

WHAT WE HEARD – ALR & RURAL HOUSING

BACKGROUND

The District of Central Saanich is looking to change zoning bylaws on ALR land to more closely align with recently updated provincial policies. As a result of provincial changes in legislation for the Agricultural Land Reserve local governments may now consider permitting up to three dwelling units on a single property. This could include a principal dwelling, a secondary suite in the principal dwelling, and a detached accessory dwelling, such as a cottage or carriage house.



In addition to considering land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), Central Saanich is including rural properties in the analysis. In total, the zoning changes could affect up to approximately 1,097 Central Saanich properties (487 zoned rural and 610 zoned agricultural).

Currently, Central Saanich's Agriculture zones only allow for a secondary suite. Within most of the Rural Estate zones, either a secondary suite or detached cottage or carriage house is permitted.

CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

The public consultation period took place from October 15 to December 15, 2023. To provide education and gauge public sentiment, a survey explaining five proposed options was posted online and available in print format. Minimal feedback was received outside of the survey.

The District presented five options to help inform the options presented to Council. It was noted to the public the staff recommendation may also be something in-between the options presented.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

- Inform and educate Central Saanich residents are informed of opportunity to participate
- Provide plain language overview of options staff are exploring and gauge support and feedback
- Provide paper and online opportunities for participants
- Gather public comments to better understand sentiment
- Reflect community feedback to Council to help inform decision making

PROMOTION

- Four local-news stories on project
- Looking Forward direct mailed sent to all homes
- Municipal website: homepage feature, news item
- Let's Talk project page
- Municipal social media sites

TOP TRAFFIC SOURCES

- CentralSaanich.ca (181)
- CapitalDaily.ca (116)
- CHEKNews.ca (112)
- TimesColonist.CA (93)

BY THE NUMBERS

- **948** visitors to project website
- **428** surveys completed



Opt-in surveys provide a convenient and popular way for the public to provide input; it should be noted opt-in surveys are not a sampling of the public and results are not statistically representative of the community. This report summarizes broad trends, preferences and themes.

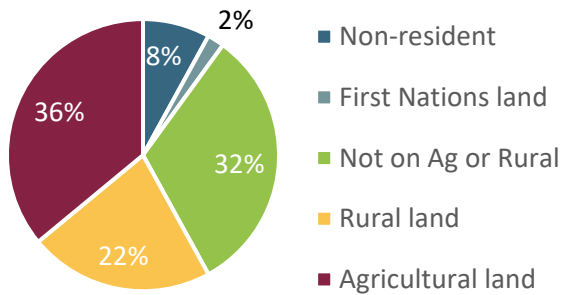
SURVEY FEEDBACK

The survey was one of the District's most responded to, and the feedback received reflected many strong feelings about the topic of housing on agricultural and rural land.

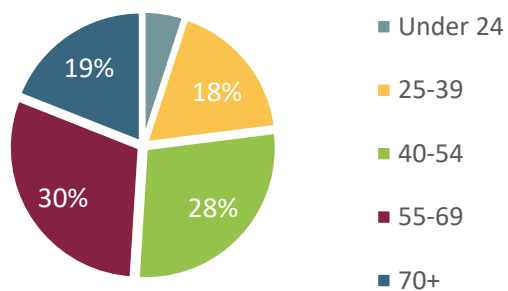
Overview of respondents

428 surveys were completed. Respondents' ages and residences were well varied.

Respondents' residence



Respondents' age demographic

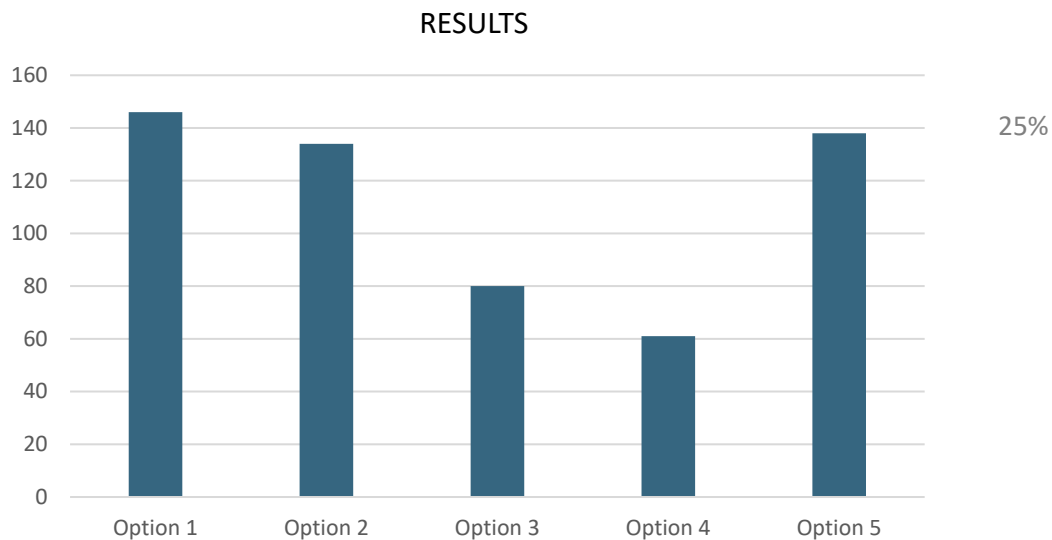


The survey provided the public and impacted parties, such as landowners and farmers, with a plain language summary of five options staff wanted to explore.

Respondents were then asked to select all options they supported and asked to comment on the options.

Which of the five options do you support (check **all** that apply)

1. Option 1: 1,000 m² minimum lot size threshold (most rural and agriculture lots)
2. Option 2: 0.4 ha (4,000 m² or ~1 acre) minimum lot size threshold
3. Option 3: Have the size threshold be different for properties having private on-site sewerage system or being connected to municipal services.
4. Option 4: Allow 3 dwellings on larger lots only (2 ha Minimum Lot Size)
5. Option 5: No net increase in housing



Findings

- Most respondents supported Option 1 and/or 2 OR Option 5.
- Those who live on rural property were most likely to support Option 5, followed closely by supporting Option 1 and/or 2.
- Those that live on agricultural property were most likely to support Option 2, followed closely by Option 1.
- Of the respondents that supported Option 1, approximately half also supported Option 2, and visa versa
- Of the respondents who want to see 'No net increase', there was almost no support for any of the other options

- No option had more than 25% support. Approximately 25% of respondents supported Options 1, 2 and 5.
- Of those who live on agricultural property, approximately 40-45% supported Options 1 and/or 2; and 28% were opposed to any increase in housing.
- Those who live on rural property were most likely to support Option 5 (37%) or Option 1 (36%)

The following pages include the common themes of the comments.

Option 1 - 1,000 m2 minimum lot size threshold (most rural and agriculture lots)

Many comments reflected the sentiment that the community needs more housing supply and see this as a solution. Some noted it allows for the type of housing they want to rent or see in Central Saanich (living on rural property as opposed to creating high density housing). Feedback also reflects the feeling this option has the least impact on farmable land. Younger respondents were more likely to favour this option than older respondents.

Concerns: Want to see enough site parking provided.

Consider a cumulative combine gross floor area for housing in the alr within the home-plate footprint.

*

Concerns for sanitation safety and balancing the need for more housing. If sanitation safety is not an issue, than option 1 might be my go for pick.

*

Only way family can afford to keep farming and pass on to next generation. Need to be able to appropriately house more than one generation on farm parcels.

*

This option will create the most new units to address the housing crisis. As long as the septic field is more than 100 feet from the nearest well it will comply with the Building Code.

*

To provide more housing, to support more families getting into real estate market through additional income via rental suites.

For all options, would support the need for off-street parking in residential areas.

Would be in support of carriage house/cottage on ALR/Rural properties connecting to municipal water/sewer if accessible

*

Gently densifying existing lots allows housing for farming families and workers while preserving the intent of rural or agricultural land, which can be done well on small lots with good design. As someone who hopes to live in or own a small home in my future, this would be a very appealing option as a renter.



Option 2 - Allow 3 dwellings on larger lots (2 ha min)

Those who live on agricultural property were most likely to support Option 2 (45%) over other options. Younger respondents were more likely to favour this option than older respondents.

Themes that emerges include that this option represents balance between housing need and preservation of agricultural land, that the community needs more housing, and farmers need support/farm help.

Concerns: Concern about agricultural production and impact more housing would have on farmable land.



Options 1 and 2 are impractical, especially concerning a well and an on-site septic field on anything less than a hectare. Options 4 and 5 are too dense now and possibly a future waste of land.

*

I think with our current housing crisis this allows for the most units without dramatically changing the character of our community which is why we live here.

*

*We need additional housing on the peninsula. By allowing this, in my opinion, the land is still farmable with minimum
Impact to ALR.*

*

Anything smaller than 1 acre will condense the space and traffic in an area that is to be considered rural very quickly. I think allowing a cottage or suite on larger sites is a great idea, but the sewage is a concern pending on what the system is. There are many responsible young adults who would love the opportunity to support the rural locations but without substantial financial aid this is not doable and we will lose the interest of those who could learn and help the farm community grow. Instead they are stacked up in the cities paying very large rent costs and not able to save enough to purchase or contribute aside from there full time jobs. I could see this as a positive adjustment to help farmers get additional help if needed.

Option 3 - Have size threshold differ for properties having on-site sewerage or municipal services

Commenters noted this option balances the need for housing, retaining use of agricultural land and impact on District's infrastructure. Many noted the importance of considering the impact of sewerage system limitations and impacts. Some noted that Option 1 is too dense and this is more suitable.

Concerns: Could incentivize housing on estate properties over farms, which isn't the intent of the change.

We need to protect ALR for food production. I think it's wise to place more housing by transportation routes and on city sewage. We can't build more and more without proper infrastructure to support it.

*

I feel that the lot size criteria needs to be greater for on site septic.

*

Option 3 balances the need for more housing with protecting the character of the community.

*

I chose option three because of the five options presented, that one restricted the largest percentage of properties to ONLY a secondary suite (no detached dwelling permitted). I am completely against building new structures on agricultural land for housing. Protecting the ALR is crucial for our long-term food security in BC. It is high-quality farmland, and if we start building new housing structures on it, that land will likely never be used as farmland again. We should be densifying our existing urban/suburban areas, and reclaiming the land that is currently being wasted on things like golf courses.



Option 4 – Allow 3 dwellings on larger lots only (2 ha Minimum Lot Size)

Respondents noted this option as a compromise by allowing three dwellings on larger parcels will provide a level of supplementary income to farmers and provide housing capacity while not taking up as much of the arable land with the footprint and infrastructure required to support the residences as on a smaller lot.

Concerns: This option doesn't impact enough properties to help with housing crisis.

The arable land on smaller lots cannot absorb the infrastructure needed for 3 dwellings.

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Allows for increase in available housing in central saanich but not too dense where problems with parking,,etc. we need to improve infrastructure if options 1-3 are allowed

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We need additional housing on the peninsula. By allowing this, in my opinion, the land is still farmable with minimum impact to ALR.

*

Need to make sure these new dwellings do not get exploited by homeowners who want to profit off their dwellings (exploiting the housing crisis) - increasing the amount of housing can not be the only measure to combat the housing crisis. Please put in legislation/ policies that reflect this if you decide to increase housing on ALR.

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There is a housing shortage and worker shortage, especially for farmers and low level jobs. This initiative is moving us forward and creating space for growth. There is really no negative impacts that I can think of... however, we do need to consider how people move around (there are no sidewalks and areas for parking). Consider a requirement for sidewalks to be added when owners are adding more residents to their properties! I live on Keating Cross rd and am terrified to walk my dog most days, as people speed and swerve off the road, as there is no curb to stop them.

Option 5 - No net increase in housing

A repeated comment was to use existing developed areas for housing. Older respondents were more likely to favour this option than younger respondents. The common concerns about this option were generally shared across respondents regardless of whether they lived on ag/rural land or not.

Respondents who do not live on agricultural or rural housing were most likely to support this option. Of those who live on agricultural property, 28% were opposed to any increase in housing.

Themes of the concerns included:

- Concerned about erosion of farmland and large parcels to farm
- Increased cost of farmland if multiple residents are built on them and inability for farmers to afford farmland
- Protecting the environment and farmland
- Any housing would take away land and current/future food security
- The ability of the proposed changes to impact the housing crisis

As a small farmer who currently needs to lease land, I see a great deal of ALR land not actually in production as the land has been used to build an estate home instead. This is concerning due to lack of food security. Permitting more buildings will only drive up the cost of land in the area which then makes it even harder to get started with farming. The biggest challenge for small farmers in the area is affordability of land. While I know there is a housing crisis as well, we do need to ensure the region can also be fed.

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Building this type of housing will never solve the housing crisis. We need multi-unit buildings with AFFORDABLE rents not single family homes or cottages. There is no point in destroying good agricultural land if you are not going to solve the problem.

*

Affordable housing is important but building more housing just to accommodate people who want to move here if it means unhealthy densification is not wise.

*

I fear that increasing housing and density will destroy the peninsula's rural nature. I think that unless we protect that it is only a matter of time before ALR land is converted to housing development. We human beings don't seem to know when enough is truly enough. Affordable housing is important but building more housing just to accommodate people who want to move here if it means unhealthy densification is not wise.
