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November 15, 2022

File No.: 11-5770-30-10

Via email: [AG.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:AG.Minister@gov.bc.ca)

The Honourable Murray Rankin  
Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing  
PO Box 9044 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Rankin:

**Re: Request for Affordable Housing Solutions Specific to Rural Islands in the Islands Trust Area**

I am writing to convey the Islands Trust Council's request that the Province of British Columbia explore what can be done to create housing solutions specific to rural islands in the Islands Trust Area, including ways to provide stable, secure, and ongoing funding.

As you are aware, Islands Trust is a special-purpose government agency with a provincial mandate to preserve and protect the unique amenities and environment of the Islands Trust Area, in cooperation with others. The Islands Trust Area is located in Coast Salish Territory, between the British Columbia mainland and southern Vancouver Island, and encompasses 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller islands in the Salish Sea. Covering 5,200 square kilometres, the region is home to biodiverse and sensitive ecosystems, one of the highest densities of species at risk in Canada, many culturally significant areas for First Nations and Indigenous Peoples, and vibrant communities that aspire to include a diverse range of community members who live sustainably and in respectful relationship with these lands and waters.

In December 2021, Islands Trust Council declared that a Housing Equity and Workforce Shortage Crisis exists on many of the islands within the Islands Trust Area. In July 2021, Islands Trust Council voted to affirm its understanding that preservation and protection of the natural terrestrial and marine environment is central to the mandate of the Islands Trust and that this responsibility must be given special and profound consideration in all our decisions and in all we do. In March 2021, Trust Council affirmed its understanding that the Object (and thus the mandate) of the Trust contained in s.3 of the *Islands Trust Act* includes the concept of and protection of healthy and inclusive communities including (but not limited to) housing and transportation.

Trust Council appreciates that the Province of BC has undertaken measures to address the affordability crisis, including rent increase freezes, a 10-year Homes for BC housing plan, a homelessness strategy, new legislation giving local trust committees and island municipalities rental tenure zoning authority, support for Housing Hub partnerships, and other measures. However, many of these initiatives largely cater to high-density urban areas that have access to adequate resources

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***Preserving and protecting over 450 islands and surrounding waters in the Salish Sea***

Bowen Denman Hornby Gabriola Galiano Gambier Lasqueti Mayne North Pender Salt Spring Saturna South Pender Thetis

and support services. It is vital that the Province also provide capacity-building support to rural island communities in British Columbia to address their unique housing affordability challenges.

We know that the Islands Trust Area is often perceived as a region of wealth, so feel it is important to state that:

- household incomes in the area are generally well below the provincial median household income;
- poverty rates are high;
- child vulnerability rates are high; and
- many islands have homelessness rates above the provincial average and many islanders are perilously close to homelessness.

The Islands Trust Area is facing an acute shortage of affordable housing options needed to support the long-term sustainability and resilience of local communities. This shortage has occurred for a number of reasons. Islands in the Trust Area are particularly lacking in purpose-built rental housing and diversity of housing stock. As many of the islands are popular tourist destinations, there is also a strong market for vacation rentals. The lack of workforce housing is a pressing concern as businesses generally need staff to live on island as few will travel by ferry to an island to work. The current lack of diverse housing stock also limits opportunities to meet the housing needs of local Indigenous Peoples. In addition, the acute shortage of affordable housing options is impacting essential services such as firefighting and health care provision, as well as key community functions such as cultural production, community education, and conservation and environmental initiatives, as the people who typically fill these roles do not have secure or affordable housing.

Housing needs assessments have been completed throughout the Islands Trust Area. All demonstrate that more affordable housing is desperately needed on the islands, and that there is a particular lack of rental housing stock. Most affordable housing projects are initiated by non-profit community volunteers with limited experience navigating rezoning, finance, and BC Housing requirements. These volunteers need more provincial resources to get projects to the point of being “shovel-ready” so that they are able to access the bulk of affordable housing funding intended for construction.

Trust Council has discussed potential ideas such as a discrete program within BC Housing to support rural non-profit projects, a separate housing-authority-type entity, a “navigator” service to help non-profit housing organizations in the Islands Trust Area achieve their goals, and the necessity of stable, long-term, sufficient funding to support this work. Any solution in the Trust Area needs to: foster preservation and protection of ecosystems, Indigenous cultural and harvesting sites, and large tracts of forests and farmland; support a socially and economically diverse population and healthy communities across the Islands Trust Area; and recognize the value of island-specific solutions, traditions and approaches to housing.

Thank you for considering this important request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Minister Rankin  
November 9 2022  
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cc:

Premier of British Columbia  
Minister of Municipal Affairs  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
Islands Trust Area Regional District Boards  
Islands Trust Area MLAs  
UBCM Executive  
Acting CEO, BC Housing  
Bowen Island Municipal Council  
Islands Trust Council  
Islands Trust website