Intricacies of the To-Do List Explained

The "to-do" list is quite possibly the world's most ubiquitous and valued organizational tool. It's certainly a key document for the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (DILTC), which in fact has two different "to-do" lists, and policies to guide how they're used. The LTC has to make tough decisions about how to prioritize our work, given that capacity (money, staff time, Trustee time, and the community's ability to engage in issues) is limited. Here's an explanation of how we do that.

The Top Priorities List is the one that really counts. This list identifies three projects the DILTC is committed to actively working on. These three items are allocated a budget and staff resources. This is not just a casual guideline – it is spelled out in a policy (6.7.i of the Islands Trust Policy Manual). The goal is to promote efficiency and transparency, and like most to-do lists, to help keep everyone sane.

Now and then a local trust committee "sneaks" a fourth item onto its Top Priorities List. Generally, this can happen when the implementation of that item is assigned to trustees and does not involve significant staff time or budget expenditures.

Note the quotation marks around the word "sneak," above. In reality, nothing can be "snuck" onto this list. Any changes to the Top Priorities List must be made at a public meeting through a resolution that is voted upon and recorded in the minutes. This formality helps keep focus and makes sense when you consider that these decisions guide the deployment of our tax dollars and, to some degree, the direction of our communities.

The Projects List is all about, well, projects. Let's take a minute to define this word in this particular context. A project is an initiative the LTC chooses to carry out. Our projects are where the LTC gets to say, "this is something that our island needs. Let's do it." (In the meantime, the LTC, supported by staff, is also carrying out various other kinds of work such as responding to applications for rezoning, subdivision, development permits and variances, engaging in networking, advocacy and relationship-building, and dealing with bylaw enforcement and legal issues.)

A project may be a general review of a community plan or of one part of a community plan. It might focus on one issue – increasing food security, supporting housing options, protecting the shoreline, responding to climate change, etc. Sometimes a project is driven by a change in provincial or federal regulations, such as the Riparian Areas Regulation or new medical marijuana regulations, which signal a need to adapt locally.

The Top Priorities List is numbered in order of importance. That means staff will work most on the number one item and least on the third.

So how does the LTC decide what to put on its Top Priorities List, you may ask. There are no hard and fast rules for this. Other than instances where work is dictated by outside forces, as mentioned above, the LTC might consider any or all of the following:

- New information about an environmental threat or an opportunity to protect the environment;
- Input from Islanders in person at meetings and/or in writing;
- Issues they've heard about in the Flagstone, at various community meetings or on social media;
- Ideas they've learned about from other Islands;
- Bylaw enforcement situations that shed light on regulations that might need review;
- Advice from planning staff;
- Priorities set by Trust Council in its strategic plan;

…and more.

This brings us to **the Projects List.** This is sometimes called "the Long List." It does tend to be long; this is because it lists all the projects the LTC sees as potentially worth doing in the foreseeable future. When a space on the Top Priorities List becomes free, the LTC usually will look at the Projects List as they consider what to work on next. However, this isn't mandatory; the trustees need to respond to emerging opportunities and issues in the community, some of which come up quickly.

Unlike the Top Priorities List, the Projects List does not have any numbering and there is no implied hierarchy in its structure. Items appear in the order they are placed there chronologically; the topic at the top is no more likely to be moved onto the Top Priorities List than the item at the bottom.

Who knew that explaining a to-do list would be so complex? **If you want a simple summary, it's this: Top Priorities List = we're working on this now; Projects List = we want to work on this soon(ish).**