-For%20Web.pdf

When City staff evaluate a development proposal and Council is considering applications that require their approval (such as rezoning applications or a variance), the City looks to the policies in the OCP for guidance on how to evaluate the application. Adherence to policies, and recommendation for development approval, are referenced in the review reports that staff provide. These staff reports are available on the City's 'Development Tracker' tool which can be accessed at: www.courtenay.ca/devapptracker

6. How much will implementing the plan cost?

As a policy framework plan with a long-range horizon, it is not appropriate to cost all aspects of the OCP. Further investigation, consultation and budgeting will have to occur for any items that have budget implications. Implementation will be incremental over the life of the plan. A local government is not required to implement everything in an OCP, but everything it implements must be consistent with the adopted OCP. Therefore, as a policy tool, the OCP will provide a framework for setting priorities, work plans, and municipal budgets.

7. The OCP talks a lot about supporting cycling, walking and transit. What about traffic congestion and the needs for personal vehicles?

Consistent with the 2019 Courtenay Transportation Master Plan, the OCP establishes policies to support the doubling of trips by walking, cycling, and transit between now and 2030, from 15% modal share (based on 2016 census) to 30% share. To make it easier for more people to use walking, cycling, and transit as a viable transportation option, or to make more trips by these means, investments in walking, cycling, and transit



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infrastructure are required. Traditionally, much of Courtenay's transportation budget has been oriented around accommodating personal vehicles. When more personal vehicle trips are replaced with walking, cycling, and transit, traffic congestion is also reduced, thus improving the level of service of existing roads and reducing pressure to create or expand more costly roads and bridges. The OCP recognizes that personal vehicles will continue to be an important mode of transportation for the decades to come. A number of vehicle policies are focused on the need to sufficiently accommodate Electric Vehicles.

8. How will these policies affect the cost of new development?

The cost of development is an extremely complex topic influenced by many factors such as materials and labour, land prices, financing terms, timeline of development approval and construction, parking and amenity requirements, availability of municipal servicing capacity, and other regulatory standards. A common assumption is that high energy and low carbon performance buildings (collectively referred to here as zero emissions buildings) will cost more to develop. While this can be the case, there are also a number of factors that can minimize the cost of creating zero emission buildings. Considering emissions right from the start is key. Other factors include the level of training and experience of designers and builders, and technology availability.

ZEBx is a BC-based industry hub to facilitate knowledge exchange and accelerate market transformation of zero emission buildings, and routinely posts case studies on zero emission buildings, including cost analyses. More information on this evolving topic can be found on their website: www.zebx.org

The following reports demonstrate examples of net zero buildings not costing substantially more in construction costs, and some even costing less to build than minimum-code standards.

- Construction Cost Analysis of High-performance Multi-unit Residential Buildings in British Columbia, ZEBx, June 2021. www.zebx.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Cost-Analysis-of-High-performance-MURBBs.pdf
- Addressing the Cost of Efficiency, Rob Bernhardt, May 2021. energystepcode.ca/app/uploads/sites/257/2021/05/Cost-of-Efficiency-Report-2021-final.pdf
- Is the Cost the Barrier to Passive House Performance: A Look at First Costs for Sixteen Multifamily Buildings, North American Passive House Network, May 2021. naphnetwork.org/featured/is-cost-the-barrier-to-passive-house-performance/

9. Who has been consulted in the development of the plan?

Collectively, hundreds of individuals, businesses, stakeholders, agencies, and jurisdictions have lent their views throughout the OCP process and informed specific ideas in the plan. Some organizations such as the School District and the Agricultural Land Commission are required by law to be consulted in the development of the OCP, while others are at the discretion of Mayor and Council. All consultation reports are available on the OCP project webpage under 'Reports and Publications': www.courtenay.ca/OCPupdate