

Trustee Elliott report from June Council

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On June 27th, Trustee Yates and I welcomed 20 of the 26 Trustees representing Local Trust Areas (LTAs) for the quarterly Council meeting, for the first time on Gabriola since 2019. Trustee Yates had strongly advocated for a return to in-person Council meetings for the first year of this new Council, after having witnessed how Council operated on Zoom only meetings during and post-COVID. I admit she is totally right!

I have found the quality of decision-making, tone of debate, knowledge-sharing, and consensus-building increases exponentially with in-person meetings.

The cost (roughly \$27,500) seems worth it as Trustees are able to brainstorm on our related island-issues, and build relationships. This is essential for a federated structure of government in which we all have one mission ("the mandate"), however 13 (or more) unique community perspectives that inform how we should go about it means there is a lot to learn from each other. I was happy to host seven of the Trustees at my tiny house location so they could witness a land-sharing arrangement that benefits both landowners and renters, and was pleased with their avid interest and support for the idea, and many seem to want this as a partial solution to housing shortages in their LTAs.

Conservancy Election

Lisa Gauvreau from Galiano Island was elected to the Conservancy after Trustee Scott had to step down. Gauvreau has been involved in both housing advocacy and conservation work. She offers a strong perspective on the need to authentically respect the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples in the Trust Area. Gauvreau's Request for Decision (RFD)

that Council and staff review and re-evaluate the Islands Trust's First Nations referral process, with the aim of ensuring Indigenous perspectives and knowledges are integrated into land-use decision making, passed unanimously. Both Susan and I are thrilled Gauvreau is joining us on the ITC!

Local Governments in Reconcili-Action

Director Brent Mueller, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and Lisa Bhopalsingh, Manager of Community and Cultural Planning for the City of Nanaimo, explored how the Province's interim approach to the Declaration Act has been playing out for local governments. Mueller said that First Nations' participation is advancing in regional districts because there is greater ability to participate in governance of services, growth strategies, and conservation, but less so for municipalities. This indicates to me that perhaps the Islands Trust structure might lend itself to a co-governance model with First Nations. Re-naming - or rather, restoration of ancestral names - is happening in different towns and regions as communities come forward with requests, as the Haida nation did to restore the ancestral name of Daajing Giids (formerly Queen Charlotte) and the Tla'amin Nation did to rename qathet Regional District (formerly Powell River). The Province's Community to Community (C2C) Fund has doubled its granting amounts to \$10,000. Bhopalsingh stated that the Declaration Act and the United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have, in many ways, "raised expectations for First Nations." While negotiations with the Crown exclude local governments, they can still greatly affect those relationships. As nations press harder to have consent, meaningful early engagement and shared decision-making be respected, understandings as to what that should look

like, vary. Land use decisions can get contentious, because "we don't have the legal framework to do these things yet." Bhopalsingh quoted Guuduniia LaBoucan of the Whitefish Lake Band (Alberta): "Reconciliation is meant to be hard and if you are finding it fun... then, you are doing it wrong."

Bhopalsingh offered some examples of how Nanaimo is building trust and working collaboratively with Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN). She cited the leadership role that Chief and Councillors took in designing community events and celebrations, like the hugely successful Junior All Natives Tournament (JANT), and the National Days for Truth and Reconciliation. City of Nanaimo staff work to support SFN's vision and help execute them. She said Nanaimo's new official community City Plan: ReImagined (July 04, 2022) has "reconciliation woven throughout" and was the result of extensive government-to-government engagements with SFN.

While partnerships like these are enviable, Bhopalsingh cautioned Trustees to expect that relationships between First Nation communities and councils and local governments will ebb and flow. "Sometimes they will hit walls, then things will shift. As you seek to build relations, it's about trust and being authentic. It's important to be honest and frank, to listen to understand and fully hear interests of First Nations even if you don't agree. Fit in the pieces that fit, don't force things." She concluded that "this is not an easy Journey: reconciliation at its centre is really about, for me, fundamentally 2 things. It is about respect and it is about love."

Strategic and Corporate Plan, and a first-time SWOT!

The Trust's new Governance Committee has made a priority of drafting a Corporate Planning process

that will better tie strategic and financial components of the Islands Trust, one of the recommendations of the Governance Review. The strategic planning process, which normally would begin now and conclude in September (the case last term) has had to wait while this new Corporate plan is drafted. Council decided to continue with the current (2018-2022) strategic plan in the interim, adding in the corporate planning process as a priority, and focussing on projects that are tied directly to land use planning, the primary work of the Trust.

To inform next year's strategic planning, staff supported Trustees in conducting a SWOT/C (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats/Challenges) exercise in breakout groups, a first for any Council.

It was fascinating to take a step back and see how the organization is performing in real world conditions, and we garnered a lot of valuable information. We then took the next step to analyze and create strategies to use our strengths, for instance, to address threats or opportunities, and I was heartened by the creative approaches that came forward!

Presentation on Research Project

I presented my research project to my colleagues (offline, not recorded) introducing the leadership project I undertook to finish my Master's degree early this year, titled Walking in Truth: Unsettling, Decolonizing and Learning Relational Ways of Being for Key organizations

on Gabriola Island. I took the opportunity to introduce new members of this Council to Lisa Wilcox, the Trust's former Intergovernmental Policy Advisor (2018-2022) and a key informant for my research, by sharing part of the interview we had recorded for the research. Wilcox's perspective and wisdom deeply shaped my understanding of the lasting impacts of colonization in the Gulf Islands. Staff and returning trustees said with deep feeling that "it was so good to hear Lisa again". I hope we can have her offer some education to Trustees and perhaps help guide the formation of our Reconciliation Learning Group (yet to begin). We sorely need Indigenous voices to inform us, and possibly no one knows better than Wilcox how the Islands Trust is perceived and comes forward to First Nation leadership. I truly

believe that as our hearts are moved and eyes are opened, we can start making changes that align with the principles of respect and love that Bhopalsingh referenced, even while working within this very colonial structure of government. If anyone wants to have a copy of the report, or to listen to the interview we conducted with Lisa Wilcox, she has given me permission for it to be shared and I would love to make it available to you!

As always, if you have any questions, or ideas you want to see explored in a video series I'm working on (short, informational videos to share context and my perspective on some of the emerging issues), please email me at telliott@islandstrust.bc.ca, or come see me during my office hours, which happen at least once a week. Love to have your input - it's been a wild ride and I'm still getting my bearings!