

District of Metchosin

**Community Input Session # 2 Notes
Buffer Land Working Group
October 4, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.**

Council Chambers
Metchosin Municipal Hall

Present: Councillor Shelly Donaldson (Vice-Chair), Bonnie Bouveur, Brian Grant, Anna Hall, Richard Simpson, Gary Smirfitt, Karen Hoffman, Bailey Spiteri, Councillor Jay Shukin (Chair), (via Teams link).

The meeting called to order at 7:00 pm.

Shelly went through the presentation:

- Background on the Buffer Land.
- Buffer Land Working Group (BLWG) purpose and mandate
- BLWG members
- Overview of work to date
- Background on the Centre Mountain Estates residential development
- Initial concepts reviewed and background on the “Status Quo” option
- Review of the preliminary recommendation. A three phase approach
 - Phase 1: Rezone the Buffer Land to the existing Parkland zone (P3) as soon as possible.
 - Phase 2: Initiate work to develop a new zoning designation that better reflects conservation / preservation goals. Apply this zone to the Buffer Land when ready.
 - Phase 3: Develop a park management plan for the Buffer. Ensure adequate resourcing.
- Review of the alternate approach: Consider selling to the CRD

General discussion occurred:

Jay: with Metchosin owning the Buffer Land, there’s also a responsibility to maintain and care for the land. If the Buffer Land becomes a park it will be very different than the other parks Metchosin owns / manages, given the proximity to the forthcoming residential area on Centre Mountain. There could be fiscal implications.

Shelly: access to the Buffer Land was a significant discussion throughout the process, particularly in how this could be managed. The BLWG talked about working with post-secondary institutions on conservation and preservation projects.

Anna: there are many examples of areas where there are on-going studies of plants and animals. Trail cameras can be incorporated both as a research tool and to monitor access. We want to look at preserving the unique ecology of southern Vancouver Island and also supporting research for future generations. The parameters for such a program have not been set. Further discussion with post-secondary institutions (Royal Roads, Camosun, Pearson College) needs to occur.

Bailey: the BLWG did consider an option of fencing off the entire parcel, as part of looking at a wide range of management options.

Gary: The group reviewed 20 different scenarios. Pros and Cons with all of the options were considered. It was a long exercise. The BLWG will provide its recommendation to Council and then it will be up to Council to decide what is acted upon. We want to hear what community members think of the ideas put forward tonight. Gary noted the impacts of construction activities in the area.

Bailey: the Buffer Land is not a large area, but it's critical to maintaining the core nature of Metchosin, and its borders.

Linda Wilson: the construction noise from Centre Mountain is constant. If the Buffer Land was gone it would be terrible for everyone in the area. Who currently maintains the Buffer Land now?

General discussion occurred on construction impacts and the future of the Buffer Land in relation to the Centre Mountain residential development. Regarding the question, as owner of the Buffer Land, the District of Metchosin has the responsibility to maintain the parcel.

Morgan Yates: Thanked the BLWG for the efforts and raised two points. First, has the BLWG considered the value of the Buffer Land in terms of the voluntary carbon credit market? This area is evolving very rapidly and there may be a revenue opportunity from the carbon credits that can come with maintaining forested land. Care should be taken to look at the sequencing of steps to rezone to parkland in light of this opportunity.

Karen: asked for further background on the revenue sources for carbon credits.

Morgan: noted the role of aggregating agencies, and that the source of the money would come from companies that are taking proactive steps to offset their carbon footprint.

Morgan Yates: referencing the 2021 atmospheric river event, did the BLWG give consideration to climate change resiliency as one of its parameters? Did the BLWG consider the stormwater detention pond in light of climate change and that perhaps a larger detention pond might be part of a climate change resiliency approach?

Gary: the stormwater detention pond is not part of the BLWG's mandate. Gary has personally reviewed the first design report, and provided comments to Council. Noted that subsequent reports have not been provided, including reports from the independent consultants hired by Metchosin and Langford. The pond design was missing from the first report. Apparently, subsequent reports include further detail. Wants assurances that the design will incorporate environmental considerations. There are many examples of effective and creative stormwater management systems.

Further discussion occurred on Metchosin's role in the stormwater management system, including the potential of the trail and swale concept that was presented to the BLWG in July.

Audience question: What is a bioswale? A bioswale is essentially a channel (a "ditch") that collects rainwater. It allows for water to be treated through biological processes, using layers of soil and plants to slow the water (allowing for water infiltration into ground) and for filtering out contaminants.

Alison Leduc: provided further input into stormwater management concept, including opportunities to incorporate "green infrastructure" concepts into such a system.

She reviewed some of the processes that allow for the management of quantity and quality, and could allow for greater stormwater infiltration and utilizing rainwater (i.e. from rooftops vs. roadways). A core principle of green infrastructure is that it's not just a one step process, but a connected chain of steps. As compared to "grey infrastructure," green infrastructure has the potential for groundwater recharge, provide flood control and other environmental aspects.

There was discussion on the subdivision approval process regarding CME; that process is likely well advanced.

Audience member: Noted a bioswale in Victoria near Oak Bay High School. Do we know where the Centre Mountain industrial and residential areas are located? What do we know about how the subdivision layout? Where will the homes be in relation to the yards? If backyards face the Buffer Land, there is likely a greater opportunity for care and stewardship.

General discussion occurred. Based on design concepts seen to date, there will be homes adjacent to the Buffer Land with backyard facing the Buffer Land. The fact of a significant stone wall along the residential / Buffer Land edge was discussed.

Richard: Acknowledged the concerns and interest in the detention pond, and larger issues such as climate change. He reflected on the working group process and the limits the group had to work with in terms of information. The options reflect the best effort to protect the Buffer Land within the vision developed.

Brian: Further noted that the detention pond was not part of the BLWG's mandate. There was also the struggle to get information on the CME development. Encouraged participants to talk to Council and staff about their interests and vision of the stormwater system.

Stephen Sawyer: Reflected on his experience in the early days of owning his home on Neild Road. At that point, Centre Mountain was about 300 acres of forested lands. He would regularly encounter mountain bikers, who were creating trails in the area; they thought the area was theirs. He expressed concerns about this happening in the future. Stephen discussed his past military experience, where he had helped manage CFB Rocky Point, which has 2500 hectares of wild land. There is fencing and regular patrols. He sees considerable value in scientific research, particularly studies on high canopy areas. How do we manage key areas we want to protect?

Anna: mentioned her own experience in working on military sites, which can be significant areas for preserving unique flora and fauna. Her learning: when the people go away the plants and animals thrive.

Pattie Whitehouse: how to keep people out is a vital question. Fencing off the area is not the solution. Regarding the detention pond, she suggested developing objective performance measures, particularly in terms of water quality and quantity.

Audience question: When are these recommendations to come to Council? The goal is to provide the recommendations for the October 23rd meeting, per the six-month reporting goal in the BLWG's terms of reference.

Audience question: What came of the discussion about an ecological preservation covenant?

Anna: this was considered. No baseline ecological studies had been done on the Buffer Land. A concern was that if the entire area was going to be protected, how would it be protected and how would we ensure people were staying out. This is still on the table, but it's a goal to work toward.

Jay: responded to several earlier comments. Mountain biking is an activity the working group noted and expressed concern about. The reality is that efforts to "keep people out" are unlikely to be successful. It's more realistic to work at managing access, and thus working to limit access. The concepts that Anna has talked about can help with that, but we can also look at other access management options (limiting parking, strategic fencing) as part of park planning.

Anna: the BLWG's recommendation is a pathway toward an end goal, which includes conservation and protection goals.

Bonnie: Questioned whether the two-stage process toward rezoning was the best approach (as in, immediate re-zoning to P3; and then the development of a zone more conducive to preservation/conservation goals). This will consume staff and Council time. Why not do it right the first time? She noted that research had been done on how other municipalities have approached park zoning; Metchosin could borrow from this.

Gary: Felt that rezoning to P3 was a relatively simple matter; however, the development of a new zone could take some time. He felt it was better to move toward protecting the Buffer Land ASAP.

Audience question: is a golf course one of the options the BLWG considering? No. A BLWG member clarified that the golf course reference came from the current zoning: Commercial Recreation 2/3 (CR 2/3)

Audience question: what is the potential for a housing development in the Buffer Land at present? The CR 2/3 designation does allow for homes. The minimum subdivision size is 9.88 acres (CR2) and 4.95 acres (CR3).

Carol Voyt: asked about the urgency to rezone to park. She asked that further thought be given to the potential for the revenue from a voluntary carbon offset arrangement. Immediately rezoning to parkland may mean missing out on a significant revenue opportunity.

Jay: it's hard to say how much revenue the Buffer Land on its own might generate. A review of carbon pricing indicates a range of \$5 to \$30 per acre annually, which would mean annual revenue of anywhere from \$567.00 to \$3,400 annually (Buffer Land is 113.5 acres). There will also be an administrative cost to setting up a carbon offset arrangement, as well as on-going administration. The value of carbon credits comes in part because they can be verified.

Bev Bacon: endorses the plan to rezone to protect the Buffer Land. Asked that the potential of carbon offsets be further explored. She wondered if there was a "co-parenting" concept that could be explored, potentially with some sort of working arrangement between the CRD and Metchosin. That may help offset some of the risks of future dramatic changes within each entity. She could see a trail from Happy Valley to section 95, but also signage that helps people understand why they need to stay on the trail. Such an arrangement might help manage access. Worries about multiple access points from the residential lots.

Chris Moehr: Thanked the BLWG for their work. Speaking for the APRM, she does not advocate immediate rezoning to park, but for the development of an "ecological reserve." No sale to the CRD should be considered without an updated value assessment of the Buffer Land. There are funding opportunities at the federal level to explore.

Kym Hill: Advocated that the land be turned over to the adjacent landowners. Land under private ownership is an effective way of protecting land. Metchosin has shown that big pieces of property support wildlife. The Buffer Land stands to be a future liability.

Morgan Yates: Asked that further research be done on the potential for carbon credits from the Buffer Land. He felt that the figures Jay had referenced were dated by several years and the value is now much higher.

Jay: Agreed and will look into this further.

Audience member: Asked further about limiting access. Can we building in zoning that includes people and encourages stewardship, particularly with the people who may be living adjacent to the Buffer Land. She mentioned examples in Saanich.

Brian: Mentioned previous discussion with the BLWG about the development of a “Friends of the Buffer Land” group to promote local stewardship action.

Werner Schmidt: asked for clarity on the stormwater detention ponds currently adjacent to the Buffer Land.

Gary: these are temporary for the construction project, and clarified the nature of future detention pond, which is allowed under the Covenant and Easement.

Stephen Sawyer: relayed a story about a map book he was shown by a mountain biker, showing a trail that went right up his driveway. Stephen described the effort he went through the get that removed from the book.

Karen: noted that there is local reference to mountain bike trails in the latest Off-Road guide.

There was further discussion about potential access points, current trails and fencing. Gary noted the requirement of access maintenance equipment for the stormwater detention pond.

Avril Yoachim: asked about fencing, particularly on the south lobe; determining the distance and cost would be good.

Shelly thanked the participants for the feedback, which will be taken into account in terms of the BLWG’s recommendation to Council.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.