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Salt Spring governance study announced ~ Sara Miles

Salt Spring Islanders will again have the opportunity to formally discuss Salt Spring's governance structure and the general implications of municipal incorporation. The BC government recently approved an \$80,000 grant for the first phase of a governance study.

The governance study will help engage the community in discussion, review how the community is currently being governed, and what has changed on the island in the past ten years. It will also gauge public support for doing a second incorporation study.

Local trustees George Grams and Peter Grove campaigned last year for the provincially-sponsored governance study. Together with CRD Director McIntyre they submitted the formal request to the Province in March.

The Salt Spring Chamber of Commerce endorsed requests for a study and believes the study will benefit the community. In a press release, Vice President Matt Steffich stated, 'This initial phase of a governance study, along with the efforts of the CRD's Community Economic Development Commission to craft an economic development strategy for the island, will move us in a positive direction.'

Murray Coell, MLA for Saanich North and the Islands, said 'it's about getting the facts out there and gathering feedback about what residents want.'

Reasons cited for favouring incorporation include the potential for facilitation of development proposals, improved access to government funds, and having a greater number of elected representatives on a council. However, in 2007 a referendum to double representation on Islands Trust Council was defeated.

Others would prefer to consider alternatives to incorporation, such as Salt Spring activist Jan Slakov who commented, '[the study] assumes we only have two choices: the status quo or incorporation.'

The 2002 Referendum

A full incorporation study was completed in 2002. Just over half of eligible voters cast ballots in the resultant referendum, and 70% of voters opposed incorporation. A similar referendum on Gabriola Island in 2004 found 87% of voters opposed.

A factor that may have contributed to the opposition was that incorporation would have increased property taxes by up to \$200 for homeowners and \$600 for local businesses.

The 2002 Governance Study is available online at www.islandstrust.bc.ca/tc/governance.cfm, under the heading 'Community Governance Reviews'. More details about the structure of the upcoming governance study will be available after local government representatives meet with the provincial government mid-October. ✉

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Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 250-629-3660 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com