

Governance Renewal in the Trust Area



The Islands Trust

The Islands Trust is a unique federation of local governments with a provincial mandate (from the *Islands Trust Act*) to make land use decisions that will 'preserve and protect' British Columbia's southern Gulf Islands. It includes a land trust that holds land and covenants for conservation.

The Trust Area is a scenic archipelago of 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller ones. It covers the lands and waters between the British Columbia mainland and southern Vancouver Island, including Howe Sound and as far north as Comox. The Trust Area is approximately 2500 square kilometres in size and has a population just over 23,000.

Photo: A. Amundsen



In 1974, the Government of British Columbia enacted the *Islands Trust Act* with a unique conservation mandate. In 1990, the province amended the *Islands Trust Act* to establish the Islands Trust as a group of autonomous local governments responsible for land use planning.

The Islands Trust Council

The 26 locally elected officials of the Trust Area form the Islands Trust Council. They also sit as Local Trust Committees, responsible for land use decisions in their own island communities. The Municipal Trustees from Bowen Island sit on their

Municipal Council, which is responsible for a range of services. The Islands Trust Council meets quarterly to make decisions about overall policy, staff resources and budget. The members of the current Council were elected for a 3-year term during BC Local General Elections in November 2002.

The Governance Renewal Initiative

The Islands Trust Council has been considering ways to modernize the unique government structure in the Trust Area. It is seeking changes that will meet the emerging needs of island communities while retaining a strong commitment to the special provincial mandate.

Why make changes to local government?

Some of the reasons Trust Council is considering renewal are:

- Unprecedented growth in the Gulf Islands.
- Province-wide interest in the local government changes introduced with the *Community Charter*.
- Creation of the first municipality in the Trust Area and an increased interest in local government options.

Some potential benefits

Trust Council's search for a change in governance focuses on improvements for island communities. Some of the expected benefits include:

- Greater fiscal sustainability
- Improved value and level of services for tax-payers
- Streamlined and responsive services.
- A greater ability to achieve the provincial mandate.

Some basic principles

Trust Council has identified some key principles to guide its investigation into governance options. These principles are:

- Balance for taxpayers while maintaining the ability to support the legislated object.
- Organizational sustainability.
- Improvements to local autonomy while retaining a shared vision of the Trust Area.

Land use planning decisions that reflect local values.

The Renewal Process

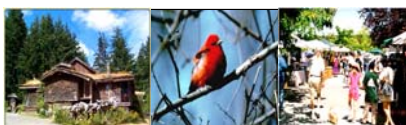
As outlined below, Trust Council has taken some initial steps towards governance renewal.

- In early 2002, Council approved some basic principles for its governance renewal initiative.
- The Islands Trust Executive Committee consulted with the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services to secure the technical support needed to explore options.

Our Provincial Mandate

"to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of British Columbia generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the government of British Columbia"

-- *Islands Trust Act*



- Council is monitoring the progress of the *Community Charter* to understand the province's new directions for local government.
- Council has narrowed its focus to four areas for more detailed study.
- Islands Trust staff have provided in-depth reviews of the legislative and tax rate implications of Council's four focus areas.
- Council met in September to review and confirm the options it wishes to explore.
- Finding ways to **resolve issues** when provincial decisions conflict with the local values expressed in our provincial mandate. *Trust Council will seek the same legislative tools for dispute resolution that are now available to municipalities through the Community Charter.*
- Improving the **coordination** between local land use plans and the services that Regional Districts deliver. *Council will continue voluntary coordination efforts and investigate formal cooperation within respective jurisdictions.*
- Looking at different ways to enhance local accountability for **taxes** and more closely link them to the local planning services each community needs. *Council will examine financial models so that members can fully understand possible changes to tax requisitions and what those changes would mean to their constituents.*
- In December, Trust Council will meet again to develop a specific proposal for governance renewal for presentation to the province and the public.

Trust Council will also continue its regular program to seek minor legislative changes as needed.

Moving forward

If Trust Council decides to move forward with changes, some of them may begin in 2004. For example, it could assume additional land use functions and make changes to the way it collects taxes. However, only the provincial government can make the legislative changes necessary for local government improvements. Some of the significant steps in the provincial part of the process are:

- Early in 2004, Trust Council will submit a formal proposal to the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services for any legislative changes necessary for the improvements it seeks.
- Trust Council will monitor and participate in any further stages of the Community Charter process that could affect governance in the Islands Trust Area.
- If the province agrees to legislative changes, it would likely consider them in 2005.

More information

To find out more about Trust Council's Governance Renewal Initiative, please see the contacts below. Information is also available from Local or Municipal Trustees. The Islands Trust website at www.islandstrust.bc.ca includes several background reports. During the fall of 2003, Trustees may discuss the topic at their business meetings and other public meetings.

Four Focus Areas

In June of 2003, the Islands Trust Council selected four key areas to focus its governance renewal initiative. They are:

- Assumption of **additional land use authority**, where other jurisdictions currently hold it and are willing to transfer it to local decision-makers. The specific areas for further investigation are:
 - **Building permits** (where they exist now). *The next step is to examine the economic feasibility of assuming the function and identify the Regional Districts in the Trust Area interested in transferring all or part of the permitting function.*
 - **Subdivision approval.** *Council will examine the economic implications of taking over the subdivision approval authority and discuss details of a transfer with the Ministry of Transportation.*
 - Land use decisions in the **Agricultural Land Reserve.** *Council will look at economic feasibility and talk to the Agricultural Land Commission about the way the Islands Trust could assume some land use decisions in the ALR.*

The next steps

At its September meeting, Trust Council identified the next steps in its governance renewal initiative. Council has planned the following steps during September to December:

- Consultation with the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services to ensure the province can support proposed options.
- Public discussions in the Trust Area during the fall, facilitated by Trustees.
- Discussions with the seven Regional Districts that provide services to the Trust Area to identify concerns and options for change.



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