



Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society

Dedicated to Protecting Victoria's Living Artifact

www.garryoak.info

RE: Quadra McKenzie Plan, Requesting a Natural Park Designation for 4015 Braefoot Road

Dear District of Saanich Mayor and Council,

Thank you for incorporating feedback from the community into the Quadra McKenzie Plan. On behalf of the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society (GOMPS), we strongly support a change to the zoning of the two-acre property at 4015 Braefoot Road to a public “natural park,” with the goal of preserving and enhancing its Garry oak ecosystem for the benefit of current and future generations.

Meeting Strategic Objectives

As a public park, 4015 Braefoot Road would contribute to strategic objectives in Saanich’s Biodiversity Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy, Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan, and Natural Asset Management program. Garry oak ecosystems are also known as kwetlal food systems to the Ləkʷəŋən peoples and ƷŁO,ELENEƆ to the W̱SÁNEƆ peoples, reflecting millenia of stewardship. Protecting this parcel enables ecosystem recovery, restitution, and repair, and constitutes a direct, place-based act of Reconciliation.

Rarity of Garry Oak Ecosystems in Canada and Significance to Biodiversity

This site retains a rare remnant Garry oak ecosystem, part of the smallest, most at-risk, most urbanized biogeoclimatic zone in BC. Garry oak ecosystems are unique in Canada, found along a narrow strip of urbanized Salish Sea coast (in the CRD: Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, Esquimalt, View Royal, Colwood, and east of Langford Lake, the Olympic Mountain rain shadow). Less than 5% remains, so small conservation acquisitions provide disproportionately large ecological and climate benefits relative to their size.

The Environmental Assessment by Corvidae (received July 30, 2024) confirms that the property “still has significant biological and ecological value (MOE 2006).” The vast majority of the 120 bylaw-protected trees are mature Garry oaks over 80 years old. Four trees on the site are over one metre in trunk diameter and several are in the 80 to 90cm range – exceptional trees due to large canopies and extensive ecosystem services. Native understory includes camas, broad-leafed shootingstar, Nootka rose, osoberry, snowberry, Pacific sanicle, small-flowered woodland star, and western swordfern.

Garry oak trees support 1,645 unique co-evolved species and are critical to biodiversity. For example, Western Bluebirds were extirpated from Vancouver Island in 1995 due to Garry oak losses, but are now being re-introduced with great efforts by the Bring Back the Bluebirds Project, so every Garry oak contributes to their survival. These ongoing recovery efforts highlight the importance of retaining and reconnecting remain habitat patches such as this one.

Services to the Regional Community

Mature Garry oak ecosystems provide irreplaceable services to the community: carbon sequestration, urban cooling, stormwater management, pollination for food security, and habitat for our unique biodiversity that supports our tourism and outdoor recreation economy.

The trees on this property are a major component of, and critical to the health of, the Garry oaks in surrounding neighbourhoods and trails, as well as abundant native species and wildlife in these contiguous areas. Even a single young sapling would take 80 to 100 years to provide similar services to a mature tree.

The property's location near the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and numerous other schools provides a range of benefits, including equitable access to public park space, wildlife corridors, education, research, and opportunities for Indigenous-led stewardship. The native ecosystem serves the community in ways that traditionally landscaped open spaces cannot.

This site is also strategically located within Saanich's greenway network (2024 OCP, Map 16), connecting PKOLS with the Lochside Trail / Blenkinsop Greenway, Feltham Park, and the Bowker Creek Greenway, as well as the 2003 Centennial Trails Plan and the 2011 Bowker Creek Blueprint.

Alignment with District of Saanich Strategies

District of Saanich policies underscore the importance of protecting such sites. The Biodiversity Strategy identifies Garry oak ecosystems as one of Canada's most endangered plant communities requiring coordinated protection, while the Urban Forest Strategy emphasizes the scarcity and importance of retaining large trees within the Urban Containment Boundary. This property, located at the urban-rural interface, contributes meaningfully to native canopy and ecological function.

A public park designation is the most durable mechanism to secure these values over the long term. Alternative tools, such as partial covenants, do not provide equivalent certainty and may be amended or overridden. Given the century-scale lifespan of these ecosystems, permanent protection is essential.

This represents a rare opportunity to protect and restore urban ecological infrastructure within an established neighbourhood – supporting biodiversity, climate resilience, and community well-being.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society