

Islands Trust, Salt Spring Office
500 Lower Ganges Road
Salt Spring Island, BC V8K2N8
ssiinfo@islandstrust.bc.ca

August 30, 2016

Re: Proposed development of Swanson's Pond property on Salt Spring Island

Dear Islands Trust,

As a neighborhood, we would like to express our concerns and share our visions regarding the proposed development of the lot known as Swanson's Pond, located near Gulf Islands Secondary School on a three-acre residentially zoned property between Kanaka Road and Park Drive, as promoted by Eric Booth. We respectfully submit this letter to the Islands Trust, rather than to the media, to allow for discussion to proceed in a responsible manner, in line with the Trust's mandate to preserve and protect our islands' unique amenities and environments. Collectively, we believe that the proposed construction of 48 apartments at this location is unsustainable.

This development has been proposed several times over the past 15 years, and each time it has been stopped by the community at large. For example in 2007, residents intervened after the flow to the pond was diverted, flooding downstream homes. In 2008, Salt Spring Secondary students gathered over 400 signatures to halt development. In 2009, the Salt Spring Salmon Enhancement group filed a legal claim to stop rash action at this site. Over the years, "Friends of Swanson's Pond" and other community members have organized and expressed their concerns.

Past concerns remain relevant, including the:

- Ecological importance of the site;
- Safety of school children and pedestrians, with regards to additional vehicular traffic;
- Limited water availability for new developments; and,
- Lost opportunities for greater outdoor education for adjacent schools and benefits of a public pond and wetland greenspace in town.

Swanson's Pond and surrounding wetlands and forests are a beautiful natural space. The area was historically a wetland and shallow salmon stream, but was converted to a wet forest and pond for drainage in the early 1960's. The area still supports large numbers of Pacific Chorus Frogs, fire-bellied newts, pileated woodpeckers and kingfishers, to name just a few species. Freshwater wetlands such as these are very important for migratory birds, especially in this seasonally-dry, marine environment.

The safety of pedestrians and school children must also be taken into consideration. The lot is adjacent to the Gulf Islands Secondary School, which also adjoins Salt Spring Elementary and Middle Schools as well as the Cooperative Preschool. Traffic is already hectic in the mornings and afternoons with drop-offs and pick-ups, along with students walking and biking to school. Occasional speeding cars, especially on Park Drive with little or no shoulder, have nearly hit several walkers. Neighbors have noticed an increase in pedestrian activity over the last year or so, with active Bed & Breakfasts and people cutting

through from town to access Country Grocer, the Thrift Shop, and other services on Lower Ganges Road. An additional 48 households in this area would pose serious traffic volume and traffic safety concerns.

Thirdly, there is a well-recognized limited water supply on the island. The lot currently has one household's water allocated to it by the NSS Water District. Proposals for shallow wells may simply drain the existing wetland further. Considering the future impacts of climate change, new developments require sustainable water solutions.

This is not to say that the neighborhood would like the land to remain overgrown and strewn with garbage, an enticing hide-out for loiterers. A collective vision may be achieved. Furthermore, we do recognize the need for affordable housing on Salt Spring Island. It just shouldn't come at the cost of natural heritage and community safety.

More importantly, the unique natural wetland, forest and pond areas could serve as a wonderful outdoor classroom for the adjoining schools, as an outdoor laboratory for art and ecology, reflecting this islands' culture and values. For example, this is the first year that Salt Spring Elementary is offering a Nature-based Program for first through third graders, where they will spend on average half the day each day outdoors learning in natural settings. Other elementary, middle, and secondary students could greatly benefit from a wild reserve across the street for ecology, science and math projects, and to find quiet places for creating art, and reading and writing. Neighbors would welcome established trails from which to enjoy the pond views and forests. Moving forward, invasive weed removal and habitat enhancement projects would benefit western pond turtles and other fish and wildlife. In 2002, PARC considered purchasing this property for some of these uses, but didn't have the financial wherewithal at that time. Perhaps now it's time to revisit that idea.

We are open to discussions and are prepared to support something that fits well with the adjacent schools and surrounding neighborhood. We are also open to trying to raise the funds to purchase the property for fair market value as a park or to be used by the schools as an outdoor classroom.

Thank you for your consideration,

[individual signatures below]

cc: MLA Gary Holman (gary.holman.mla@leg.bc.ca) and MP Elizabeth May (elizabeth.may.c1a@parl.gc.ca)




