

## Opinion piece by Renee Stephen

October 19, 2021

For those who don't want to d/l the whole report, here's the intro.

"[...]...What is clear is that the Islands 2050 process has been one that has captured the public's attention. The engagement process started off strong with preliminary conversations about the aspirations and values of constituents. Engagement touch point numbers were higher during the first two phases than any other Trust wide process to date. The process leveraged digital technologies to increase accessibility, which was very well received across the Trust Areas.

However, the engagement for the Islands 2050 project was challenged in the following ways:

- Promise to the Public - Communication about the project phasing and sequencing, including the way public engagement was feeding into this Policy Statement process (how their input would be used) was not as clear as it could have been, resulting in a lack of clarity about how and when public engagement would be used.
- What We Heard - Lack of staff resources had compromised the roll-out of the original engagement plan, and resulted in missed opportunities to communicate the critically important connection between the values established in the first phase of engagement and the resulting Policy Statement changes. For iterative engagement processes, it is critical that there is a strong report back of 'what we heard', and how that input has informed the next steps in the process to ensure that the project is on the right track.

It is important to note that this is a multi-year, regional scale project. Comparable projects often have dedicated internal project management and engagement staff to ensure the project is run efficiently and effectively. These internal staff are often supported with engagement and communications consultants which require a higher project budget.

- Broadening the Reach - The Trust serves residents, non-residents and all residents of BC as part of the "preserve and protect" mandate. To date, the Trust has not been collecting information on who has been engaged other than information about age collected during the online survey. In order for this process to be successful, a broader reach of constituents needs to be reached and brought into the conversation— including harder to reach demographics (elders, youth, the unhoused, ethnic minority populations, working families, low income people, LGBTQ2S+ populations and disabled persons) and the silent majority.

It is our recommendation that the process re-calibrate, starting first with clear communications to the public about the pause in the project, and the plan going forward – not just to first reading – but through to project completion including future opportunities for engagement. Given the resources required for a regional scale engagement process, it is recommended that the Islands Trust contract the services of both an engagement and ideally a communications consultant to

ensure that this project is properly resourced moving forward. Other recommendations are included within this document

As a consultant myself (not in this area of expertise, note) I have to say this is pretty damning. They're writing it mildly because the goal is to get the Trust to take their advice -- they're not gonna say "you're doing it wrong", but that's what they've said here.

Stipped down, this say:

1. The IT didn't tell anyone what they were doing in any detail, or what the plan was.
2. The IT didn't tell anyone what impact input had on which parts the plan or how to get involved.
3. The IT didn't commit the staff, time, or budget to do this the way it should be done.
4. Where they did minimally get feedback, they had no process in place to actually track it, consider it, or account for it.
5. They didn't meaningfully include -- and \*listen to\* anybody who wasn't already going to be included.

And the conclusion? Ouch. The IT doesn't have the staff or expertise to be doing this, and they need to hire people who do.