

To: Chair Luckham and Trustees,
From: Tobi Elliott, Snuneymuxw unceded territories, Gabriola Island
July 7, 2021
Town Hall

I am here to encourage everyone – Trustees and the public – to act with courage in this very difficult time, to listen to one another, and continue to work collaboratively on this historic document.

I read a great first draft policy statement here, with policies inclusive of every element in our eco-systems – people and biodiversity, secure and safe housing, protection of land and waters, social equity, and conserved spaces, and our relationships with, and commitment to First Nations.

None of the priorities or values that have been articulated in this draft policy statement should be neglected. It's not perfect, but it can and should be refined through the next stages of public engagement. I really encourage Trustees to move this draft to First Reading, so that communities can start to grapple with what the terms and ideas mean in practice.

We are in a time of immense transition and change. Many of us – me included – feel fear as we see the islands are losing biodiversity, and challenges to access to equitable housing in our communities. There is a sense of grief and a sense of loss for a world that is in fact, gone. I think we need to accept that no policies of the Islands Trust can ever restore the islands, bring back the ancient forests or make the islands completely immune to commercialization and development. And there is fear of the unknown, how are we going to meet the challenges of the future. So we desperately need some new direction. We need to innovate how we live and work on the land. And that will take courage.

And that's what I see in this draft TPS. Environmental protection, social equity, and reconciliation have been established as top priorities. I see that the policy statement strives to address these as intersectional, interconnected realities. This is the only way the Islands Trust can meet the considerable challenges facing our communities and the biosphere we call home. We need to keep working toward a **holistic, regional, equitable, systems-wide approach to policy and planning**. We need to stop pitting the needs of the environment against the needs of the people. This has never been successful. Instead we must strive and make every effort to create policies that act with **the whole system** in mind.

What I see in this document is a real effort at a holistic, eco-centred and equitable living document that honours the islands' rights and titleholders, First Nations and our communities. This new territory will create tensions and challenges for all of us. It may mean we create policies that do not privilege private rights ahead of the community good. And it may also mean we start privileging land and eco-system and First Nations priorities ahead of individual property rights. And I think that's a good thing, but it's going to be challenging for sure.

So we need to be courageous when we think about new ways of living and working together on the islands. We need to be brave and innovate in order to create structures that hold the integrity and ecology of the islands and our communities. The Trustees need our support in this process, and I encourage everyone, fellow community members, to please stop attacking the Trustees and staff, and help them in this work. It's our work.

Thank you to staff and Trustees for working to create policies that articulates all of the values of that we've decided together are important to us. Thank you for centring this process around honouring the voice and will of Indigenous peoples. Thank you for your work.

Trustees, I urge you, to continue on the path that you have set, act with courage and leadership. We need to create new ways of being and living on the land, and it's a real challenge, but you are the right people to help get us through this important work.

There is a grassroots group forming interested in supporting a systems approach called (working title) the *Gulf Islands Communities Network*. We want to advocate for shared interests to regional, provincial and federal agencies, explore regional partnerships, projects or other initiatives, and engage in dialogue and learning with regional relevance. So if anyone wants to join a group that is interested in working collaboratively, please reach out.

I encourage Trustees to adopt this draft and move it to First reading. I really think this is the time, and we need to act now.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Tobi Elliott

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