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Mayne meeting—local democracy in action

Christa Grace-Warrick

At Mayne Local Trust Committee's July 5 meeting, a crowd of over a hundred turned up at the Agricultural Hall in Miners Bay to witness the LTC's discussion of a popular rezoning application.

Although it was not the only item on the agenda, meeting chairperson Gary Steeves rearranged items to accommodate what was on most attendees' minds: an opportunity to address the McDougall application to rezone a commercial property so it could be used as a farm store. Recognizing strong feeling in the community, he invited any attendee who wished to speak to the issue before the LTC considered it.

But first, Trustee Jeanine Dodds read a statement to the meeting. She said that on June 4, Islands Trust's legal counsel had told her she did not have a conflict of interest in participating in the McDougall issue.

She disclosed that, yes, she did hold the mortgage on her mother's C1-zoned commercial property in Miners Bay. Nonetheless, legal counsel had also advised her she did not have a conflict of interest when turning down a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) for the McDougall's property on June 7 and that the TUP decision was valid.

However, she said, people in the community still see her as having a conflict of interest and 'view her as biased.' So, she said, she would recuse herself from the rezoning application. With this she left the table.

The rezoning application and the TUP turn-down were both about changing the use of a defunct automotive repair shop (C3) and creating a commercial outlet for Mayne Islands' burgeoning food growing community (C1). The McDougalls have been farming on the Island for a number of years and have been working on food distribution systems, such as the vibrant Saturday Farmers Market. They have also sought to buy a commercial location in Miners Bay for several years.

Issues against the new store brought up in the TUP application were: competition with other businesses,

parking, and traffic, and these continued to be the issues Islanders wished to address at the meeting.

A tendency to speed on Fernhill Road, even in the nearby school zone, combined with a blind hill in the vicinity would cause more accidents, thought some. However, Dawn Cressman, who lives nearby, said she had never seen one accident there, and in any case, she said, accidents on Mayne were alcohol related.

Traffic speed should be addressed by the police and the Ministry of Highways, thought others. The staff report presented by Andrea Pickard, later in the meeting, stated that a Ministry of Highways application for a new permit for access was automatically triggered by the commercial rezoning application.

Glenda Johnson, who has lived on Rural land on Horton Bay Road since 1974, said that she wanted no more commercially zoned property. She had seen a quite a lot of rezoning since she came to the Island, including the lumberyard. She said that the Trust should review the spot zoning existing in the centre of the Island and remove commercial potential from property not using it currently.

Others, however, felt that Mayne needed more commercial space.

Two tenants in the adjacent Fernhill Centre expressed their fears of a monster operation developing next door (C1 zoning permits a maximum 9,264 sq ft of business space), killing their businesses through the amount of noise and traffic created, and also because of product competition.

Ron Willick pointed out that in relation to noise, the current zoning was the real problem. A potential 120 decibel automotive repair shop next door would be bad for business. He pointed out that the application was for a 1,800 square foot store (a building of 1,100 square feet already exists) and that the Islands Trust could specify the scale and type of operation.

In relation to competition, Brian Crumblehulme

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reported on his experience in his many years of creating and doing business on the Island. Giving examples from the last twenty-five years, he stated that, despite misgivings, competition had always turned out to be a good thing for the community. In any case, he said, competition was outside the Islands Trust's mandate in a rezoning.

The carbon footprint issue was raised. Brian Lefler, who lives a block away, thought that the store would increase Mayne's carbon footprint.

However, Lynn Tanaka pointed out that bringing food from off-Island was part of the carbon footprint and that every family driving around the Island to farmgate sale locations also increased the carbon footprint. The Saturday market, which brings products to one location, did not operate week-round or in winter. Edward Gale thought that traffic going to Miners Bay would be proportionally less.

Annette Witteman added that the store would also be an opportunity to learn about and trust local growers and the local food access on a regular basis would be beneficial.

Richard Iredale felt that the improved choice in sustainable and local food would encourage people to shop on-Island, also a good carbon footprint outcome.

Parking was mentioned as a problem but planners pointed out that the McDougalls had made provision for more off-road parking than was demanded by regulation.

Artist Bill Jamieson said that many people on the Island may have made their money elsewhere but that Island businesses helped support younger people, who in turn supported the fire department and the school.

Ellen Visser commented on the 'rumours and fear-mongering among the naysayers.' She encouraged people to check their facts before spreading rumours. They were, she said, 'not good for us and the store will be good for us.' Fred Sexsmith said he had been saddened by the divisiveness that misinformation had caused.

Amongst other considerations, the staff report stated that Fernhill Road was designated a main connector road, that the rezoning followed smart-growth principles, the majority of letters received were in support of the rezoning, and that use and size could be contained. The staff report recommended that the LTC proceed to having a bylaw drafted.

Shanti McDougall then spoke. She felt that questions about the three negative points of competition, traffic, and parking had been well addressed at the meeting. The McDougalls had gone door-to-door in the neighbourhood

and visited 23 properties: two parties had not been reached, fifteen were in support and six in opposition.

She said that they were very surprised at the outcome of the TUP application. She was concerned about misinformation and 'lines drawn in the sand.' She hoped that everybody would 'be able to look each other in the eye at the end of the process.' Don McDougall added that people with questions were invited to phone or visit them.

Trustee Colin Shew summed up. He said that competition was not an issue, parking was not an issue but traffic was. Planner Robert Kojima stated that a Ministry of Highways permit was paramount in any case.

Trustee Steeves then suggested that the way to proceed was to 'do the Ministry of Highways first.' In that way they would 'deal with facts rather than fight each other.' If Ministry of Highways said it was a no-go, then that was the end of the matter. Trustee Shew said he couldn't argue with that. A motion was made and carried for the McDougalls to submit an application to the Ministry of Highways.

During the break after the session, the buzz outside the hall was lively and energetic.

TUP Turn-Down Rescinded

Subsequently, the Mayne Island Local Trust Committee passed a resolution-without-meeting on July 14 that rescinded its June 7 decision on the McDougall Temporary Use Permit Application. Trustee Dodds did not participate, as per her statement at the July 5 meeting.

This means that the Temporary Use Permit application is once again before the Local Trust Committee for consideration. A special meeting will be held on August 12 at 1pm at the Mayne Island Community Centre.

Whoops!

Island Tides apologizes for misspelling Jeanine Dodds' name in our June 24 edition. ✍