

Island ^{Reprint} Tides

Visit www.islandtides.com for more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics

Reprint from Volume 18 Number 14

July 27, 2006

Editorial: No Shortcuts

Over half of Galiano Island, formerly a MacMillan Bloedel tree farm, was sold as large forestry lots to individuals and groups in the early '90s. Ninety lots were created often with multiple owners.

Including community processes and MacMillan Bloedel's court challenges, it took over ten years for Galiano to finalize its Official Community Plan and its Forest Policy bylaws, which currently allow residential use through a rezoning process. Since that time, some owners of ex-forestry property have rezoned their parcels, following the procedures set out in the bylaws. However, a good deal of disagreement with Galiano's Forest Policy bylaws is still very alive in this sector of the community.

The election of new trustees last November brought the promise of change, and Trustees Smith and Sharp set in motion a process to review Forest Policy bylaws. Despite the fact that a full OCP Review is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2007, this review was not to be a normal OCP process; which is led by the trustees and staff, involves the entire community working on the entire OCP, and leads to a revised Official Community Plan Bylaw.

Instead, the trustees set about hiring a facilitator to conduct an arms-length public meeting process (Phase 1) to define the process by which a consensus would be arrived at (Phase 2). Conclusions would presumably form the basis of revisions to the Forest bylaws and the applicable parts of the OCP. The provincial government, weary of being lobbied, supported the approach, paying the facilitator's fees.

Between 80 and 130 Galianoites attended each of the facilitator's meetings—a remarkable number.

The budget has now run out and Gordon Sloan, the facilitator, has left Phase 1, despite the group not having reached its objective of a design for Phase 2 participation. Sloan is not expected to be available for Phase 2 facilitation.

However, Trustees Smith and Sharp want to waste no time in commencing and completing Phase 2. At a special LTC meeting on July 20, they accepted Draft 3 as a final report and were accepting no more input from the community and themselves set about planning the structure for Stage 2, which they could finalize as soon as the end of this month. Trustee Smith explained he did not want to waste valuable public meeting time in planning the missing structure.

The facilitator clearly considers the only process with any potential for resolving the ongoing disagreement between forest

lot owners and the community of which they are a part, would be a series of negotiations between appointed representatives of each.

Judging by the Draft 3 report, the special review's participants have, instead, endorsed seeking a process similar to an OCP process; one in which discussion involves all members of the community who wish to be present. In fact, a section of the Galiano community believes it is simply improper to consider Forest Policy in isolation from the rest of the OCP Review.

In our opinion, a negotiation process is inappropriate in this case. The forest lot owners have no means of empowering any individuals to negotiate for them nor to commit to any agreement. The community has no representatives empowered to negotiate for them, nor to make commitments. Trustees have also not been so empowered in the special review process, though it is they who would, after all, be deciding the final outcome.

Understandably, in this strange process Galiano's trustees seem very unclear of their role; now absenting themselves, now coming on strong. The community also seems bewildered by the twist and turns the process is taking.

While everyone is operating in good faith, there is no provision in Islands Trust governance for this review. One is reminded of the softwood lumber agreement, in which the US government relies on the 'Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports' to negotiate with Canada.

In any case, with an OCP Review process looming, it is too late and would be in bad faith to bring forward bylaws which change a major part of the current OCP.

Incidentally, there may also be a dangerous precedent here which should concern other Islands and the Trust Council. Are we to assume that any bylaw passed anywhere in the Trust Area can be changed in this way by any special interest group who may wish, and has the influence, to do so?

The Islands Trust has an adequate and known structure for dealing with land use issues. It also has a long history of managing public participation in complex processes. Galiano Islanders, in particular, know how to do this well.

The special review has been invaluable in getting sectors of the community into discussion; but it is time to abort what the facilitator has indicated will be now be a failing process. Any further discussion could be recreated as a prelude to the OCP Review. Forget the shortcuts and do things properly. ☞

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

'This article was published (July 27, 2006) in 'Island Tides', an independent, regional newspaper distributing across the Southern Strait of Georgia from Tsawwassen to Victoria to Nanaimo.'

Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.

Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>