A ROADMAP TO INDEPENDENCE:  
the K’ómoks First Nation 
Comprehensive Community Plan and 
Developer Guidelines

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Aweetnakula means “one with the land and sea” in Kwakwaka’wakw (one of the languages spoken by the people of K’ómoks First Nation). This phrase sums up the philosophy and direction of future development in K’ómoks territory, which has grown from the relationship we have had with the lands and sea since time immemorial, building on the past and developing a roadmap to new opportunities. Building upon this philosophy, the K’ómoks First Nation has taken a proactive approach to planning, which has included an award-winning Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) as well as the creation of a Developer Guidelines and Protocols booklet. This article outlines the approach that has been taken by the K’ómoks First Nation to ensure that the bountiful relationship with their land continues.

Community and Context

K’ómoks First Nation is located on the east coast of Vancouver Island. The Traditional Territory reaches across the Salish Sea and over the middle of Vancouver Island. Members of the Nation have lived on these lands and by these waters since time immemorial. The Nation first entered into the Treaty Process almost 20 years ago as a member of the Hamatla Treaty Society. However, after much negotiation, K’ómoks First Nation (KFN) decided in 2008 to negotiate with the provincial and federal governments independently and since then KFN has moved from Stage 1 to Stage 4 of the process. Conclusion is anticipated in 2017.

A Comprehensive Community Plan

As part of this latter Treaty Process, K’ómoks First Nation initiated a wide-ranging planning initiative in 2011. The process was needed because there were many decisions needing to be made on land acquisitions and other Treaty related issues, and these decisions had far-reaching implications for the Nation’s future. Also, the surrounding governments were seeking the Nation’s involvement in a regional growth strategy, and new opportunities for partnerships and involvement in infrastructure decisions were potential outcomes of this process.

From the beginning, community members were clear in their expectations of the Community Comprehensive Plan and Process. With their guidance, four core messages were developed that shaped the structure and contents of the Plan:

• Build on the past: Traditional knowledge and the information from past reports, studies, and planning projects were incorporated into the Plan.
• Include everyone: Members both home and away were included in all aspects of the Plan process. Extensive use of social media and the community website ensured everyone stayed up to date on the Plan.
• Watch the horizon: Community members noted KFN is affected by forces on local, regional, provincial, national and even global scales.
• Take action: K’ómoks First Nation members supported turning ideas into concrete, measurable actions.

Over two years, the Planning Team conducted a wide range of community consultation initiatives that were tailored to the community, including BIGs (Barbeques in the Garden), CALMs (CCP and Lands Meetings), KISSs (K’ómoks Information Strategy Sessions), FLIEs (Fun-Filled Land Information Events), as
well as social media outreach, interactive mapping sessions, language lessons, ‘quick facts’ posters, newsletters, presentations, and the creation of “I’m part of the Plan!” carry bags, keychains, notebooks, and removable tattoos.

The Plan process provided the opportunity to hire members as Community Planners and to include members in other parts of the process. Three young people, Alanna Mitchell, Josh Frank, and Pauline Engish were hired to bring new perspectives to the development of the Plan, and Pam Mitchell, a community member and artist, developed the logo for the Planning Project which represents the four families of the K’ómoks First Nation. In addition, youth were involved in the making of a CCP video (available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DawiNxbM14) as a way to bring the story of the CCP to life.

Now complete, the CCP is a reference document that helps the community set priorities for people, finances, and land uses. The final document is titled K’ómoks First Nation Comprehensive Community Plan Version 1.0. This shows that the plan is a “living document” that will be amended as new opportunities are developed by or presented to the community. Keeping the Plan as an amendable document recognizes that changes are on the horizon and ensures that the Plan will always remain current.

Developer Guidelines and Protocols Booklet

New opportunities bring new challenges. The external development community recognized early on that K’ómoks First Nation is a significant player in the local economy, and the

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selection of suitable development partners is a critical part of the Plan’s success.

Following the CCP process, there was an identification of a need for a document that communicates the community’s vision, goals, and ideas on what constitutes culturally appropriate development for K’ómoks First Nation. The desire was to have a document that could be distributed to prospective development partners, and that would be a primer for these partners to utilize in conjunction with consultation with K’ómoks First Nation.

Resulting from an illuminating engagement and brainstorming process focused on how development should be undertaken on K’ómoks land, the K’ómoks First Nation Developer Guidelines and Protocols booklet outlines the values and goals that the Nation has with respect to future development. It also, crucially, includes recommendations on processes and protocols for engaging in productive, respectful, and meaningful discussions regarding development on K’ómoks First Nation land.

The Guidelines outline the preferences and expectations with respect to how buildings are sited within the landscape, the overall preferred design aesthetic, how interior spaces are typically used and therefore how they should be designed, how to design landscapes that honor local ecosystems, expectations regarding the use of natural materials, the preferred color palette to use, and desires regarding the incorporation of local art. It is meant to be a ‘first stop’ document for prospective developers to read and reflect upon before proposing any development projects with K’ómoks First Nation administration. The intention is to be more efficient of the Nation’s time, and to reduce misunderstanding and wasted time with developers that do not understand or respect K’ómoks culture and values.

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) adopted a Regional Growth Strategy in 2014. There were ongoing discussions with KFN as the Strategy was drafted as to KFN’s inclusion in the Plan. One option was full partnership as a signatory to the Plan, which would trigger the need for a Regional Context Statement and full adherence to the Plan, as well as KFN’s participation in the Regional District’s Board of Directors as a voting member. However, given that the Treaty process was underway and the relationship between KFN and local governments required additional discussion, the Nation opted to limit...
K’ómoks First Nation (cont’d)

recognition in the Strategy to existing Reserve Lands and to work with the CVRD on text references throughout the Plan. Some of these references speak to future actions that will be taken by the CVRD and KFN, including the drafting of a Regional Growth Strategy Implementation Agreement. That project is currently underway.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

At the conclusion of the Treaty Process, K’ómoks First Nation will be one of the largest landowners in the Comox Valley. The CCP has become the guiding document for decision-making, bringing community issues forward for consideration by Chief and Council. The Developer Guidelines will provide additional guidance and informational value to prospective development partners in the future.

The CCP process opened a wide range of new mentorship and sharing opportunities among many First Nations in BC. Staff from Musqueam First Nation and Tsawwassen First Nation were wonderfully generous in sharing their own Comprehensive Community Plans with K’ómoks Community Planners. The K’ómoks Planning Team has worked diligently to share their experiences with other Nations embarking on planning projects. This openness has been one of the most successful aspects of the project.

As Chief Rob Everson noted at the March 2013 People’s Assembly: “Comprehensive Community Planning is a new way to make decisions as a community and to move forward as one. This Comprehensive Community Plan presents many opportunities for K’ómoks First Nations for prosperity through the use and protection of our lands, and through the development of new programs and services for our people. We stand before a bright future!”
Thank-you's

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