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## Diversity given a thumbs up

June 13, 2008

Over the past five years Bowen Island has grown twice as fast as the rest of the region with a growth rate of 14 per cent, compared to a GVRD growth of seven per cent. According to the Bowen Island Housing Needs Assessment, compiled by Eberle Planning and Research and presented to Bowen Island Municipal council in May, 2007, Bowen is likely to experience continued strong population growth, but very few rental units are available at any given time, and prices are high and rising. The report also says that 40 per cent of on-island employers have experienced difficulty hiring the staff necessary to run their businesses due to the lack of affordable housing.

The needs assessment identified approximately 100 renter and owner households on fixed or very low incomes who need housing with rent levels that reflect their ability to pay. Renters with low to moderate incomes who need housing at the low end of market rental prices were estimated to be around 200 households.

The report concluded by recommending that an affordable housing strategy be developed. In September, 2007 a Bowen Island Affordable Housing Strategy was presented to council by the Affordable Housing Task Force. It recommended that council "act immediately and take steps to leverage affordable housing through the development and rezoning process by ... working with developers."

Council struck an Affordable Housing Working Group and hired consultant Tim Wake to assist the group and municipal staff to produce an Affordable Housing Policy.

On Monday, June 9 at the policy was presented to and approved by council. Of primary importance, according to Councillor David Hocking, is that new developments will be encouraged to include 15 percent of gross floor area as affordable housing. Drafts of covenants for affordable housing as well as the policy can be viewed on the municipal website at [www.bimbc.ca](http://www.bimbc.ca) and clicking on the 'Events' link on the home page.

AFWG chair Elizabeth Ballantyne issued a statement to the Undercurrent following the meeting on behalf of the group. "We are delighted that council adopted the Affordable Housing Policy without delay. Having the policy in place introduces a new value into the development process on Bowen. In future, development must take into account what many consider a core island community value – Bowen's social diversity. In practical terms, what that means is that we will have no more homogeneous developments that are affordable to only a small minority of Bowen residents. In future, development must take into account what many consider a core island community value – Bowen's social diversity. We will be able to produce housing to meet the needs of people with moderate incomes, including young families seeking a first home and people who work on Bowen and would like to make it a permanent home."