

Trust Stuff by Paul Brent (mainly)

We are going to try a different report format, a little less “what I did on my summer vacation” and a little more issues focused, trying to inform more and bore less.

First, the “what we did stuff: Paul went to both Trust Programs and Financial Planning meetings in May. He attended a two-day oil spill exercise in Delta, and he attended the three-day quarterly Trust Council meeting, which was held on North Pender. And both Paul & Pam attended the two local trust committees meeting here on island.

Pam skipped the Trust Council meeting altogether and instead went to watch her first grandchild being born. However, on June 27th, instead of going to visit her granddaughter, she is going to an orientation followed by her first meeting as the Trust Council representative to the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve Advisory Board.

Both our local trust committee meetings were well-attended. No, they were fabulously attended. Our participation rate is the envy of the islands, both in terms of meetings and correspondence. We know that everyone’s time is extremely valuable, and the level of thoughtful engagement and active participation is very, very helpful. Thank you.

Locally, we approved Aleah Johnston’s (Wild Tyme double decker coffee shop) temporary use permit for a period of three years after an overwhelming show of support for this local entrepreneurial initiative.

We agreed to keep the topic of an additional bylaw enforcement regime (Draft Bylaw 105) alive, and have placed a review of our land use bylaws (as they apply to enforceability under the proposed new regime) on our project list. We did this to address concerns that our existing land use bylaws (created during a period of growth, economic prosperity and an island predominantly in private hands) might not be appropriate to an island wishing to counter negative growth, an exodus of businesses, jobs and families, and a threat to the vitality of our community.

We deferred a decision on a subdivision application on a 8.94 acre property in Boot Cove to examine more options. While there was general support for the subdivision to allow the three legally built homes to have their own strata lots, concern was voiced about the creation of a fourth lot on the 4.4 acre piece of the property across the road from the piece containing the (three) dwellings. While some supported this as an initiative to help counter the decline in population, others expressed concern that it would increase island density, and would require we amend our OCP. We elected to further explore if options for a win-win situation might be available.

Some facts on density; Saturna, with 9.4 people per square kilometer is the least dense of all the vehicular ferry served islands in the Trust area. For comparison, our neighbors on Mayne and North Pender have 5 and 4 times that density respectively. What makes Saturna even more unique is that with the creation of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve (GINPR) in 2003, almost 45% of our island is protected park. So yes, we are very unique, and are still dealing with the significant change to our community that came with the creation of the GINPR.

The Trust Council meeting had a large component dealing with education as to dealing with First Nations. Of interest and pride for Saturna was the Sustaining the Island - Community Stewardship Award given to SEEC for its innovative program that has brought students from around the province to study, enhancing their education while bringing additional support for our school. We will have a formal award presentation to celebrate this achievement at a later date.

Another outcome of the Trust Council meeting, significant enough for a press release, was the decision to oppose the expansion of oil pipelines that would lead to more tanker traffic in our waters. Trustee Brent voted against that motion and his response to a reporter's query as to why appears in this issue's Letters to the Editor. So he asks for feedback – was he wrong to take the stand he did? As a local government whose mandate is land use planning, should the Trust be directing its resources to issues such as opposing pipelines, or lobbying for changes to Canada's national energy policies. He needs to hear from you, so he can accurately reflect your views.

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Letter to the Editor

Note:

This letter was sent to a news reporter querying why Trustee Brent voted against a motion endorsed by the other island trustees, to oppose the expansion of pipelines that would lead to increased tanker traffic in our waters. Since there has been precious little public consultation on this matter here on Saturna, reflecting the views of the populous based on a few comments (both for and against) is nigh impossible. So what do you think?

Hi,

There are a myriad of reasons that influenced my decision to vote against the oil pipeline motion but a deciding factor in my not supporting the motion was its wording, which was unconditioned opposition.

To be clear - I am very concerned of the possibility of an oil spill in our waters. I have property on the water, and I know the impact of oil on our waters and shorelines would be devastating. However, the blanket statement of opposition doesn't make allowance for possible risk mitigation. Why not say "we are opposed to pipeline expansion unless steps are taken to reduce the threat of a spill below current levels?" An outright ban is more easily dismissed by senior government, whereas a thoughtful and measured statement is more difficult to challenge, and adds to our credibility.

A simple ban on more oil tankers doesn't address the existing risk - the large vessels plying our waters that carry grain, potash, lumber, coal or other Canadian commodities all contain large quantities of Bunker C oil for fuel. An oil spill involving these vessels would have very serious consequences.

Assuming that this is an appropriate role for the Trust, I believe our focus should be on advocating that the proponents of any project that increases vessel shipments demonstrate that they will reduce risk levels below current levels. Such measures are possible and place the responsibility for the project's approval in the hands of the proponent. Changes in vessel handling requirements, anti-collision technology, tug assists and other risk amelioration efforts could reduce current risks and may well become a standard for large vessels in our waters. So would a requirement to increase spill response budgets and deploy additional assets in our area, as an additional measure to improve the "status quo".

By setting a precedent of opposition to projects that increase vessel traffic and commensurate risk, where do we stop? Should the Trust oppose the potash mine expansions that are on the horizon? Or that of sulphur, or steel-making coal? These commodities will almost all be exported, leading to increased vessel movements through our waters. Do we oppose more grain production, leading to increased vessel movements? Or how about the shift in our forest products markets from the US to Asia? Do we ban these vessels as well?

It is also questionable whether it is appropriate for a local government whose mandate is land use planning to use scarce resources to wade in on national energy policy. What would my constituents say about this use of their local government tax dollars, as I fear we've not actively sought their input prior to making this decision?

So yes, I am as concerned as my fellow islanders about oil spill risks, and any other spill that would lead to an environmental disaster, I was just not in agreement with the way the one motion was worded. And I communicated those views to my fellow trustees.

Let me know if you have any further questions or need further clarification.

Paul Brent Saturna Island Islands Trustee

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