

From: Heather Menzies [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2022 12:59 PM
To: Islands2050
Subject: re. the Draft Policy Statement
Attachments: Islands.Trust.Policy.letter.May.22.docx

Good afternoon,

I have finally gathered my thoughts into the form of a submission to the Trust Program Committee's deliberations on revising the Trust's policy statement.

Could you please circulate the attached to the trustees serving on that committee as well as staff. If you could send it to the other trustees with the Islands Trust, I'd appreciate that too.

Thanks.

Heather Menzies

[REDACTED]
Gabriola, BC. VOR 1X7

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Heather Menzies

Writer & Past-chair, The Writers Union of Canada Adjunct Professor, School of Indigenous & Canadian Studies, Carleton University.

[REDACTED]
Coastal Salish Land

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A Vision for the Islands Trust

I initially only wanted to suggest that “density” be defined in context in the Islands Trust Policy Statement – in the context of the larger vision within which the Islands Trust thinks through technical concepts like density. But the closest I could come to a vision was the Trust’s mission statement, which is to “preserve and protect” the Gulf Islands, in what seems to be a tacitly resistant relationship to property development. To me, this is inadequate and problematic as well. First, the phrase about preserving and protecting the land implies a kind of Terra Nullius, land without human habitation. Second, the language of density and development associated with the human habitation continuing here on the Gulf Islands implies a business model approach to the Trust’s work.

I would like to recommend that the Trust use more ecological language and metaphors, especially as these were articulated in pre-modern, pre-business model times, for example, in the Commons and, for the Abenaki and other Indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Northeast here on Turtle Island, the Common Pot. The word ‘common’ derives from two latin words and means “together as one.” In this instance, it meant habitat and inhabitants together as one for mutual sustainability -- in an inhabited habitat.

If the Islands Trust were to dare to think differently, it could consider the Gulf Islands as a Commons, where the inhabitants of its commonly shared habitat can enjoy use rights within limits – as existed in the original Commons. In the pre-modern locally self-governing commons, these limits were determined according to the carrying capacity of the local habitat, and rigorously policed. And so, not only were there limits (called ‘stints’) to the number of sheep, cows and goats any one family could send to the uplands common pasture for the summer, to ensure the pasture’s sustainability. There were commons-elected or appointed field constables who impounded any animals that exceeded the allotted quota, and levied fines that went into the Common Good fund to buy, for example, a breeding bull to be shared by the community. (And for those whose knowledge of the commons is dominated by “The Tragedy of the Commons” essay by Garrett Hardin, I will point out that this essay was based on a thought experiment conducted by an amateur mathematician, William Forster Lloyd, in 1832. Lloyd’s speculative projection of an inexorable overgrazing of the commons, made in a public lecture he was invited to give at Oxford University, assumed away these already embattled local customary laws and assumed instead the unregulated, unconstrained maximization of individualistic private-profit thinking that was gaining legitimacy at the time.)

The implications for the Trust adopting a commons vision and a more ecological (and perhaps closer to Indigenous) mindset are huge and would take years to both comprehend and embrace. That it would involve some important decolonization goes without saying too. As does the implication for enabling legislation, to uphold this vision of Gulf Islanders’ individual property rights being enforcibly constrained by their shared responsibilities as residents/inhabitants of these lands. Yet it’s fitting that a governance body like the trust should take the initiative to champion such legislation – and timely too, given the requirement to bring BC and Canadian law into harmony with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Article 25 of which affirms their ongoing responsibility to the land.

For the time being, I recommend amending the existing mission statement to read: ***“to preserve and protect the Gulf Islands as a healthy and responsibly inhabited habitat.”***

Considering “density” in this revised framework, its definition would become more nuanced, as the concept was defined within the carrying capacity of the environment. For instance, if rainwater could be approved as a source of drinking water for multiple family habitations, the density permitted in

a particular locale could increase. Ditto if there were strict water-, tree- and other conservation measures applicable across the commonly shared land of the Gulf Islands.

If the Trust's vision were to support and protect a healthy inhabited habitat, considerations of density would also take diversity into account – including diversity of age and income level. A habitat that becomes a monoculture is not healthy, and human habitats like the Gulf Islands are no exception.

Respectfully submitted by:

Heather Menzies



Gabriola Island