



3.0 Planning Context

Community planning in Saanich is undertaken in the context of local circumstances – physical and biological attributes, history, and current socio and economic trends, as well as Provincial legislative requirements and regional priorities.

3.1 Physical Setting

Saanich, with an area of 103.44 km² (39.94 sq. mi.), is the largest Municipality in the Capital Region. It occupies a major and central position within the region – immediately north of the City of Victoria and sharing boundaries with Highlands, View Royal, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, and Central Saanich. As the gateway to the metropolitan core, Saanich provides key transportation links to the airport, ferry terminal, Western Communities, Saanich Peninsula, and the rest of Vancouver Island. Saanich's physical setting comprises 29.61 km (18.39 mi.) of marine shoreline, 3.3 km² (1.3 sq. mi.) of freshwater lakes, numerous natural watercourses, a diverse undulating topography with elevations ranging from sea level to 355 m (1164 ft.), and a landscape that includes glacially scoured rock outcroppings, farmland, dense woodlands, and an extensive system of open space and parkland. Approximately half the Municipality is urban and half rural/agricultural – a dual role that has influenced its character and development.



Hastings Street ~ looking south



Cormorants at Swan Lake

3.2 Past and Present

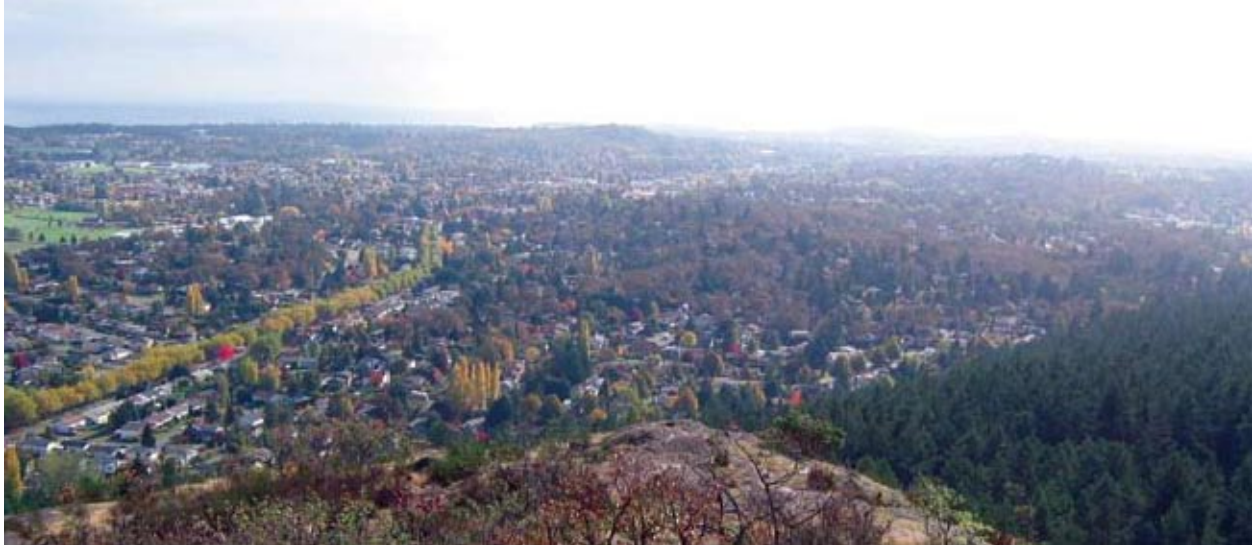
For thousands of years, the area that comprises Saanich today was a popular summer hunting and fishing ground for the First Nations Saanich tribes. This history is evident today in a number of provincially registered archaeological sites. By the mid-1850s, Hudson's Bay Company employees and the first colonial settlers began transforming the area's virgin forests into productive farmland, which soon became a vital source of food for the region's expanding population. This rural history and the associated settlement pattern is a continuing legacy, evident throughout the community in many buildings, structures, transportation links, and names.

The latter part of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries saw increasing settlement and the extension of services in Saanich. Elk Lake was established as the main domestic water source. Beginning in 1896, three railroads (the Victoria and Sidney, B.C. Electric Interurban, and Canadian Northern Pacific) were built through Saanich in response to the pre-World War I land boom. Improved road connections led to the demise of the railways, but some rail beds have since become part of the regional trail system. To meet the needs of early settlers, Saanich was incorporated as a Municipality on March 1, 1906. In 1949, the most northerly and rural part of the Municipality became the District of Central Saanich. Saanich expanded its western boundary to include all of Heal's Rifle Range and the Hartland Landfill in 1995. The original municipal hall was located in Royal Oak until the current municipal hall was built in 1965. It has since been designated as a heritage structure.

Following World War II, Saanich became a major residential area within a suburban community serving Greater Victoria. Today, with an estimated 2007 population of 113,529, Saanich is the most populated Municipality on Vancouver Island, and the seventh most populated in the province. The urban landscape comprises distinctive low-density neighbourhoods, primarily single-family, serviced by higher density Village, Neighbourhood and Regional mixed-use Centres, plus several regionally important industrial and institutional nodes.



Spurgin Residence on Waterloo ~ 1928



Mt. Douglas summit ~ looking south

3.3 Residents

Since the adoption of the 1993 Official Community Plan, the population of Saanich has increased by approximately 16,000 residents. While growth is expected to continue and exert pressure on land use and infrastructure planning, the rate of growth will not be as significant as in the past. The population is projected to grow to 119,300 by 2026, a 5% increase over 2007. In 2007, Saanich accounts for 33% of the region's population, and by 2026 it will comprise 29%. In contrast, the region's population is expected to grow to 427,800 by 2026, or by 24.5% over 2006. The vast majority of this growth is and will continue to occur in the Western Communities.

While growth rates are important, other demographic factors also affect the community. One of the most significant of these is the aging of the population. In 2006, 23% of the population of Saanich was over the age of 55. By 2026, it is expected that one in three people will be over the age of 55. This trend has significant implications for the form and location of housing, and the provision of services – such as health care, education, arts and culture, recreation, transportation, and the design of the built environment.

Another demographic trend affecting the community is the continuing increase in the number of households, combined with a decrease in household size. Between 1981 and 2001, the number of households grew significantly faster (40%) than the overall population (23%) as a result of the shift towards a greater number of smaller households. Average household size in Saanich fell from 2.9 people in 1981 to 2.4 in 2006 due to an increasing proportion of households consisting of individuals living alone. These included widowed seniors, young childless couples, “empty nesters,” and divorced persons.

Families are also changing. While the number of families with children is still growing in absolute terms, these families are having fewer children and are starting families later in life. A majority (52%) of Canadian households today include no children, compared to 45% in 1981. The proportion of families with three or more children has fallen over the past two decades, while the relative proportion of families with only one child at home has increased. Lone-parent families, the majority headed by women (81% in 2006), have increased as a proportion of total families in Saanich, from 11% in 1981 to more than 15% in 2006. Consequently, the proportion of all Saanich children aged 14 and younger living in lone-parent families has increased to about 19% of children in 2001, compared to 13% in 1981.

3.4 Planning Framework

The preparation of this Plan is guided by the British Columbia “Local Government Act”, which provides legislative authority and sets out a number of requirements regarding content and process. While the Plan applies only within Saanich, it does contain statements for consideration by other jurisdictions such as senior governments, the Capital Regional District, adjacent local government jurisdictions, First Nations, and School Districts. The Official Community Plan (OCP) also works in tandem with the Saanich Strategic (Corporate) Plan. Where the OCP is the umbrella document for the Corporation outlining the community’s values, vision and goals, the Strategic Plan maps out specific actions that the municipality will carry out to achieve them.

Planning in Saanich takes place at a number of different levels, and across the Corporation. Other departments such as Parks and Recreation, Engineering and Public Works, Police, and Fire also prepare and oversee long range planning documents that are an important component of creating a healthy and vibrant community. The Official Community Plan (OCP) applies to the entire Municipality and provides the principal policy framework for development and regulation within an overall municipal perspective. In an effort to move towards a more sustainable community, all plans and long range studies must comply with the principles and policies of the OCP.

Local Area Plans, are developed within the framework of the OCP, and capture issues unique to each neighbourhood within the community. Respecting neighbourhood characteristics and addressing residents’ concerns is a way of maintaining the diversity of Saanich. Action Plans address specific issues within a smaller well-defined area, such as a street or transportation corridor. Development Permit Guidelines provide direction on how to design buildings and developments that are sensitive to the existing character of an area, and add to the community through improved streetscapes, pedestrian mobility, and quality green or open spaces. In addition, Development Permit Guidelines can provide guidance on land use issues in and around sensitive ecosystems, and within hazard areas such as flood plains and areas susceptible to wildfires.

3.5 Regional Context

The Capital Regional District adopted its Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) in 2003. The RGS was developed to guide decisions on growth, change, and development within the regional district to promote socially, economically, and environmentally healthy human settlement that makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land, and other resources. Five goals were identified to assist Saanich and other local governments in the region in making day-to-day decisions that are sustainable and work towards maintaining and improving the quality of life for citizens. As part of the RGS implementation, member municipalities are required to prepare a regional context statement that indicates how each Official Community Plan conforms with the Strategy. With the adoption of this Plan, complete conformity with the RGS has been achieved (see Section 7.3 of this document for the formal context statement required under the “Local Government Act”).

3.6 Global Context

No community functions in isolation. Global environmental, political, social, economic and demographic challenges shape local lives and have direct impacts on local government. This plan recognises that reality and attempts to encourage and empower Saanich residents to “act locally” while “thinking globally”.