

'Ungovernable' island's way forward needs willingness to compromise

Given the choice, I think I'd sooner eat my own right arm than stand for the Islands Trust. Or the other one — the Local Community Commission (LCC) — the new, lesser, local thingamabob whose function I'm still trying to figure out.

Talk about "Damned if you do and damned if you don't!"

Last month's Driftwood was a distillation of everything that's cocked up about the governance of Salt Spring and from whichever side the various contributors were lobbing angry epithets, it was the Islands Trust that copped it.

Eric Booth, for instance, was very, very cross and had previously demanded the resignation of Laura Patrick, one of the Trust's worthies, because he disagreed with her. Or she disagreed with him. Either way, Eric theoretically knows his stuff because he was a trustee himself in the olden days.

I'm not entirely sure where Eric's coming from, but it seems to be from a different direction to the Islands Trust. He wants something done urgently about the shortage of housing on the island which, in Eric Booth's argument, appears to be entirely Laura Patrick's fault. Laura and Bylaw 537, which is apparently even worse than Bylaw 530 and something "those of us with half a brain should be hopping mad about." Grrr.

Eric wants the Trust to get on

and build stuff, or at least to allow people to open up their guest suites to rent payers, which doesn't seem too much to ask, but I suspect he's been banging the same drum for 20 years and, as with most things on Salt Spring, nothing much gets done.

Meanwhile, a few pages into the Driftwood, the Islands Trust was being given another going over for allowing TOO much development, and unless something was done about it, we'd become a second Hong Kong.

Its writers, a couple of scholars, unless I'm mistaken, do at least admit that the Trust is in a difficult position: "Damned if you do, etc. etc." but has become comatose or worse still, is now "running rogue," which conjures up a disturbing image of the island's trustees rampaging through Ganges in leathers and swinging bicycle chains.

The basis of this particular complaint is that the Trust has had the temerity to try to redefine its mandate so that it makes some small sense in the 21st century. David J. Rapport (a pioneer, no less, in the field of ecosystem health) and Luisa Maffi, an anthropologist, which is an entirely useful discipline for understanding the caprices of Salt Spring and other small tribal islands, are miffed because the duly elected trustees have taken it upon themselves to consider some small



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degree of development, which, in the opinions of Rapport and Maffi, is protected down to the last blade of grass by the Trust's original mandate.

And there's the rub. What little governance there is on the island is so utterly convoluted, so arcane, as to be unfathomable to most of us. At least it is to me.

I'll confess that I know Laura Patrick well. I admire her and know that she is a woman of great principle, but sit her down and get her to discuss the machinations of the Islands Trust, the CRD and the LCC and you quickly realize how utterly impossible it is to manage Salt Spring. Ask Laura why she bothers, why she doesn't just walk away, and she'll tell you she serves because she cares about Salt Spring and the people who call it home.

I care, but not enough that I'm prepared to get slapped up and down from both sides. The truth is the island is virtually ungovernable because of how its authority was ordained years ago. Like the Ameri-

can Constitution, the Trust's mandate seems to be open to interpretation and lends itself to endless haggling over its intent.

Preserve and protect, but preserve and protect what? On the one hand, there are the "Originalists" who believe the Trust's mandate doesn't extend beyond the environment and therefore disapprove of just about everything.

The Originalists, on the other hand, insist that Salt Spring has only one amenity – the environment – which, in my opinion, is a notion that is both suffocating and short-sighted.

But there is another interpretation, which has the Trust preserve and protect its unique environment AND its unique amenities, which is where the trustees mainly wind up bashing their collective heads against a brick wall.

Most dictionaries define an amenity as "a desirable or useful feature or facility of a

building or place." In property and land use planning, it is something considered to benefit a location, contribute to its enjoyment and thereby increase its value. Heating is an amenity, and so is a library or an ice rink. Housing is most certainly an amenity and there are those on the Trust like Laura Patrick who recognize that if Salt Spring is to flourish those amenities and others need to be addressed.

The Originalists, on the other hand, insist that Salt Spring has only one amenity — the environment — which, in my opinion, is a notion that is both suffocating and short-sighted. If it is to thrive and survive into the next century, or even the next few decades, Salt Spring needs sensible management, neither a developers' free-for-all nor a complete mistrust of anything that smacks of development. Many of us chose to live here because the island is relatively rustic, undeniably picturesque and offers a degree of rural life without ever having to become farmers, but we are as much entitled to our own amenities as the guy in the gumboots.

It needs a compromise and THAT is something that has always been in short supply on Salt Spring.

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