

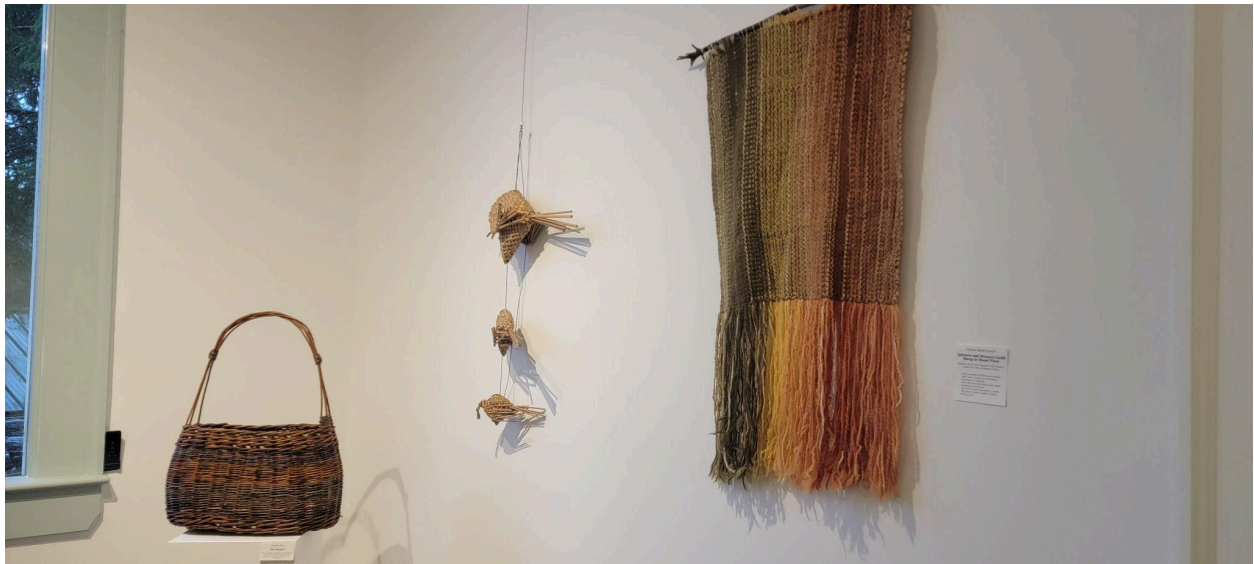
Gabriola Island Fibreshed Visioning

Sponsored by the Local Trust Committee 2050 Visioning Process

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Introduction

On the weekend of January 27 and 28, the Gabriola Island Fibreshed Working Group hosted a series of workshops, a textile show, and a community drop-in event as part of the Local Trust Committee 2050 Visioning Process. The initiative drew approximately fifty participants, who engaged in various activities throughout the weekend.

The primary objective of these events was to facilitate community dialogue surrounding the current state of textile use on Gabriola Island and explore potential strategies for improvement. Specifically, the focus was on envisioning a fibreshed approach tailored to our community's needs and aspirations, with an eye towards shaping the island's vision leading up to the year 2050.

Through interactive workshops and informal discussions, participants had the opportunity to share ideas, insights, and concerns regarding sustainable textile practices. The aim was to foster a collective understanding of how a fibreshed framework could contribute to a more resilient and environmentally conscious future for Gabriola Island.

By engaging in these activities, community members were able to contribute to shaping a vision for the island's textile landscape, laying the groundwork for informed decision-making and meaningful action in the years to come.

What is a Fibreshed?

The fibreshed concept originated from the idea of creating a localized textile system where fibres are sourced, processed, and used within a specific geographic region. It aims to reduce the environmental impact of textile production by promoting local, sustainable practices and connecting producers, artisans, and consumers within a community or region.

Rebecca Burgess, an environmental activist and founder of the Fibershed project, is credited with coining the term fibreshed. She developed the concept in response to the environmental and social challenges associated with the global textile industry. Burgess's work emphasizes the importance of regenerative agriculture, natural dyeing processes, and community-based textile production in creating a more sustainable and resilient textile system.

The fibreshed model encourages collaboration among farmers, ranchers, fibre producers, artisans, and consumers to create a closed-loop system that supports local economies, preserves cultural traditions, and promotes environmental stewardship. By focusing on local resources and relationships, fibresheds seek to minimize the carbon footprint of textiles and foster greater transparency and accountability in the supply chain.

Gabriola Island has enough elements of a fibreshed at work that it's possible to envision that with support and resources we could develop a more sustainable, closed-loop approach to textiles on the island. Strengthening collaborations among farmers, artisans, and consumers, and investing in regenerative practices could enhance sustainability, reduce environmental impact, and foster a resilient, community-driven textile ecosystem on the island.

Workshops

Fashion Fictions

On Saturday, January 27th we started the day with a "Fashion Fictions" workshop. Twenty-three people attended.

Fashion Fictions, created by Amy Twigger Holroyd, is a methodology that explores sustainable fashion through storytelling and creativity. Participants imagine alternative narratives and scenarios within the fashion industry, using fiction to challenge conventional practices and envision more sustainable futures. The process involves speculative thinking and playful exploration, inviting participants to craft stories, characters, and worlds related to fashion.

Participants in this workshop started by exploring issues that Gabriola Island faces with regards to textile waste, lack of laundry facilities, lack of connection between farmers and textile producers, and consumerism (among other issues summarized in the themes below). They then went on to imagine fictional/parallel worlds in which textile and fashion conditions were different as a way of examining our current textile/fashion paradigms.



Community Cafe

On Sunday, January 28th we held a Community Cafe. 20 people attended, many of whom had participated the day before. Participants explored four questions over the course of the morning:

- When you think about textiles – clothing and accessories, domestic linens, upholstery, etc. – what comes to mind for you about Gabriola Island specifically? What does GI do well?
- When you think about textiles – clothing and accessories, domestic linens, etc. and Gabriola Island – what is a key thing you think needs to change?
- How can the Island Trust Committee help with your vision of developing a fibreshed and a vibrant textile culture on Gabriola Island? (Land use planning, funding, support for specific activities etc)
- How would you describe your hopes and dreams for a Gabriola Island fibreshed in 2050?

Honored Guest Dave Bodaly joined us for this workshop. Conversation was active, and each question had a scribe to keep notes throughout the process.

Textile Show and Weekend Drop-in



Over the weekend, we hosted a textile arts exhibition highlighting fibre processing tools and locally sourced fibres, including yarn and textiles repurposed from the GIRO waste stream. Our afternoon drop-ins welcomed community members to engage in textile arts activities like knitting, mending, and spinning. This inclusive environment encouraged further discussion about sustainable

textile practices in our community. Through hands-on participation and shared creativity, we celebrate the richness of local resources.

Emergent Themes

Through the course of both workshops, as well as informal conversations throughout the weekend, several themes emerged which we have organized into a SOAR Framework (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results)

Strengths that exist in our community

Our community boasts a vibrant and engaged populace, enriched by a wealth of knowledgeable individuals and diverse skill sets.

With a collective problem-solving mindset, residents actively contribute to community initiatives and endeavors.

The presence of a well-established recycling centre underscores our commitment to sustainability, bolstered by passionate advocates for recycling and upcycling.

Creative thinkers abound, fostering innovation and artistic expression across various domains. Notable organizations such as the Agricultural Co-op and GIRO play pivotal roles in community development and resource management.

Supported by an active and substantial volunteer base, our community thrives on collaborative efforts and collective action.

Vocal community members ensure that diverse perspectives are heard, driving inclusive dialogue and decision-making processes.

Imagination flourishes, igniting inspiration and shaping the future trajectory of our dynamic island community.

Opportunities for change and growth

The opportunities for change on Gabriola Island are numerous and multifaceted. The island faces challenges such as the overwhelming volume of discarded clothing and questions around consumerism and accumulation. Concerns about the ease of washing and drying clothes, along with a lack of knowledge about caring for and repairing garments over the long term, highlight areas for improvement.

Living conditions in an isolated community pose unique challenges regarding resource access and disposal methods. International shipping to dispose of fabrics also raises environmental concerns.

Furthermore, addressing the prevalence of fast fashion and disposable culture, as well as tackling issues of planned obsolescence and poor quality, are crucial steps towards sustainability. Education on clothing maintenance and repair, along with promoting value attachment to garments, can instigate behavioural shifts. Reintroducing home economics education can empower individuals with practical skills.

Community engagement and awareness campaigns can combat inattention to disposable fashion and foster appreciation for clothing value.

Encouraging diversity in dress and self-expression counters homogeneity, while addressing social justice issues in fashion production challenges systemic inequalities.

Overcoming barriers to basic needs and waste management requires collaborative efforts, considering the island's location-specific challenges.

Investing in long-term clothing solutions and sustainability measures demonstrates a commitment to lasting change. By addressing these opportunities comprehensively, Gabriola Island can pave the way for a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient community.

Aspirations for our community

During the workshop, participants articulated textile-related aspirations for Gabriola Island including:

Establishing one or more functional and sustainable textile hubs/makerspaces, integrating recycling, upcycling, and production.

Developing supported programs to foster collaborative work and textile education.

Prioritizing intergenerational involvement: Supporting elders in providing mentorship and textile education, while educating youth to care for, mend, and create functional textiles.

Implementing small-scale economic projects which embrace closed-loop approaches, while promoting a shared value system supporting sustainable agriculture and local economies.

At an island-wide level, committing to reducing goods imported onto the island, prioritizing mending and repair to minimize contributions to the waste stream.

A central laundromat with high efficiency machines could reduce water needs on the island, and also be a hub for education on textile care, mending and upcycling.

Building community resilience and environmental stewardship through co-development of a thriving local textile ecosystem founded on collaboration and shared values.

Results we want to undertake collectively

During the workshop, participants outlined tangible changes and projects integral to the development of the Gabriola fibreshed:

Advocating for zoning adjustments to accommodate light industry, such as establishing a mini-mill for wool finishing.

Facilitating stronger connections between fibre artisans and farmers producing fibre products.

Assisting island farmers in accessing markets for their fibre products through the creation of an island-based cooperative.

Lobbying for the inclusion of fibre products in the definition of agricultural products at both federal and provincial levels.

Advocating for changes to the federal 10-acre minimum rule for hemp fibre production.

Creating a makerspace or textile hub that integrates with the agricultural community, possibly within the developing Agricultural Co-op space or in conjunction with John Switzer's farm conservancy.

Establishing a textile tool library for community use.

Launching an ongoing education series covering various textile-related skills, including sewing machine use, clothing care and repair, fleece preparation, spinning, weaving, etc.

Collaborating with the Snuneymuxw First Nation to deepen understanding of Indigenous textile creation and plant-fibre stewardship.

Incorporating textile and fibreshed considerations into land use planning and supporting building code changes to promote waste product utilization (e.g., bricks made from recycled textiles).

Integrating the fibreshed concept into the community plan with guidelines for sustainable textile agriculture and recycling, along with protecting land for fibreshed use.

Survey

As part of our visioning weekend, we launched a survey on paper and online that aimed to gauge community sentiment and interest regarding the concept of a local fibreshed. We had twenty respondents to the survey (Appendix 3). The key findings are as follows:

Familiarity with the fibreshed concept: Respondents exhibited varying levels of familiarity with the concept of a fibreshed, with the majority falling in the "Somewhat familiar" category.

Importance of developing a local fibreshed: The overwhelming majority of respondents consider developing a local fibreshed as at least Very important, with a significant portion indicating it as "Extremely important."

Preferred fibre-producing resources: Sheep, hemp, flax, and alpaca were identified as the most suitable fibre-producing resources for the local fibreshed.

Interest in fibre production: A notable number of respondents expressed interest in fibre production as part of a local fibreshed.

Community benefits: Respondents recognized various benefits of a local fibreshed, including economic development, environmental sustainability, support for local farmers and artisans, and community education and engagement.

Infrastructure and support: Infrastructure needs for a successful local fibreshed include fibre processing facilities, marketing and distribution support, funding for research and development, and education and training programs.

Additional Comments and Suggestions: Respondents provided diverse additional comments and suggestions, ranging from incorporating reconciliation and re-localization efforts, to practical involvement opportunities like curriculum development, rezoning space, and fostering in-person discussions.

Though the sample size was small, it does show there is significant interest and support for the development of a local fibreshed among textile hobbyists and farmers, with a clear recognition of its potential benefits for the community.

A vision for Gabriola

We envision a world where textile consumption and production are rooted in quality materials, cultural reverence, and a connection between products and the ecosystems from which they originate. As Gabriola Islanders, we embrace the concept of the fibreshed, where our community prioritizes the development of sustainable, regenerative practices in fibre production. By fostering a deeper understanding of the materials we wear and use, we seek to honour the diverse fibres produced by animals like sheep and alpaca, and plants such as hemp and flax, within our local landscapes.

Our vision extends beyond consumption; it encompasses a holistic approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of ecosystems, culture, and craftsmanship. The fibre producers and workers of Gabriola aim to reclaim traditional knowledge and practices, reintroducing skills like knitting, sewing, and textile repair into our communities' fabric. This revitalization effort is not just about creating garments but about nurturing relationships—with the land, and with one another.

As we embark on this journey, we recognize the importance of incorporating principles of reconciliation, re-localization, and sustainability into every thread of our work. Together, we strive to weave a narrative of resilience, diversity, and harmony—a narrative where textiles are a reflection of our values, our heritage, and our commitment to nurturing the planet and each other.

Appendix 1: Article in The Sounder January 17, 2024

Gabriola Island Envisions a Sustainable Textile Future

The Gabriola Fibreshed Working Group (GFWG) will be hosting two workshops, and a local textile arts show at the Gabriola Arts Center January 27-28 as part of the Islands Trust Vision 2050 land use visioning process. Funded by Islands Trust, this weekend-long event is designed to stimulate discussion about how Gabriola Island can participate in the wider Fibreshed movement, and what kind of planned land use supports that.

A fibreshed refers to a geographic region that focuses on the production, processing, and consumption of fibre and textiles within a local context, emphasizing transparency, ethical practices, and reduced environmental impact. Building a local fibreshed and integrating it into land use planning is a progressive approach that not only addresses the growing demand for sustainable fibre resources but also contributes to the development of resilient and environmentally conscious communities.

Establishing any kind of local textile supply involves collaboration among farmers, artisans, and community stakeholders to create a closed-loop system that supports the entire lifecycle of fibre production. This includes the raising and cultivation of natural fibres like wool, flax, and hemp, as well as the promotion of regenerative agriculture practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity. By integrating fibreshed principles into land use planning, communities can strategically allocate space for fibre crops, as well as textile processing facilities such as small scale wool and flax mills.

Community engagement is vital in envisioning a successful fibreshed, and land use planning is one platform for inclusive decision-making. The GFWG encourages farmers, textiles workers, artisans, and any residents who care about clothing and fashion, to participate in the weekend-long event to ensure that input into the Islands Trust process aligns with the values and needs of the community.

Workshops run 10-12 both days:

| Fashion Fictions, January 27 (Saturday) | Fashion Fictions is a workshop process that brings people together to generate, experience and reflect on engaging fictional visions of alternative fashion cultures and systems. Through these activities, we gain new

perspectives on challenges, possibilities and pathways for change in the real world. Fashion Fictions was designed by Dr. Amy Twigger Holroyd, Associate Professor of Fashion and Sustainability at Nottingham School of Art & Design. The GFWG has Dr. Holroyd's blessing to use this model for our workshop, and our outcomes will become part of our report to the Islands Trust Gabriola 2050 project.

| Textile Land Use Planning Community Café, January 28 (Sunday) | Community Café participants will engage in small-group discussions on the subjects of textile sustainability, regenerative agriculture, land use requirements for milling and other enterprises, and other subjects as determined by those who attend. Feedback from this process will be included in the final report to Islands Trust. Coffee, tea and snacks provided!

To attend either workshop, please RSVP to megan.e.adam@gmail.com.

The GFWG will be at the GAC Hall both days from 10-4, and outside of the workshop times, we encourage everyone to stop in and see the exhibit of locally-raised and created fibre goods and tools. Bring your spinning/knitting/hand sewing projects and sit for a chat, or fill out our land use planning survey.

Appendix 2: Advertisement in The Sounder - January 17 2024



Community Input & Workshops

January 27 & 28
10am-4pm

Gabriola
Arts Center
476 South Rd

Featuring:

Fashion Fictions Workshop
10am-12pm, Saturday the 27th

Textile Land Use Planning Community Cafe
10am-12pm, Sunday the 28th

Plus:

Exhibit of locally-raised and created fibre goods and fibre tools.

Drop-in hand-making and conversation both days, noon to 4pm.
Bring your spinning wheel or knitting and join us!

Land use planning questionnaire: If you can't join one of our workshops, please pop in to fill out a short survey.

If you wish to attend the workshop or cafe, please email
megan.e.adam@gmail.com to RSVP.

All weekend activities free of charge. Funding for this event provided by



Appendix 3: Responses to the Gabriola Island Fibreshed Survey

As part of the Local Trust Committee 2050 Visioning process, the Gabriola Island Fibreshed Working Group is gauging interest in community agriculture and economic development as it relates to textile production, reuse, and recycling.

20 responses received

What is your level of familiarity with the concept of a fibreshed?

4 Not familiar at all

9 Somewhat familiar

5 Very familiar

How important do you think it is to develop a local fibreshed in our community?

Not important

2 Somewhat important

11 Very important

5 Extremely important

What types of fibre-producing animals or plants do you think would be most suitable for our local fibreshed? (Select all that apply)

13 Sheep

11 Alpaca

14 Hemp

13 Flax

Other (please specify) Angora, Goats, Nettle, cedar, Silkworms

Do you currently produce fibre or have an interest in producing fibre as part of a local fibreshed?

11 Yes

7 No

Not sure

If yes, describe your fibre production or interest _In general the comments reflected that people are interested in using local products, re-using/recycling materials and growing flax or hemp,

How do you think a local fibreshed could benefit our community? (Select all that apply)

15 Economic development

18 Environmental sustainability

18 Supporting local farmers and artisans

16 Community education and engagement

Other (please specify): Pooling of knowledge, tools, and resources; social; reduce waste and level of shopping/fast fashion; direct relationship with our consumption; adding beauty and diversity to our environment

What types of infrastructure or support do you think would be most helpful for developing a successful local fibreshed? (Select all that apply)

17 Fibre processing facilities

11 Marketing and distribution support

12 Funding for research and development

17 Education and training programs

Other (please specify)

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions related to the development of a local fibreshed in our community?

- How do we incorporate reconciliation into this work? How do we re-localize with this in mind? How can we bring back the woolly dog.
- How can I get involved
- Curriculum development to incorporate into optional student programs to bring back knitting, sewing, clothing repair, dye gardens, spinning, small tool making and using, etc.
- Our RDN and IT need to rezone space for creative local fibreshed
- The more regenerative and cyclical practices we can develop on island, the better - a local fibreshed's ability to compost and make/renew textile waste would be a huge accomplishment toward sustainable economy on Gabriola
- More in-person meetings/discussion similar to this weekend can be very inclusive and developmental

The majority of respondents are textile hobbyists, with a few fibre producers/farmers in the mix.