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The Galiano Local Trust Committee

Via email: gharris@islandstrust.bc.ca; spottle@islandstrust.bc.ca; lbusheikin@islandstrust.bc.ca

Dear members of the Galiano LTC:

I am grateful to connect and communicate with elected Galiano Island Local Trust Committee representatives by letter. What follows highlights some concerns I have about the decision making process of the LTC and offer some general comments for the Local Trust Committee's consideration.

I have lived on Galiano Island since 1995 at 218 Sturdies Bay Road. I am also a member of the Crystal Mountain Society, an organization with a rezoning application currently under consideration by the LTC.

It is only recently that I have returned to attending the Local Trust Committee meetings on Galiano. My observations and comments relate to the two meetings in November and December 2015. I ask your forgiveness as I pose a number of questions which may not be readily answerable. Perhaps these enquiries are best left to ponder.

My comments regard some behaviours and words that I observed/heard at both these meetings which have left me concerned about how the LTC is working on behalf of our community. I took to the Island's Trust website and did some research about the role and purpose of a LTC. The mandate of the Island's Trust created in 1974, and it stated that it is still valid today: "to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of residents of the trust area and of the province generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the Government of British Columbia." I understand this to mean that the LTC elected representatives for Galiano are charged with *working in cooperation with others to help us, island residents* – to ensure what happens on our island benefits the environment, islanders and visitors.

What does that mean I wonder - working for the benefit of islanders? Does it mean to encourage the members of the LTC look up, look forward, to look out, look at what is possible, look to how they might support islanders in their endeavours, to endorse new ideas, new ways of being and living, new ventures, all the while keeping in mind the OCP, environment and the unique amenities found in this area. Does it give the Islands Trustees the mandate to be supportive and encouraging of islanders or rule driven, detail oriented naysayers? Is the LTC glass half full of possibility or half empty with fear?

At the two meetings I attended, it appears – and I make an assumption - that the LTC and some members of the audience are **not** actually working *for the benefit of the islanders*. Instead, it appears the LTC and some members of the community who speak at the meetings, spend time

focusing on the miniscule details of a myriad of items, much from a negative, fear based perspective. Is this really working for the benefit of islanders?

For example:

- Most of what I heard from the members of the LTC in response to applications in front of them, questions or comments, were a combination of “no; it won’t work; we can’t do that; it doesn’t fit; we need another study - oh, staff, please prepare a (or another) report...; no, can’t do that - it would set a precedent; well, you go back and do more research, spend more money at the lawyers, the hydrologist, the consultant...”
- I was surprised with the LTC response to one applicant (for Galiano Green) who expressed concern about spending thousands of dollars on additional lawyer’s fees - ‘oh, well’ - it seemed to be the cost of doing business. Really? Applicants spending thousands of dollars trying to do something to benefit the community and they are told to spend more money? After years of effort to get an idea off the ground, it seemed insulting towards the efforts of this applicant. The LTC might wonder why there is so much ‘illegal’ activity on the island. What would motivate islanders to work with the LTC with this sort of negative, indeed often, punitive attitude towards their requests.
- Members of the audience stand and read lists of concerns, worries, negatives. There were very few people speaking with excitement, with hope, with anticipation – in fact, the tone of the meeting was all rather depressing.

I wonder what might happen if the members of the LTC asked themselves these questions:

- What kind of community can we create together?
- What can we craft together for our community?
- How can we support imaginative, innovative out of the box thinking?
- How do we support the residents of this special place so we can all grow, be sustainable, thrive and blossom?
- How can we work with the professional staff of the Islands Trust to utilize their professional expertise to craft leading edge, creative and innovative land use policies?
- How can we do this within the structure of our OCP, in keeping with the mandate of the Islands Trust?

Perhaps I do not entirely understand the intricacies of subdivision, development and rezoning. It seems that there are other organizations with expertise and authority charged to handle much of the detail that I heard being discussed by the LTC – the CRD, Island Health, Government Ministries, IT Staff Planners, etc all provide expertise to handle these applications; the LTC can focus then on the bigger picture rather than micro manage. For example:

Septic fields: is that not the responsibility of the CRD and Island Health and the certified septic installers?

Water use: a well? catchment? Let the property owner work with the legislated organizations involved and figure out a plan. Hydrologists and other water experts know their business.

Composting toilets: Can one be bold and consider this a creative, water-less, affordable and responsible option to a septic field? Is this decision actually part of the mandate of the LTC or best left to the CRD and Island Health? Might a composting toilet have less impact on the ecosystem than a septic field?

Alternative energy systems: could this be resolved by experts who know processes - solar panels, wind wheels, water wheels, etc.

Covenants: is it not the responsibility of the land owner to ensure that a covenant for their land meets criteria that is acceptable to the covenant holders and the land owner?

Covenants are important documents, which can be written to reflect the unique requirements of each piece of land. There are experts who can do this. (See also Goal A, IT Strategic Plan)

Mortgages: is it not the responsibility of a purchaser to figure out whether there is an opportunity to acquire the funds to purchase land or a share or ? Banks, credit unions and mortgage brokers handle this don't they? Should this be a concern of the LTC?

Expert opinions are credible and very thorough, objective in their review of the subject area. The staff reports provided to the LTC are thorough, objective and extremely detailed. The recommendations are considered. Yet one or two community members can challenge any expertise provided and stop an application in its tracks. Is one complaint or one concern enough for the LTC to discount expert opinion? Is this working to benefit islanders?

Some applicants have hired lawyers and/or consultants. The LTC operates under the mandate 'to cooperate with others' yet applicants think it necessary to hire 'professionals' to negotiate on their behalf? This certainly doesn't sound collaborative or supportive. In fact, it is only making everything harder, more expensive and extraordinarily time consuming, a drain on all people's time and effort.

I am concerned about the LTC's focus to protect the lands zoned Forest on Galiano Island. I suspect most of the island has been logged, indeed clear cut, probably more than once. Much of the forest that the LTC is now protecting is a badly grown second (or third) growth forest. Trees grow in all zones. In the Galiano OCP there is reference to 'Maintaining and restoring Galiano's forest ecosystem is critical for maintaining the forest ecosystem-based sustainable forest management'. Logging is an unlikely economic activity these days in this small island community. Restoring forest, protecting watersheds, drainage systems, delicate ecosystems yes – all good work to support managed development in *all areas* of the island. This applies to all lands on Galiano, not just that zoned Forest, and should apply equally regardless of the zone designation.

It is time to empower the landowners with the responsibility of protecting the unique and important ecosystems on their land through covenants (created with the experts who know, in conjunction with organizations prepared to sign on to hold them). It is time to permit a variety of activities on all the lands. It is time to trust. The development wolf is not at the door. (see Goals of the updated IT Strategic Plan)

What does community benefit actually mean? I have searched the Islands Trust website for a definition with no luck. At the last LTC meeting, when I asked what did community benefit mean (in reference to the Crystal Mountain rezoning application) one trustee replied, that it

meant 'transferring title' to an off island organization. How is giving land to another organization a benefit to the community? How better to ensure the land is preserved and cared for than hold the landowner accountable for holding and managing a covenant, working to restore a seriously damaged forest, where this land will benefit all beings who call this place home. (see Goal A, point 1, updated IT Strategic Plan)

Two points in closing:

In the January 14, 2016 issue of the Island Tides, an article on page 7 titled "Islands Trust adopts its Strategic Plan" outlines four updated goals for the 2014 -18 term. Of particular interest is Goal A: To foster preservation and protection of the Trust area's ecosystems. The first bulleted point is "encouraging voluntary stewardship..." and Goal C: To sustain island character and healthy communities". The first bulleted point in this section states "enhancing, protecting and restoring community character, socio-economic diversity and economic sustainability, using land-use planning tools."

Finally, I support the applications before the LTC and encourage their approval. Innovative and creative, the Galiano Green (2011) project deserves a chance to move ahead. It will help to restore community character, in particular the socio-economic diversity and economic sustainability as expressed in Goal C. The Crystal Mountain application (2004, resubmitted 2015) also meets Goal A and C, both with voluntary stewardship as well as attracting visitors, stimulating the economy through purchasing groceries and other supplies while maintaining a tiny footprint on 25% (approx. 15 acres) of the land in question.

I appreciate your acceptance of my many questions for your consideration. I hope that this letter might provoke some reflection on purpose and intention of your work as our Local Trust Committee.

Yours very sincerely

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