

# Official Community Plan

## Policy Direction Report

Community Meetings, February-March 2009

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north cowichan | PLAN > 09



OUR VISION. OUR FUTURE.

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## POLICY DIRECTIONS

### 1.0 Introduction

This report presents a summary of what the community told the Municipality of North Cowichan during seven community meetings and open houses, held February & March 2009, as phase 3 of the public consultation during this Official Community Plan (OCP) review process.

These meetings gathered material from members of the North Cowichan public in a variety of ways:

- Community questionnaires, customized for each meeting to address specific concerns of each community;
- Open house comment sheets; and
- Question and answer sessions (summarized by planning staff after each meeting).

The Planning Department has analyzed the responses to 261 questionnaires and 57 open house comment sheets, representing the voices of approximately 1% of the North Cowichan population. Together with other community information, this input provides a foundation for the Planning Department to move forward with policy development for the revised OCP.

#### 1.1 *Who Came to the Meetings?*

Just over half of meeting participants were male, and the rest were female. Most of the people who came to these meetings were between the ages of 40 and 79. The under-40's were under-represented.

People who came to the meetings had lived in the Municipality for an average of 20 years, but this average conceals the range of  $\pm 18$  years. In other words, the majority of people attending these meetings had lived in the Municipality between 2 and 38 years, representing a good range of newcomers and old-timers in the community.

#### 1.2 *Reading the results*

The questionnaires, together with the presentation, were meant to get gut-level reactions from meeting participants on the various proposals or issues facing the Municipality as a whole, and their specific neighbourhood or community. Some people completed the questionnaires without listening to the discussion. Many people chose not to respond to one or more questions, perhaps because they felt rushed, or the question was complex. The results presented here reflect the answers received.

The results may be helpful in understanding community wishes for the future, but cannot be seen as a totally reliable guide. It is important for the reader to remember that these questionnaires reflect the views of the participants in Phase 3 of the community consultation process. When there are differences, these views must be balanced with the views obtained from the Ipsos Reid survey (January 2008), which interviewed 500 people by phone, and the community meetings on specific topics, which took place in the summer and fall of 2008.

In determining its policy direction, the Municipality also needs to consider the needs and desires of people who were unable to participate in these meetings, whether due to the pressures of work and child-rearing, or other concerns.



## 2.0 Policy Direction Results

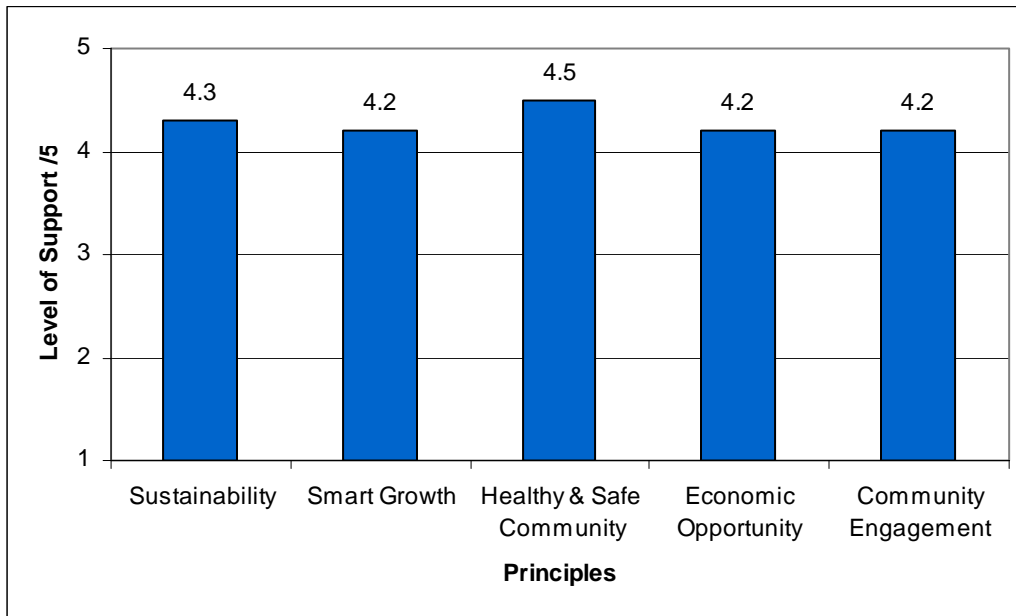
### 2.1 Municipality-Wide Issues

#### 2.1.1. Principles

The community meeting participants strongly supported the integration of the proposed principles into the OCP:

- Sustainability;
- Smart Growth;
- Healthy & Safe Community;
- Economic Opportunity; and
- Community Engagement.

The response for the principle of “healthy & safe community” was the highest rating of any question asked, showing extremely strong support for these principle within the community.



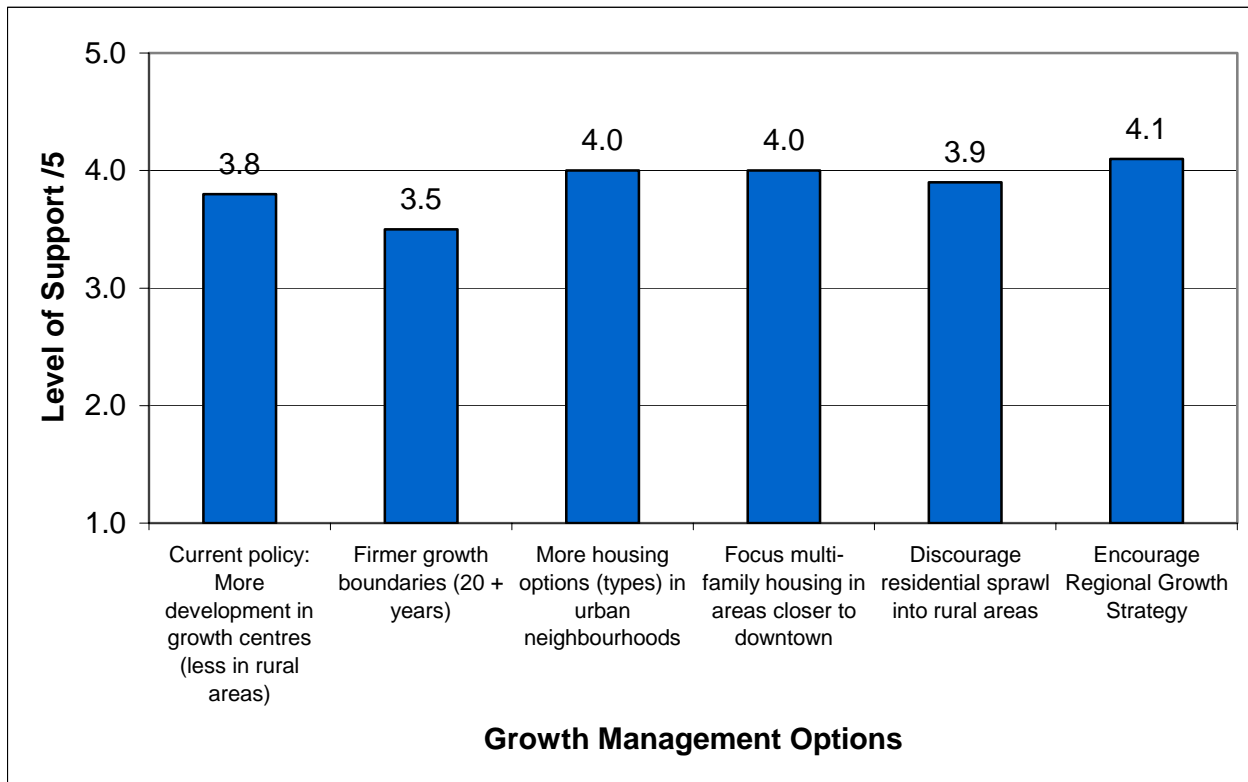
**Figure 1: Support for Principles**

Although supporting the ideas, meeting participants expressed some concerns about how these principles would be implemented, and that all of them must be addressed to have a sustainable community.

#### 2.1.2. Growth Management

Municipal efforts to manage growth are supported by the community for a variety of reasons:

- Prevent rural sprawl;
- Create liveable communities;
- Protect the environment.



**Figure 2 Support for Growth Management Options**

Current growth boundaries were generally well supported, although participants are in favour of some modifications to address failing septic systems (Bell McKinnon), create more defensible ALR boundaries (South End & Chemainus), or make efficient use of existing infrastructure (South End).

The suggestions for better addressing edge issues, separating urban areas from agricultural land, were moderately well supported – with the exception of the Bell McKinnon area, which has unique concerns.

### 2.1.3. Rural Policy

Protecting the Municipality’s rural character is an ongoing challenge. In addition to the existing OCP policy and Strategic Agricultural Plan, the Municipality is exploring a variety of options to strengthen the rural economy and protect its rural character. Consensus emerged about the value of ensuring agricultural leasing opportunities and studying the water needs of farming, but other proposals did not receive the same level of support.

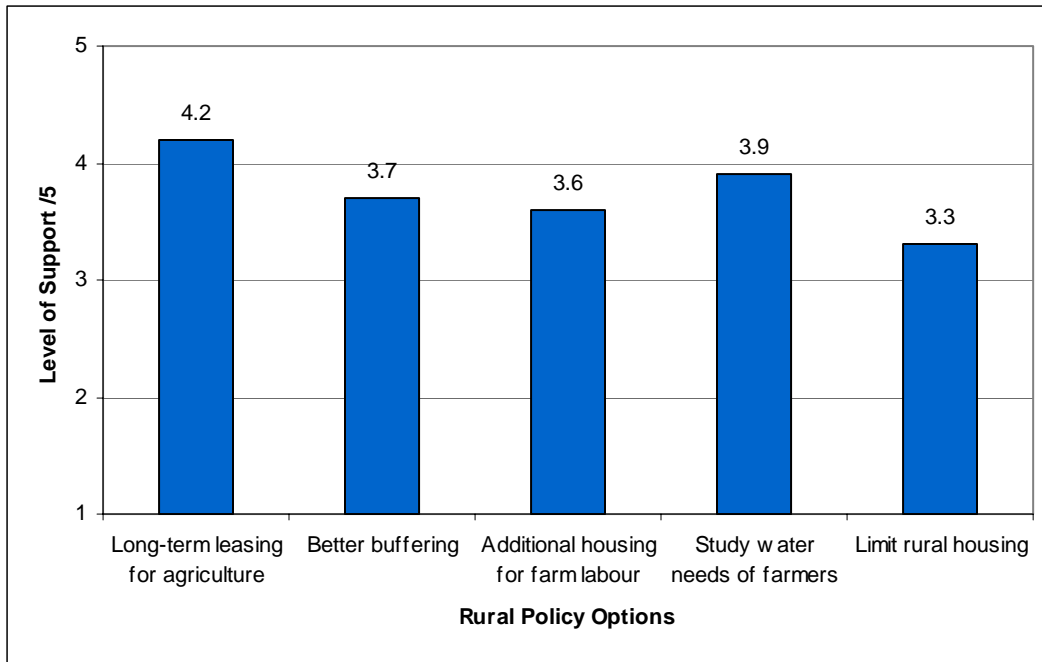
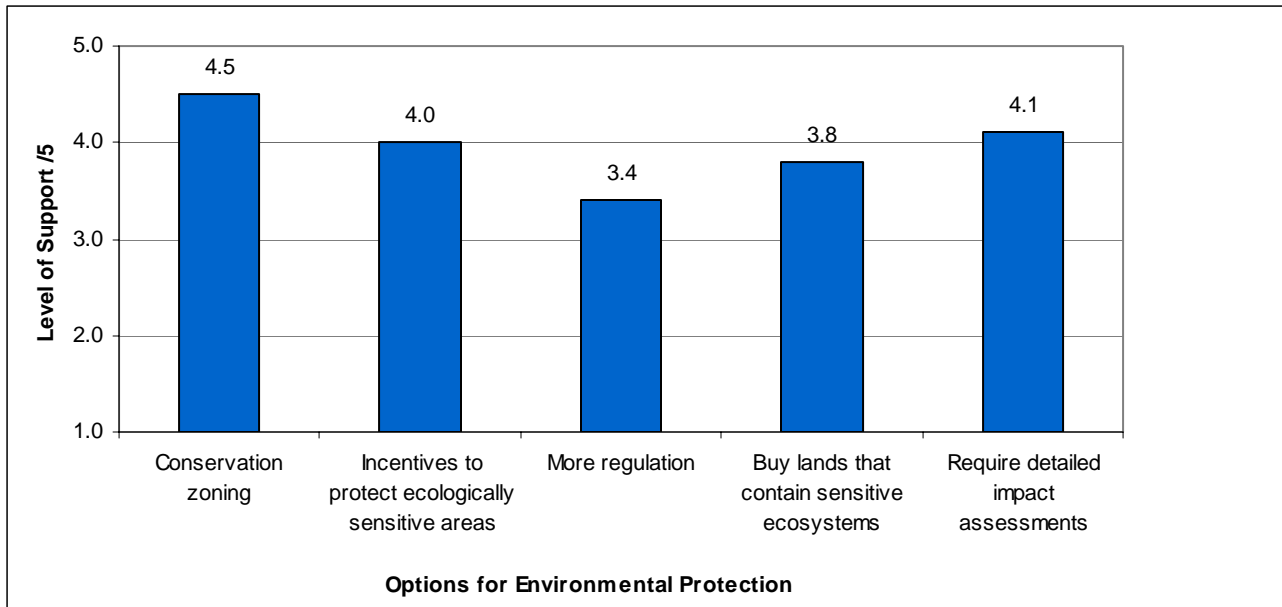


Figure 3: Support for Rural Policy Options

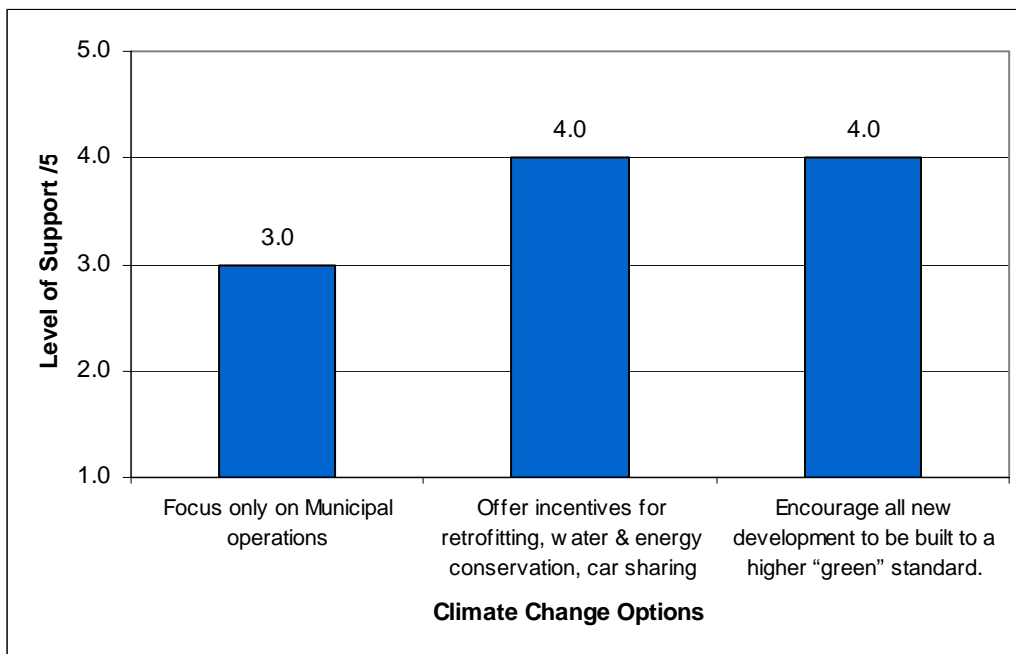
### 2.1.4. Environmental Protection and Climate Change

The policies proposed for enhanced environmental protection were well supported. There is strong support for the development of a conservation zone to protect areas of particular ecological importance. Increased environmental regulation received low support, although the example of “tree protection” bylaw may have influenced the result.



**Figure 4: Support for Environmental Protection Options**

Taking action on climate change was strongly supported (91%), particularly in terms of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 5: Support for Climate Change Options**

<sup>1</sup> Adapting to climate change means making changes to protect the community from the impacts of climate change, while mitigating means taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow climate change/global warming.

### 2.1.5. Social Planning and Affordable Housing

The policy of continuing to plan for all ages was well supported, while recognizing the overall aging of the population.

A stronger role for the Municipality in ensuring the availability of affordable housing was well supported, with strong support for ensuring that a range of housing types is available.

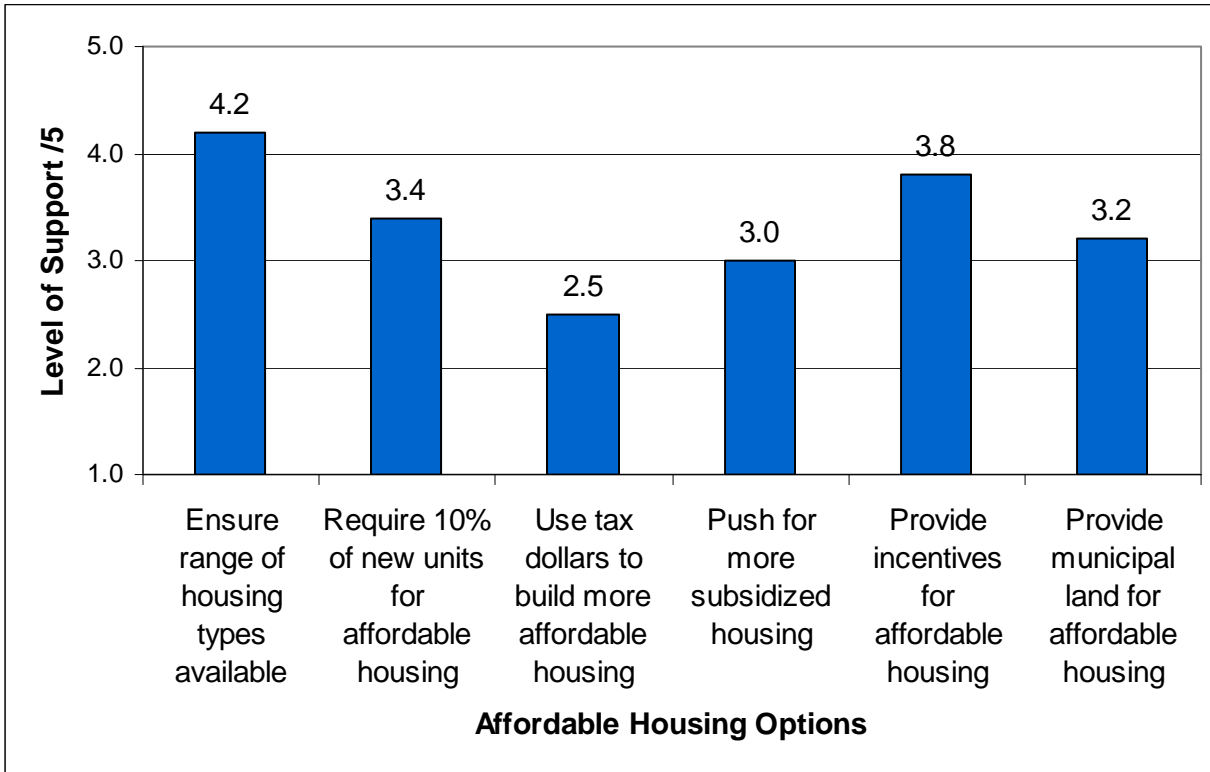


Figure 4: Support for Affordable Housing Options

### 2.1.6. Safety and Social Capital

As a group, North Cowichan participants indicated strong feelings of personal safety and security, but when they tried to put themselves into the shoes of other more vulnerable people, there was a sense that our streets are not as safe as they could or should be.

Participants expressed strong support for the development of dedicated bike lanes, sidewalks, and off-road trails connecting places that people need to go, as well as traffic calming. These would increase community safety, in particular for vulnerable people, and should also contribute to a better sense of community.

Most participants (88%) indicated that they are volunteers, which shows good community spirit, and is an indicator of community health and well being.

### 2.1.7. Urban Agriculture

Food security is a new issue to be addressed in the revised OCP. Urban agriculture is part of food security, and looks at producing food in urban areas. The development of more community gardens in the Municipality is well supported, but there was no agreement on the question of keeping chickens in urban areas.

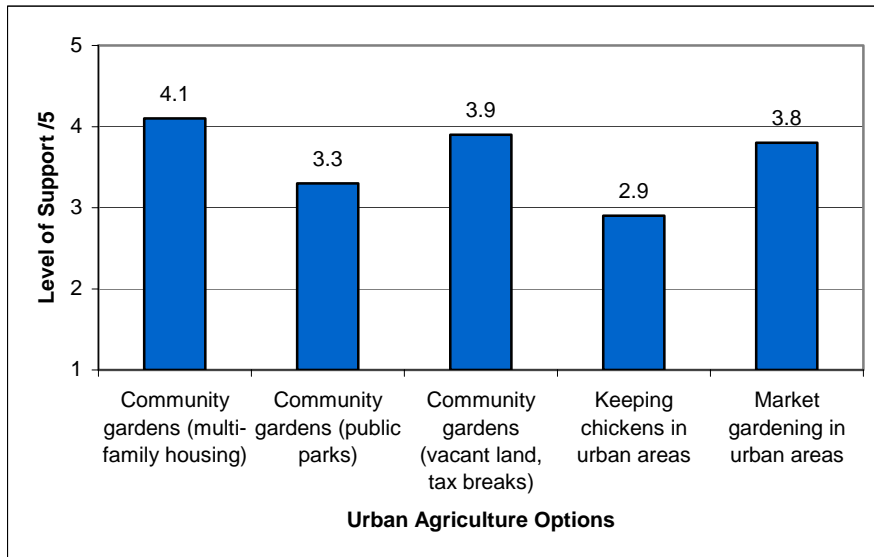


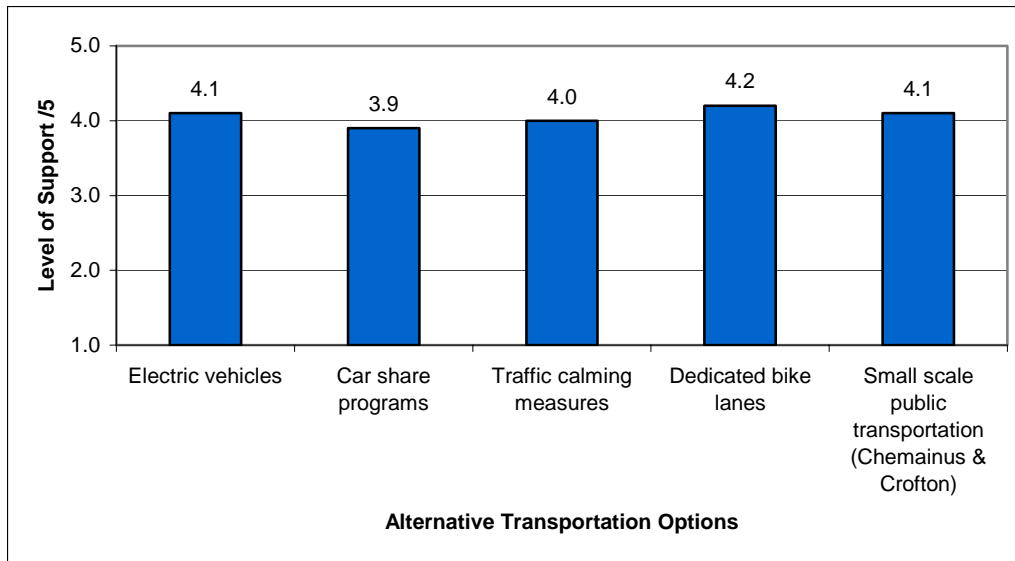
Figure 5: Support for Urban Agriculture Options

### 2.1.8. Transportation

While cars will be with us for years to come, since 2002 North Cowichan has tried to improve ways to get around the community without cars. One question asked about non-car transportation ideas.

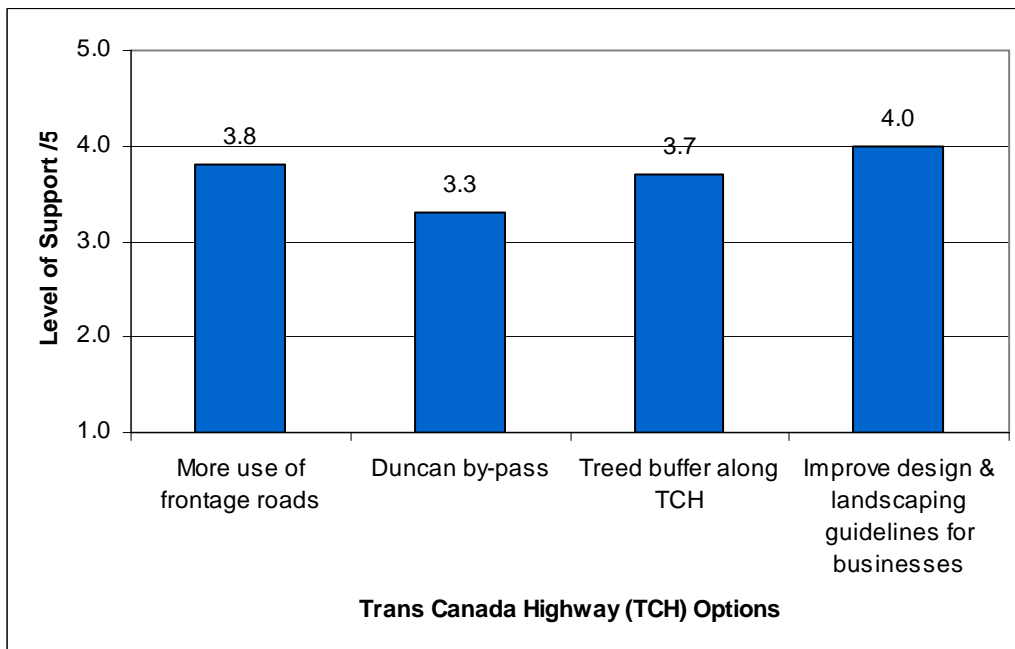
Of those proposed, dedicated bike lanes received the most support, followed closely by supporting the use of electric vehicles within our community, and better transit services, particularly for small communities.

## POLICY DIRECTIONS



**Figure 6: Support for Alternative Transportation Options**

Participants would like to see improvements to how the Trans Canada Highway (TCH) functions, and the aesthetics of businesses along the TCH. One suggestion was to synchronize the lights along the TCH through the Duncan business corridor, which would permit better traffic flow. The idea of improving design guidelines for businesses along the TCH also received a lot of support.



**Figure 7: Support for TCH Options**

### 2.1.9. Parks & Recreation

The citizens of North Cowichan love their parks and trails. In response to the list of new trails to be developed, it appears that people will be willing to travel long distances to walk on those that are near important places, like Somenos Marsh or the Crofton Waterfront. People want more green corridors developed, and at the same time, do not want to lose their neighbourhood parks (tot lots). They want their recreational opportunities to be accessible and near their homes.

### 2.1.10. Economic Development

Participants want their community to be vibrant and prosperous, but not at the expense of the environment. The economic development approaches strongly supported by participants include the provision of adequate infrastructure and the development of liveable communities, with some support also for providing small business incentives.

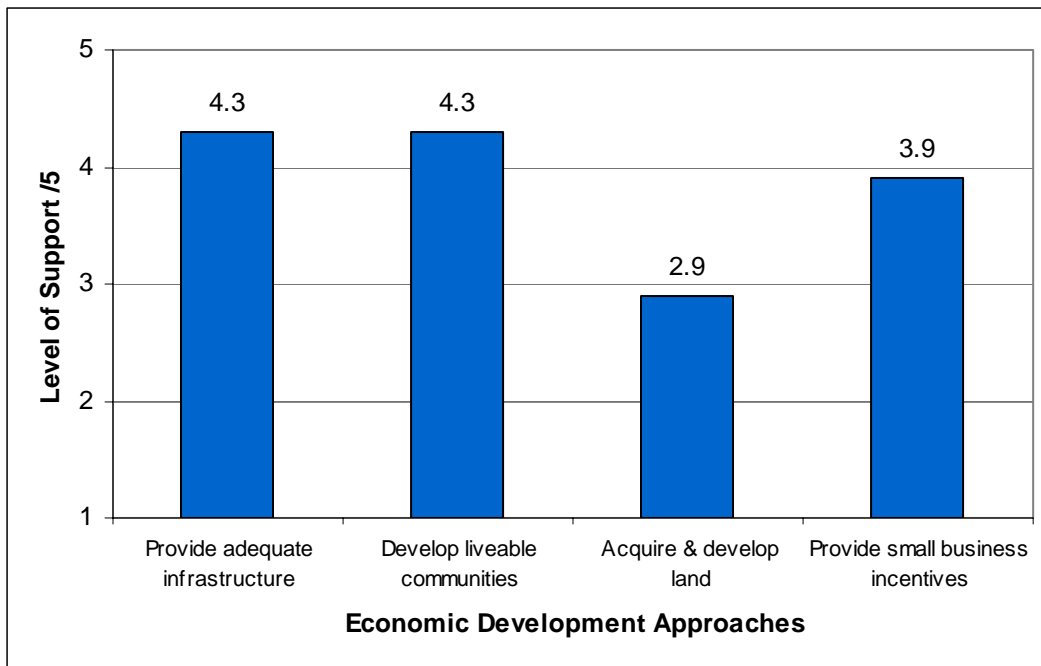


Figure 8: Support for Economic Development Approaches

## 2.2 Community Specific Issues

### 2.2.1. Bell McKinnon

There are deep divisions within the Bell McKinnon neighbourhood about its future and how it should develop. These emerge in discussions about sewer and roads, as well as in response to the Municipal question about vision for future land use. While the majority of participants (67%) indicate a desire to maintain the rural character of their neighbourhood, a significant minority (25%) wishes to move to full urban development standards.

### **2.2.2. Chemainus**

The participants from Chemainus are concerned to keep their town feeling like a small town, and consistently advocate for strong environmental protection, tight growth boundaries, protection of ALR lands, reduction in car dependency, and development of community amenities like new trails.

### **2.2.3. Crofton**

Croftonites love their waterfront, and are developing a community-based vision of how it should develop, to be able to more effectively negotiate development proposals for that area, and for the rest of their community. There were some mixed messages from the community about how its growth boundaries should be managed.

### **2.2.4. Maple Bay**

Maple Bay is subject to development pressures that are threatening its character as a place. Participants are anxious to protect the values that attracted them to this place, including its environment of forest, mountains, and ocean; its views and trails; and its village “feel.” As such they appear to be more open to the use of regulation as a tool for environmental protection, than are other parts of the Municipality.

### **2.2.5. Rural**

The turnout at the Rural meeting was too low to have full confidence that the results reflect the desires of rural residents. Participants were generally supportive of initiatives by the Municipality to protect the rural land base, and enhance the rural economy.

### **2.2.6. South End & Mount Prevost**

Turnouts at the South End & Mount Prevost meetings were too low to have confidence that the results reflect the desires of the South End residents, although for many of the issues tested at the meetings, their views may be indicative. The key issues canvassed at the meetings were growth boundary adjustments and traffic along the TCH.

South End participants appear to be more receptive than other North Cowichaners to modifying their growth boundaries, whether for reasons of environmental protection or efficient use of existing assets. Their ideas for addressing traffic congestion along the TCH in the Duncan/North Cowichan corridor included providing alternate routes through Duncan for local traffic, and synchronizing the lights.

## **3.0 Next Steps**

The community’s input, as summarized here and in reports from previous phases of consultations, is an important contributor, together with technical reports, in evaluating the feasibility and desirability of pursuing particular policy options in the revised OCP. After the revisions have been drafted, another round of community consultation will be organized to permit the community to comment again on the directions proposed for the OCP. Further revisions will then be made, and the OCP will be presented to Municipal Council for adoption.

For more information about the OCP review process, see the North Cowichan website ([www.northcowichan.bc.ca](http://www.northcowichan.bc.ca)) or contact the Planning Department at (250) 746-3119.