



## Getting Along with Neighbours

We've all been staying home a lot lately. And so have our neighbours. This can be wonderful—porch visits, grocery deliveries, help with practicalities, and just having someone else to talk to. Even a wave and a smile can lift our spirits.

It also can be challenging. Minor quirks become major annoyances when scaled up from now-and-then to 24/7. The pandemic means many of us have changed our habits and/or have decided to use this time to improve our properties. We may find we are stretching our neighbour's tolerance, or they are stretching ours, or both.

Whatever the reason, I've had a lot of calls lately from people either upset about things happening on a neighbouring property, or upset that someone is upset with what they are doing. I try to help, but it's often not easy.

Islands Trust regulations can't tell us how to be a good neighbour. They do provide enforceable rules about which land uses are acceptable, and which aren't, on different types of properties. These rules come from community conversations and reflect shared ideas about what is best for our island, filtered through the Islands Trust "preserve and protect" mandate.

Islands Trust bylaws don't cover everything that can happen on a piece of land. Below, you'll find information on who is in charge of what.

**But first—because regulations are just one of many tools in the *how-to-get-along* and *how-to-live-responsibly-on-the-earth* toolbox—here are some other considerations:**

I'm sure you all know this, but it bears repeating: **good communication (that means speaking and listening) is the number one tool for creating and maintaining positive neighbour relationships.** Options such as bylaw enforcement or legal action are there if you really need them, but please, try talking first. And don't wait till there's a problem. Get to know each other. Help each other out.

**Consult neighbours before making changes or doing activities on your property that will create impacts for them.** This doesn't mean you need your neighbour's permission before holding an outdoor (socially-distanced) party, or building an addition, or cutting trees close to the property line. Just talk to them about it, and be ready to listen and to consider their input.

**If talking to a neighbour feels intimidating, or hasn't gone well, and there are issues to resolve, consider mediation.** Ask a trusted community member to help, or hire a professional. You could contact the Comox Valley Justice Centre, which has a team trained in dispute resolution, and sometimes can provide support for resolving neighbourhood conflicts.

**Also, learn about regulations before building or starting a new activity on your property.** You'll potentially be saving yourself a lot of hassle, heartbreak and expense down the road. No one wants to be half-way through construction and then find out they're too close to a neighbouring property line, or to the high-tide line, or on a First Nations midden. If you think the regulations need to be changed, write a letter, speak to an elected official, come to a meeting, or organize in your community.

And remember, **regulations are there to protect you from harmful neighbouring activities, and also to protect your rights** (and your neighbour's) to live on and make reasonable use of your property. The trick is finding the balance. Compromise, as in all human relationships, is usually necessary.

### WHO IS IN CHARGE OF WHAT?

#### Islands Trust

Setbacks, building height, lot coverage, environmental protection in Development Permit Areas (lakes, streams, and wetlands, steep slopes, etc), density (number of homes), commercial uses (including vacation rentals) and other zoning-related issues

Contact: [northinfo@islandstrust.bc.ca](mailto:northinfo@islandstrust.bc.ca) or 250-247-2063

#### The Comox Valley Regional District

Noise, unsightly premises (for instance, garbage dumping, fumes and odours)

Contact: 250-334-6000

#### The RCMP

Animal control

Contact: 250-338-1321

#### The BC Archeology Branch

Archeological finds; Indigenous cultural heritage

Contact: 250-953-3334, [archeology@gov.bc.ca](mailto:archeology@gov.bc.ca)

**For trespass issues,** where a property is being physically encroached on (with a building, or due to excavation, or in other ways), regulators like the Islands Trust can't help. Start with a conversation with your neighbour. People often don't know where their property lines are. If a conflict becomes irresolvable, your recourse is through the court system via a civil suit.

As fall and winter approach, and our pandemically narrowed horizons close in a little more, let's hope that our neighbour relations are cordial and supportive, and that residents plan carefully and communicate well as they contemplate changes.