

Trustee Notebook

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Islands Trust

A YEAR OF LOCAL POLITICS IN REVIEW

I'm writing this in mid-December, almost exactly a year since I was sworn in as a Local Trustee, to serve as one of three members on the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (DLTC), tasked with the governance of land use on the Island. I can't resist using this opportunity to look back over the past year. The main issues can be roughly, albeit overlappingly, organized by theme:

Feel-good moments:

- Completion of the Farm Plan, a toolkit and information package with great potential to support farming and food security on the Island;
- The honouring of community member Peter Karsten with an Islands Trust Community Stewardship Award;
- The donation of land by Islanders Kal Holsti and Marilyn Wan to the Islands Trust Conservancy (this is the new name of the former Islands Trust Fund, the Trust's conservation body).

The community speaks:

- The DLTC was presented with a steady stream of letters, petitions, and delegations calling for a review of visitor accommodation regulations;
- The DLTC heard vehement opposition to the potential adoption of a ticketing system that could be used as a tool for bylaw enforcement, with particular concerns raised around the potential effect of ticketing on affordable housing, and decided not to proceed with this;
- Islands Trustee drop-in office hours were held every other Saturday morning at the Old School, with steady attendance by Islanders with questions, ideas, and opinions;
- As part of all these discussions, and of almost all discussions of community issues, we're hearing ongoing concern about the loss of social diversity on the Island due to economic pressures and demographic trends;
- Partly in response to all this community input, the DLTC put "Review of Housing Policies with respect to secondary cottages and suites" on its Top Priority list, with the specific activity designated as "consider potential use of secondary dwelling units for affordable, care-giver, special needs, and elder housing, and visitor accommodation."

Slow but steady progress:

- as part of our long march towards complying with the Provincial Riparian Areas Regulation, a draft map of the Morrison Marsh watershed was completed, and a draft Bylaw was reviewed by our Advisory Planning Commission;
- a rezoning application for the Keystone Project, which, if adopted, would create one affordable housing unit on Denman, is slowly moving through our system, and I very much hope to see it move less slowly towards a conclusion

in the first half of 2013 (also I hope to find ways to improve the application process for these sorts of community projects).

Tough issues:

- The Raven Coal mine project continues to loom. The DLTC (via Trustee David Graham's participation in the mine proposal's Working Group) and the Trust as a whole (via letters written by Trust Council Chair Sheila Malcolmson) are voicing our concerns, but still it feels as if we are just one small player in something very big.
- Ferries! As the new DLTC representative to the Ferry Advisory Committee, I've had quite a year — doing my best to advocate for our community throughout the cable ferry process and the recent province-wide ferry consultation. Does it make a difference? I can't say for sure, but it's well worth a try.

Marine environmental issues:

The DLTC has long been concerned about the negative impacts of shellfish farming on the marine environment and has, over the years, engaged in various initiatives to promote a sustainable approach to this valuable local agri-food industry. Early in 2012, the DLTC signaled its intention to review our Bylaws on issue, specifically to consider the banning of beach modification, driving on the foreshore, and the use of predator netting on the beach. After months of waiting for staff capacity to be freed up to deal with this, we have now contracted with a consultant to get this work done and we expect it to be a major agenda item in January.

Questions to ponder:

After a year of being a Trustee, I am still surprised by just how different things look from "the other side of the table." I find myself mulling over big questions which don't have clear answers. For instance...

- When there are many strong voices on one side of an issue, how do we also listen to the voices that aren't in the room, and the people who don't have the skills, opportunity, or mindset to speak up, while honouring the passion and knowledge of those who are so audibly and fully engaged in our political process?
- How can we keep things simple, human and flexible within the complex world of local government? Is there any way to keep the bureaucracy to a manageable scale?
- How can bylaws respond to individual situations while also treating everyone equally and remaining impeccably transparent?

As we move into 2013, I'm sure I'll find more questions, and continue to enjoy the challenge of serving the community by being a local Trustee.

I want to end with a big *thank you* to our local media for providing a community forum for political discussion, information and debate. Your hard work is much appreciated!