

**DATE:** January 31, 2024

**FILE:** 6500-30/Comox and 6500-40/Comox

**TO:** Chair and Directors  
Electoral Areas Services Committee

**FROM:** James Warren  
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by James Warren,  
Chief Administrative Officer  
**J. Warren**

**RE: Town of Comox Referral – 1966 Guthrie Road**

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**Purpose**

To respond to the Town of Comox (Comox) referral on a proposed Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw amendment for a multi-unit residential/commercial development that is adjacent to Lazo North (Electoral Area B) (Area B).

**Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:**

THAT this staff report, dated January 31, 2024, be provided to the Town of Comox in response to a referral relating to a proposed mixed-use, multi-residential development at Lot A, Section 77, Comox District, Plan 86498, PID 027-869-067 (1966 Guthrie Road).

**Executive Summary**

- A referral from Comox was received for an OCP and Zoning Bylaw amendment application.
- The application proposes a mixed-use, multi-family development including 205 rental units and approximately 1,400 square metres of commercial floor area on the eastern portion of the property at 1966 Guthrie Road. The westerly portion of the property is developed for commercial use. The site of the proposed development is adjacent to properties in Area B to the east and north.
- Provided is an overview of the proposal and staff’s comments relating to transportation (including active and public transportation), housing supply and affordable housing, the residential/agricultural interface, landscaping, rainwater management, and servicing infrastructure.
- Staff recommend that this report be forwarded to staff at the Comox as a response to the referral.

Prepared by:

Concurrence:

Concurrence:

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**Government and Community Interests Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)**

Town of Comox	✓
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### **Background/Current Situation**

The referral from Comox for a proposed development on the property at 1966 Guthrie Road (Figures 1 and 2) is adjacent to properties in Area B to the north and east. The subject property is approximately 2.7 hectares in size and is zoned C3.1 (Arterial Commercial) under Comox's Zoning Bylaw No. 1850. Most of the property (1.6 hectares) is already developed with commercial uses, though approximately 1.1 hectares of the easternmost part of the property remains undeveloped, which is the site of the proposed development. The proposed development requires several applications to Comox, including:

- Subdivision to subdivide the undeveloped 1.1 hectares from the remainder of the property;
- OCP amendment to change the land use designation and the development permit area map to capture mixed-use commercial-residential on the eastern (undeveloped) portion of the property;
- Rezoning to create a comprehensive development zone tailored for the proposed development;
- Development Variance Permit to allow the proposed development on proposed Lot 2 to be serviced via proposed Lot 1.

The proposed development includes 205 rental units and approximately 1,400 square metres of commercial floor area in a six-storey building (Figures 3 - 5). The proposal also includes 35 surface parking stalls, 178 underground parking stalls, rainwater management infrastructure, and servicing infrastructure.

Per Section 475(2) of the *Local Government Act* (RSBC, 2015, C. 1) (LGA), when a local government is considering an amendment to its OCP, it must consider opportunities for consultation with several affected groups, including the board of the regional district in which the area covered by the plan is located. This report is being brought to the Electoral Areas Services Committee given this LGA requirement, as well as the size and scope of the proposed development.

### **Planning Analysis**

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) being the "Comox Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 120, 2010," designates the subject property as being within a Municipal Area. However, the RGS does not provide further direction on where growth should be concentrated *within* Municipal Areas. The proposed location is in the immediate vicinity of a major intersection (Anderton Road/Guthrie Road), a number of commercial businesses, and some higher density residential developments.

CVRD Comments: Staff's comments are informed by an understanding of applicable plans and bylaws as well as comments provided by various affected CVRD departments, the Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission (AAPC), and the Advisory Planning Commission (APC) for Area B. The comments focus on landscaping and rainwater management, active and public transportation, housing needs, the residential/agricultural interface, and servicing requirements.

Landscaping and Rainwater: The Town of Comox's guidelines for the Mixed-Use Commercial-Residential development permit area require that all areas not covered by buildings, structures, driveways, or parking areas be landscaped. Permeable landscaping decreases the amount of impervious surface area, which helps manage rain and stormwater onsite. A stormwater management plan has been prepared which requires a bioswale capable of storing 459 cubic metres based on a 1-in-100 year storm event, though this is based on calculations for the entire development site except the 15 metre landscaped buffer between the proposal and the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) property and some proposed pathways – “the entire proposed development will be controlled other than the ALR [setback] buffer as well as some pathways south of the new Building 1 which will continue to drain per the existing drainage paths towards the Agricultural Land Reserve.” Staff want to ensure that this would not result in an increase in volume or change in timing of the flows from pre-development conditions, but strongly encourage Comox to ensure that all rainwater and stormwater is managed onsite in ways that account for climate change and increasingly frequent and severe storm events.

Transportation: The applicant's design rationale (Appendix A) references working with Watt Consulting to “analyze parking and traffic requirements/patterns and provide alternate means (bicycle use, public transit)” for transportation; staff encourage Comox to ensure the traffic assessment includes impacts within the adjacent areas of Electoral Area B (i.e. consider a transportation network that transcends political boundaries).

Active Transportation: Staff note the amount of bike storage on site, as well as a bike repair and wash area, but encourage the development of a protected multi-use path along Guthrie Road to further increase the accessibility of active transportation options. This would align with a regional project outlined in the [Comox Valley Active Transportation Network Plan Implementation Strategy](#).

Public Transportation: Given the significant arterial connections provided by Anderton Road and Guthrie Road with bus stops near the intersection, improved bus shelters would be supported by policies 4A-5 and 7A-6 of the RGS if an opportunity exists for these upgrades.

Housing: The proposed development will contain 205 rental units, 10 per cent of which (20 units) will meet the Province of BC's Adaptable Housing Standards for increased accessibility. Staff note the documented need for more purpose-built rental housing in the region, as well as a range of unit sizes to meet the needs of different individuals or families, noting that many are included in the proposal (from studio apartments to three-bedroom apartments). However, ensuring that a certain proportion are rented at below-market rates is necessary in order to support Comox Valley residents during the housing crisis. Staff note that an [introductory report](#) on the proposal to Comox Town Council indicates that no affordable housing contributions are proposed, and strongly encourage the Town to require the provision of affordable housing units or contributions per the Town's Affordable Housing Amenity Contribution Policy. The [Regional Housing Needs Assessment](#) highlights a need for more subsidized and non-market rental housing, noting

that “the private market is not able to provide housing for a significant proportion of the Comox Valley.”

Residential/Agricultural Interface: Both the [CVRD OCP](#), and the [RGS](#) have policies that encourage natural or landscaped buffers between residential development and agricultural land. The CVRD’s Farmland Protection Development Permit Area guidelines also suggest a minimum 15.0 metre landscaped buffer when building a structure on a lot that is adjacent to land in the ALR. The Development Permit Area (DPA) guidelines do not apply to this development as the development is not within the CVRD’s jurisdiction, but the proposed development does feature a 15.0 metre vegetated buffer along both lot lines that are adjacent to ALR land. The AAPC was supportive of the proposal because of the 15.0 metre landscaped buffer and a commitment from the developer to have tenants acknowledge in writing the differences that living next to an active farm operation can bring (e.g. odour, noise).

Servicing Infrastructure: The Comox Valley Water System (CVWS) water master plan currently underway will confirm the capacity of existing regional water transmission systems and projects that may be needed to accommodate growth. CVRD staff will work closely with Comox staff to ensure that development projections are up to date and that specific water conservation measures will be implemented to minimize the cost of infrastructure to the community and limit the impact on local aquatic ecosystems. The proposed development will incur CVWS and Comox Valley Sewerage System (CVSS) development cost charges (DCCs), to be collected by Comox and transferred to the CVRD, and staff note that a study is underway to update the CVSS DCC bylaw and rates.

**Options**

1. Authorize staff to provide this report, as well as any public correspondence received about the proposal, to the Town of Comox as a response to the referral staff have received for the proposal at 1966 Guthrie Road.
2. Direct an alternative response.
3. Provide no comment to the Town of Comox.

Staff recommend Option 1.

**Financial Factors**

Resources spent on the referral review come from the Function 500 electoral areas planning service budget for staff time.

Strategic Considerations - Strategic Drivers							
Fiscal Responsibility		Climate Crisis and Environmental Stewardship and Protection		Community Partnerships	✓	Indigenous Relations	Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**Community Partnerships:** The LGA requires a municipality to consider consultation with the applicable regional district when considering an amendment to its OCP. Referrals from member municipalities allow the CVRD to provide comments and recommendations based on CVRD policies and impacts on regional services (e.g. transit, solid waste) for consideration during Comox’s review process. This will promote a regionally aware approach to development and increase community partnerships.

Strategic Considerations - Regional Growth Strategy Goals							
Housing	✓	Ecosystems, Natural Areas and Parks	✓	Local economic development		Transportation	✓
Infrastructure	✓	Food Systems		Public Health and Safety	✓	Climate Change	✓

The proposal is related to several objectives, policies, and goals. A more fulsome discussion is provided above in the Planning Analysis section under “CVRD Comments,” but applicable objectives include:

- 1-B: Increase affordable housing options.
- 1-D: Minimize the public costs of housing (e.g. servicing).
- 2-B: Frame environmental protection and policies around the principles of precaution, connectivity, and restoration.
- 4-A: Increase public transit use.
- 4-B: Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to increase the use of active transportation options.
- 5-C: Manage stormwater to preserve ecosystem and watershed health.
- 7-A: Increase the number of pedestrians and cyclists in the Comox Valley.
- 8-B: Reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions created by the on-road transportation sector.

**Intergovernmental Factors**

Pending consideration by this Committee, staff will be providing this report to Comox staff as a response to the submitted referral for 1966 Guthrie Road.

**Citizen/Public Relations**

Any public correspondence received by the CVRD regarding the proposed development will be provided to Comox for their consideration. The proposal was also sent to the AAPC and the Area B APC. Both advisory planning commissions were supportive of the proposal due to the landscaped buffer between the building and the farming properties, a commitment from the developer to have tenants acknowledge in writing the differences that living next to an active farm operation can come with (e.g. odour, noise), and that more housing options are needed throughout the Comox Valley.

Attachments:           Appendix A – Design Rationale for 1966 Guthrie Road

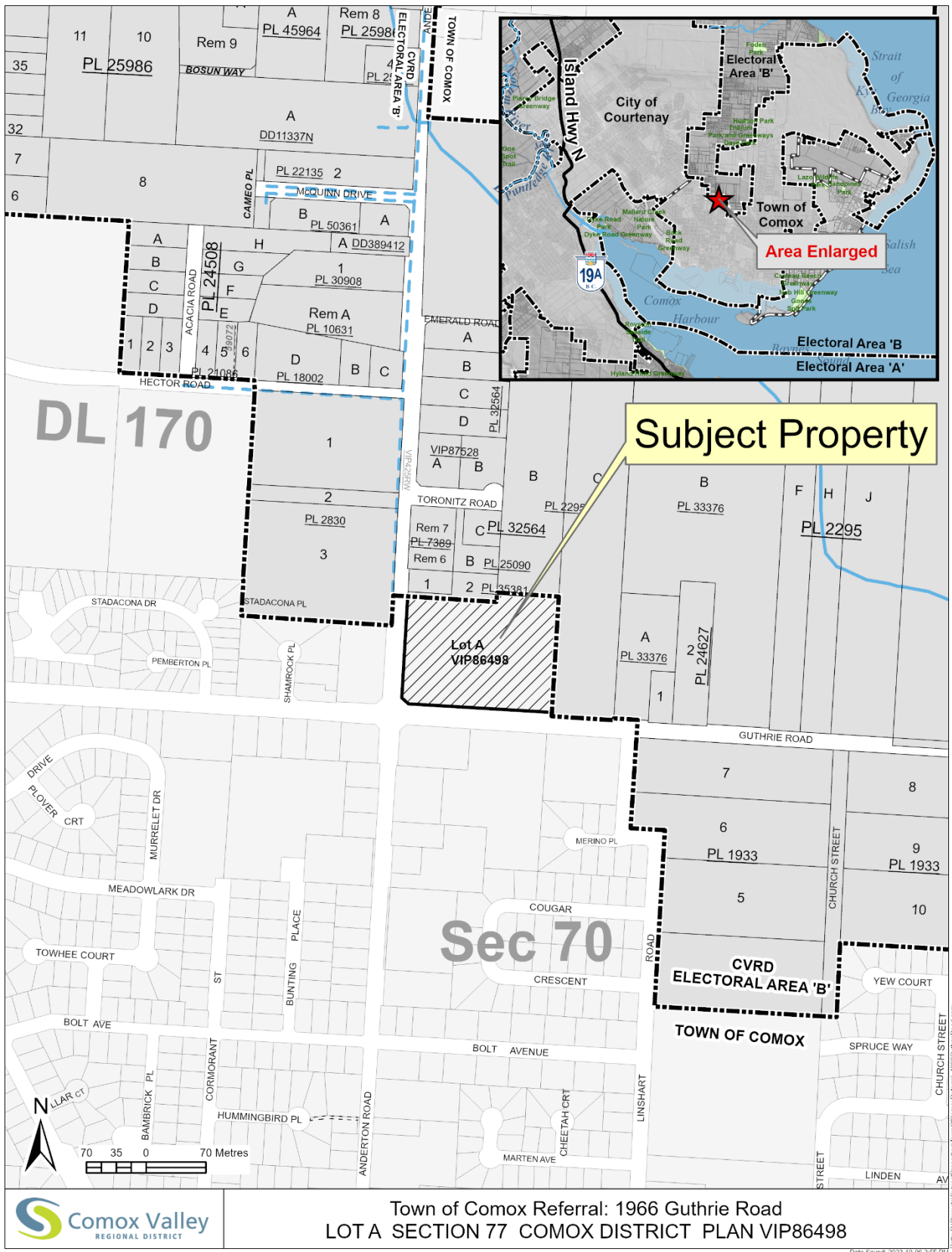


Figure 1: Subject Property Map

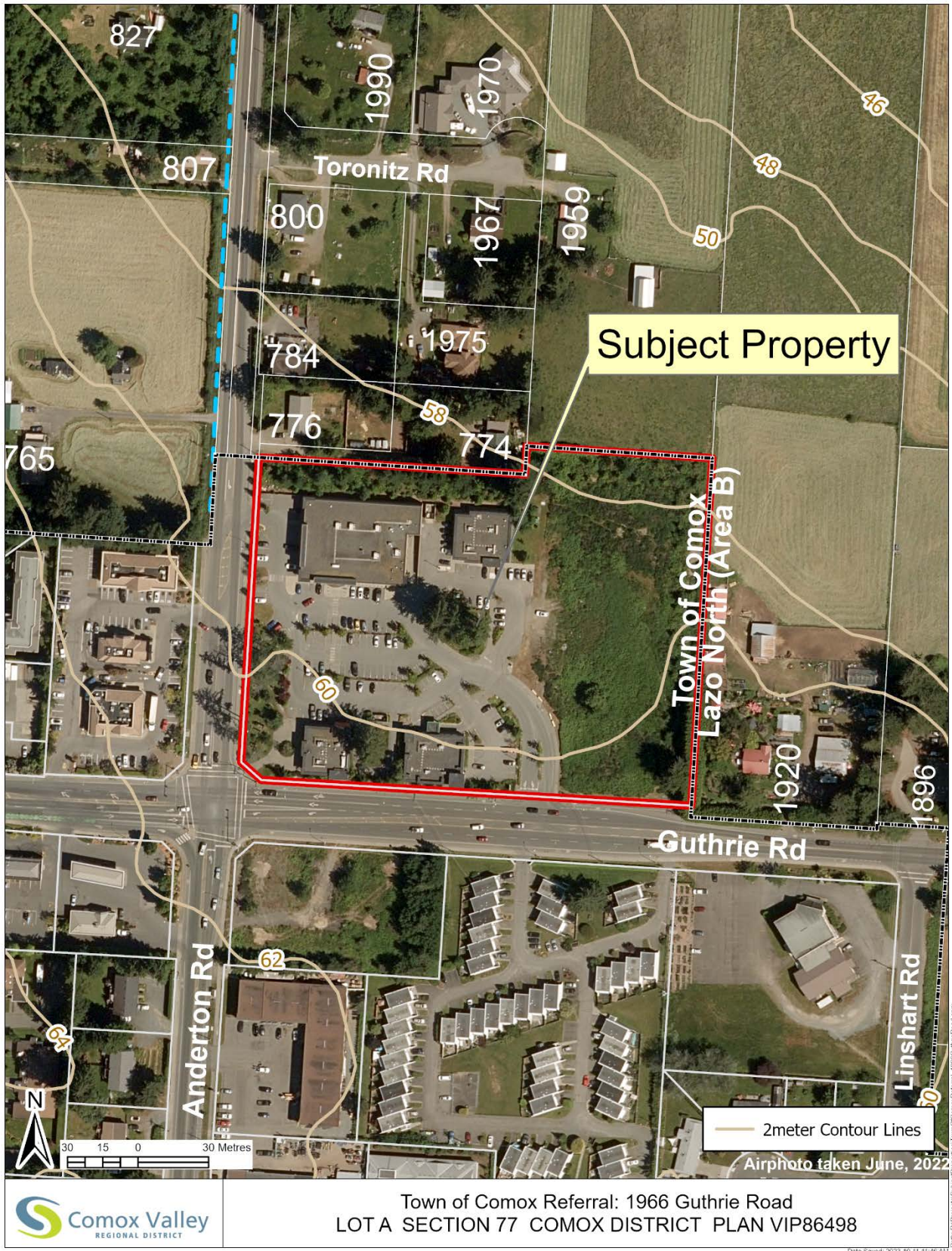


Figure 2: Aerial Image



**Figure 3: Rendering, Viewed from Guthrie Road (from South East)**



**Figure 4: View from Proposed ALR Buffer (from North East)**



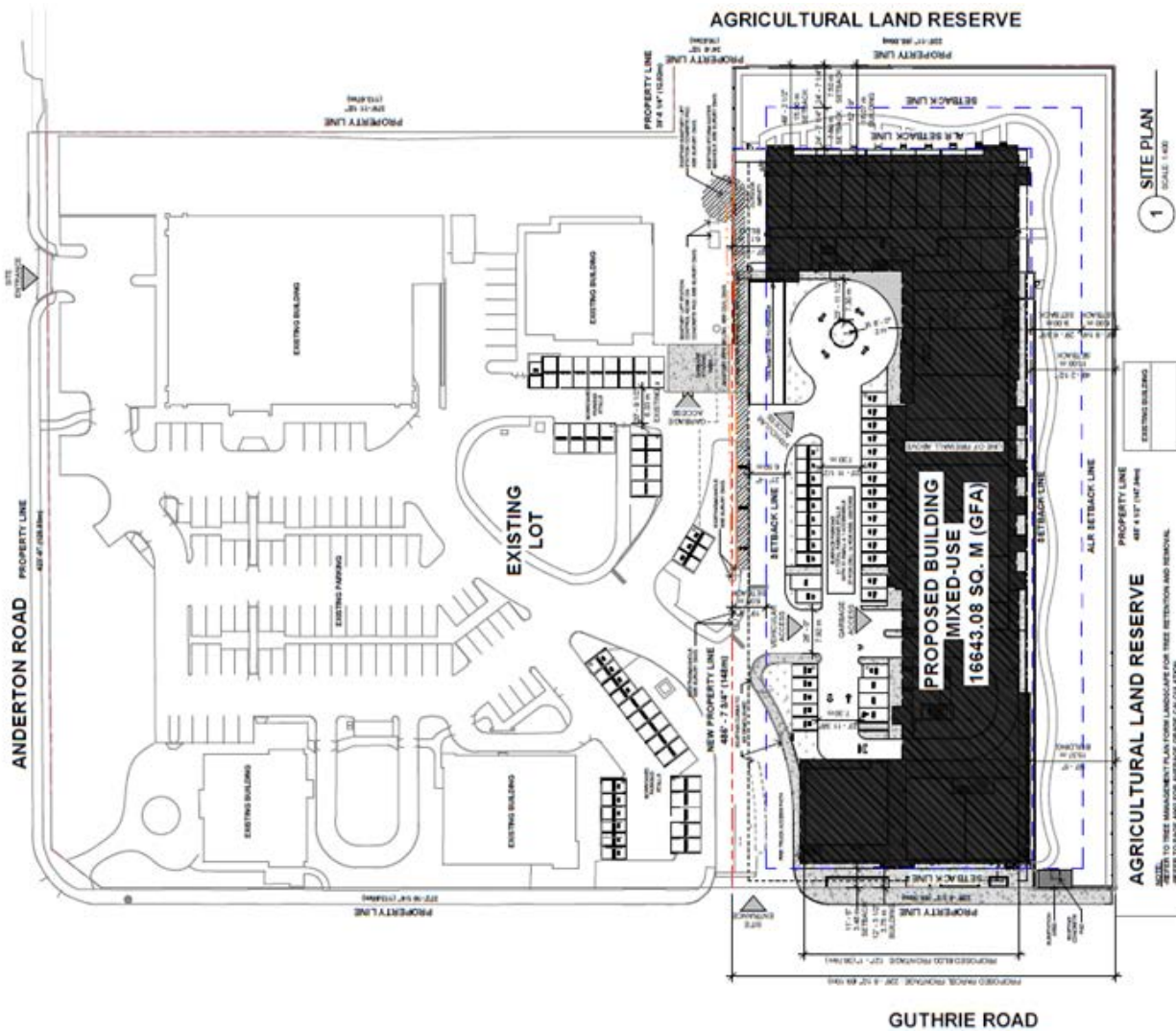


Figure 5: Site Plan



Aug 31st, 2023

## DESIGN RATIONALE

1966 Guthrie Road Mixed Use, Comox, BC

Project: #21005

*The Design team of this project respectfully acknowledges that the land on which we propose to build these homes is on the Unceded traditional territory of the K'òmoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.*

WA Architects Ltd.

### | PRINCIPALS

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**We are building communities.**

### Site Context

This proposed mixed-use residential development is located at the intersection of Anderton Road and Guthrie Road in the Township of Comox. Located between agricultural lands (ALR) along the North and East property lines and Highland Village shopping centre immediately to the West, it is a short distance from many of the Township's shops, recreational facilities, businesses, schools and parks. Multi-family and single family lots populate the areas South and South West of this property. It has a great walkability score and is immediately adjacent to dedicated bike lanes and public transit. This makes it an ideal location for residential development.

### Land Use

The current use of the lot is commercial. There are 4 existing CRUs on Anderton roadside (Shoppers, Subway, Bank, Medical / Care buildings), and a vacant area on the other side. Our development takes place in the vacant area and offers a mixed use residential commercial program. A subdivision is proposed to make a clear separation between the existing and the proposed programs.

### Adequate infrastructure

With the help of a team of qualified professional, we established that the existing utilities, routes, and walkways were suitable for our proposal.

### Project Statistics and Programming

Highland Village Residence will consist of one six (6) storey mix-use building containing 205 purpose-built rental units over 15,000 sf of ground floor commercial space. This development proposes approximately 140,000 sf of residential area, comprised of 18% Studio, 54% 1-bedroom, 12% 2-bedroom, 7% 2-bedroom plus den, 4% 3-bedroom, and 5% Live/Work Lofts. Parking for both commercial and residential components will be provided through a combination of surface and below-grade structured parking. A 15m (49 ft) landscaped buffer separates the proposed building from the agricultural lands along the North and East facades.

The organization of commercial and residential uses was carefully considered. Commercial retail use was located along Guthrie Road for street-front activation while the upper residential floors are set back to visibly reduce massing and keep the frontage at a pedestrian scale. The ground floor residential components would be located along the quieter North side of the development away from traffic.

We chose to support an active lifestyle by encouraging bike-use and showcasing two large secure bicycle centres prominently adjacent to the main residential lobby. No more small bicycle storage in the furthest corner of an underground parkade.



Commercial and residential uses are further separated by a wide breezeway connecting the residential lobby with the lush, landscaped buffer along the East property line. Entrance to the underground parkade is located at the North West corner of the building adjacent to one of the building's indoor and outdoor amenity spaces.

To encourage a café or coffee shop, a prominent corner retail space along Guthrie was equipped with drive-through service and an outdoor patio space. The drive-through was strategically located to minimize visual impact to the neighbourhood and future residence of this development.

A generous 15m landscape strip along the North and East sides of the property provides a significant buffer to shield agricultural lands from this proposed development. This landscaped buffer is divided into two zones; a 6m (20ft) restricted area and a 9m (29 ft) zone designed with an undulating gravel path connecting Guthrie to the North facing live/work loft units. We have provided 2,450 sq. ft of outdoor amenity space that will accommodate BBQ areas and a community garden. Additional indoor and outdoor amenities are provided on the second floor above the commercial units along Guthrie Road.

### **Amendment and Variances requested.**

#### Parking Amendment (Toc Zoning bylaw 1850 – 6.15)

The proposal meets the residential 177 permanent residential parking stalls in a secured underground parking, using the bylaw reduction of 28 stalls with providing all the minimum bike stalls required. To meet the residential parking visitor need, the proposal offers 11 surface parking stalls, and is asking for an amendment for the 40 remaining stalls to be able to share with existing retail complex in parking excess, through a parking covenant. The proposal meets the commercial/retail parking requirements with 27 surface parking stalls and one loading stall.

#### Building height Variance (Toc Zoning bylaw 1850 – 305.8)

To accommodate a six-storey mixed use development, our proposed max building height is 24m and would require a variance. The proposed building height is limited to 10m in the current zoning.

#### Servicing Variance (ToC Subdivision & Development servicing Bylaw 1261)

We worked closely with a qualified team of civil engineers to determine that the existing utilities were suitable for both existing and proposed programs. Our proposal is requesting a variance to allow the existing servicing to be shared between the two sites after subdivision.

### **Form and Character**

To be consistent with the Land Use change, our proposal requires a change of Development permit zone from DPA #5 (commercial: neighbourhood) to DPA #4 (Mixed use: commercial / residential). Our design complies to the DPA #4 requirement.

We chose a West-coast Contemporary aesthetic with large varying sizes of balconies, generous roof overhangs and a modern palette of colours and material. From the early stages of design, we recognize the need to reduce the visual massing of this proposed structure. We started with a series of solid ground floor elements (commercial arches) that would march along the length of the building creating solid and void spaces. This served to emphasize the commercial programming, create a covered shopping experience, and separate the upper residential use from the predominantly commercial pedestal.



By stepping the second level back from the brick base, it allowed us visual separation of the upper floors and provided a continuous privacy screen for the residential units above. This technique was further utilized at either end of the building to present a pedestrian scale façade and reduce the overall size of the building along Guthrie Road and at the indoor amenity space along the North end of the building.

By introducing white residential blocks of varying width and height, we were able to breakdown the length of the building and create relief along its façade. Inset stacked balconies juxtaposed against cantilevered random ones served to further create the illusion of separate buildings and a unique skyline running across the length of this structure. The white element only breaks through the brick commercial base to the ground where we identify the residential character of lobby. The top floor is also set back to further reduce the impact of the six floors.

We identified any area we could to add planters and landscape nodes so as to provide visual interest and break up the continuity of the surface parking areas. A round-about driveway with central planter and tree identifies and separates the residential portion of this development from the commercial.

The design team held our first Public Information Meeting back in January 25th, 2021 and a second one in March 29th, 2023. We heard your comments and have responded as follows:

Views, Noise and Privacy Concerns – being surrounded by ALR and landscape buffer along two sides and a commercial development and Guthrie Road on the other two has allowed for significant separation between this proposed development and all residential developments around. Additionally, we have orientated the building massing so that the smallest cross section of the building faces directly onto Guthrie Road.

Parking and Traffic Concerns – We are working with WATT Consulting Group to analyze parking and traffic requirements/patterns and provide alternate means (bicycle use, public transit) to reduce the impact of the added density.

Protection of Environment/Farm/Water – We are working closely with Grade Consulting Inc. (Civil Engineers) and Mystic Woods Landscape Design to have a comprehensive storm management strategy to retain and control rainwater runoff and ensure the development service demands on the township's infrastructure meets all required levels and rates.

### **Community Benefits amenities**

20 units (10% of the total proposed) have been designed to meet the city adaptable housing standards. An Affordable housing letter is submitted with the application to outline the measures provided. This project is also being design along Step 3 Sustainability requirements to ensure we meet responsible environmental mandates.

### **Regional growth context strategy**

This community is growing. Studies and reports show the need to construct many new homes in the coming years to meet the demand of a vibrant economically strong centre, including the workers and families of CFB 19 Wing Comox who are challenged to find appropriate housing close to the Base. We welcome your feedback and look forward to working with you and the Township to create homes and places of business.

WA Architects Ltd.