

Trustee Notebook

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Islands Trust

"Democracy is the worst form of government -- except for all those other ones." -- Winston Churchill

Flawed though it may be, our democratic system does provide opportunities for people -- call them the people if you're so inclined -- to wield influence. And in fact, that's the best way to make our democracy...well, more democratic.

So in the interests of supporting broad community involvement in our local government, the Islands Trust, I present **The User's Guide to Denman's Local Government, Part I.**

This Guide assumes a basic knowledge about the Islands Trust and the Denman Island Local Trust Committee. For more info about this dig out my February column which has recommended reading, peruse the Trust website, or ask a friend who's been involved.

This column focuses on the **Denman Island Local Trust Committee (LTC) regular business meetings**, where local decisions are made.

When, Where, and What's On the Agenda?

LTC business meetings generally happen once a month. Details of when and where are published in both local newspapers, on local Internet calendars, and on the Denman Island page of the Islands Trust website. In fact, the schedule for the whole year is on that website (click on "Meetings Schedule" on the list of Committee Links on the right-hand side).

You can also sign up for the **Meetings Notification Service** which will send you emails alerting you to upcoming local meetings (not just regular business meetings but also Community Information Meetings and Public Hearings, both forums for in-depth and significant public discussion).

Agendas for LTC meetings are posted on the website about 10 days in advance of the meeting, and paper versions are posted on bulletin boards outside the Old School, the Seniors' Hall, and the General Store.

To flesh out what you see in the agenda, go to the website, click on 'meeting agendas,' and then on 'meeting package.' This generally voluminous document is full of background info on agenda topics (hard copies are available at the meetings). For further information on specific issues, you might want to look at meeting minutes from the past -- again, available via the right-hand menu on the Denman Island main page -- or see if the topic has its own section in the main part of the Denman web page.

If you have questions about agenda items or the meeting generally, you can contact one of the Local

Trustees or Island Planner Courtney Simpson.

The agenda includes an estimated time frame so you can plan to show up just when your item of interest is being dealt with (times are approximate; plan for some leeway). Agendas are always discussed and adopted -- sometimes with changes -- at the beginning of meetings.

How to participate?

Just attending a meeting, learning how they work, and knowing the issues is a great form of participation. If you want to speak your mind and/or set something in motion, you have a few options:

Every meeting has two scheduled Town Hall Sessions -- one near the beginning, one during the end. Members of the public can put their hand up to speak on any issue during those sessions. Alternately, for something a bit more formal (and for more time to speak), you can request to be on the agenda as a delegation. The surest way to make this happen is to contact the Islands Trust Office at least 10 days before the meeting. Alternately, you can show up at the meeting and ask, when the Committee adopting the agenda, to speak as a delegate, but in that case you take your chances -- there may not be time for you.

Many delegates also submit a written version or summary of their presentation.

LTCs also take input through letters and emails. Any correspondence you submit to the LTC becomes part of the public record and is included on the agenda and in the meeting package.

Between Meetings

If you have a question, an opinion to share, or an idea to explore, feel free to contact the Planner and/or the Local Trustees. Also, you can set up a meeting or drop by during Trustee office hours, every 2nd Saturday at the Islands Trust office at the Old School, 10 - noon (May 5 and 19). As well, planning staff have quarterly office hours on Denman and can schedule appointments on the Island at other times as needed.

Your LTC Meeting Experience

Frankly, if you find the LTC business meetings somewhat tedious and opaque, you aren't alone. I sometimes do, as well. I also find them fascinating -- and, the longer I'm involved in the Trust, the more I understand the reasons for much of the protocol that defines public process. That being said, I sure my fellow LTC members will agree that we're very open to hearing suggestions to make the meetings more user-friendly. Because without you there, in all your diversity, democracy is that much less democratic.

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