

TRUST US (TO KEEP YOU INFORMED)

By Paul Brent

As we near year-end, your local trustees are focused on three projects: a review of island densities, a review of methods to pilot expanded short term vacation rental (STVR) possibilities and the potential to allow for secondary suites on our island.

Our review of densities really focuses on the “Community Amenity Density Reserve” or in more simple terms “the land bank.” Our land bank has been around for well over a decade, and while there were quite a few potential “deposits,” most were not documented and therefore not made. A withdrawal from this bank (for a lot density and/or a residence) requires a “community amenity” in return. So good stuff can come of it. So we are looking at ways to improve its functionality to the benefit of our community.

STVRs are a hot topic on many Trust Islands. Some islands allow them, others prohibit them and others allow them with varying degrees of restriction. Saturna actually allows STVRs, but has restrictions that effectively restrict their application to a very small percentage of property owners. We are looking to expand that percentage, but to do so in careful fashion – effectively a pilot program to see what impact additional liberalization might have, positive or negative.

Finally, we are looking at the option of legalizing secondary suites on the island, to improve the affordability of housing for different segments of our population.

All of this will take time in order that the community has ample time to review what lands may be developed. At our next Local Trust meeting on (February 13th, 2014 at the Rec Centre) we'll be looking at some draft bylaws and Official Community Plan language that might be used to implement these plans. We are looking at these projects to help sustain our community in the face of some pretty significant external forces. We all know ferry fares are up over 300% since 1987, over four times the rate of inflation and way higher than other transportation systems supported by our tax dollars (like BC Transit, Translink, inland ferries, etc). So people are moving to and visiting those areas that are cheaper to access. And now our government is instituting ferry service cuts and cutting senior's fare assistance, which will have a further negative impact on our aging island (Saturna's median age in 2011 was 60.9 years old).

We are trying to make these changes while keeping Islands Trust budgets under control. We are all very aware of the staggering tax increases that have occurred on our islands from local and regional governments, while concurrently seeing our communities sustainability falter. Our property assessments will decline again this year, so we realize the absolute necessity to control spending and in particular where (our) tax dollars end up being spent in other jurisdictions, or in questionable “value for money” propositions.

To that end your trustees participate in Islands Trust Committees (Finance, Local Planning and Trust Programs) and our message has been crystal clear – no waste, no frills and no more “nice to haves.” And our message is now being echoed by some other trustees, so we expect a budget for next year reflective of that message.

That pretty much wraps things up for our year, except for our quarterly Trust Council meeting in early December. On our first day we'll be hosting a session on Economic Sustainability (in our communities), where we've invited a wide variety of folks (including Regional Directors) to exchange best practices and ideas as to how we can reverse some of the decline in our communities' economic health. (I'm sure the obvious solution – fund ferries and bring fares in line with other provincially funded transportation will be much discussed, but to what end we're unsure.)

Thank you all for your great support and feedback this last year. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year and look forward to a very delightful 2014 on our beautiful island paradise.

Contact Us

Islands Trustees

Paul Brent
250-539-5454
pbrent@islandstrust.bc.ca

Pam Janszen
250-539-5150
pjanszen@islandstrust.bc.ca