Island’s Trust  
Attention: Stefan Cermak, Regional Planning Manager  
1 - 500 Lower Ganges Road, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2N8

Regarding: Proposed rezoning of 2152 Fulford-Ganges Rd, Salt Spring Island, BC  
Applicant: EcoReality Sustainable Land Use and Education Cooperative  
Contact Person: Jan Steinman

A. Background
The Applicant, Mr. Steinman is interested in applying for a rezoning of the subject property owned by Eco Reality Co-op, of which he is a member. Central goals of the Co-op are to provide ecologically sustainable affordable housing and operate an ecovillage including sustainable agriculture on Salt Spring Island. The subject property is a 43 acre parcel, most of which is in the ALR, but with a 6.5 acre area at the back of the property zoned Rural Residential. Mr. Steinman reports that Co-op has faced challenges in recruiting and retaining long term members willing to invest due to lack of permanent housing. Thus they would like to change the zoning of the 6.5 acre Rural Residential area to ALR, and in exchange apply change the ALR zoning of the roughly 2 acre area at the road frontage to a new zoning, an Agricultural Enterprise Zone, which would allow higher housing density in the form of sustainable affordable housing and intensified farm infrastructure, in order to attract members of the Co-op and justify the cost of increased farm infrastructure, thereby increasing the agricultural utilization of the property. He envisions a tea house, farm stand, and farm processing and storage space built with 2 housing units above, within the existing footprint of the farmyard. In addition, he would like the proposed new zoning to allow for up to 9 individual affordable houses to be built in a ~0.5 acre area adjacent to the road, driveway and 2 existing houses. The housing would be equity based housing for members of the co-op only, using sustainable building practices. This is intended to be in keeping with the Salt Spring Island OCP B.6.2.2.7, and would include using composting toilets to reduce impact, in keeping with the values of the Co-op and the values of Island’s Trust.

B. Observations
I visited the proposed site on December 11, 2018. It is apparent as an initial observation that the neighbourhood is rural and remote with limited access to housing. The property has 2 homes currently, both occupied. Land use is currently a 3000 sqft greenhouse, 0.2 acre of vegetables and berries, 0.5 acre young orchard plus scattered mature fruit trees, 14 acres of hay/pasture, 4 acres of pasture, 1.5 acres of buildings and permanent roads, the remaining 23 acres are forest, silvopasture and riparian areas. 10.5 acres of the hay/pasture is piped for irrigation, and there is ample access to surface water. The 2.6 acre field between the streams has the highest agricultural capability, it has mild slope to provide natural drainage and the soils are clay loam with high organic matter. There are goats and small flocks of ducks, geese and chickens.
The property is bisected by two streams (Reid Creek and Daniel Brook), with well forested riparian buffers through the whole property. A narrow panhandle connects the Rural Residential zoned area at the rear to the main farmyard, which is clustered at the road frontage. Access roads to the rear are seasonal, that is, they are pasture with culverts at stream crossings. In order to access and develop the rear area, increased road access would result in impact to the forested riparian buffers and loss of prime agricultural land. Mr. Steinman envisions the 2.6 acre area to be fully utilized for vegetable production, as well as expanding livestock and greenhouse production in the irrigated pasture area, but additional labour is needed to expand production.

The Rural Residential zoned area is very steep and forested with mature mixed conifer (cedar and fir) and deciduous (maple and alder). The soil is rocky and unstable former glacial till with some rocky outcroppings at the north boundary. The site is currently used as silvopasture for goats, cultivated medicinal plants, wildcrafting and agrotourism. The terrain limits the agricultural capability of the area for most other purposes.

The proposed area to be rezoned for Agricultural Enterprise is at the road frontage and currently consists of rotational pasture with several heritage fruit trees, a young orchard, the two existing residences, tractor shed, storage buildings, greenhouse, poultry and goat shelters and driveways. Most of the site is fenced for deer. The proposed ~1 acre building site has soils of lower agricultural capability than most of the rest of the site due to poor drainage, and is under-utilized. The site slopes with a medium grade towards the road, and soils are clay loam transitioning to heavy clay. There is some room for intensification of the already developed areas to create additional farm infrastructure as well as housing without creating significant impacts to the agricultural areas, as planned. Mr. Steinman also envisions up to 9 additional small, sustainable dwellings which would create some agricultural impact, he proposes to place this impact on the less utilized pasture area near the road.

C. Summary
The subject property is not farmed to its full potential, and has the agricultural capacity and basic infrastructure in place to be better utilized for agricultural production. In my opinion there is very good justification for removing the Rural Residential zoning to prevent development at the rear of the property, in order to prevent the loss of riparian habitat and agricultural land in order to access it with roads. If well conceived in order to increase the agricultural production on site and ensure a small footprint, a change in zoning to allow an increase to the residential capacity of the property could also be justified.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan Halstead, P. Ag. Date: December 29, 2018