

Amazing Grace Ecological Society

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CHARTING OUR AGRICULTURAL PATH at the Gabriola Commons

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Centrally located in the village core of Gabriola, the Gabriola Commons is an "agricultural pocket" virtually surrounded by commercial and institutional zones, accessible by all residents. This makes the Gabriola Commons ideally suited to respond to a wide range of community agricultural needs. The 26.5 acres comprise a wide spectrum of land capabilities, ranging from low wetland to arid rocky escarpments. Respect for the agricultural capacity of the property is "written in stone" in the mandate of both AGES and the Gabriola Commons. Projects essentially agricultural in nature are woven throughout the vision for the Commons that we have created with the community of Gabriola.

Over the past year, AGES has consistently invited community input and suggestions for the agricultural landscape of the Commons through such events as Open House gatherings, workshops, Open Space 3 day forum (Nov/05), Food forum (March/06) and various community events and activities (Islander Days, PHC Home and Garden Tour). Community feedback for the agricultural use of the land has included community gardens, allotment gardens, a golden garden for seniors, long-term island food security, an increase in locally produced food and products, organic farming/gardening practices, alternative energy sources, commercial kitchen, farm co-operatives, buying clubs, Gabriola brand products, food storage and preparation in times of disaster.

In order to oversee and coordinate the short and long term agricultural initiatives, a **farm management team** is being formed. It will ensure that a comprehensive budget and evaluation process accompanies each stage of the agricultural plan that reflects and responds to local conditions, changing situations and community needs. (Please note that the accompanying site plans are drafts, subject to modification as planning progresses.

AGRICULTURAL GOALS

The guiding principle in the vision of the Gabriola Commons is the philosophy behind sustainability – improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. The agricultural goals are based on an ethic of caring for the earth and interacting with the land in mutually beneficial ways. There are several specific goals underlying the long-range "Agricultural Path" at the Commons:

1. An unassailable reserve capable of food production for generations to come
2. Agricultural food production largely for the benefit of the community
3. A model of environmentally-sustainable, community-supported agriculture, using renewable energy practices.
4. Preservation of heritage species and seeds.

PHASE I: PLANNING AND CURRENT ACTIVITIES - June 2005 to July 2007
(June 5/05 is occupancy date)

Planning

- Site and land assessment:

Extensive soil testing was conducted during the summer of 2005, based on a 100' x 100' grid over most of the property (except the southeast quadrant where deep peaty soil was known to be present throughout.) Initially a two-man auger was used to drill the holes. This proved unworkable with the quantity of rock in the soil and the shallow depth to bedrock (see photo of cutaway bank in January/06 submission to ALC). In order to acquire an accurate sampling from three layers of soil at each hole (at the request of the soil engineer) we dug by shovel and hand tool and kept each sample separately in labeled ziplock bags (which we have preserved). All of the test holes were immediately filled in after the samples were taken as a safety precaution.

Site assessment was made for establishing of various gardens at planning stage (based on sun exposure, access to irrigation system etc.)

- Research and Information Gathering:

General agricultural research establishing best practices for gardening as well as serving as a demonstration model in alternative energies and agricultural experiments (in conjunction with Malaspina University)

Permaculture studies explore potential of property (see below)

Capacity Building project for a community food security plan

Research of agricultural history of the property

Current activities:

Twice-monthly Permaculture Walk (with naturalists, biologists, gardeners and community members at large) with the goal of exploring the landscape through the seasons, recording observations on water table levels, indigenous plants (revealing soil conditions) etc.

Community Garden (coordinated by People for a Healthy Community)

Site chosen for proximity to existing irrigation system and existing partial fencing

Garden design by master gardener

Funding applied for and obtained for completed fencing and tool shed

Fencing completed, tool shed at design stage

Soil improvement begun (composting bins established)

Weekly collection of manure from island farms

Couch grass eradication begun – test methods used

Several experimental areas planted

Community Agricultural/Food Events

PHC Plant a row- Grow a row program
Chowder Cook-off (Islander Days Aug. 19)
Annual Agricultural Fall Fair (Sept. 16)

Repair and Maintenance

(overseen by Landlord Management Team)

Irrigation system upgrade

Top soil scraped off site of parking area and reserved for screening

Barn cleaned

Invasive species eradication begun (broom, daphne, couch grass)

Workbees for general maintenance

Building partnerships and alliances

People for a Healthy Community (PHC) – a grassroots community service organization in existence for over 10 years: Hire students as summer staff to assure irrigation and care of growing garden; hire Food Programs coordinator; establish a Food Security Standing Committee (an ongoing group)

Gabriola Emergency Social Services

Earth Masters Sustainability College

Malaspina College (mentoring the Commons in its role as demonstration model)

PHASE II: EXTENDING THE AGRICULTURAL FOOTPRINT - August 2006 – August 2008

Planning:

Formation of Farm Management Team (mandated by AGES and the future Commons Council)

Includes AGES rep, Commons Steering Committee, farmers, gardeners, youth and community members at large.

After extensive consultations with island growers, biologists who have "signed on" to the Commons project and scientists in the Malaspina University Horticultural Department, a comprehensive planting plan will be developed. This will be part of an ongoing process permitting us to assess and evaluate the varied projects over years to come.

Current Activities:

- Community garden fully cultivated and producing "market-garden" vegetables
- Kitchen garden near commercial kitchen (in process of obtaining VIHA approval): garden fully cultivated and producing herbs and salad greens.
- Allotment gardens: Guidelines and operating procedures developed and in place; site preparation in progress, irrigation in place
- Orchards of fruit and nut trees and berries planted, "cuttings" nursery for grape cultivation

Community Agricultural Events:

- Annual Agricultural Fall Fair held at the Commons in collaboration with the Gabriola Agricultural Association and other groups
- Saturday Farm Market. Discussion initiated regarding possible siting of the Saturday market on the Commons (limited parking and limited space for vendors are raising problems with present site.)
- Roadside Stand/Farm Gate sales
- Demonstration of composting etc.

Operating and infrastructure:

- Construction of greenhouse begun
- Extension to irrigation systems, drainage and fencing as required

Groups involved:

Gabriola Commons Farm Management Team with interim caretakers and land stewards

Seniors group (based at Rollo Centre adjacent to the Commons)

Youth group (from the Gathering Place nearby)

Gardening group from Elementary School (across the road from the Commons)

Community members interested in allotment gardens

Community at large participating in land preparation and planting workbees (90 people on list so far)

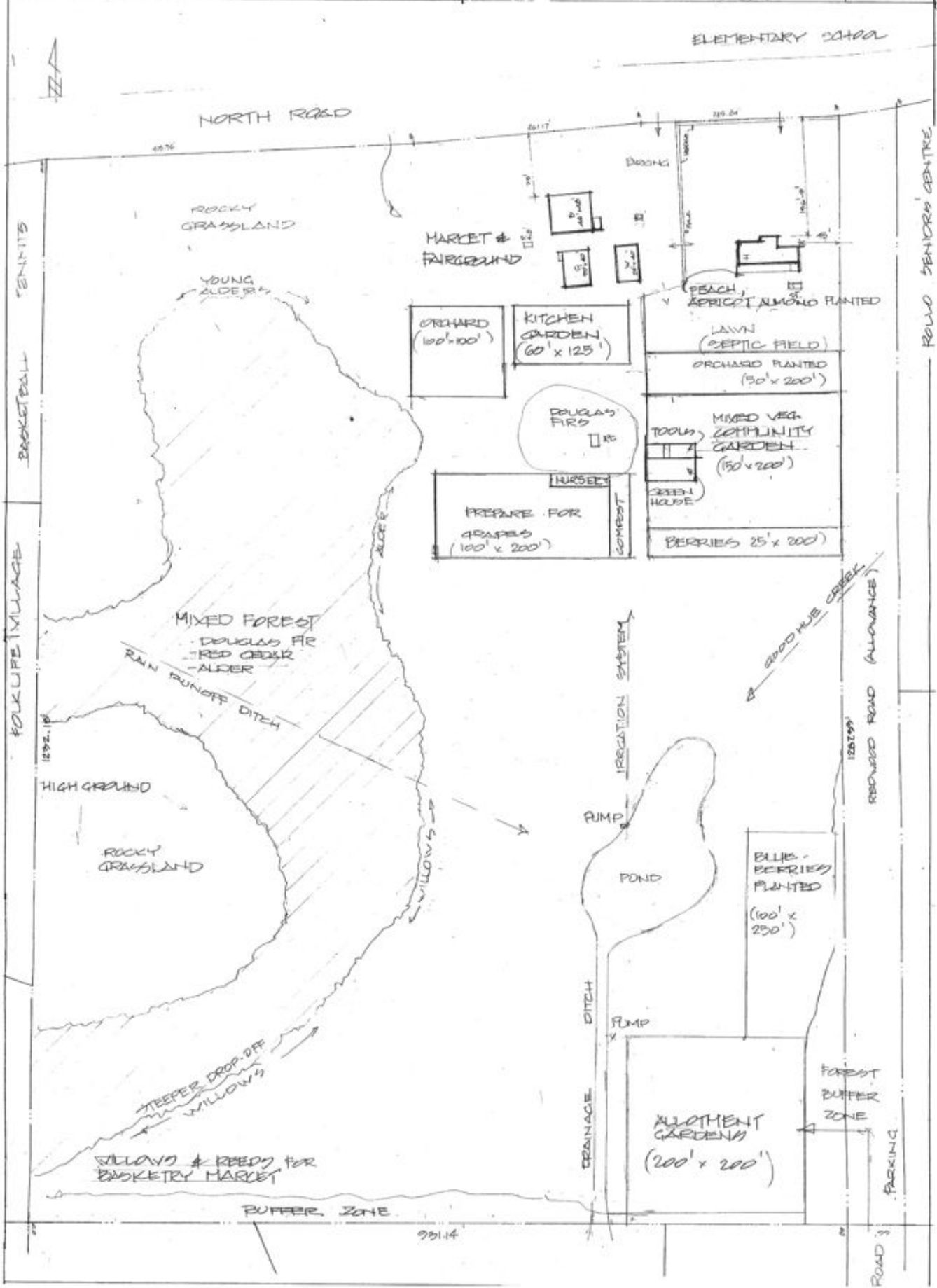
PHASE III: LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY 2008 – 2012

Subject to funding and the completion of Phases I and II, we hope to have in place:

- Farm stewards living on the land and working it in conjunction with Farm Management Team. Three residential units are proposed to house the team of farm stewards. Located near the site of the old farmhouse (and its spring), the units would average 800 to 900 sq.ft. each with a commons space of approximately 600 sq.ft. for a total area of approx. 3000 sq.ft. (i.e. the equivalent of the existing house, which will be entirely used for institutional/community service purposes).
- The necessary infrastructure of fencing, irrigation systems, water catchment systems and warehousing to support the following agricultural activities:
 - Diversified fruit and nut orchards
 - Vineyard and varied berry crops
 - Kiwi vines in production (supported on trellis work at edge of all parking areas)
 - Greenhouse producing nursery seedlings as well as seasonal produce
 - Community gardens growing food for community use
 - Allotment gardens established
 - Kitchen garden growing herbs, green, garlic etc.

- The infrastructure permitting a functioning commercial kitchen for farm produce and value-added product. The intention is to create viable small-scale agriculture that increases opportunities for food processors to meet the market for specialty foods and to grow for island restaurants.
- The means of operating a farmers' market and fairground with dining area

Ultimately we hope to have created partnerships for business opportunities for islanders and to have helped in a significant way to support food security for Gabriola in developing this long range plan for the farming land at the Gabriola Commons



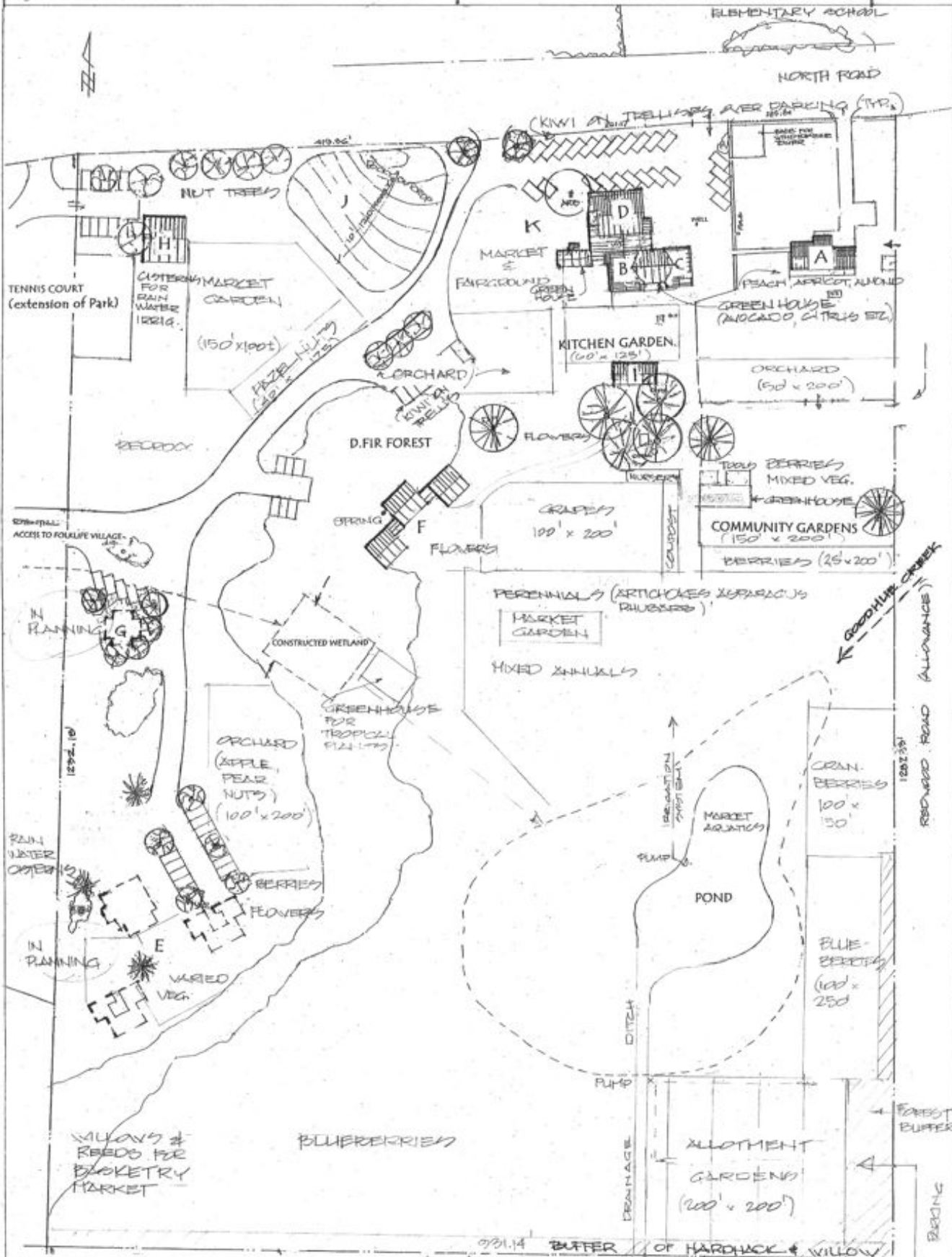
the Gabriola Commons

gabriola island

bc

AGRICULTURAL PLAN PHASE III

site plan
scale 1" =



LEGEND:

- A. Main House
- B. Commercial Kitchen
- C. Woodwork Shop
- D. Performing Arts Centre
- E. Elder Village
- F. Farm Management Centre
- G. Education Centre (Library)
- H. Co-op Radio & Gabriola Emergency Social Services Centre
- I. Arts & Recreation Studio
- K. Agricultural Fairground & Marketplace
- J. Memorial Skateboard Park