

Trustee Notebook *By David Graham*



This month's report is coming to you, well it was started, as Trustee Borthwick, Chair David Maude and I attended the three day spring quarterly meeting of Trust Council, in Nanaimo.

The main task for all 26 Trustees during our meeting was to approve the Trust Budget for 2024 – 2025, never an easy job, but necessary to the work of the Trust, including the work that each Island's Local Trust Committee engages in.

By the time Trustees sit down in March to approve any budget, many hours have been spent by various Trust committees, management groups, Planning Staff and administration, who are tasked with setting work priorities for the upcoming year. Staff then creates business cases, supporting each work activity, including an estimate of dollars required and staff time allotted to the tasks. Then the proposed draft budget is worked on by members of the Financial Planning Committee. This committee includes the Chairs of the other Trust committees, as well as a member of the Executive and one member at large, me.

Trustee Borthwick sits on two Trust committees, Trust Programs Committee and Regional Planning Committee. I sit on Regional Planning Committee and Financial Planning Committee. The Financial Planning Committee (FPC) has the final duty to review all business cases submitted with the goal of evaluating the various cases and wish lists, reducing, if possible, or asking Staff to take a deeper look into the rationales supporting the needs etc. The FPC accepts, reduces or eliminates budget requests, and finally presents their notes to the draft budget to Trust Council. This brings us to our work during three days in Nanaimo, consideration by all Trustees, and finally adopting a budget for 2024 – 2025.

Each elected member of Trust Council is keenly aware of the responsibility to respect the tax implication of their island community members. We are also dedicated to carrying out the mandate of the Trust, as best we can. The planning of land use on thirteen major islands, directed by elected Trustees, with support of their community members, administered by professionally trained staff, working out of three Trust offices, all add up to many dollars.

The costs associated with every aspect of local governments in every community have increased. The added responsibility to address the effects of climate change on land uses, the pressures of trying to provide affordable housing and the requirement to broaden

engagement and capacity building with respect to involving First Nations and furthering reconciliation.

Other areas of monetary support provided by the Trust include: a number of non-profit organizations which, through their work, furthers the protection of the natural environment, groups such as the Baynes Sound Ecoforum and the Southern Gulf Islands Forum. Work on the Policy Statement update (think of this as an OCP for the entire Trust area) On Salt Spring Island, work on the Ganges Village Area Plan, and monies set aside for various legal costs. (For those with a keen interest in the fine details, the entire budget spreadsheet will be posted to the Trust Website soon.)

The Islands Trust Conservancy is the land acquisition and protection arm of the Trust, it is managed by its own Board of Directors and administers a budget of \$320,000. Half of this money is used to manage 1,383 ha of property, either in a Nature Reserve or Conservation Covenant protection. The other half includes Staff costs and general administration costs. Their budget is part of the overall budget for the Trust.

So, what did we finally agree on, after so many hours of deliberation, and spirited debate?

For property owners on every island in the Trust, except Bowen, the increase over last year's tax is approximately 6% and for Bowen, approximately a 12% increase.

This increase will pay for Official Community Plan (OCP) reviews on some islands, work targeting housing on others, technological changes which will provide better service to islanders and make work more efficient for Staff, a replacement for office space, no longer available on Salt Spring this summer and wage increases to BCGEU staff and excluded staff.

If you are still reading this, I commend you! Budgets, and numbers etc. are definitely not that interesting to most of us, but I thought I would try and capture the creation of the budget, where the money goes and what increase property owners will see on their tax forms this year.

More information is available on the Trust Website for those who wish to go deeper. That's all from me this month.