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Editorial: A Lot At Stake

Island Tides has been deluged with email letters about the upcoming local elections, particularly the election of Islands Trustees and particularly the southern Gulf Islands.

Some letters are advocating certain trustees but there are also many letters concerned about negative tactics and hidden agendas. From North Pender and Galiano we hear most anguish. Letters from frantic Islanders giving backgrounds on candidates who ought not to be running; they don't know how to get the word out.

There are just so many letters, we can't print them all. Rather than leave many out, we will try to represent the concerns expressed.

It's time to call a spade a spade. The expression 'rogue trustees' has in the last year become common parlance. This is a breath of fresh air; there are people who run for the Islands Trust who are not friends of the Trust and its Mandate—to believe otherwise is naive. All is not sweetness and light here—it's simply a very beautiful place. And that's the point, to preserve its beauty.

Clearly there is often a lot of money at stake—given the value and rarity of land on the Islands, how could it be otherwise? Wholesale development is probably not a worry, except on Galiano, but creeping development is everywhere.

Trustees who have made or implied promises to supporters looking for development breaks may not get clearshot at aiding such development; almost certainly they will get their Island into an awful wrangle which will make life depressing for three years.

Let's remember that the only Islands Trust candidate platform is: 'I will be the most effective person to preserve and protect this Island-in-trust.' Any candidate who is standing up for the Trust is doing their duty, it's there to be stood up for—nothing else.

This is a perilous time for the Islands Trust, only one person from a tried and true Trust Executive is standing again. There will be many first time trustees, let us hope they are clear on their proper duties.

For much of what the human community needs, we should pay more attention to the regional district director's mandate. For the last twenty years, regional director has been a very ignored position in the southern Gulf Islands, barely having candidates and often acclaimed. However, it is the key position

for delivering what our burgeoning populations need and want in their built communities.

The appropriate regional district director platform is: 'I will be the most effective person in creating and delivering services for the human and built community on the Island.' Qualities to look for in a regional district director are caring deeply about the health and happiness of communities and the ability to think creatively, to search out diverse ways and means, and to lobby on behalf of projects such as affordable and seniors' housing, healthy recreation, food production and water regulation.

Those standing for the Islands Trust on issues other than the proper business of the Islands Trust, such as municipal incorporation, should probably be standing for regional director. If their hearts are in the right place, municipal advocates should be interested in the delivery of services to residents, with the aim of creating vibrant communities. Those narrowly interested in incorporation are not appropriate as trustees, their key interest will probably take too much time away from the proper duties of a trustee.

Beware also of those who say they will reform the Trust. Let's name that spade again—more properly it is the quality of trustees that need reforming. But only the electorate can do that.

There's a lot of development money to be made on these Islands. That in itself is not inappropriate; but making it to the detriment of the tenets of 'preserve and protect' is not appropriate. Ask yourself who is backing this candidate or that one. Who has a vested interest? And particularly a vested interest that will, in practise, make it impossible to carry out the true duties of a trustee. Such folks may not be 'bad' people, just mistaken and misguided and should not be running for Trust. You must look and ask questions and figure it out.

During the campaign period, negative tactics are sometimes used. We should be able to recognize them by now. We have had the benefit of watching two elections this fall, this should make it easier to see these moves. We need to question deeply: what is the purpose behind the tactics; what is the history behind them?

Living in this very special place makes everyone of us a steward. The onus is on each and every voter to seek out the truth and to search their hearts to be sure they are truly upholding 'preserve and protect' by their vote. ✍

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