

SS Solution Delegation to Trust Council | December 4, 2019

Good Afternoon,

My name is Elizabeth FitzZaland. I grew up on the shores of the Salish Sea and am now raising my children on Salt Spring Island. I co-own a green building company that employs 12 full time tradespeople at living wages on Salt Spring. I am also a professional community planner with about 20 years of experience in long-range, comprehensive planning.

I am here to talk to you today about solutions for affordable housing that the Trust Council can take, that are also solutions to the climate emergency.

When I went to planning school two decades ago the most pressing issue of the day was integrating climate action with land use planning. Carefully planning the location and intensity of housing, transportation and protected natural areas had already been recognized as the best way local and regional governments could participate in slowing down the impacts of climate change. Since then, I've worked with communities small and large, up and down the West Coast, as well as with non-profits, agricultural clients and conservation groups. I am a lifelong environmentalist and social justice advocate. As a planner, I have come to realize that these two elements – the natural world and humans – are totally intertwined. To plan for one in isolation of the other is certainly the reason why we find ourselves in a climate emergency today.

I took today off of work and organized childcare for my two young kids to journey here to speak to you as a volunteer, on behalf of a new advocacy group on Salt Spring called Salt Spring Solutions and also the Salt Spring Island Housing Council – two volunteer groups working to address the housing crisis that is poised to hollow out our community. More than that, I am here representing 900 people who signed this petition which I respectfully submit to you. The petition asks the Islands Trust, CRD and the largest water district on Salt Spring to take immediate action to address the Housing Crisis. These are 900 of your constituents.

Perhaps, you own a house and so do all your friends. Perhaps, you have not yet been touched personally by the housing crisis, or you don't realize there are people you interact with regularly who are struggling. The people we have been listening to over the past 2 years have a very different reality. They are families living in moldy structures with outrageous rents, single parents living in tents with their children, seniors sleeping in cars, businesses struggling to attract and retain qualified employees, long-term residents being evicted, non-profits and government organizations struggling to hire staff, commuters travelling by car to work but not live in our community, and so on.

The Housing Crisis is happening in many places and driven by many forces outside of your control, true, but the crisis is acutely experienced in desirable, tourist driven economies that have major protections on land. What is our community going to look like in 10 years if these trends continue unabated?

There is good news, though – and that's what I'm excited to share with you.

The good news is that as the land use planning agency for the Gulf Islands, the Islands Trust has both the authority and the responsibility to address the Housing Crisis. Furthermore, addressing the housing crisis requires solutions that will also address the Climate Emergency. What an amazing stroke of luck!

The solutions we are asking for locally on Salt Spring Island and championing across the region are land use planning strategies that have long been understood to be environmentally sustainable:

- **Plan for more housing close to town** – to reduce vehicle trips
- **Legalize suites and cottages** – as compact, low resource homes

- **Support Eco Village zoning** – by which compact, resource efficient housing is clustered on a small portion of land and the remaining portion is protected for ecological conservation
- **Rainwater harvesting** – as a sustainable water supply
- **Protecting forests** – by prioritizing compact, clustered housing away from ecologically valuable land instead of allowing land clearing for large-scale homes and estates.

The housing solutions we are proposing will result in more conservation land, greater forest and shoreline protection, and less greenhouse gas emissions than what will result under the status quo. Like it or not, the settlement pattern in Islands Trust area is predominately car-dependent, rural and suburban sprawl. Mansions being built far from town, with few to no restrictions on their water, energy, or forest use.

Continuing this development pattern is to perpetuate climate change and social inequity.

Another piece of good news, is that the Islands Trust has already invested in all the planning work for affordable and sustainable housing. Starting with a 2003 report titled “Options for Affordable Housing: New Solutions to the Housing Crisis in the Islands Trust Area” up to the 2019 reports you received last spring “Affordable Housing in the Islands Trust Area” and “Affordable Housing Strategic Actions,” Trust Council has already done a great job of figuring out what to do.

So now, it is time to do the work. We are asking you to do the following:

1. **Maintain affordable housing as a Trust Council planning priority. Period.**
2. **Establish a timeframe for implementing the 2019 “Affordable Housing Strategic Actions”**
3. **Hire a senior housing planner for the Trust Area to manage that work and to support individual LTCs and their staff**

If you wonder if this is just a Salt Spring thing, I can put that question to rest. On October 15, we had a video conference with representatives from Galiano Island, Mayne Island, Cortes Island, Hornby Island, Denman Island and Gabriola Island. Many of these same people and organizations submitted a letter to you before your meeting in the Fall. Like us, these folks are working, in many cases volunteering, to keep our communities diverse and equitable. We are not doing this work instead of or in conflict with preserving and protecting the ecology of the islands, we are doing this work in service to that exact mandate.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge our local trustees, Laura Patrick and Peter Grove, for their vocal and ongoing support of affordable housing. I understand that the trustees from Gabriola have also been bravely challenging business as usual. I encourage the rest of you to educate yourselves your powers and capabilities in addressing housing and climate change, to listen to new and different voices, to read the reports your organization has produced, and to be courageous enough to take action before it is too late.