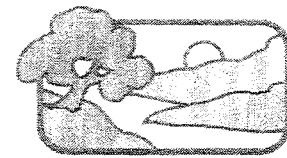


Trustee Notebook

By Laura Busheikin



Islands Trust

A few months ago I wrote about Denman Local Trust Committee (LTC) regulations for guest accommodation, and here's why: the community group DenmanWORKS! made a request to the LTC to amend our Land Use Bylaw to remove a number of restrictions on businesses providing guest accommodation.

At the May 1 LTC meeting, the Trustees responded by a) putting this task on their Project List, which signals an intention to deal with it, but only after other ongoing and already prioritized tasks are finished with; and b) passing a resolution temporarily suspending bylaw enforcement on certain types of guest accommodation infractions. From now till the end of this year, there will be no bylaw enforcement when guest accommodation providers offer cooking facilities in guest rooms, nor when they allow paying guests to sleep in accessory buildings (without cooking facilities), unless there are safety or environmental concerns or undue impacts on neighbours.

All other types of bylaw infringements are subject to enforcement as per the usual regime. Guest accommodation providers, please be aware that this is not "carte blanche." We don't want to lead you into trouble. Also note that this resolution has a "sunset" date of December 31, and that the LTC can revoke it at any time if it proves to be problematic.

This 8-month period will ideally allow guest accommodation providers to experiment, to consult with the public, to find out if these measures truly make their businesses more viable, and to gauge how these practices affect their neighbours and the Island generally.

It also allows the LTC to keep watch on the situation, to hear from Islanders, and to take note of the impacts of this approach. All this will inform future LTC decisions about guest accommodation regulations.

Getting guest accommodation just right is a challenging and complex task throughout the Islands Trust area, and each island deals with the issue in its own way. The trick is to find the balance between supporting tourism (apologies to those who don't like that word -- I don't have a better one) and keeping it to a shape and scale that fits our community goals.

These goals are set out in our Official Community Plan (OCP). Here are the highlights of that document's directions on tourism and guest accommodation:

The overall goal for tourism is "to ensure that tourism is managed in a way that respects our community's foremost function as a home for its residents." Economic activities in general should not threaten "the privacy, peace and quiet beauty that island living permits."

Section E of the OCP deals with economic activities and points out that Denman has a special attractiveness to visitors. It speaks of the need for a diverse economy that supports creation of local products, self-employment and self-reliance. It also points out that economic activity should be small scale and it recommends looking closely at negative impacts of traffic, noise and artificial light.

The OCP directs the LTC to "support types of tourism that are low impact, environmentally sensitive and educational and that provide local employment." Tourist accommodation, it states, should be provided primarily in home-based guest accommodation.

In past discussions on Denman, some people have stressed the need for limits on tourism generally and specifically on permitted types of accommodation, so that the Island retains its quiet, intimate, low-key character. Also, people state concerns about having an economy that is too reliant on tourism, feeling that it's better to be more self-sufficient and to minimize seasonal ups and downs.

Advocates for affordable and seniors' housing point out that when accessory buildings are permitted as guest accommodation, they are often removed from the already scarce rental market, or tenants are required to move out for the summer. This can contribute to the loss of social diversity on the island and lead to stress and conflict. There are also concerns about environmental impacts, particularly on groundwater levels.

On the other hand, advocates point out the clear economic benefits of having fewer restrictions on guest accommodation, not just for accommodation operators but also for Island businesses of all kinds. Without a well-functioning economy, we will lose our vibrant and diverse population. As well, many people appreciate the cultural value of sharing our beautiful island -- its natural glories, its artists, events and people -- with visitors. After all, the Trust mandate talks of "preserving and protecting...for the benefit of all British Columbians."

These are some of the key issues in this discussion. Stay tuned.

To comment on or ask questions on this or anything Trust-related, contact Local Trustees Laura Busheikin at 250-218-3216 / lbusheikin@islandstrust.bc.ca or David Graham at 250-335-3033 / dgraham@islandstrust.bc.ca, or contact the Islands Trust office at 250-247-2063