

The *Saturna Scribbler* is edited by a group of local volunteers. Editors this issue include Andrée Fredette, Judy Tipple, John Robertson, Bill Schermbrucker and Bernie Ziegler.

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Cover photo *Easter Daffodils* by Andrée Fredette, taken this month. Other photos by Andrée Fredette, Rennie Muir, Wayne Quinn, David Rees-Thomas, Bill Schermbrucker, Judy Tipple, Maureen Welton and Jude White.

TRUSTEE REPORT

by Paul Brent

Since our local Trust meeting occurs after the deadline for this edition of the *Scribbler*, and since I've used up all my "late submission" credits with the editors, I'll focus on the Trust Council quarterly meeting I attended on Gabriola Island along with Trustee Lee Middleton.



Since I am a returning member of the Financial Planning Committee of the Islands Trust, I'll focus on financial topics discussed at our quarterly meeting. I might add that those topics were vigorously debated, with disparate views espoused by many.

First and foremost Trust Council approved a budget of \$7.25 million for fiscal 2015/2016. Which as reported is an increase from (the budget) of the previous year of about \$125,000, so pretty reasonable. And especially since there will be no tax increase attributable to the Trust in our area. We'll draw the additional funds from a growing surplus.

But comparisons are kinda funny. We are comparing "budget" with "budget," not what actually was expended in a year. If we do that, there is a slightly different story.

For the year ended March 31, 2014 (the Trust fiscal year runs April 1 to March 31), the Trust spent \$6.5 million. The 2015/16 budget is more than \$700,000 higher, or an increase of over 11%.

When I look at the economic health of our community I wonder how we can support an 11% increase.

I look at the Islands Trust budget and in the year ending March 31, 2004 we spent just under \$4 million. \$7.25 million represents an 80% increase. Why? Have there been new Official Community Plans? Nope.

Has our population grown? Nope.

I'm told constituent expectations have risen. And that we have to step in where the Feds and Province have cut back, transferring the burden to local government. It sounds good if you say it fast. But I struggle with that, because we are responsible for Land Use Planning. Not much more – no sewers, roads, hospitals, policing, foreign affairs, military, just land use planning in an area with declining applications and stagnant populations.

Does this mean I'm "anti-Islands Trust". No, just the opposite – I want the best, most effective organization to deliver its mandate to the people who voted for me to represent their interests. Does it mean I think Trust staff are inefficient or incompetent? No, absolutely not. I would hire many Trust staff members in a heartbeat – there are some superb skill sets on staff. But I seriously question their deployment, and I fundamentally disagree that the majority of staff (staff costs represent over 60% of the cost of the Trust) are located outside the Trust area.

I find that hard to understand. We are according to the Trust the most special place in Canada if not the world. Most of us live here because we agree. Yet we are also told we cannot attract excellent staff. Seriously? I get that partners of staff may not have great work opportunities, but the fact that we are in a most special spot should be a considerable draw.

So locating Trust functions (and offices) in the area it serves, needs to be explored. This should be done in a very measured way, ensuring that if a decision to relocate is made, it is done so over years and with lots of consideration for the impact it has on existing staff.

And we need to do some serious benchmarking. An independent report from an outside consultant (Stantec) in 2007 suggested the Trust was over-staffed. An immediately-following report prepared by Islands Trust staff disagreed, suggesting instead a significant increase in staff (in 2007 the Trust had 37 staff, we now have over 50 – despite a stagnant Trust-area population).

While it is true that we represent thirteen island areas comprising 25,000 residents, a sensitive area like Alberni-Clayquot has over 31,000 residents, yet has only four land use planner/bylaw officers on staff. Perhaps we can learn from them and other jurisdictions like them. It's certainly worth having a look. Δ