

Five Questions posed by the Shawnigan Focus Newspaper: Answers by Bruce Fraser

1) *The CVRD will eventually be restructured as a result of some areas incorporating into municipalities. Should Shawnigan attempt to incorporate on its own, or as part of a larger "South Cowichan" entity? When do you think this might occur?*

"South Cowichan" appears to me to be a definition of convenience rather than a unified community. There is no doubt that incorporation into a municipality is necessary for the proper governance of our area and its growing population. Serving Area B with a single Regional District Director is just too little coverage for the complexity of the issues that must be addressed. Exactly how the boundaries should be established has two main factors: what people actually see as their home base and what area must be assembled to provide a realistic tax base. I tend to favour incorporating the Shawnigan area separately because that to me makes social and geographic sense, but I have to remain objective about the tax question until the necessary economic research has been done. The Provincial government must agree with an incorporation initiative, so the timing will be based on their willingness to conduct the work and support the effort financially. The sooner the better!

2) *BC Stats cites the 2011 population of Shawnigan at about 8,600 and projects an annual growth rate of almost 2% resulting in approximately 11,350 people by 2026. These extra 2,750 people will require an additional 1,100 dwelling units (2.5 people per household). Is this growth desirable and what policies would you propose to manage it?*

Growth in our region is inevitable as the unaffordability of Victoria propels young families north of the Malahat. The question is not if, but how. The Official Community Plan and its subsequent zoning by-laws is one device for shaping the future design of development, but it needs to be supplemented by widespread and continuing public discussion. Village containment, density issues, transport implications, cost of servicing, environmental suitability, location of civic amenities are all essential considerations. These have to be actively planned, not arrived at by accident.

3) *Shawnigan Lake and the surrounding watershed provide the water supply for thousands of residents. Compared with the Victoria watershed around Sooke Lake there are very few constraints on activities that adversely affect this vital resource. What short and long term measures are required to protect the lake?*

We need to treat the Shawnigan Basin as an integrated whole. Pressures on the land will only increase, with all the side effects on water quantity, quality and treatment costs that we are already experiencing. I believe that we can make progress on these issues by developing a "Shawnigan Round Table" of concerned residents, commercial and industrial interests and relevant provincial and federal government agencies. Such a cooperative group can do the necessary research, devise suitable conservation and remediation programs and advise governments on measures that protect our water. The Cowichan Round Table, now ten years old, and the recently established Cowichan Water Board provide a model that we can examine for ideas on how to proceed in our own area.

4) *The OCP speaks of providing a vibrant commercial core to meet the shopping and service needs of Shawnigan Lake residents. For several years Shawnigan Village has had a surplus of vacant commercial space and appears less than vital at the moment. What is your vision for the village core and adjacent areas? How would that vision be achieved?*

Shawnigan Village is currently fractured and held back by developments that have not been planned to a coherent vision. I would like to see a walkable, diverse village core that ties the lakeshore, the rail station, the shops and offices, the recreation centre and the proposed lower commercial development into an integrated community centre. Thought must be given to the hazardous intersection, paths and trails, parking, business mix and the freeing up of the currently unoccupied store-fronts. I think a "Village Development Council" should be established, informally at first, to propose design options for public discussion. This could help generate the enthusiasm and momentum for progress.

We cannot forget that what is being called Malahat Village on the south boundary is also developing rapidly. It will have a different character as an industrial and commercial centre, but it also needs attention to make it serve the needs of a growing south end population. As long as Area B also extends along the Koksilah corridor, the unique character of Cowichan Station also needs to be considered.

5) *The proposed Eco-Depot has run into significant opposition primarily because of the selected site. Do you think the project should go ahead, and if so, where should it be located?*

There is no question that we need to provide effective waste management services in our area and I appreciate the difficulty facing the Regional District in finding a suitable piece of land. It is easy to criticize their choice but difficult to suggest other locations without the confidential land investigations necessary. The concept of a comprehensive waste assembly and transfer system seems to make sense in its own right. The current plan for a depot located at the confluence of Cameron-Taggart and Shawnigan-Cobble Hill road is the main issue. While I support the need for a facility, I believe that there are three questions that affect its suitability. Could we not have partnered with the existing commercial waste facilities on Fisher Road and the South Shawnigan Lake Road, which do happen to lie in industrial zones with near highway access, instead of displacing them with a tax supported one? Did we not give equal weight to the living environment of those in a rural residential-agricultural area as we did to the transport logistics of road locations and land availability? Have we actually created a new industrial zone in the midst of an area zoned for other existing uses? I will pay close attention to the results of the upcoming referendum.