

**AGE-FRIENDLY  
 COMMUNITY PLANNING  
 SUMMARY REPORT**



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 Age-Friendly Community Planning Summary Report

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## **1. Introduction**

The Town of Comox is a very desirable place for retirees due to its natural features and relatively affordable housing. The proportion of people aged 65 and over is significant - 23.3% in the 2006 census compared to the provincial average of 14.6%. Although Comox is perceived as an ideal place to retire, the Town is facing challenges in addressing the changing demographic structure combined with the steadily increasing population. Seniors' needs such as housing, transportation and safety will become more pronounced as the Town's population continues to age.

This report summarizes the results of an age-friendly planning component completed in conjunction with the Town of Comox Official Community Plan (OCP) update. The age-friendly community planning component of the OCP update had three main objectives:

- o Expand the public consultation process for the OCP to specifically target and include participation of the Town's seniors and aging population;
- o Research demographic characteristics of the Town's aging population and the implications for OCP-related issues such as housing and transportation; and
- o Formulate land use objectives and policies to be included in the updated OCP to prepare for and accommodate an aging population in a sustainable manner.

All three of these objectives have been accomplished. The OCP public consultation process was expanded to include two public meetings directed specifically at seniors. These meetings were held on at eh Seniors Centre (d'Esterre House) on November 17, 2009 and January 19, 2010. Summaries of these two meetings are provided on the project website ([www.comoxocp.ca](http://www.comoxocp.ca)).

Generally, the first meeting covered an introduction to the OCP and how issues important to seniors could be addressed in the OCP. Participants asked questions about the process and scope of the OCP update and identified aspects of Comox they liked and disliked.

The second age-friendly public meeting focused more on issues that will affect an aging population. These included access to the town's services and amenities with emphasis on providing adequate access for scooters and wheelchairs, walkability around the town, safety, public transportation, housing and recreation.

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The Age-Friendly Community Planning Background report (available on project website) is a comprehensive document which provided direction for the OCP as well as the specific outcomes for the age-friendly component to be included in the overall OCP update. The report discussed current age-friendly initiatives in the Town's OCP and includes a literature review and analysis, which helped provide the basis for objectives and policies to be included in the OCP.

The report also discussed current and future demographic characteristics in Comox relating to the town's aging population. These demographic characteristics were then used to support findings in the Background and Policy Alternatives Report relating to the future demand for housing in the Town of Comox. The Background and Policy Alternatives report noted that:

*"The combination of a large and increasing proportion of seniors and increasing costs of housing is creating increased demand for smaller, more affordable housing. Seniors will increasingly look to downsize from larger single family dwellings to more affordable and manageable housing types. There is also a need for housing with a range of assisted living options, given the rising proportion of seniors in the community. Younger families and families in general will also seek out affordable housing options as home prices continue to increase at a disproportionate rate to incomes".*

Housing implications for the Town's aging population as well as those related to outdoor spaces, buildings and transportation have been incorporated into the proposed objectives and policies proposed for inclusion in the updated OCP. Additional objectives and policies have been proposed regarding seniors' civic participation to ensure continuous input from seniors on making the Town more age-friendly. The proposed objectives and policies are listed at the end of this report.

A Youth/Seniors engagement activity was conducted in late March 2010, which included a workshop for youth and seniors. Students from Highland Secondary School were asked to use cameras to take pictures and map issues relating to transportation, housing, development and recreation. A similar workshop with seniors from Comox was conducted separately. Mapping, wayfinding and photography information was compiled, enabling youth and seniors to engage in a third meeting to discuss commonalities in youth and seniors issues and visions for the future of Comox.

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Unfortunately, only a small number of seniors participated in this engagement, three people at the senior's workshop and one person at the meeting held for both seniors and students. A map documenting the results of the engagement is available on the project website.

As mentioned above, the Town of Comox OCP has proposed to include objectives and policies for making the Town a more age-friendly place. For the purposes of the OCP, age-friendly means good accessibility and safety for the Town's aging population with respect to outdoor spaces, buildings (including individual homes) and transportation. Age-friendly also includes "aging in place", which means remaining in one's home or neighbourhood as they age and their needs change.

One important aspect of being age-friendly is participation in making decisions. The objectives and policies set out here provide guidance on age-friendly development; however, ongoing contact with the aging population regarding the Town's growth is desirable for addressing the specifics of individual projects and development applications. These elements: accessibility, safety, aging in place and decision-making are represented in the following objectives and policies, which are proposed to be included in the updated Town of Comox OCP.

## 2. Age-Friendly Planning Objectives

- To create a desirable location for people of all ages to live, work and retire
- To ensure Comox provides a safe, accessible community with a variety of services available
- To ensure the needs of seniors are considered in the context of new developments proposed for Comox

### Age-Friendly Planning Policies Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Outdoor spaces and buildings are ideal issues for age-friendly community planning. Elements in this category are largely controllable by policies that could be part of an OCP. Some examples include ensuring that future development is safe, has accessible washrooms and rest areas and readable signage. These features can be entrenched in the OCP as general policies, which provide a basis for more specific planning tools such as zoning and guidelines, including density bonus zoning and direct control zoning for private development. The OCP can also encourage these features through public initiatives, such as commitments to public investment in facilities and infrastructure.

#### Policy Statements for Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

##### Outdoor seating

- Through development applications and public investment, the Town will seek adequate outdoor seating, particularly in parks, at transit stops and public spaces

##### Sidewalks

- Sidewalks will be well-maintained, clear of obstructions, smooth, level, non-slip and wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters with low curbs that taper off to the road

##### Roads

- Roads have well-designed and appropriately placed physical structures, such as traffic islands, where applicable, to assist pedestrians to cross busy roads

##### Services

- Services are clustered, located in close proximity to where older people live and can be easily accessed (e.g. are located on the ground floor of buildings)

##### Buildings

- Buildings for public use are accessible to seniors and have the following features, where appropriate:
  - Elevators

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- Ramps for wheelchairs and scooters
- Clearly understandable signage
- Railings on stairs
- Stairs that are not too high or steep
- Non-slip flooring
- Rest areas with comfortable chairs
- Parking that is near the building for easy access
- Sufficient numbers of public toilets

### **Transportation**

Transportation is a key issue for age-friendly planning because the ability to travel is essential for other age-friendly planning themes such as social participation and accessing health services. Good roads, light traffic flow, prompt snow removal and adequate parking options are among the positive aspects of driving in communities. Driving is important to seniors because of the associated independence it creates; however, walking and public transportation are also important modes of transportation for seniors. The travel patterns of seniors often do not coincide with public transit peak hours.

### **Policy Statements for Transportation**

#### **Transportation reliability and frequency**

- Council will encourage Transit Oriented Development that makes public transportation more reliable and frequent

#### **Travel destinations**

- Council will encourage public transportation that reaches key destinations such as hospitals, health centres, public parks, shopping centres, banks and seniors' centres

#### **Age-friendly public transit vehicles**

- The Town will work with BC Transit to identify and implement public transit vehicles that are accessible, with low floors, low steps, and wide and high seats

#### **Specialized services**

- Council will ensure sufficient specialized transportation services are available for people with disabilities

#### **Transit stops and stations**

- Transit stops and stations are easy to access and are located conveniently

#### **Parking**

- The Town encourages developments that include drop-off and pick-up bays close to buildings and transport stops for handicapped and older people

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### **Housing**

Appropriate housing forms allow seniors to age in place and move to different types of housing as their needs change. Some seniors recognize their older homes are not practical for an aging person; however, many cannot afford the upgrades and adaptation required to meet their changing needs. Financial barriers facing seniors who want to remain in their homes include those relating to heating and home maintenance costs. Seniors may be unaware of government programs that help finance retrofits to homes for mobility and accessibility.

Smaller homes, ground oriented multi-family development and condominiums provide housing options for seniors who desire to move but remain in Comox. Also important is the availability of a full continuum of assisted living options to allow seniors to ease out of totally independent living and into semi-assisted and fully assisted living.

### **Policy Statements for Housing**

#### **Housing Affordability**

- The Town will consider zoning incentives including increased density for multi-unit developments in order to provide market rental and non-market affordable housing units that represents at least 10% of total build-out

#### **Housing Design**

- The Town encourages homes to have accessible design elements for bathrooms and kitchens as well as even surfaces and passages wide enough for wheelchairs to accommodate the needs of mobility impaired persons and aging in place

#### **Housing Modifications**

- The Town will require development applications for new housing to consider future housing modifications that are easy and affordable to accommodate seniors' changing needs

#### **Aging in place**

- The Town will encourage housing for seniors to be located close to services and facilities
- The Town will encourage new housing developments to include "Alert systems" to be available for seniors living alone (i.e., systems that alert someone when a senior needs help)

#### **Housing options**

The Town will encourage:



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- Developments that include a range of appropriate and affordable housing options for older people, including assisted living
- A range of appropriate services and appropriate amenities and activities in older people's housing facilities
- Housing for seniors to be integrated into the surrounding community

### **Civic Participation**

Continuous participation in decisions that affect their lives is a cornerstone of democracy and will help ensure the aging population of Comox has a monitoring role and a say in what constitutes "age-friendly" as the meaning of this term evolves through time. Seniors will be represented on the appropriate advisory committees as a source of advice on both local and regional development issues.

### **Policy Statements for Civic Participation**

- Council will recognize the expertise of Seniors with respect to Age-Friendly Community Planning policies and include appropriate representation from Seniors on the Advisory Planning Commission and Advisory Design Panel
- The Town will seek the expertise of seniors with respect to age friendly initiatives at the regional level including for the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy
- All development applications will include a consideration of the Town's OCP Age-Friendly Community Planning policies during application evaluation

### 3. Concluding Comments

It is recommended the policies discussed in this report be incorporated into the new OCP for the Town of Comox.

Although the official activities and research for the age-friendly community planning component of the Town's OCP have come to an end, seniors will be encouraged to continue their participation in the OCP update process. The recommended objectives and policies listed above are proposed to be incorporated into the updated OCP in mid 2011 when Town Council adopts the updated OCP.

The age-friendly community planning component has included issues that are applicable to the OCP; however, the Town may wish to expand the scope of age-friendly planning in the future. Age-friendly issues that lie beyond the scope of an OCP include issues such as social participation, respect and social inclusion, employment and volunteering, communication and information and community support and health services. These are important components of an age-friendly community that could be pursued through other initiatives.