

News Release

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ISLANDS TRUST 2012-13 BUDGET DECISION REJECTS GAS TAX GRANT AND HOLDS TAXES AT 2011 LEVELS

VICTORIA -- On March 7th at its meeting on Gabriola Island, the Islands Trust Council approved its 2012-13 budget of \$6.8 million, resulting in no property tax increase for 2012. Islands Trust taxes account for approximately 10-20% of total property taxes, depending upon other jurisdictions listed on local tax bills.

The budget covers the costs of maintaining current levels of local and federation-wide services, adding a part-time Bylaw Enforcement Officer and continuing to implement BC's *Riparian Areas Regulation* in the next term.

"The biggest budget decision facing Trust Council was whether to review the Islands Trust Policy Statement using a planning grant of \$250,000 from Canada's Gas Tax Fund," said Sheila Malcolmson, Islands Trust Council Chair. "Last term Trust Council applied for the funding to defray the high cost of engaging every local trust area in a review of the Islands Trust's guiding principles. The new Trust Council carefully considered input from trustees and constituents and concluded that there was no appetite for such a comprehensive review. It may seem odd to reject a grant, but we heard that there's support for the 1994 Policy Statement, and that the ambitious scope proposed in the grant would detract from more pressing local needs. We are grateful to the Gas Tax Fund for this grant offer, and since we are not allowed to reallocate it ourselves, another local government will benefit from the planning grant instead."

The approved budget supports some of the strategic priorities of Trust Council:

- Compliance with provincial requirements under the *Riparian Areas Regulation*. This regulation requires local governments to ensure that fish habitat within their jurisdiction is protected to specific standards. Funding to continue the work to bring the Islands Trust Area into compliance includes public consultation to develop necessary bylaws, and mapping of streams where the regulation would apply.
- Confirmation of the trustee remuneration bylaw adopted in September 2011, intended to attract more diverse electoral candidates by offering an increase in remuneration;
- Significant improvements to the management and accessibility of Islands Trust records. In a two-year project begun in 2011, staff began replacing the thirty-year-old system in order to efficiently track and retrieve documents required by the public, trustees, staff and other parties. The project will be complete in 2012.
- Improvements to the accuracy and availability of Islands Trust mapping products; and
- Acquisition of additional laptop computers for trustees to transition to 'paperless' meetings.

The approved budget supports several projects important to individual island communities, including:

- Completion or significant advancement of community work in reviewing Official Community Plans and Land Use bylaws in seven Local Trust Areas. In addition to public engagement, specific work would be related to affordable housing, groundwater and shoreline protection, and food security.
- Community planning projects on Salt Spring Island related to the Official Community Plan; and
- A groundwater study on Galiano Island.

The Islands Trust Council is a federation of local government bodies that plan land use and regulate development in the Islands Trust Area. The area is home to 25,000 people and covers the islands and waters between the BC mainland and southern Vancouver Island. It includes 13 major and more than 450 smaller islands covering 5200 square kilometres.

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Preserving Island communities, culture and environment