

Official Report of DEBATES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (Hansard)

September 25, 1973 – Afternoon Sitting

Select Standing Committee on Municipal Matters

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MR. SPEAKER:

Your Select Standing Committee on Municipal Matters beg leave to report as follows:

The Select Standing Committee on Municipal Matters examined the matters affecting islands in the Strait of Georgia and the adjacent waters. It visited and viewed the following islands: May 2, 3, 4, North Pender, South Pender, Saltspring, Galiano, Mayne, Saturna; July 23-27, Bowen, Gambier, Keats, Denman, Hornby, Lasqueti, Gabriola, Kuper, Thetis.

On July 23 the Committee experienced a most meaningful day at the UBC Resource Science Centre under the direction of Dr. Crawford Holling, who presented a computer simulation that demonstrated the relationships between speculation thrust, people's satisfaction, land prices, land values, environmental quality, etc. In its context, environmental quality was related to ease of transportation, water availability, nearness to a lake or ocean, slope of land, type of land, i.e., agriculture vs. rock, and the amount of open land and finally the diversity of tree cover.

Public meetings were held on the islands, and the Committee was pleased and impressed with the interest and turnout by the local people, who expressed a vital concern about the future of the islands.

It is apparent to the Committee that the islands are of extreme importance to the Province of British Columbia; they are fragile; their location is crucial, being between the two largest cities in the Province; it is felt that people are entitled to use them and enjoy them to the capacity which they are able to serve.

For the purpose of this report the Gulf Islands shall mean all islands in the Strait of Georgia and adjacent waters.

Observations

1. These islands are different from each other and from the Mainland. However, some Mainland areas, especially the Sunshine Coast, because of difficult access, probably have some similar problems.

2. Apart from their natural insularity, isolation and uniqueness, the islands have the problem of these "special interests":

(a) Local residents, many of whom are retired, and others who have to make their living locally;

(b) Large numbers of summer residents and (or) visitors;

(c) Large landowners, usually absentee, often corporate and foreign;

(d) A larger or "provincial" interest of the general public;

(e) Land developers and speculators;

(f) Tree-farm licence holders (TFL).

3. Existing boundaries of regional districts and means of representation and communication to land from some regional districts are causing considerable frustration. (Seven regional districts each have a portion of the islands within their boundaries).

4. A complete lack of jurisdiction by Provincial, regional or municipal bodies over Indian lands because of exclusive Federal jurisdiction may cause increasing difficulty.

5. There are some existing subdivisions which appear attractive and rural in character but this is only due to the fact that many are as little as 15 per cent developed. Of all the problems, the Committee identifies large subdivisions and over-development as the priority concern.

[[Page 256](#)]

6. Requirements such as a 10-acre freeze or limiting subdivisions to larger parcels of similar size will not be sufficient in the long term, nor will such rules be as effective as other more sophisticated and imaginative planning techniques such as clusters, green belts, etc.

7. There is a need for an increase of supervised public space, beach access, hiking trails, picnic and (or) campgrounds, etc., on virtually every island. Most land adjoining the best beaches is privately owned. It is unfortunate that many of the Howe Sound islands' most attractive bays and coves are spoiled for recreational use by log storage and booming grounds.

8. Water transportation to the islands is a key to the entire situation and needs careful control and co-ordination (but this is not within regional district jurisdiction). It is also evident that no one island or regional district can control the frequency, cost and type of transportation. Transportation on the islands is also an important related factor. Emphasis should be placed on pedestrian transit rather than vehicle transit, and the use of the islands should thus be planned accordingly.

9. One of the major problems encountered by the Committee in its tours, hearings and public meetings is the fact that there has been, and remains, a very serious lack of co-ordination and communication. In many respects, the islands have fallen victim to ad hoc or "band-aid" activity. There is a need for a co-ordinated jurisdiction to be responsible for planning, zoning, control of land use, transportation and related matters for all the islands, and this jurisdiction would require sufficient funding over and above the current revenue source from local taxation.

10. Although regional districts are not geared to carry out all the responsibilities expected of them relative to the future of the Coastal islands of British Columbia, they can well serve the islands for many administrative purposes including hospitals, schools, local improvements, special projects, health, building inspection, etc. Boundaries of regional districts need to be reviewed for possible transfer of some islands, based on natural lines of communication. Further, the means of representation and communication between some islands and its regional district needs to be studied.

11. Recognizing the need to ensure continued employment opportunities for some residents of the islands, strictly controlled limited commercial development, light industry, and agricultural activity compatible with the life style of the islands can continue, nonetheless, emphasis for the future development of the islands should be placed on recreation, moderate residential use, and preservation of a rural atmosphere. The Committee was impressed with some instances of desirable land use (by residences, summer camps, a few parks, endowments) but was alarmed at the possession or hoarding of land by resident and absentee owners for high capital gains purposes. It was also distressed by the evidence of considerable subdivision activity in the past, which was undertaken without full determination of its impact on the future of each island. Our belief is that the islands are too important to the people of Canada to be left open to exploitation by real-estate developers and speculators.

12. Virtually without exception, shortage or potential shortage of potable water is of major concern to practically all islands and to this Committee.

13. Waste and garbage disposal is another serious matter of major concern to this Committee.

14. A potential exists for conserving many archæological sites on the islands.

Recommendations

1. The Committee recommends that the regional district boundaries be reviewed and adjusted to assure that the respective islands are in the most appropriate regional district.

2. The Committee also recommends that the Provincial Government establish an "Islands Trust" (or commission), as the most appropriate body to be responsible for and to coordinate the future of each island within our terms of reference. It must be emphasized most strongly that the trust is to assume the primary responsibility for all Gulf Islands' affairs within Government jurisdiction, including land use, future growth patterns, control of development, industrial, recreational and commercial activity, as well as parks and open space designations. It is essential that the trust be fully representative of all interests, not only on the islands, but throughout the Province as a whole. While recognizing the rights of the islanders, the Committee suggests that this section of British Columbia is dramatically affected by private and public activity which does not have the same impact in other parts of the Province. The Committee again refers to the fragile nature of these coastal units. Because it is recognized that a variety of Government departments and agencies: Highways, Health, Ferries, Lands and Forests, Parks, etc, as well as regional districts and citizen groups on the islands, all have an important role to play in this respect, we emphasize that the proposed trust or commission must not be a separate and (or) remote agency, but rather a fully representative co-coordinating body, whose task it is to bring together each group, agency or department of Government and to act in the best interests of the islands and their residents with due regard for the broader and Province-wide interest.

3. The Committee also recommends that until the trust or commission is established, no subdivisions be permitted on any islands south of and including Denman, Hornby, and Lasqueti Islands, i.e., on any of the Gulf Islands in the Strait of Georgia and any adjacent waters.

4. The Committee recommends the 10-acre freeze be continued on the northern Gulf Islands that have not yet been studied by the Committee.

Conclusion

The Committee appreciates that many months of hard work have gone into the planning process on some of the islands, and the Committee hopes that if the Government accepts these recommendations, that the trust be established and operative as soon as possible, so as not to prolong unduly the wait on these islands.

A. A. NUNWEILER, *Chairman*
