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Here's your chance to envision your community

Michele Deakin, Oceanside Star
Published: Monday, May 19, 2008

The Regional Growth Strategy, dubbed "Shaping our Future" is up for review. Another boring planning process you say? Perhaps.

Unfortunately it's difficult to make such processes both comprehensive and entertaining. But as the foundation of future Official Community Plans that guide future by-laws and regulations and affect our quality of life, perhaps we should entertain this exercise, even briefly.

A growth strategy can be a tool to help a community build shared vision. We can use it to paint a picture of what we want our neighbourhoods and communities to look, feel, and sound like for the next 20, or heck, even 50 years from now.

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Before you delve into the lengthy public information that accompanies the Growth Strategy Review, imagine your ideal community. Ask yourself: What are the little things here that you wish to maintain?

Is it customer-friendly local businesses? Maybe it's as simple as being able to let the kids run free in your neighbourhood, greater public access to our beaches, reasonable line-ups at the store, or less-crowded roads. Maybe you enjoy the farmers markets, waterfront views, or summertime at local swimming holes. Why do you live here, and not in Vancouver, Toronto, or Cache Creek? This may sound trite, but this approach has created consensus in other communities and became the basis of entire land use plans.

Many aspects of our community today, from its size to its character, are a result of planning decisions. Certain approaches to development could reduce, remove or enhance what we value about living in Oceanside.

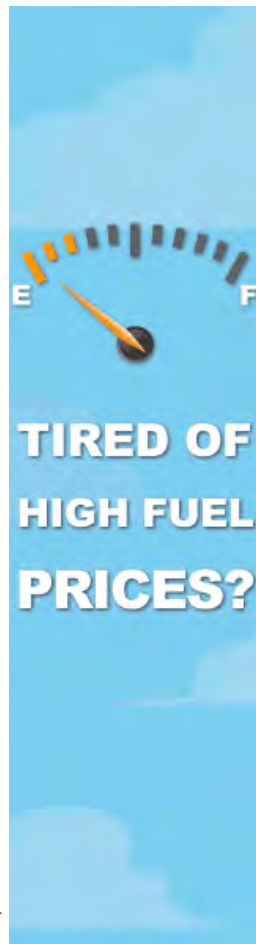
We often complain about a development after it happens, but just as often our official's hands are tied. The rules for development come out of the Official Community Plans which are guided by the Regional Growth Strategy. If the right policies aren't in place the board can't use them.

This is our chance to say what we want, or don't want in our community and region. We might want to keep our taxes at current levels, instead of increasing them to provide more services for a growing population, especially since we can't afford to maintain the infrastructure we already have.

We probably also want to preserve and protect the ecosystem services and natural landscapes that sustain us physically, emotionally and spiritually. These include the wetlands, estuaries and forests that clean our air and water, manage our water supplies, control flooding or provide food, wood, fibre and fuel. It also includes those lands which provide the ability to grow food through soil formation and nutrient cycling, regulation of climate and disease, and recreational pleasure.

A politician once said, citizen participation is a device whereby public officials induce individuals to act in way the officials desire. I remember using a similar ploy when my kids were young. I'd give them a choice between A or B - either of which I was willing to implement. When they got older and wiser they would choose C, the choice they truly wanted.

Perhaps it's time we choose C. We can dare to envision a community that maintains the important things in life. But to realize that image, we have to tell our elected officials what our vision is, and encourage, even help them put the policies and tools in place to make it happen.



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The Regional Growth Strategy workshops are May 24th in Parksville and June 7th in Nanaimo. If you can't make either workshop, send in your comments, ideas, and pictures. And be sure to complete the survey at

www.shapingourfuture.ca. Let's participate!

Michele Deakin has an education in business and parks management and is involved in watershed and tourism planning, coordinating field work and public discussions related to healthy shorelines and watersheds.

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