Salt Spring Island Local Governance

Introduction

Salt Spring Island[1] (SSI) has an unusual form of local governance, unique in the world to it and 11 other island communities in the southern Gulf Islands[2], an archipelago of 450+ islands in British Columbia[3].

The land zoning and community planning services of these 12 islands are delivered through[4]Islands Trust, created in 1974 by the British Columbia government through the Islands Trust Act[5], to separate land use and planning from delivery of other local government services.[6] The impetus was to curb unbridled development, under way and in planning, at odds with rare, fragile, beautiful ecosystems (notably, coastal Douglas-fir[7] and Garry oak[8]) valued by all British Columbians. The constant press to expand the local tax base would doubtless sacrifice natural landscapes and biodiversity. The mandate of Islands Trust is to "preserve and protect"[9] the environment in balance with broad human needs. The result is a distinctly different local governance system from rural-district and municipal models.

Many residents of Salt Spring Island and neighbouring southern Gulf Islands (30,798 population, gleaned from 2011 census) are engaged in efforts to understand how their local governance works and to make it work better. Interest in this extends to other jurisdictions world-wide working to accommodate human and unique natural communities in sustainable balance.

Local Governance Overview

Salt Spring Island elects the following island-wide representatives:

- 1 CRD Director
- 2 Islands Trust Trustees
- 3 School Board Trustees
- 7 Fire Protection District Trustees

- 1 Member of the Legislative Assembly, B.C.
- 1 Member of Parliament, Canada

Residents of 3 Waterworks Districts elect 3 Trustees; residents of 1 district elect 5 Trustees.

The Capital Regional District provides the greatest number of local services, as noted in the two left columns below. The B.C. government provides the biggest-ticket items.

CRD Regional Services	CRD Electoral Area 'F'	Islands Trust	Local Improvement Districts	B.C. Gov't Services	Federal Gov't Services
legislative & general government	economic development	local land use planning & regulation	SSI Fire Protection District	schools	harbour authorities
regional planning	parks & recreation	community planning	*7 TRUSTEES*	*3 TRUSTEES*	Fisheries & Oceans
by-law enforcement	transportation	development approvals	3 Waterworks Districts	roads	*1 MEMBER of PARLIAMENT*
solid waste management	water & sewer services	land-use by-law enforcement	*3 TRUSTEES ea.*	BC Ferries	
climate action & adaptation	search & rescue	subdivision approval (deferred to MOTI)	1 Waterworks District	RCMP policing	
affordable housing	arts services		*5 TRUSTEES*	health & hospitals	
noise control, nuisance, unsightly premises	public library	**Trust-Wide Services**		property tax collection	
All Electoral Areas Services	emergency communication	administrative services		subdivision approval	
Electoral Area admin'	stormwater mgmt	financial services, HR, IT		affordable housing	
building inspection	building numbering	records mgmt, legal, elections		septic requirements	
emergency program	grants-in-aid	policy, planning, advocacy		B.C. parks	

animal care	Fernwood dock streetlighting *1 CRD DIRECTOR*	*2 TRUSTEES*		wildlife issues *1 MEMBER of the LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY*	

Local Government Service Operations

Each type of government service is like a big workshop. For tools, their personnel have the means and methods inherited from previous administrations set out as policies, processes, and protocols. These tools can be used as received, or sharpened, augmented, supplemented, and delimited following prescribed procedures.

1. [Capital Regional District (CRD)](#)[10]
Salt Spring Island is one of [3 electoral areas and 13 municipalities](#) within the [Capital Regional District](#). Salt Spring Island is a rural community with a village hub (although, oddly, it's classified as "urban" within the CRD).
Salt Spring's [[CRD Director](#)][[11]](#) sits on the 23-member CRD Regional Board, as well as on the 3-member [Electoral Area Service Committee](#)[12] .

The CRD Director appoints citizen volunteers to the following commissions and committees, charged with community advisement on these services, their functionings, and finances:

Commissions & Committees

- [Parks & Recreation Commission](#) (PARC)[13]
- [Transportation Commission](#) (SSITC)[14]
- [Economic Development Commission](#) (SSIEDC)[15]
- [Sewer, Waste, & Water Services](#)[16]

    Liquid Waste Disposal Local Service Commission
    Solid Waste Advisory Committee
    Local Water Commissions (Ganges, Beddis, Cedar Lane, Cedars of Tuam, Fernwood, Fulford, Highland)

- [Emergency Program Advisory Commission](#) (SSIEPAC)][17]

- [Public Library Board](#)[18]
- [Island Arts Centre Society Board](#)[19]
- [Fernwood Dock Management Commission](#)[20]

Commissioners and committee members are solicited via local media, relevant local organizations, and other means, vetted by the CRD Director with volunteer commission/committee advisors, then appointed by the Director.

Potential for Improvements

Note: The CRD model of electoral-area governance allows for the creation of authorities within local commissions to deliver services required - eg. the SSITC has a latent parking authority, enacted but not yet enabled.[21]

Local commissions may also be created to serve functions not covered by existing CRD services. This could be another commission equivalent operationally to the existing ones, or could be an overarching one responsible for the rest.

This latter, a [Local Community Commission](#) (LCC), could be created by the CRD Board and have delegated to it the planning of local services, budgeting (subject to CRD Board approval), approval of expenditures, contracting, operational policies, procedures and decisions.

If approved by referendum, there would then be an election for four or six commissioner positions. The Salt Spring CRD director would also be a member of the LCC. Unlike current CRD commissions, whose members are appointed, LCC members would be directly elected by Salt Spring voters.

An elected LCC could reduce existing fragmentation of governance and allow greater co-ordination and local control of service delivery, especially when working with locally-based staff.[22]

2. [Islands Trust](#)[23]

Within the Islands Trust, each of the 12 [Local Trust Areas](#)[24] and one municipality elect two trustee each. Salt Spring's [two trustees](#)[25] sit on the 26-member [Islands Trust Council](#)[26] .

Local land use decisions are made by [Salt Spring's Local Trust Committee](#)[27], which includes the two SSI Trustees and another member from the four-member [Islands Trust Executive Committee](#) elected from within the Islands Trust Council.

[chart overview of the governance structure.](#)[4] SSI's trustees appoint citizen volunteers to the Advisory Planning and Agricultural Advisory Planning commissions for community inputs re: zoning and related issues. Commissioners are solicited via local media, relevant local organizations, and other means, vetted by the Trustees and existing citizen advisors, then appointed by the Trustees.

3. Local Improvement Districts[28]

Improvement Districts] are created through letters patent issued by the B.C. government. They are no longer being created, but current ones continue. They are autonomous local government bodies responsible for providing one or more local services for the benefit of the residents in a community. As they're phased out, they may be converted to regional district or municipal services.

The SSI Fire Protection District[29] is an island-wide service.

The other four Improvement Districts deal with waterworks in specific areas.

4. B.C. Government Local Services

Salt Spring is part of the Saanich North and the Islands Electoral District.[30] The following provincial government services have standing avenues for local advisement.

- Gulf Islands School District 64[31] operates the following island schools:

  4 elementary (Fernwood, Fulford, Phoenix, Salt Spring)
  1 middle (Salt Spring)
  1 high (Gulf Islands Secondary)

- B.C. Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure (MOTI)[32] is responsible for the maintenance and upgrades of Salt Spring Island's public roads, excepting BC Ferry terminal accesses and those built and upgraded by private developers.

  The ministry has a 1992 Letter of Agreement with Islands Trust to work together on road standards, classification, and consultative process, including cycling upgrades.[33] It remains viable, but unimplemented. It's the vehicle by which Salt Spring's elected trustees, Local Trust Council, and the full Islands Trust Council can have direct input into MOTI operations within the Trust Area.

- BC Ferries Services Incorporated (BCF)[34] is a B.C. Crown corporation wholly owned by B.C. taxpayers. BCF operates three terminals on Salt Spring Island and is advised by the Salt Spring Island Ferries Advisory Committee (SSI-FAC) of citizen volunteers.

- BC Transit[35] is a B.C. Crown agency that coordinates the delivery of public transit throughout B.C., excepting the Greater Vancouver area, working with SSI's elected CRD Director and the SSI Transportation Commission.

From the inception of Salt Spring's bus service in late 2007, BC Transit provided start-up funding and vehicles and aided its continuance. The SSI Transportation Commission gradually assumed many of these costs, to become a more self-sustaining partner.

5. Canadian Federal Government Local Services

The federal government has some local authority on Salt Spring Island, pertaining to harbours and government docks, coast guard, and fishing licences. To fund some of these services, the federal government charges taxes and fees.

- Salt Spring Island Harbour Authorities[36] (Ganges, Fulford, Vesuvius, Burgoyne, Musgrave)
- Gulf Islands Marine Rescue Society, Royal Canadian Seach & Rescue, Station 25, Saltspring[37]
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada[38]

  - B.C. Tidal Waters Sport Fishing information
  - Salt Spring Island fish conservation areas
  - Salt Spring Island bivalve-fishing area closures

Electoral Area/Islands Trust *versus* Incorporated Municipality

In 1989, the Islands Trust Act was amended to allow island communities to incorporate[39], while remaining nominally within the Trust.

In 1999, the Bowen Island[40] Trust Area community voted to become the Bowen Island municipality[41] and take over zoning and planning, plus many other local services formerly provided by regional and provincial governments.

Following this, Salt Spring Island prepared a Government Restructure Study[42], published in May 2002. That June, a referendum on incorporating was rejected by 70 per cent of voters.[43] In 2013, the British Columbia government funded a Salt Spring Island Governance Study[44], to compare the current governance system with that of a municipality. If, through this study and its straw-poll feedback, incorporating as a municipality appeared favourable to the community, then a futher study might be funded to flesh out the particulars and costs of incorporating, followed by another referendum.

To see the Capital Regional District overview of the main differences between an electoral area and a municipality, click here.[45]

Local Governance History

Author and resident Charles Kahn covers well Salt Spring Island's early governance history in his book, Salt Spring: The Story of an Island.[46] From 1859 - 1866, Salt Spring Island was represented by one elected official in the government of the Colony of Vancouver Island, then, from 1866 - 1871, by the United Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Voting was restricted to white, male landowners. Full enfranchisement of women, other races, and aboriginal peoples was not enacted for long decades.[47] No local government existed.

In 1871, British Columbia became a province of Canada. Salt Spring's arms-length representation in Victoria continued. In 1872, the first B.C. Legislative Assembly passed the Municipality Act[48] , through which it made considerable funds available to incorporated townships for roads, schools, etc. In late 1872, several prominent Salt Spring citizens asked for this designation, and in January, 1873, the island received letters patent as an municipality. The first by-laws for the island were published that year. A decade of disagreements over taxation, north island favouritism over south, and lawsuits over alleged corruption resulted in the B.C. Legislative Assembly dissolving the municipality of Salt Spring Island in May, 1883.[49] From 1883 to the mid-1960s, Salt Spring Island had provincial and federal government representation, but no officially sanctioned local governance body. From 1965 - 1968, the B.C. government created [1] regional districts throughout the province.[50] SSI became Electoral Area 'F' within the Capital Regional District (CRD), electing one director to oversee local government services under the aegis of the Regional District Board. The present CRD board has three electoral area directors and 20 municipal representatives.

Islands Trust Separates Land Use & Planning from Other Local Government Services

"In the late 1960's, the provincial government became concerned at the scale and pace of real estate development on the islands and imposed a minimum ten-acre freeze on subdivisions until a permanent solution could be found. The solution recommended by a Standing Committee of the Legislature was a unique and creative one – separate the land-use planning function from the regional district service delivery function. In this way, land-use is not driven by service demands as in a regional district or municipal structure. In June, 1974, the Islands Trust Act was passed with a special mandate to "preserve and protect" the islands for the benefit of all British Columbians, not just the islands' residents."[51]

Peter Lamb (Salt Spring Island trustee, 2005-2008) wrote and published The Islands Trust Story[52] , the best source for the history and evolution of the Islands Trust from its preconception in 1966 to its 35th anniversary in 2009.

Following is a list of past studies, votes, and agreements from "Our Island, Our Government", *Gulf Islands Driftwood*, 2011 August 17, by Gail Sjuberg:[53]

- 1967 — Ganges-area voters reject a proposal to incorporate the village by a 109 to 91 vote. Incorporation was viewed as a way to get a sewer system for Ganges.
- 1984 — Feasibility of SSI incorporation explored in a study but decision made to not proceed.
- 1986 — Ganges Incorporation Study Committee struck to explore feasibility of incorporating Ganges as a village municipality. Pursuit of the idea was abandoned in 1989.
- 1991 — SSI Local Government Committee formed to look "at options and opportunities for change" in local government structure.
- 1993 — SSI Local Government Committee produces its final report, recommending a Phase II study to explore both the island municipality and one other option.

- 1993 — Salt Spring CRD director Julia Atkins creates paper for Ministry of Municipal Affairs titled SSI Local Government Study Stage II.
- 1994 — SSI Residents Against Waste and Inefficiency in Government issue report called Time to Take Charge — Making SSI a Healthy Community.
- 1995 — Islands Trust Council and Ministry of Municipal Affairs agree on how municipalities would function within the Islands Trust Area.
- 1998 — Salt Spring receives Municipal Affairs funding for a Salt Spring incorporation feasibility study. Committee appointed in 1999.
- 2001 — SSI Local Government Restructure Study released, with update in May of 2002.
- 2002 — Incorporation referendum fails with 70 per cent voting "no." Voter turn-out is just under 50 per cent.
- 2005 — Trustees Eric Booth and Kimberly Lineger, and CRD director Gary Holman issue a report called Improving Governance on Salt Spring Island.
- 2008 — Islands Trust referendum to increase Salt Spring Local Trust Committee size to four trustees from two fails with 65 [sic: 58] [54] per cent voting against it, with voter turn-out of about 40 per cent.
- 2009 — Trustees Christine Torgrimson and George Ehring, and CRD director Garth Hendren are advised by the Ministry of Community Development that it will not support a governance study for Salt Spring] — either in concept or with funding.

Update:

- 2013 - B.C. government funded Salt Spring Island Governance Study, Phase I, to review SSI's current governance, compare it to municipal governance, and engage islanders in the discussion.[55] If, through surveys and other feedback, the community was deemed to favour more detailed study of the costs and other particulars of incorporating, then the study would recommend funding of Phase II, followed by a referendum on the issue.

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