

Friends of the Gulf Islands Society
Build-out Analysis Needed for Each Islands Trust Island
British Columbia, Canada
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A build-out analysis for each island would determine how many people would likely be living there if all properties were developed to their current zoning potential. This document explains in more detail what “build-out” is, how it is determined and why it is needed.

Explaining build-out Each island in the Trust Area is divided into parcels or lots. This is how land ownership is held and tracked in British Columbia. Each lot has a Parcel Identification Number or PID that allows the Provincial government and others, to track who owns each parcel of land.

Local government (or in this case each island’s elected Local Trust Committee) passes a Land Use Bylaw to control what uses can occur on each category of lots. For example, some lots are zoned residential and certain uses are allowed there. Other lots are zoned commercial or industrial, likewise with a list of allowed uses. Generally, the zoning depends on lot size and location.

What is subdivision potential? When most people buy a lot, that lot cannot be further divided without special permission from their local government. However, there are lots (usually larger) that have what is called “subdivision potential”. This means they can be further divided into more lots with the number being controlled by the Land Use Bylaw. Subdividing property is a complicated process involving (in the Trust Area) the Ministry of Transportation, proving adequate water, location of driveways and more. At the end of the process and if approved, the land has been divided into more lots and the owner can sell the new individual lots to new owners.

How to count development potential? To determine how many residences are allowed on an island by current zoning, first we count the number of existing lots on an island. Then we also have to count how many additional lots are allowed to be created by dividing the lots with subdivision potential under the zoning bylaw.

Lots zoned for multiple residences If there are lots that are zoned to allow multi-unit residences, i.e. apartments or condos, duplexes, suites or cottages, then those additional residences must be counted.

Floor Area Ratio Another example of zoning for more than one residence is a policy known as Floor Area Ratio (FAR) or Flexible Zoning Model. This policy permits adopting a zoning (Land Use Bylaw) that would set a maximum area to be covered by a building footprint and gives the land owner a choice how to allocate that space, i.e. by allocating that building footprint to one or more residences.

For example, Mayne Island’s Local Trust Committee adopted such a bylaw that allows the following on a few lots, previously zoned for only one residence:

(a) On lots less than 1.5 acres, one additional dwelling is permitted if the total combined square footage of all dwellings does not exceed 2500 square feet.

(b) On lots having between 1.5 acres and 3 acres, two dwellings, and a cottage are permitted if the total combined square footage of all dwellings does not exceed 3500 square feet.

(c) On lots between 3 acres and 10 acres, three dwellings and a cottage are permitted if the total combined square footage of all dwellings and cottages does not exceed 4750 square feet. (It is not clear whether 3 acre lots fit into category (b) or (c).

Such a bylaw could allow even more residences for larger floor areas. Since the number of future possible residents is not known, an estimate would be made.

How to estimate the number of residents? We can estimate how many people will live in those residences by multiplying the average number of residents in each residence on that particular island (as determined by Statistics Canada) by the number of allowed residences. The average number of residents per residence across the Islands Trust area is two.

Objections to determining build-out When one of our members asked a staff person about determining build out, she was told that that this was too complicated, too expensive and that residents would not understand the result. We disagree. Those residences may not be built in the next year or even the next few years but development is likely to eventually occur. -Planning is not just about “now” but about planning for the future.

Is it possible to do a build out analysis? The answer is “yes”. It has already been done on Gabriola Island. A build-out report was prepared for Gabriola in 2021. According to a Gabriola trustee at that time, it still needed some tweaking but gave a general idea of build-out based on current zoning. The method used to prepare the Gabriola build out analysis was to be made publicly available for use on other islands. But that has not yet happened. The lack of such data was also referenced in the 2022 Islands Trust Governance Review.

Why is build-out data needed? Many islands are considering adopting zoning bylaws that ~~will~~ could allow significantly more people to live on each island than are allowed now. Good planning anywhere requires a clear understanding of how many residents you have already planned for, before expanding those plans further. This especially important on islands with limited water supplies and services.

A build-out analysis would give us hard data from which to plan for worker housing, necessary services such as health care. Decisions should be made with consideration and knowledge of the entirety of the development picture on our islands. This is good planning.