



Community Summary Report #3

Location: Sooke, British Columbia

Partner Name: Alysha Jones (co-chair Intersectionality and Truth and Reconciliation Committee, Canadian Association of Nurses for the Environment & member of the District of Sooke's Climate Action Committee)

Green Resilience Project Community Summary Report (Sooke)

Community Partner:

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1. Introduction

A. Summary

Key takeaways from the Community Summary Report:

"We're dealing with a little town that didn't develop smartly, in practical terms" (Conversation Participant).

Primary concerns of Sooke community members:

- Rapid pace of growth and development in Sooke and loss of carbon sinks and small-town culture
- Narrative of Sooke now as a bedroom commuter community for Victoria; social and environmental costs of traffic and commuting
- Fragile self-sufficiency and inadequate infrastructure
- Need for good planning, emergency preparedness, food security, local economic development, and job creation
- Need for green affordable housing innovation and co-op housing, active transportation, and public transportation infrastructure
- Emphasis on belief in the power of the municipal government to effect change for social and environmental health

B. About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security, and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community's conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing

findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the Green Resilience Project is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The Project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenu de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts and local partners

C. About the Community Partner organization

Alysha participated in the Green Resilience Project through her work with both CANE and the DoS CAC. Alysha has advocated for a Climate Justice lens for Sooke's Climate Action Plan and is in the process of creating a community-based Climate Justice Advisory Group. She sees income security and affordability as key issues within Climate Justice discourse and policy development.

D. Why this community was selected to have a conversation



Sooke is a rapidly changing community in the Territory of the T'Sou-ke Nation, a true leader in green energy community development. Sooke's ecology is remarkable, with a great river system, basin, and protected forested hills. Once a forestry and fishing town, the population has increased by about 15% in the past several years, and the one artery into the community is

clogged with traffic. “Sooke is a sprawl community that developed along the highway, was resource-based, and pretty small until recently” (Conversation Participant).

The rising costs of living and unaffordable housing, pressure on ecosystems and loss of carbon sinks and green space, and the intensification of traffic and carbon emissions are increasingly unsustainable and impact the community’s mental health and future.

E. About the conversation participants/F. Community conversation

Four community conversations have taken place in Sooke to date. Participants were invited to the conversations through word of mouth, Facebook, email invitation, several community leaders in Sooke, and a non-profit organization. I (Alysha) reached out to youth, seniors, members of the T’Sou-ke Nation, people who are insecurely housed or experiencing homelessness, small business owners, young families, grocery store and retail workers, and staff at a long-term care facility. It was challenging to successfully recruit from several key informant groups, including the T’Sou-ke Nation, people experiencing homelessness, young families, retail workers and long-term care staff. Given immediate needs, daily life, and rising costs, it is not surprising that people who are more vulnerable to socioeconomic pressures could not afford the time to engage with this project. Additionally, the T’Sou-ke Nation are green leaders in the Sooke region, providing mentorship for other Indigenous Nations. T’Sou-ke community members are likely very focused on the needs and goals of their community, and rightly so.

Participants included:

- Two youth-focused groups, both in-person, including two and three participants, respectively. Youth were aged between 11 – 17 years old.
- One small focus group of four individuals online via Zoom, including three small business owners and one unemployed individual.
- One large community conversation featuring 16 participants online via Zoom, sent into smaller breakouts of four participants each. Most participants in this group were seniors.

2. What We Heard

A. How are the changes to our community’s environment and economy discussed in the introduction affecting you, your family, or the community as a whole?

Mental Health Impacts

- Participants expressed anger, grief, and anxiety about damage to the land and the intensification of development and traffic; participants expressed concerns, particularly about impacts on youth

- o “A lot of people in our community are bearing mental health challenges as a result of some of these events happening”
- o “I would say a lot of the changes are somewhat traumatic, it’s tough to watch us lose so much of our carbon sink every time you take the highway to Victoria”
- o “Green space is sanity space”
- o “It’s [development in Sooke] dramatically affecting us, it certainly affects our mood and our hopes for the future”
- o “There is a low-grade anxiety that I think was affecting us all pre-COVID, and it’s now bubbling over, I’m seeing a lot of mental health issues certainly with the homeless population”
- o “Sooke had a climate grief workshop series a few years ago”
- o “There’s anger in youth that live here; they say they can’t care about the community because they feel they won’t have a future living in Sooke because it is too expensive”
- o “We need therapy as a community to grieve through this process [loss of green space and agricultural land] and move forward with it because we do love it here and do want to do everything, be positive contributing members”

Fractures in Community Identity and Integrity

- Sooke was historically a logging and fishing community: “it is certainly not that anymore”
- Participants spoke about development and population growth weakening the sense of community integrity in Sooke and well as being highly unsustainable for people and land:
 - o “I think the biggest issue in Sooke, and climate change, is what I’m sure everybody else is saying; we’re new, we’re growing, we’re trying to fight the amount of growth and the way we’re growing. And the way we’re growing is tragic because here we are at a time when we know so much about how you can build and how you can create community, and how you can create neighbourhoods and have sustainable environments and we’re not doing it”
 - o “There are things you can try to do to develop your city in a way that builds connections and community with people; I don’t think that’s being done”
 - o
- Some participants also spoke about a divide between newcomers and people who’ve lived in Sooke a long time; alternatively, one participant talked about a lessening of the divide between newcomers and long-time residents: “they’re coming in with new information, new interests and there’s a vitality that they’re bringing to the community”
- “We’ve lost all the community activities we used to do – probably mostly because of COVID”

Unaffordability in Sooke

- Participants spoke about growing unaffordability resulting in people working more and therefore having less time to work on solutions
 - o “The more threatened we are by the housing market or fear of hyper-inflation and all these factors, the less it seems feasible to be content with less because we’re all struggling to create financial security for our families for the future”
 - o “The more we work, the less time we have to learn to grow food”
 - o “When you have two people, and their life is commuting and working to keep body and soul together...there isn’t as much mutual aid and sharing in a community where lives are taken up with work and commuting”
 - o “We’re under a cycle of more pressure and fewer resources whether it’s time, energy, mental energy, or actual money to invest in solar panels and gardening and all that”
 - o “It would be nice if people were less under pressure to work two jobs or work shitty jobs
 - o “I work out of town because I can’t get a liveable wage job in Sooke”
- Participants spoke about struggling with low income in Sooke:
 - o “All too often people fall through the cracks; some of us are just one health crisis away from absolute [financial] ruin”
 - o “There’s a large clientele for the food bank, and we have a lot of elderly people in Sooke living on a lower income”
 - o Several participants spoke about their adult children working lower-wage jobs in Sooke and struggling to afford the cost of living despite secure housing
- Lack of affordable housing in Sooke:
 - o “It just simply puts us back to the situations where our kids cannot afford even in Sooke; it used to be Sooke was where you could come if you couldn’t afford it in Victoria but not anymore”
 - o The growing population in Sooke has driven up housing costs, making things unaffordable for long-term residents and others seeking housing
 - o “I work with youth, and they have a lot of anxieties, a lot of their families are long-term residents of Sooke, and they are at a crossroads because they can’t afford to live here anymore, can’t afford to pay rent, or the house they’re in isn’t viable for some reason, and then they can’t even afford to move”
 - o “It’s daunting the cost of housing; we have a house we can sell, but we can’t buy another because other homes are even more expensive”

Loss of Agricultural Land

- Development in Sooke is resulting in the loss of critical agricultural lands at a time when food security is a pressing issue and most food imported:

- o “So far, Sooke has not been taking very good care of its agricultural lands. All the best lands run right through the middle of Sooke are all being gobbled up by subdivisions, by single house subdivisions that my kids couldn’t possibly afford”
- o “...as a small community, we have this influx of a huge number of people coming to this area and taking up the little agricultural land we have, and that’s a huge thing”

Water Security

- In the Sooke Region, in some areas (Otter Point, Kemp Lake), people rely on well water – wells are drying up, or the water is of very poor quality
 - o “Some people can’t afford the necessary water filters and UV lights if their wells go bad”
 - o “There are quite a few people out in Otter Point whose wells have gone bad and who are having water trucked in, but a lot of people can’t afford that”

Climate-Induced Extreme Weather Events

- Participants spoke about the worries and concerns regarding forest fires and heatwaves, as well as emergency preparedness
 - o “If there was a major fire and we had to exit, where are we going to go? We’re in-between the ocean and the hills”
 - o “I think we’re very vulnerable in Sooke to fire”
 - o (Youth participant) “when it was scorching in the summer, we got a hotel room for a couple of days with air conditioning because we don’t have it at home”

B. How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

Fragility of Infrastructure

- Sooke lacks self-sufficient and resilient infrastructure in terms of energy, transportation, and food security: Sooke is accessible only via Highway 14 and is mainly dependent on BC’s Mainland for electrical power and energy
- Road closures and blockages impacting Sooke residents due to flooding and other issues are increasing in frequency; and are projected to with climate change
- A lack of robust transportation planning and challenging coastal geography were identified as problems
- Participants noted the fragility/inadequacy of the region’s infrastructure concerning roads/traffic, supplies, and jobs:
 - o ‘With COVID, many people have moved from the cities because it’s more affordable, but as a small community, we’re not ready for it. We don’t have the infrastructure”

- o “We have infrastructure problems and transportation problems, and then the pandemic hits and exacerbates supply chain issues, these aren’t necessarily stemming from climate change but are accelerated by it”
- o (Youth participant) “they’re building a lot of houses in Sooke, but there is no infrastructure, so no jobs to support people who live here, so there’s lots of driving and people can’t make enough money”

Problems of a Commuter Community

- Most participants noted a significant increase in vehicle traffic with more GHG emissions production moving into and out of Sooke, which they attribute to the growth of the Sooke population and commuting; 70% of Sooke residents commute:
 - o “In my experience, I’m driving at 2 pm coming to Sooke from Victoria, and there’s a lot of cars on the road right now”
 - o “Sooke is now well on its way to becoming a commuter suburb of Victoria.... that was not why the people who’ve been here a while came here...but that is very strong part of the picture in my experience over 18 years”
- Participants linked commuting and the undermining of the local economy
 - o “If you’re commuting, not only are you doing a lot of shopping in Victoria, but you may not have time to do a lot of volunteering to help with solutions to climate change”
 - o “Quite often the people I know are working in Victoria, and they also shop in Victoria – so adding a burden to our emissions and there aren’t nearly as many connections happening in Sooke”

Barriers to Solutions

- Participants spoke about how many climate change mitigation strategies were not affordable:
 - o “...a lot of the solutions for climate change are only available to the privileged, like electric cars or rainwater systems
 - o “I own a little Nissan Frontier truck right now. I don’t drive much, but it wouldn’t make sense economically or anything to get an electric car right now.”
 - o “Green energy is great, but that all require an investment up front, which makes it unattainable for many people”
 - o “It’s like saying we should all be driving electric cars, which are priced at a luxury”
- Participants spoke about how the local food growing, a mitigator of climate change and facilitator of the local economy, had barriers:
 - o “It’s even hard to give food to the food bank because they have rules and regulations. We took a whole batch of homegrown, homemade jams and preserves, and they couldn’t take them”

- o “Lots of people want to sell eggs in stores in Sooke but can’t because of regulations”

C. What are some possible solutions to the challenges we’ve discussed that will help the community respond to climate change and create income security for all community members?

Strengthening Community Connections

- Participants spoke about the need to develop community connections (including community centres and parks) but also talked with optimism about what already exists
- Need for shared facilities and shared spaces: “Why don’t we have community rooftop gardens, tool libraries, shared spaces? There are lots of places around the world where those things happen, and we could make them happen by the way we develop”
- A considerable strength of the community is volunteer capacity:
 - o “I don’t think I worked as many hours a day for paid work as we are working volunteering and loving it. And our friends are doing the same thing. It’s a huge community for volunteering and for caring and being friendly, and people will help strangers”

Evidence-Based, Big Picture Thinking

- Rational thinking, evidence-based solutions, common sense, bigger picture view: “Think global, act locally”
 - o “I think it’s important that we educate ourselves about bigger pictures, and then rather than just having a stamp of approval, that we make sure the energy that we’re putting into, and I mean, either emotional or business energy, the financial energy that we’re putting into something, that it has the biggest actual impact for our community at the end of the day.”
 - o “Don’t need to be perfect, but we do need to act decisively”

Simplified Lifestyle

- Many participants spoke about the need to be satisfied with reduced consumption and to find solutions at home:
 - o “We all have to learn to be happy with less”
 - o “We need to consume a lot less and be more thoughtful about what we’re consuming”
 - o “My daughter and her kids are involved in a few groups in town that do clothing swaps, no waste at all and everybody gets a new wardrobe every few months”
 - o “Educate people to have a good think about the huge difference between need and want”

- o “Attitude change by the Sooke community”
- o “Have to move away from the Growth Economy”
- o “I realized why don’t we work with what we’ve got? So, I turned my suburban house into a little permaculture oasis with solar power, greywater irrigation, food gardens...they were such simple solutions but can have a huge impact. I think if we all realize we can take little steps and if everybody takes little steps it’ll make a huge difference”
- o “We need to quit thinking like entitled North Americans like space is endless”

Appreciating Sooke

- Several participants focused on the need to appreciate Sooke, the land, people, and opportunities:
 - o “One of the things I think we could do is change our attitude to appreciate how good it is here in Sooke. You don’t have to run into Victoria all the time or into Langford, to shop. We’ve got everything that you need here. And you don’t have to spend all this money on gas and everything, we’ve got the infrastructure here, we’ve got the arena, we’ve got the Galloping Goose, we’ve got the ocean right here, we’ve got fishing, everything is right here...and it helps with the economy”
 - o “It’s critical for people in Sooke to appreciate what they have, and to have less reliance on zipping into town”

Local Economic Development

- Local economic development was offered as a critical solution to reduce commuting and its associated GHG burden and more:
 - o “A lot of people are interested in working with the local community and trying to make it the best community it can be”
 - o “Cooperative, value-added businesses that might make use of locally harvested resources, so whether that’s sustainable fisheries or local-managed forestry, on that serviced land across the river, maybe we can see some cooperative businesses, some sort of made-in-Sooke branding”
 - o “The tiny home proposal that we’re working on.... we were thinking of putting something commercial on our property as well, and we’re thinking of an art gallery or Laundromat”
- Sooke Council is developing employment lands and cooperative working space in Sooke to stimulate local job creation and local business development
 - o “Well, the Community Economic Development Committee has been looking at a lot of these solutions and localizing our economy, which also means localizing jobs, so people don’t have to go out”
 - o “We’re going to get jobs in Sooke, get people off the road”

- A youth participant noted that improved wages are needed for local job market sustainability: “I think we need a better wage because people aren’t making enough money for it to be worth it”
- Another participant noted a recycling centre had been proposed for Sooke several years ago, with associated cottage industries

Financial Safety Net

- Participants discussed basic income; many were in support, but some had reservations:
 - o “I think it’s a good idea, but then I see what happened with CRB handing out money, and then people felt they didn’t need to work, and now we can’t find people to work...I just don’t know how that is practically going to work in a society that is already taxed quite highly, and our government is going deeper into debt”
 - o “We are fortunate to be on pensions and not to be on again off again COVID workers, so a basic income makes a lot of sense”
 - o “Our society needs a strong safety net instituted sustainably”
 - o “I think a guaranteed minimum income I think is necessary but not enough. So, it isn’t just a guaranteed income that we need, we need much, much higher taxes on corporations so that money goes into the public purse to increase lots of public goods like transit and cooperative housing”

Land Use

- Participants spoke about the need for careful land-use planning and protection of the ALR:
 - o “We have to look at things a bit more holistically with our land-use bodies, because every time the developers are going to go for the places where they can build the houses fastest, which is usually the land that is the flattest and has the best potential for being part of our food security net”

Transportation

- Transportation solutions are a top priority for Sooke residents, who proposed:
 - o Local car share
 - o Active transportation networks: more walkability, enhancing trail connectivity
 - Increasing e-bike infrastructure and incentives (like Saanich)
 - o Improved public transit: rapid transit, more frequent
 - Public transit between Sooke & Port Renfrew
- “Would it be better to put that amount of money that you were going to give those individuals [with basic income] into a transit system so that they don’t have to pay ever when they travel...maybe convert the entire transit system to electric buses

Green Affordable Housing

- Participants emphasized the need for affordable housing to provide protection from extreme weather (and save lives) and have zero emissions and green features:
 - o “Better affordable housing that’s also designed for extreme weather...new affordable housing in Sooke has baseboard heaters but needs heat pumps”
 - o “Some of this low-cost housing their putting in Sooke, during the next heat dome people are probably going to cook, so we need heat pumps funded”
 - o “It must be part of the build, the roof is now a green roof, and you can grow things up there, and that we’re doing more rainwater harvesting and those types of things”
- One youth participant noted: “I think affordable housing is important, but rent control is more important”
- Green Co-op Housing
 - o Multiple participants live in green co-op housing, while another is working on a tiny house co-op housing project
 - o “We need more “trailer parks” and places where people live together where it doesn’t cost so much for a home”

Green Energy for Housing

- Participants were keen to refer to the T’Sou-ke Nation as an example of a green community and for their solar energy leadership; T’Sou-ke is a mentorship community for other Indigenous Nations seeking a just transition
- Municipality of Sooke “should move immediately to Step Six in BC’s Step Code, and I would even push it further than that, to say that you shouldn’t be allowed to build a house without having a rainwater system in it, metal roof, ad preferably solar panels”

Localize and Diversify Food Production

- Participants spoke strongly about the need for enhanced local food security both in terms of growing food at home, in schools, and via agricultural technologies like vertical farming:
 - o “I believe a community shouldn’t be any bigger than the agricultural land base that can support it”
 - o “Grow more of your own food, share your food with people. Go back to the Depression in Britain, everybody had a victory garden”
 - o “We need more community gardens to help with income and food security”
 - o “There are food gardens now at the schools and the BC Housing projects. I think the trend is happening, it’s like smarter planning”

Extreme Weather

- While some participants feel that “Sooke hasn’t been affected by that much yet frankly”, suggestions for addressing extreme weather included:
 - o A local cooling centre
 - o Forest fire mitigation strategies: “on a local level, what we could do is have a unit crew or something similar”

D. How do you think these solutions can be achieved to build, maintain, or strengthen community resilience? Who is responsible for these changes—individuals, community groups, governments, or a mix?

Engage with Youth

- “Have to empower youth, have to get kids involved as much as possible at an early age”
- (Youth participant) “youth are the generation actually living the consequences”

Who is Responsible?

- Participants acknowledged that everyone needs to participate and be responsible:
 - o (Youth participant) “It’s a bit of everybody, but I think it should be government because they are more powerful than anybody”
 - o “Everybody needs to take steps toward the 7% solution, each of us cutting our emissions by 7% whatever that means”
 - o “I think everything starts with the individual”
 - o “All levels of government”
- Participants spoke about the vitality and activism of community-based groups like Transition Sooke, the Rotary & Lion’s Club: “Community groups need to push on the governments”
- Participants emphasized municipal government involvement:
 - o “They have tremendous power, believe it or not, even though other regulations up the line can get them to do things. They are the starting point for future development. They are the ones that can say, “in our community, we will not allow cars in this area because we want to turn it into a citizen’s mall”
 - o “The council has to be the first ones to see that and say, “okay, like it or not, this is what we’re going to have to do, we all must bear a little responsibility for lowering our emissions as a community, and for making ourselves sustainable”
 - o “It may be 20 years before we see the decisions the Council could make today, based on the new OCP for example”
 - o “We’re [citizens] are easily connected to the City Hall and the Mayor’s Office and to what’s going on there”

- o “I think the current leadership we have in Sooke is quite good, especially the council. We need to do all we can right now while we have this leadership, right?”

3. What We Learned

To what extent do you think your conversation built wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.

- o 3

I think many participants had already made these links. However, emphasizing an affordability lens in the context of climate change was still relatively novel for them.

To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.

- o 3

Participants largely spoke about climate action as the work of planning within the municipality.

To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.

- o 3

New connections were made, and many participants already knew one another. Given the strong spirit of volunteerism in Sooke, I imagine these connections continuing and growing stronger. Especially given our growing intersecting socioenvironmental crises.

To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster an ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience? Please explain your response.

- o 4

I hope this conversation will be taken forward! There was evident passion and interest in this group and ideas about the next steps for participants to take to connect and work on solutions.

In your opinion, what does the community need to do next to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?

Community members need to continue to push the municipal government to develop the local economy transportation options and to adopt a very low growth model of development with an emphasis on holding up the T’Sou-ke Nation and protecting carbon sinks.

4. Next steps

The next step for GRP-Sooke is for me (Alysha) to share the Community Report with participants. My (Alysha's) work with the District of Sooke's Climate Action Committee continues. I am currently seeking a Climate Justice Advisory Group or roundtable to critique and advise on our Climate Action Plan. The GRP-Sooke has allowed me to make connections in the Sooke community to facilitate Climate Action work in Sooke including the Advisory Group.