

# Growth on Gabriola

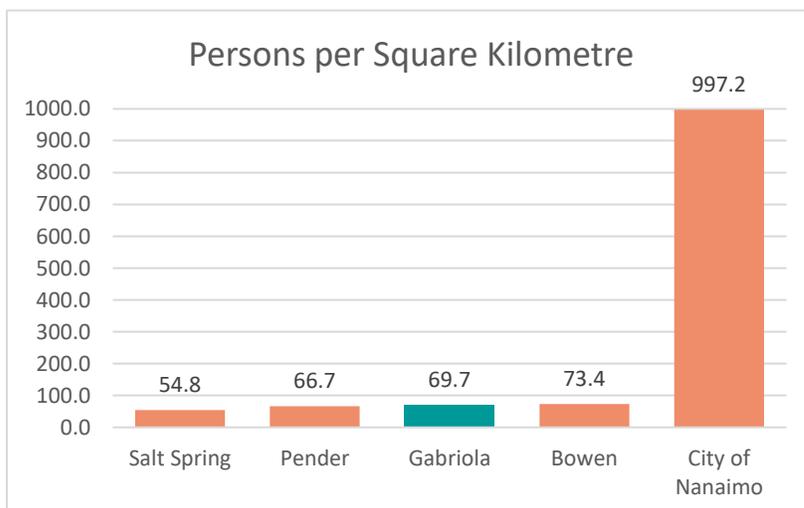
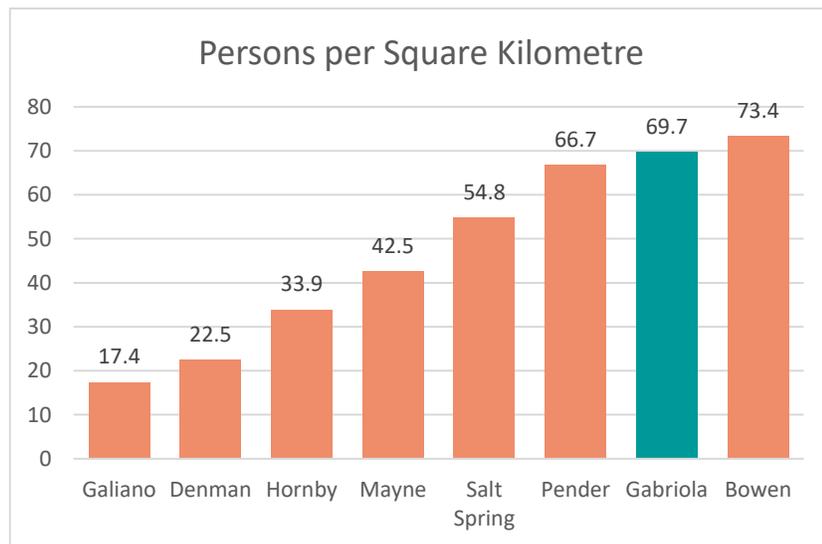
This document provides information about:

- how Gabriola’s current population density compares with other islands and areas
- population growth
- factors that moderate growth
- two population projections
- four growth scenarios.

## 1. Population Density

Gabriola has a population density of 69.7 persons per square kilometre, making it the second most densely populated of the Gulf Islands. Only Bowen has a higher population density.

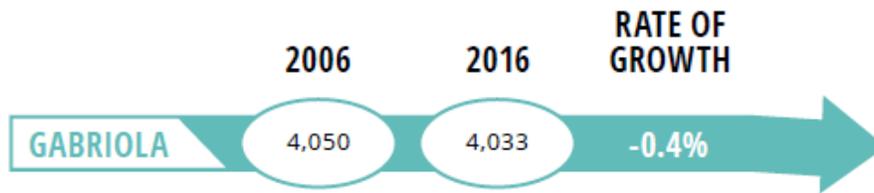
This first bar graph shows population densities for many of the major islands of the Salish Sea.<sup>1</sup> Our high population density relative to these other islands may be because of our close proximity to the major centre of Nanaimo and the more regular ferry service we enjoy compared to some other islands.



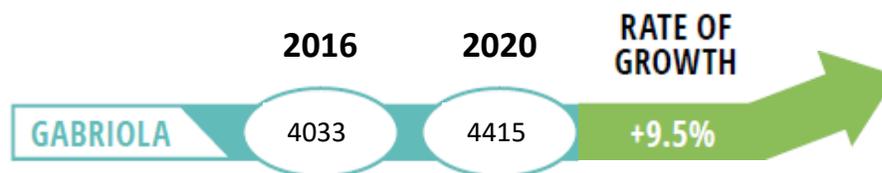
This second bar graph compares Gabriola’s population density (and that of some of the other major islands) to the Nanaimo Census Agglomeration (which includes the City of Nanaimo as well as surrounding rural areas) and to the City of Nanaimo.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Population and Growth

The population of Gabriola according to the 2016 Census was 4,033. Before that, growth was stagnant for the previous two census periods.



However, we know that our population has grown since 2016 because the BC government's Medical Services Plan health care coverage registrations record 4,415 people on Gabriola in 2020. This is an increase of 382 people, or 9.5%, in the past four years.



## 3. Moderating Factors to Growth

Several factors may impact growth: for example, changes to demographic issues like average household size, birth and death rates, and migration to and from Gabriola, as well as physical factors like the availability of lots to build on and the proportion of unoccupied dwellings, as well as how development is regulated through land use planning and development controls.

Of course, demographic issues can't be addressed through planning and development controls. So, for example, we can't change the Official Community Plan or Land Use Bylaw to restrict people from moving to Gabriola to occupy available lots, or from having large families. We can, however, change the OCP or LUB to modify things like how lots are zoned and developed and how much density is allowed on private land.

- **Average Household Size**

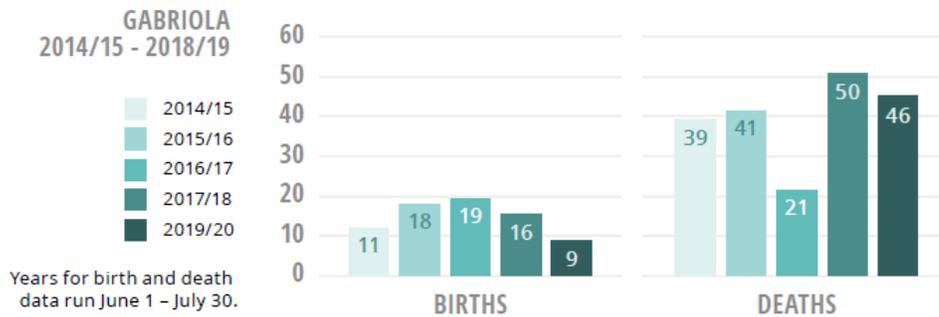
The average household size on Gabriola is 1.9 people per household, as reported in the 2016 Census.<sup>3</sup>

The average household size has stayed nearly the same over the past ten years. It was 1.9 in the 2011 Census and 2.0 in the 2006 Census.



- **Births and Deaths**

Over the last five years, Gabriola has had an average of 14 births per year and 39 deaths per year.<sup>4</sup>



In other words, people on Gabriola are dying at a faster rate than they are being born.

- **In-migration**

The rate at which people come to Gabriola from other places compared to the rate people leave Gabriola to live elsewhere has an impact on the growth rate.

We know from the 2016 Census that 1,250 people living on Gabriola on the date the Census was taken had moved between 2011 and 2016 and that, of those, about 68% (845) moved to their residence on Gabriola from another community.<sup>5</sup>

In that same five year period, however, Gabriola’s population declined from 4,045 to 4,033. As a result, the change in our population must have come from some combination of more people dying than being born on Gabriola (which we know from the data above) and more people leaving to live elsewhere than moving here. (Unfortunately, the Census does not tell us the exact number of Gabriolans who left the island between 2011 and 2016.)

- **Unoccupied and Under-occupied Properties**

The 2016 Census indicates that 845 dwellings on Gabriola were not occupied by the usual resident (i.e., they were vacant, or either rented seasonally or used by their owner seasonally). This represents 28% of the dwellings on Gabriola.<sup>6</sup> This means that 72% of the dwellings on Gabriola are currently occupied full-time.

- **Build-out Potential**

**Undeveloped Lots:** There are 490 vacant (or undeveloped) private lots on Gabriola as of February 2021.

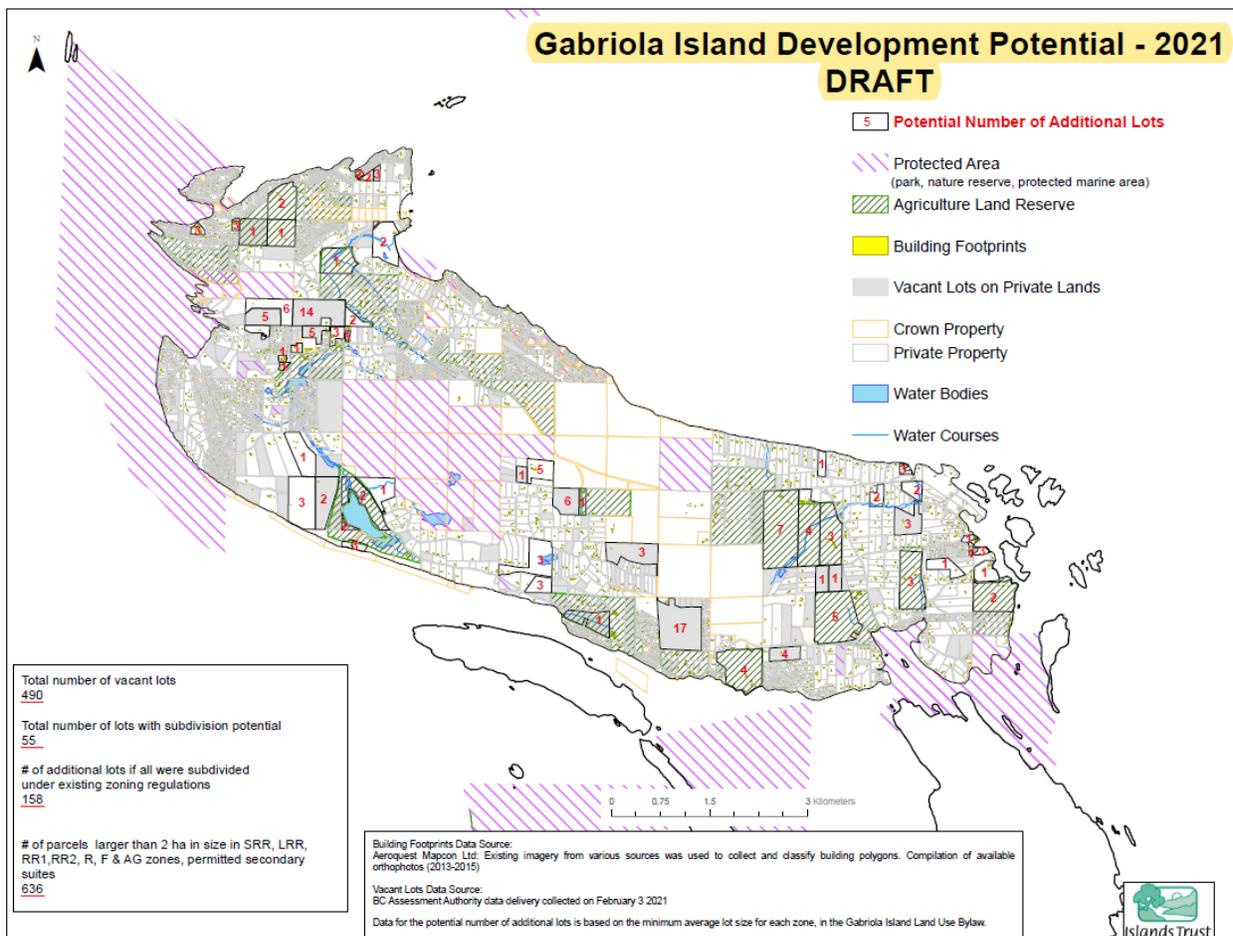
**Secondary Suites:** Current planning rules allow for secondary suites to be built on lots that are over 2 hectares in size and within specific zones (for more information see the Key Policies backgrounder and the Draft Development Potential map). The Islands Trust says that there are currently 636 lots that meet this criteria. Some of these secondary

suites may have already been built (and the Islands Trust is working to identify how many) but the number is likely to be small.

**Subdivision Potential:** Current planning rules allow for subdivision of certain existing lots into smaller lots, as long as they meet minimum lot size criteria for the planning zone they're in (as well as other criteria - for more information see the Key Policies backgrounder and the Draft Development Potential map below).

The Islands Trust has identified that there are 55 lots with subdivision potential under existing regulations, which would result in an additional 158 lots.

The map below shows the development potential under all of these situations. It is available as a separate PDF (that can be enlarged) on the Housing Matters website.



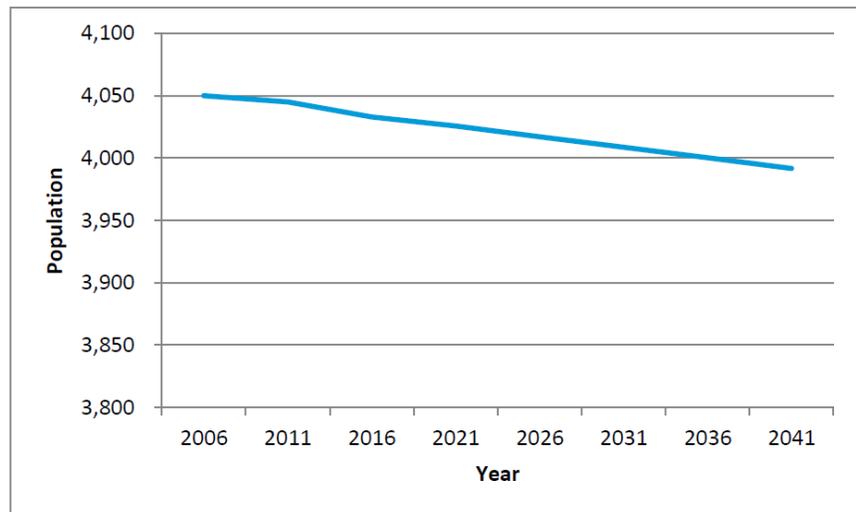
## 4. Population Projections

Two projections for how many people might live on Gabriola in the future predict that the population could decline to 3,990 people or increase to 5,295 people between now and the year 2041. These projections are models based on historical population data and don't take the moderating factors to growth (see above) into account.

### i. Population Projection 1: Straight Line Projection

A projection based on ten years of population figures from the 2006, 2011 and 2016 Census years shows a steady decline in population, from 4,050 in 2006 to **3,990** in 2041.<sup>7</sup> This represents a decline of about 1.5%.

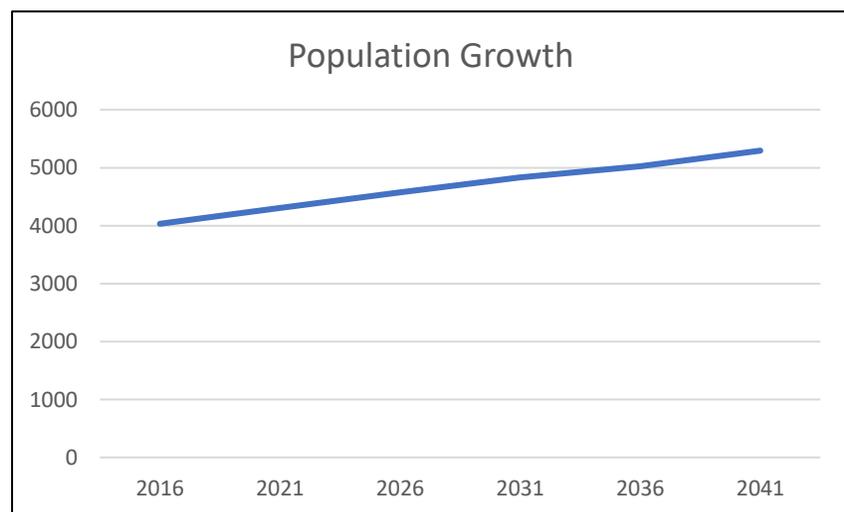
Given that the population of Gabriola appears to have already increased by 9.5% since the 2016 Census (see above), this projection may not be based on accurate assumptions.



### ii. Population Projection 1: Nanaimo Projection

A second projection assumes Gabriola will grow at the same rate as the Nanaimo Local Health Area over the next 25 years. In this scenario, the population would increase by about 30%, from 4,033 in 2006 to **5,295** in 2041.<sup>8</sup>

This projection is based on changes in population in a much more urban environment than Gabriola, and that has distinct differences in current land use planning and servicing.



<b>Population Projections</b>	<b>Population by 2041</b>
Projection 1: Straight Line population prediction based on historical data	3,990
Projection 2: Parallel growth with Nanaimo	5,295

## 5. Growth Scenarios

Four growth scenarios predict a regular resident population of between 4,631 and 6,632 people in the future. These scenarios are based on information about how many lots on Gabriola are currently undeveloped, how much subdivision potential exists, and how many secondary suites are currently allowed.

These scenarios also rely on assumptions about current household size and patterns of occupancy (as per the moderating factors to growth above).

However, in each scenario, two population numbers are projected:

- one based on the current proportion of dwellings that are occupied full-time (i.e., 72% full-time occupancy, see above)
- one that would occur if all the potential dwellings were occupied full-time (i.e., 100% full-time occupancy). This somewhat mirrors the population increases experienced during the summers.

These scenarios show the potential growth possible within existing land use policies around development of existing lots, subdivision, and secondary suite development. The date at which the population would grow to the numbers projected would be whenever all the potential for development is realized.

Because of certain limitations in the data around secondary suites (see below), the numbers may be slightly overinflated.

### i. Growth Scenario 1: Build Out of All Existing Vacant Lots

In this projection we start from our current Medical Services Plan registration population of 4,415 and we assume that:

- it's possible to build on all 490 undeveloped lots
- current occupancy patterns stay the same – so 28% of dwellings are un- or under-occupied and 72% are occupied full-time
- the current average household size of 1.9 applies to all occupied dwellings on developed lots.

Given that we're interested in knowing how much the regular resident population of Gabriola would increase, we would multiply the number of fully occupied lots by the average household size.

If all 490 lots are developed and 72% are occupied full time, at an average household size of 1.9, the regular resident population would increase by 670 people, to **5,085**.

If, however, occupancy patterns changed such that 100% of the dwellings were occupied full-time, the regular residential population would increase by 931 people, to **5,346**.

#### **ii. Growth Scenario 2: Build Out of All Allowable Secondary Suites**

In this scenario we start again from the current Medical Services Plan registration population of 4,415 and look at what happens if secondary suites are built on all 636 lots that are allowed to have one.

In this scenario, Gabriola's regular resident population would increase by the number of fully occupied secondary suites multiplied by the average household size.

In other words, 636 suites with an average household size of 1.9 would mean an additional 870 people at the current occupancy level of 72%. The resulting population would be **5,285**.

If 100% of these secondary suites were occupied, the population would increase by 1,208 people, to **5,623**.

(As noted above, some of these secondary suites may have already been built, so the numbers being projected here may be slightly overinflated.)

#### **iii. Growth Scenario 3: Build Out of All Potential Subdividable Lots**

In this projection we start again from the Medical Services Plan registration population of 4,415 and look at what happens if all 158 lots resulting from possible subdivisions are built out.

At an average household size of 1.9 people per household, dwellings on the 158 lots would result in a regular resident population increase of 216 people, at the current occupancy level of 72%, to **4,631**.

If occupancy levels rose to 100%, the resident population would increase by 300 people, to **4,715**.

#### **iv. Growth Scenario 4: Comprehensive Build Out (combination of 1, 2, and 3)**

This is a combination of all three scenarios above and would result in a population increase of 1,768 people at current occupancy levels, to a total resident population of **6,183**. If occupancy levels increased to 100%, the population would increase by 2,447 people, to **6,632**.

<b>Growth Scenarios</b>	<b>Total population within current use patterns</b>	<b>Total population assuming full year occupancy</b>
<b>Scenario 1: Build Out of Vacant Lots</b>	5,085	5,346
<b>Scenario 2: Build Out of Secondary Suites</b>	5,285	5,623
<b>Scenario 3: Build Out of Subdividable Lots</b>	4,631	4,715
<b>Scenario 4: Comprehensive Build Out (combination of 1, 2 and 3)</b>	6,183	6,632

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Taken from each island's 2016 Census Community Profile (<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>) except Pender which was calculated based on population and size data in its Wikipedia entry ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pender\\_Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pender_Island)).
- <sup>2</sup> Taken from each location's 2016 Census Community Profile (<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>).
- <sup>3</sup> See "Average Household Size" data at Gabriola Island Trust Area 2016 Census Profile: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=DPL&Code1=590003&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&SearchText=Gabriola%20Island%20Trust%20Area&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=590003&TABID=1&type=0>.
- <sup>4</sup> Gabriola Health and Wellness Collaborative. 2020. Gabriola Health Report. Page 2. Available at: <https://www.ghcs.ca/2020-Gabriola-Health-Report.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> See "Mobility" data at Gabriola Island Trust Area 2016 Census Profile. See link in Note 3 above.
- <sup>6</sup> See "Private dwellings occupied by usual residents" data at Gabriola Island Trust Area 2016 Census Profile. See link in Note 3 above.
- <sup>7</sup> Dillon Consulting. *Housing Needs Assessment, Northern Region of Islands Trust*. 2018. Page 11. Available at: [http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/346025/lpc\\_2018-06-21\\_northern\\_hna.pdf](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/346025/lpc_2018-06-21_northern_hna.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> Line graph derived from data provided in Dillon Consulting. *Housing Needs Assessment, Northern Region of Islands Trust*. 2018. Page 12. Available at: [http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/346025/lpc\\_2018-06-21\\_northern\\_hna.pdf](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/346025/lpc_2018-06-21_northern_hna.pdf).