

## A truly Golden opportunity for change

by Cleo Corbett

How do you protect what makes a community unique, special, and feel like home to the people who live there? What makes residents proud of where they live? What do citizens want to see changed for the betterment of all?

Last year, the Town of Golden asked these difficult questions-in places you'd never expect: coffee klatches, a skate night for families, and a jam night for local musicians. Residents' answers contributed to the development of a new Official Community Plan (OCP), which aims to protect what they said they value by setting a vision for future growth and change (for more information about community plans see the end of the story).

In developing its new OCP, the town of Golden used a grassroots process involving a public steering committee and extensive public consultation. Many events were held in the spring of 2007, with more than 1,200 area residents being contacted. Creative and fun opportunities for public input included a family skating party, a jam session for local music-lovers, open houses, and even input tables outside local grocery stores. The town hired co-op students from College of the Rockies to design and host the events. Students from Malaspina University also helped educate the public about the OCP and promoted the various events. The students' energy and passion was remarkable.

The steering committee included 20 residents representing diverse backgrounds and ages (from 12 to 80 plus years). They met often in 2007 and discussed many important issues facing the community. "Participating in Golden's OCP Steering Committee has been exciting and engaging

### Grassroots input key to Golden's new OCP



**Tamika Nagao (left) and Michaela Dunn attended an OCP workshop for children at Lady Grey Elementary School. They were very interested to see where they live as pictured on an Ortho map.**



**College of the Rockies students Adrienne Daniel (left) and Alison Perrin designed and implemented the events that provided opportunities for public input to the OCP planning process.**

because I have been able to learn more about community issues while implementing something tangible for a community I love," noted one committee member. "What is most exciting to me about the OCP is the marriage of a progressive vision of our community's future with the tools to bring it to life."

The most senior member of the committee described the process as follows: "To me, the most remarkable thing on the OCP process was how passionate the participants felt about their community. Not only the committee members, but all Golden residents who took the time to give input. Even though there were strong differences of opinion, the process helped to bring the people of Golden together in making collective decisions about the future. And for participants to see their input reflected in the final document gives them a sense of pride and accomplishment in their community."

The youngest member of the committee was truly a superstar, continually reminding the group of what the planning process was all about. During one heated discussion between committee members about standards for development and provincial minimum requirements, the young member said, "But Golden's better than the minimum." This became some members' tag line throughout the process.

Golden's new OCP is an extremely important document that will guide all future land uses and development regulations. It is also a progressive document that pushes the boundaries of community planning by targeting the social, cultural, environmental, and economic needs of current and future generations.

The document includes four main parts, and was structured for easy use by the public, private, civic, and academic sectors.

The **Background** section contains information on climate, ecology, wildlife management, community, trends, industry, culture, demographics, economy, tourism and green space. It also includes data on the physical, social, and regional context of Golden.

The **Vision** section outlines how both the town council and the steering committee envision Golden's future. It also speaks to the desired direction for social, cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability.

The **Plan** outlines the goals and objectives identified during the public process, and the policies proposed to achieve them. The planning team organized and created nine main topic areas including land use, community economic development, transportation, infrastructure, environment, sustainability, housing, health, and quality of life.

The **Implementation** section includes specific design and environmental criteria through the use of Development Permit Areas.

Some highlights from the plan include:

- Requesting 15 percent of any residential development to be affordable (as defined by Golden)
- Trading developers increased density for LEED projects and amenity contributions
- Implementing our own version of smart growth
- Introducing design guidelines that are flexible yet demand good design.

In closing, we are proud to report that our new OCP is a document for the people by the people. Through sustainable community planning and development, Golden is 'Keeping it Real' (another favourite tag line in the OCP document), which is available for review at [www.town.golden.ba](http://www.town.golden.ba).

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## **UNDERSTANDING OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLANS...**

As defined in BC's Local Government Act, an official community plan (OCP) "is a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management, within the area covered by the plan, respecting the purposes of local government."

An OCP "must include statements and map designations for the area covered by the plan respecting the following:

- (a) the approximate location, amount, type and density of residential development required to meet anticipated housing needs over a period of at least 5 years;
- (b) the approximate location, amount and type of present and proposed commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses;
- (c) the approximate location and area of sand and gravel deposits that are suitable for future sand and gravel extraction;
- (d) restrictions on the use of land that is subject to hazardous conditions or that is environmentally sensitive to development;
- (e) the approximate location and phasing of any major road, sewer and water systems;
- (f) the approximate location and type of present and proposed public facilities, including schools, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites;
- (g) other matters that may, in respect of any plan, be required or authorized by the minister."

An OCP must also include "housing policies of the local government respecting affordable housing, rental housing, and special needs housing."

An OCP "may include the following:

- (a) policies of the local government relating to social needs, social well-being and social development;
- (b) a regional context statement, consistent with the rest of the community plan
- (c) policies of the local government respecting the maintenance and enhancement of farming on land in a farming area or in an area designated for agricultural use in the community plan;
- (d) policies of the local government relating to the preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment, its ecosystems and biological diversity."

The act also requires local governments to consult residents during the development of their OCPs and outlines adoption procedures. Once an OCP is adopted as a bylaw, it becomes "official," and all future land-use decisions made by council must reflect the objectives and policies outlined in the plan.

For OCPs to be effective, local governments must implement complementary planning tools such as zoning bylaws, development permits, capital expenditures planning, development cost charges, and subdivision controls.

Intended to be "living" documents, OCPs should be continually adapted to reflect communities' trends and respond to special circumstances. To that end, OCPs are typically reviewed every five years.