

May 2010 South Pender LTC Pender Post Report

SOUTH PENDER LOCAL TRUST COMMITTEE

Plumper Sound Gypsum Dust Emissions

It appears that a solution has been found to the irritating and potentially hazardous-to-health emissions of dust during the offloading of gypsum in Plumper Sound. In response to concerns raised by the Islands Trust, the ocean shipper, CSL International, is designing an elongated chute that is expected to put an end to dust emissions by securely enclosing gypsum being offloaded from freighters onto barges. CSL expects the first chute to be installed for testing by August 2010.

CSL's previous efforts to control dust emissions by applying a surfactant to the cargo prior to offloading were occasionally rendered ineffective by strong winds that picked up the gypsum, carrying dust towards the islands.

National Park Zoning

At its April 13th meeting, the LTC held a public hearing, followed by second and third reading, on bylaws to amend South Pender's Land Use Bylaw to change the zoning in the Land Use Bylaw on lands and waters in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. The 296 hectares of parkland on the island include 280 hectares of national park reserve and comprise 32% of the area of the island. The national park reserve component includes the former Mount Norman Regional Park and Beaumont Provincial Marine Park as well as the area around Greenburn Lake, Blunden Island and islets in Bedwell Harbour, and certain waters in Bedwell Harbour and surrounding Blunden Island. The bylaws, which the LTC has forwarded to the Executive Committee of the Trust for approval, simply reflect the park status of that land and make it clear that other uses are inconsistent with that status. If approved by the Executive Committee, the OCP amendments will be sent to the Minister of Community and Rural Development for consideration and approval,.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

The LTC also gave second and third reading to a bylaw to amend the OCP to include greenhouse gas reduction targets, policies and actions, as required by provincial law. One effect of the bylaw is to add an additional goal to the OCP to support the provincial target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 33% by 2020. In keeping with the Advisory Planning Commission's recommendations to the LTC, the bylaw articulates general policies and objectives to support actions intended to reduce greenhouse emissions while steering clear of the specifics that will be more appropriately addressed during the process of amending South Pender's OCP, which will begin this fiscal year.

For example, the bylaw introduces policies / objectives for

- increasing food security and sustainable agriculture, including community gardens (section III-E);
- encouraging retention and restoration of forestland and parkland for their carbon sink functions (III-F and G);
- identifying options for reduction of transportation-related emissions, and encouraging alternative transportation initiatives such as car stops, neighbourhood zero emission vehicles, car sharing, a bicycle path network and walking trails (VI-A); and

- encouraging the expansion and improvement of high-speed internet and other electronic communications services to the South Pender community (to reduce the need for vehicle trips) (VI-B).

2010-11 Islands Trust Budget

The March meeting of Islands Trust Council approved the budget for the 2010-11 fiscal year. This budget will represent an increase of 4.6% in the Islands Trust portion of your property tax which is approximately \$2.77 per \$100,000 of assessed property value. One item in the budget that was the subject of much discussion was the creation of a new senior administrative position in the Trust office. This new position was approved by a vote of 15 in favour and 8 opposed. Trustee Scholefield attended the meeting and opposed the creation of a new position and did not support the tax increase included in the budget. (Trustee Greer was out of province and unable to attend.) Although some South Penderites indicated that they could accept an increase in taxes, many others objected to more bureaucracy and higher taxes for Trust services.

Beach Clean-Up

Many South Penderites participated in this year's beach clean-up on Saturday April 17. Thank you to all of the people who took part on Saturday and to those who gather garbage from the beach throughout the year to keep our beaches clean. It was astounding to see the amount and variety of "stuff" that gathers up on the beaches, though clearly Styrofoam from docks is becoming the clear leader in sheer volume. Particular thanks to Anne and Mike Burdett who worked through the day and are taking all of the gathered garbage off the island – THANKS SO MUCH!

David Greer
Wendy Scholefield

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Dates to Note:

May 1 "Your Septic System: the Other End of the Water Business." Mayne Island Integrated Water Systems Society, 8 am to 4 pm, Mayne Island School Gym, Fernhill Road. \$30.
For information: watersociety@shaw.ca
May 4, 10 AM Local Trust Committee Meeting, Community Room, South Pender Firehall
May 10 and 31 Islands Trust Planner Andrea Pickard at Driftwood Centre Islands Trust office, 11 to 1 or at other hours by appointment (250-405-5151)

DIAL-UP PURGATORY ON SOUTH PENDER--A Modest Proposal for Citizen Action

Tata Creek has it. Tyaughton Lake has it. Tsaxana has it. Even Tobacco Plains now has it. And those are just the Ts. BC communities you never even knew existed now have high-speed internet, thanks to generous provincial and federal government grants and the initiative of service providers glowing with pride over delivery of "last mile" broadband service.

Fed up yet? Had enough of dial-up purgatory? Then consider this a call to arms, or at least a call to take up the pen.

High-speed Internet a Modern Necessity

The last report of the Premier's Technology Council calls broadband development a "critical part" of BC's knowledge-based society and notes that "362 of 366 identified communities [in BC] have received points of presence". [South Pender was apparently not considered an "identified community" because it doesn't have a school or library. Sigh.]

Meanwhile, federal government bumpf trumpeting the effectiveness of Canada's Economic Action Plan calls broadband internet access "essential infrastructure for participating in today's economy, as it enables citizens, businesses and institutions to access information, services and opportunities that could otherwise be out of reach."

Tell us about it. Tell the South Penderites who pleaded for federal assistance for access to Broadband Canada funding, only to be told that we had to partner with a service provider. Problem is, service providers head for the hills when they learn we only have something shy of 200 homes (Tobacco Plains, by comparison, had 57 in the 2006 census. But who knows, maybe it has a library.).

South Pender Stymied Yet Again

In addition, telecommunications companies are required to contribute to a National Contribution Fund administered by the CRTC. The original purpose of the fund was to subsidize delivery of phone service to rural areas where service would ordinarily be unprofitable to the providing company. A few years ago the fund had gotten so large that it contained a \$600 million excess, so the CRTC got the bright idea of using it to subsidize telecommunications companies to provide internet service to communities that still didn't have it. The catch here was that if your community had any existing service, no matter how slow, you weren't eligible. South Pender lost out again.

Meanwhile, the BC government requires us (your Local Trust Committee) to amend our community plan to fight greenhouse gas emissions, and we obligingly comply, adding an objective to reduce transportation-related emissions. And what's one big contributor to vehicle emissions? The need to drive to North Pender or Vancouver or Victoria because you have no workable internet access. And when provincial grants are occasionally made available to bring high-speed infrastructure to the very few communities left without access, can we make arrangements with national providers such as Shaw and Telus that are the logical sources of service? Not a chance. Only local providers need apply, and the only local provider that advertised service to South Pender on its website is now reported out of business, having failed in its bid for provincial grant money.

Have you seen the new Alice and Wonderland flick featuring Johnnie Depp? It's supposed to be quite wonderful. A non-sequitur? Not entirely. For wasn't it Alice who said "It would be so nice if something would make sense for a change"?

No Logic to Lack of Access

Doesn't that sum up South Pender's high-speed internet dilemma? We have governments all around us assuring us that high-speed internet is absolutely essential in modern life

and that they're going to make sure rural communities aren't left out. We have national service providers who make a tidy bundle out of providing service to densely packed urban populations with apparently no obligation whatsoever to extend it to rural and, alas, less profitable communities. And meanwhile, both federal and provincial governments trumpet that their granting programs have been such a huge success that high-speed access is no longer an issue. Party's over, lights out, sorry you missed the cake.

How would you react if phone companies told you they had no obligation to provide phone service to you, not even a land line, even though you live a few miles from two of Canada's largest cities? Would you stand for it if the phone company told you there was no "business case" for rural telephone service because it didn't generate the same kinds of profits as service to Vancouver's West End? Unfortunately, that's the situation we face today with regard to high-speed access.

What the Telecommunications Companies Say

So what to do? Trustee Greer has been writing letters left and right without apparent effect. Hon. Gary Lunn at least had the decency to reply, reiterating his support for our efforts but noting that there's unlikely to be any more federal funding. Federal Minister of Industry (responsible for Broadband Canada) Tony Clement concluded: "I applaud the efforts of the Pender Island residents and the Island Trust Committee for encouraging their local ISP [Shaw Cable] to bring broadband connectivity to their community," while noting that federal funds for rural broadband access are now exhausted.

Telus, when it responds at all to requests to discuss service, tells us it has no interest if we can't make a business case for a Telus profit. But what about Shaw? Well, Shaw currently provides high-speed service to all of North Pender (save for isolated pockets that it says it is addressing). Years ago, Shaw extended its infrastructure to a few houses on South Pender, then abruptly came to a stop without explanation. At the other end of South Pender, Shaw provides service to Poet's Cove resort by private arrangement. Given its infrastructure at either end of the island, Shaw would seem the logical choice to fill the gap elsewhere.

When Industry Canada last fall announced a round of Broadband Canada funding (the funding to which Hon. Mr. Clement refers), Shaw initially informed us that it was making application on our behalf and would see to it that South Pender had universal access to high-speed within roughly a year, which naturally was a cause for some celebration. A week later, Shaw announced that it had changed its plans, having concluded that there wasn't time to properly prepare an application, given the very short time window announced by Broadband Canada. Instead, Shaw applied on behalf of South Saltspring and parts of Mayne.

Shaw's Most Recent Statement

And that's where it stands. A letter sent in January by Trustee Greer to Shaw's CEO, Jim Shaw, remains unanswered. However, in response to an islander who had asked about Shaw's plans for South Pender, Shaw's Victoria office wrote the following, in March this year:

“We currently have no plans to extend our services on South Pender Island.

“We continue to review areas adjacent to our existing service areas such as South Pender Island.

“Our records currently indicate there are approximately 139 potential homes existing on South Pender Island at this time.

“To date, we have received 53 individual resident requests for our services of the potential 139.

“As we continue to consider this area we encourage all residents to contact our Victoria office to request service. We then record their request on file to assist in our future considerations.”

What Shaw’s letter neglects to mention is that the 53 requests were primarily emails forwarded to Shaw by Trustee Greer last fall, and that that number (and more, actually) were received by Trustee Greer WITHIN 48 HOURS after he sent out an email to a few people sounding out community opinion on the question of high speed access. It also doesn’t take into account that the few people on South Pender who for years have received Shaw services (on the north end of the island) are unlikely to write to Shaw to request services they already have and presumably enjoy.

What You Can Do

The bottom line appears to be this: Shaw’s incentive to provide high-speed service to South Pender apparently relates directly to the quantity of expression of demand for high-speed service from individual residents and property owners. Therefore, if you are at all interested in receiving high-speed internet access from Shaw, you need to write to Shaw fairly promptly and let the company know that high-speed access matters to you. That includes people who may currently have service through another provider but would consider switching to Shaw in the short or long term depending on pricing and projected reliability and legality of the service.

And if you live on North Pender Island and are surreptitiously reading the South Pender news, please don’t rest on your laurels – write to Shaw and say how much you appreciate their service (if true) and how much your continuing business depends on Shaw extending service to your South Pender friends who would like to send you passionate emails but can’t afford the half-hour wait for the dial-up connection to engage when the (somewhat faster) alien invasive black slugs are invading their gardens.

Now here’s who to write to:

Kerry Hunt
Regional Manager
Shaw Communications Inc.

751 Enterprise Crescent
Victoria BC V8Z 6P7

Or email Kerry Hunt at kerry.hunt@sjrb.ca with copy to dgreer@islandstrust.bc.ca (for documentation).

Several countries have already designated internet access as a fundamental human right; the UK has committed to delivering universal broadband to all its citizens by 2012. The secretary-general of the International Telecommunication Union has cogently made the point for the need for government involvement in provision of broadband, suggesting that governments must “regard the internet as basic infrastructure—just like roads, waste and water.” Here in BC, governments have left the job half done and moved on to issues more likely to generate good press.

Dial-up doesn’t effectively provide access both because of its snail-like speed and because users constantly risk being disconnected in an arbitrary and capricious manner. A Globe and Mail editorial in February 2010 (“Canada’s broadband lag”) lamented the fact that Canada is only 19th worldwide in overall internet access because “almost no Canadian home can tap the ultra-fast speeds offered by, say, fibre-to-the-home services, which are available in 44% of Japanese households.” It’s a given, naturally, that all Canadian homes have basic access to high-speed internet. That is so, like, yesterday.

If you care about your own access or about the rights of your fellow islanders to access to high-speed, please consider writing to Shaw. Or call them at 250-475-7210. And if you have any questions, please get in touch with David Greer at 1-250-598-3607 or dgreer@islandstrust.bc.ca.

Others you might want to write to if you have an abundance of ink in your well include Hon. Gary Lunn, Member of Parliament for Saanich and the Islands, House of Commons, Ottawa (no stamp required); Hon. Tony Clement, Minister of Industry, House of Commons; and Hon. Murray Coell, MLA, Saanich North and the Islands, Parliament Buildings, Victoria V8V 1X4.

David Greer
Co-trustee, South Pender Island