



Zooming on Denman: Islands Trust Electronic Meetings

Like countless organizations around the world, the Islands Trust has moved to a mostly on-line format to continue working the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (DILTC) held its first-ever electronic local meeting in May, followed by another one in July, using the Zoom platform.

Here's a summary of how this is working out:

Approximately 15 members of the public attended each meeting, using the Zoom on-line link or by phoning in. In my experience, this is about average for an LTC meeting, but I don't have statistics handy to verify this. Attendance ebbed and flowed during the meetings.

Regional Director Daniel Arbour also attended for part of one meeting to give a report on the work of the Comox Valley Regional District. This was very welcome and I hope that this can become a regular feature.

Technically, the meetings have gone fairly well, although I struggled with spotty Internet connectivity during our July meeting.

Feedback has been varied but mostly positive. For instance, one islander wrote to say, "Kudos to the trustees...for holding an electronic meeting! This makes the meeting far more accessible to me. If LTC meetings were always held this way, I would attend many more of them, and be more involved with local trust activities. I hope electronic meetings are the wave of the future, with concomitant savings in transportation and accommodation for off-island trustees."

Another islander said he appreciated being able to keep the meeting up on his computer while he worked, and then tuning more closely in for the parts that he was most interested in.

Concerns came from people who found the technology a barrier. For instance, I heard "couldn't figure out how to raise hand to speak," "had trouble finding the Zoom invitation," and "didn't realize it was an electronic meeting till the last minute." This article is one way of helping Islanders understand and feel comfortable with electronic meetings.

I haven't actually heard from anyone who couldn't access the meetings because they didn't have good enough

Internet capacity. If there's anyone out there who wanted to attend, but couldn't, let me know.

At our July meeting, the DILTC discussed "should we hold community information meetings and/or public hearings electronically?" and decided that yes, we should. We have heard from islanders who strongly oppose this, and others who strongly support it, and there are convincing arguments on either side.

What swayed me, in making this decision, was the fact that we don't anticipate being able to hold in-person community meetings anytime in the foreseeable future. We are not allowed to have more than 50 people at an event. It is fairly common that for important rezonings and bylaw amendments, we have more than 50 in the meeting hall.

There's no indication that the 50-person limit will change this year. Also, there are many Denman Islanders who are in the vulnerable population group and may not feel safe coming to public meetings of any size. It's not an ideal situation, and we are choosing to adapt in order to move forward with community planning initiatives.

As always, when I am reporting on anything COVID-related, I offer the caveat that things are unpredictable and may have changed by the time you are reading this.

How to Stay Informed About Islands Trust Meetings

The very best way to stay up-to-date on upcoming meetings, especially in our currently ever-changing world, is to sign up to get email notifications. You can do that at www.islandstrust.bc.ca; click on "subscriber options" in the middle of the page.

Also, you can find the Denman Island meeting schedule on the Islands Trust website here:

<http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/islands/local-trust-areas/denman/meeting-calendar-agendas-minutes/>.

Meeting schedules and announcements are posted on physical bulletin boards (at the Old School and outside the General Store), and are usually included in local print publication event listings and calendars. Also I consistently post meeting announcements on the Denman Facebook community bulletin board.