

RESPONSES FROM TRUST CANDIDATE BRYAN YOUNG TO POSITIVELY FORWARD'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions on Trust-wide issues:

1. The Islands Trust mandate states that “*The object of the Trust is to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of British Columbia generally.*”

What do the words “environment” and “unique amenities” mean to you?

The terms were not defined in legislation and while they can be seen as highly subjective, we have more than 50 years of discussion and ongoing interpretation. Interpretations in 1986 and 2023 were seminal. The 1986 definition hews closely to natural and ecosystemic attributes, while the 2023 definition is broader and includes human elements.

It is the job of Trustees to acquaint themselves with the scope of this discussion within the context of the Trust object, and make decisions that strike a balance – looking to the Trust Policy Statement for guidance.

From my point of view, all of the words in the object need to be taken together. To that end, it strikes me as unnecessary, imprudent, and challenging to redefine “unique amenities” to include human settlement and its artifacts. The object of the Trust already states that “unique amenities and the environment” are to be “preserved and protected...for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of British Columbia generally.” Humans and their artifacts are considered in the object as beneficiaries of the preservation and protection of the unique amenities and environment” found in the Trust Area.

Unique Amenities

We sit in the Coastal Douglas-fir ecozone, perhaps the smallest and most heavily altered ecosystem type in British Columbia. Roughly half of it has already been developed. Under one percent of its old growth remains. On these islands, we hold a mere sliver of the zone, with our Garry oak meadows, manzanita, camas, and madrone on the dry rocky bluffs we love. These are our “unique amenities”.

We’ve already lost a lot of that uniqueness here on Salt Spring. The maps created by Ruth Waldick and Nicholas Courtier in the [Climate Action Plan 2.0](#) that I co-edited with Elizabeth White chronicle forest loss, and from 2000 to 2020 according to Global Forest Watch we lost 6% of forest cover.

To me, ‘preserving and protecting that which is unique’ has to be the pre-eminent priority, and against which all development must be measured, and against which any future Official Community Plan or Land Use Bylaw amendments must be judged. Development is legal in the Trust Area, and we have this mandate. Both co-exist. We must reckon with that contradiction, and based on the steady diminishment of those ecosystems and the species within them over the past 50 years, we cannot continue clearing forests for houses. We need to stick with what we’ve cleared and live within our means.

Environment

I resist reading the word ‘environment’ through the lens of people on one side and nature on the other, with ‘protection’ meaning keeping them apart. The meadows and open forests that we value so highly were shaped over millennia in interactions between the Coast Salish peoples, other animals and creatures, the soil, the sun, and the rain. Human interactions included seasonal burning to suppress Douglas-fir, and promote open Garry oak savannah and camas production. In the language of the SENĆOŦEN speaking peoples KŁO,ELENEØ, is translated as “Camas food systems” which clearly shows that humans were an integral part of what the western way of seeing calls “environment”. Some would say that without this active stewardship, the productivity and complexity of these lands has diminished.

Being a part of “the environment” means being mindful about where we step, how we steward, and how much we take and put back. Sadly, our current relationship with this place is net negative by a wide margin.

There are more and less integrated ways of living within this environment and how islanders score on this criterion is determined by the sum of everything we do, from collective personal practices to government decisions made every single day. If blame is something we need to ascribe, there is plenty to go around, but that is not a fruitful path. Each generation inherits a slightly diminished island and calls it normal. At the same time, almost nobody would deliberately vote for tiny serial degradations at a Local Trust Committee or Trust Council meeting if they lived in the knowledge of the larger context.

The existing Trust Policy Statement (3.1.1) says that

“Trust Council holds that proactive land use planning is essential for the protection of Trust Area Ecosystems and planning must account for the cumulative effects of existing and proposed development to avoid detrimental effects on watersheds, groundwater supplies and Trust Area species and habitats.”

Decisions are made in every day in meetings and through our personal actions that don't take cumulative impacts into account. This puts the fact of land zoned to allow development, and a preserve and protect mandate into increasing tension over time while we continually fail to account for cumulative effects.

We can lessen the "cumulative effects of ... proposed development", by building where we already have services in places like Ganges. North Salt Spring Waterwork District (NWSSD) had about 300 multi-family equivalent connections available when it partially lifted the moratorium, and of that roughly 250 are left. NSSWD calculated the 300 connections based on "multi-family units" (aka: apartments) which have far lower domestic water consumption on average than single family homes. These connections should go to affordable and workforce housing sited where there are already existing services, starting with rental housing for the people who already live and/or work here. It's the only way I can see to better balance preserve and protect with the need to address the housing affordability crisis.

Ultimately, "environment" is paramount. For many of us, it's why we came, it's why we love it here. But between the impacts of climate change, and our highly inefficient and wasteful rural sprawl development pattern, we're in fact steadily losing land to preserve and protect.

2. Do you support passing the 2026 draft Trust Policy Statement as it is? Why, or why not?

Short answer - No.

My journey with the Trust Policy Statement (TPS) started a year ago, with a submission I made on behalf of Transition Salt Spring. Our focus then was to add climate change which is absent from the current TPS. I also know from reviewing the current TPS that there is nothing on Indigenous rights and title or commitments to reconciliation. It is also a really challenging document for most people to read.

The draft of the updated TPS is a lot easier to read and navigate. For the general public to truly understand, let alone appreciate, why the Trust is important, they must be able to read and comprehend its core document. A Latin mass is great if you can understand Latin, but when you don't understand what is being said?! We need a modernized TPS (and OCP and LUB) that makes an effort to speak in ways that more people can understand to build better public familiarity and support for the mandate.

That builds trust.

Since I gave that submission I have reviewed a line by line comparison developed by Friends of the Gulf Islands. The language, for example, around cumulative effects in

the current and proposed versions is striking. The proposed version says we should “strive” to account for cumulative effects, while the current one says that “planning must account” for these effects (emphasis added). It’s clear that we are failing to achieve this part of the TPS now, and is perhaps a cautionary tale about how much stock we should put in foundational documents if the institutions charged with upholding them do not uphold their directives. We must reckon with this contradiction in the revised TPS.

I pledge to broaden my understanding of the content and history of the current TPS and the arguments many have made about its strengths. I also pledge to push for a renewed TPS that

- keeps and strengthens environmental protections,
- adds principles and directive language about the undeniable fact of climate change and our need to mitigate ecosystem impacts and develop adaptation policies and strategies, and
- enshrines meaningful reconciliation as outlined in the draft TPS.

I don’t think we will survive the climate crisis well without meaningful reconciliation. Traditional western dichotomies of mind body, human nature drive insufficient responses.

3. Given the legal authority of the *Islands Trust Act*, what are your thoughts about the role of elected Trustees?

The role of Trustees is to uphold the Trust’s objects, while acknowledging the facts of human settlement, Indigenous rights and title, and climate change. The role of Trustees should be to be innovative and collaborative in dealing with systemic challenges, and in interfacing with the public, agencies, and other levels of government.

Trustees must also be clear-eyed about organizational capacity. My platform places the Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw as the two single biggest commitments. This is deliberate. The more we freight the boat with commitments, the less we will achieve given Trust capacity. Collaboration across agencies, rebuilding public trust, and improving how the Trust listens to a broader range of residents are the means by which I want to achieve these commitments. Trustees key goals are to unite residents around the Trust’s mandate.

Democracy itself in the Trust Area needs to evolve, and there is significant tension between many people across the Trust Area and amongst trustees. To help rebuild (or build) trust in the Trust, I plan to advocate for establishing engagement processes drawn from citizens assemblies and deliberative democracy to improve the diversity of voices providing input on key LTC or Islands Trust projects, and empowering citizens to

hold some accountability in making recommendations about the shared stewardship of this place we are blessed to call home. We have experts living right here and in Victoria ready to help the public learn about these tools, and in turn help trustees exercise their duties.

4. How do you feel about the various criticisms that have been leveled against the Islands Trust?

The Trust's own CAO, whom I respect and have met with a number of times, laid out several criticisms of the Trust laid out in last year's operational review. He was not criticising staff, but rather the almost impossible situation the organization is in, the age of its systems and processes, and the demands placed on it.

The Trust is struggling under decades of cumulative decision making by everyone from provincial officials and their staff to Trustees and Trust staff, along with pressure from thousands of constituents, all with their own needs and perspectives.

The Trust's professional Planners are amongst the lowest paid in BC particularly when you factor in living costs on these islands. It's part of the reason why few planners live on the islands, why staff turnover is so frequent. The remoteness of island planners from day to day islander life has heightened the disconnect between the Trust and residents, breeding mistrust and substandard ways of engaging islanders. With high turnover goes institutional momentum, capacity and memory. This is one reason the Trust's processes are slow and inefficient.

There are OCPs and land use bylaws for each of the 12 LTCs, and one municipality, each of which are unique, in a Trust Area characterized by similar ecosystem zone characteristics and development challenges. Add to that the demands of a 26-member Trust Council that turns over every four years, and the ongoing and steady stream of development applications, and it's pretty easy to see how things got to where they are.

The Trust has a mandate to preserve and protect, for us here on these islands and for BC in general, but the Trust is almost exclusively funded by revenue from its islands. This wasn't always the case – staff used to be exclusively paid for by the Province. Part of the reason for the Trust's challenges come from the lack of Provincial support for the mandate. I will advocate on this issue if elected.

While some would abolish the Trust, I strongly believe we need to retool, reempower, and strengthen the Trust, to give it a proper fighting chance to truly realize the ambitions of the mandate.

Questions on Salt Spring issues:

5. Specifically, what policies would you propose to better protect the natural environment on Salt Spring?

As one example, we must restrict development in areas in the path of documented climate risks to protect the Trust from liability, and our community and ecosystems from harm.

The Trust and the SSIFPD have discussed a Wildfire Development Permit Area and, while it is a step in the right direction, its initial outlines however were insufficient for the magnitude of the wildfire risks we are facing.

The Trust needs a Climate Risk Development Permit Area (DPA) focusing on scientifically validated risks from seasonal freshwater flooding, wildfire, and coastal flooding due to sea level rise. We already have high quality work that covers Salt Spring to plug into a Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment that would provide a defensible rationale for risk mitigation and climate change adaptation in our revised community plan and land use policies.

A Climate Risk DPA restricted to landscaping and building materials recommendations is helpful but insufficient in addressing wildfire risks in some areas. Likewise in areas where coastal and freshwater flooding zones which will become imprudent to build in, and a Trust liability. Humans cause most wildfires on Salt Spring. Keeping homes out of the highest risk zones is prudent to protect stressed forest ecosystems and increasingly vulnerable aquifer recharge zones.

6. The current Official Community Plan (OCP) has this policy: “B.2.1.2.1 Zoning changes should be avoided if they would likely result in a larger island population than is expected under the development potential zoned in 2008. Exceptions to this policy are to be few and minor and only to achieve *affordable housing and other objectives of this Plan.”**

****As defined by the BC government, the provincial definition of “affordable housing” is housing that costs no more than 30% of household income.***

Do you support retaining this policy? If not, what policy would you put in its place?

Yes, but with qualifications.

- a. The definition in Part A of the OCP “describes rental or owned housing that can be acquired with 30 per cent of the median gross income of families or

individuals on Salt Spring Island" (emphasis added). The question above varies from the actual policy by redefining "affordable housing" as no more than "30% of household income" not "30% of the median gross income of families or individuals on Salt Spring." What is written in the question and what is written in the OCP is apples and oranges. Regardless, the OCP definition seems flawed because it fails to account for the skew in Salt Spring incomes to the lower end because incomes of retired people often include investment income not captured in the calculation of what "median gross income" would be on SSI. What's more, Salt Spring Foundation's 2025 Living Wage Report pegs living wage at \$28.45 which is \$10.60 above the BC minimum wage (\$17.85), meaning that the OCP definition fails to account for higher living costs on SSI. At the very least the OCP definition needs to be examined for flaws if its goal is social equity. As it stands, it seems like an arbitrary cut off that makes it harder for affordable housing to be built.

- b. It must be acknowledged that current housing economics are terrible – especially for the construction of "affordable" housing, however defined. No policies, separately or in the aggregate, can accomplish affordable housing on their own without significant philanthropy, land contributions, or government grants. Instead we see a proposal for a recreational vehicle park in a clearcut on a bad road with no current water and wastewater system connections. How do we develop housing solutions appropriate for our island that will work, given government indebtedness, poor housing economics, and an island construction premium added onto that?
- c. Having said that, we first need to focus on affordable rental housing units close to services, especially Ganges. I recommend that the Trust collaborate with the LCC, CRD, NSSWD to better support the proponents of projects like King's Lane, Norton Road, and the remaining density at the Drake Road property to see if there is a winning formula to get these built. We need everyone to come together to find ways to make them work, including proactive support from Positively Forward. At the same time, I will need the support of Positively Forward and its members to implement ecosystem and climate readiness measures to better "preserve and protect" our island home.

With respect and hope,

Bryan Young, candidate

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