

July 4, 2021

Notes from a South Pender Taxpayer to a North Pender Trustee, Ben McConchie --

Introduction

Ben, these thoughts follow your random notions posted on Facebook, and shared with me.

Ben, you note in your preamble that "I hold a double major in political science and history from UVic and was fortunate to study B.C. politics with the late prof. Norman Ruff - so I find this process all so interesting." You also state, "I don't mind criticism" Good, because I hope you won't mind this screed, most of it probably wrong. Wrong is my forte as you might know.

Ben, your comments are useful, for they confirm that despite a fine education, you seem to have been missing a message. Let me be blunt. Many of us in the Islands communities do **not** buy what the Islands Trust management are selling. Wait, let me change that verb, for were you selling, you might take into consideration the hearts and minds of your customers who support the Trust's Objects. Change "selling" to "foisting" for it is more accurate action word for what the Trust has been doing. Because of the behavior of the IT management and many Trustees many of us wish it would just go away. And for many good reasons, current and historic.

One thing I do know from my time selling hot dogs at the Fall Fair, you don't do more business at your kiosk by ignoring your customers, by overcharging them, or by shorting them on relish, mustard and ketchup. You don't sell more hot dogs by shoving dogs down their throats.

Now as a double flunk-out from Victoria College, University of Toronto, I probably don't know very much. And yes, its okay to think, "It shows." From the school of hard knocks I learned enough of the importance of care and kindness that tens of thousands of direct and indirect clients entrusted billions of dollars of their savings to my firm for their management. And that is what this letter is about - care and kindness, something that should be of benefit to you.

Let me lay on you a couple of homilies that you might consider during this period of discussion. The first is from the *Tao Te Ching*. It has a little of Doctor Bonnie Henry inside.

The sage has no interest of his own, but takes the
interest of the people as his own.
He is kind to the kind; he is also kind to the unkind:
for Virtue is kind.
He is faithful to the faithful;
he is also faithful to the unfaithful: for Virtue is
faithful.

Next,

Zi Gong asked: "Is there any one word
that could guide a person throughout life?"

The Master replied: "How about 'shu' (reciprocity):
never impose on others what you would not choose
for yourself?"

That is from *Confucius, Analects*. I kinda like that stuff, but I am very old fashioned.

Now Ben, ask yourself, "What is it the Trust has been doing?" And, "Why the outcry?"

I'm no Norman Ruff, your esteemed professor, so I'll try my best to elaborate. Here is the message from a dumb, old university drop out. "If you want to sell a product, or a service or an idea to a person, you might want to think of their interests, consider their views and their wants and provide them with a benefit or enhancement." As Mary Lathrap penned, "Walk a mile in their moccasins." That is the benefit I offer you. Do you really think that you and your co-trustees are doing that?

Does anyone in the Islands Trust think of the hearts and minds, the properties and the livelihoods of the thousands of working people paying taxes to keep you in business? And what is your business? Let me suggest - the creation of tyranny by by-laws. The Trust's re-write of the Policy Document is evidence of that. And if you continue with the policy statement, constant anxiety, and battle will be the outcome.

Lets continue with your points.

1. You state in your opinion, we have 63 elected officials for this area and that is too many. Well stated. Most Pender people would agree.

So let us remove the four Pender Island Trustees, and get down to 59 officials and save the taxpayers about \$50,000 or \$60,000 in honoraria and expenses. I'm such a Philistine, money again! But after all, Pender developed very nicely as a community for some 10,000 years under the stewardship of First Nations and for some 150 years of settlement without the oversight of the Islands Trust. Oh maybe I'm being too flippant...but in the ten years as a tax payer here I see precious little the Trust has achieved.

Correction one achievement stands out, three sets of trustees, three sets of whimsical bylaw proposals and three tsunamis of community distress, contention and bitterness.. In the first instance and to her ever lasting credit Trustee Montague voted down a welter of bylaws as she faced a pretty earnest crowd. When she did, everyone went home happy.

At the time your relative by birth, 'Good Old Landslide McConchie' was a trustee on South Pender Island I witnessed an incident typical of the Islands Trust's attitude. McConchie's adjunct, in a public meeting, scorned and ignored the diligent work of a neighbour. He had created a reasonable method to regulate house sizes and setbacks relative to land coverage. The Chair made no effort to intervene to consider and respect his work. Funny thing, same person sits in the same chair position today, but at the top of your organization.

2. You observe that "if we wondering where our tax dollars go the Capital Regional District has a budget of \$283 million and the Islands Trust one of \$9 million". The implication is that you are a cheap service.

But...your education might tell you that is a non-sequitur. Or in plain speak, you are comparing apples with oranges. You sly fox. You thought you might get one over on me.

To keep things in perspective, to use your phrase, the services of the Islands Trust includes land planning and zoning, that should be it. The services of the CRD include land planning and zoning, fire prevention and water, and sewer services and parks and emergency services. Docks too.

Now I believe the Trust serves some 26,000 full time residents. Therefore, the cost per resident per year in the Trust region is about \$346.15 or nearly \$700 per two person household.

The land planning and zoning numbers provided me, for a somewhat comparable region, Juan de Fuca, run about \$684,625 for a population of 5,000 or \$137 per person or about \$280 per household. Same service as the Islands Trust for about 60% less. Gee, match Juan de Fuca, and

you'd save the exchequer some \$5.5 million. Do that and Ben McConchie might get an election lift in the tougher times to come.

Applying the same calculation for the CRD the cost per person per annum for the CRD taxpayer is \$624.02 per person (\$238 million by 383 thousand population). Humm, a number slightly different from yours but it was provided by the Director. So if his numbers are correct, the Trust is costing taxpayers more than half the per person amount for one service compared to seven services from the CRD. I'm not that good with numbers, but the Islands Trust hardly looks like a bargain to me.

3. You state the Trust Policy Statement is getting a lot of attention and that is great. (Alas, you do not mention a lot of the attention is push back from distressed people. Count me in!)

You say that we have the option of ignoring the document and "allow Wal-Marts and Best Buys if that's what the electorate wants". Would you like to retract that remark, or walk it back in current lingo? How contemptuous is that of the concerns of people here?

Do you mean to impugn the character of Islanders who care? Do you really mean to suggest we who object to the behavior of the Trust management and its wanton expenditures, are any less concerned for the conservation of our environment than the Trustees?

You say, the "typical election cycle for the trustees is to vote in a strong environmentalist slate." If my memory serves Ben, you and Ms. Morrison were not voted in. You were acclaimed.

What does that say about the interest people have in your organization. I would argue, not very much!

Might it be that only environmental people stand to be elected and the rest of us prefer to get on with our lives and work and contribute to the community? You might find that snide. Sorry.

Has it ever occurred to you why so few run for the Trust? How few vote? Many of us would just like it to go away, all of it. But I'm being redundant, forgive me.

Please don't demean our concern for the natural features of these Islands. We who distrust the Trust is because of the use of environmental oppression, because of the playing, out of your remit may I suggest, the First Nations' card and because of the abuse visited in the past on taxpaying residents. We think people, their feelings, their consideration and their property deserve better.

4. You comment about racist remarks on Facebook. That is a pity and I cannot comment, not being a Facebook person.

You go on to say that "reconciliation could prove to have the most positive impact on our Island community". Really? Is that responsibility written the Islands Trust Act? And on Pender, have you solicited those First Nations who live here?

I know only of two. One of the two, Dennis Perch, has written eloquently against the Trust's contention of indigenous consultation.

At the risk of being vilified, may I suggest that reconciliation is none of your business and that others more sensitive and authoritative have taken on that task. Leave it, and other social causes, to them.

Let me say, I believe that at no time in its 47 year history has a First Nations person been in the Trust or on the Executive. (In this I could be wrong and stand to be corrected.) So one could believe that the Trust, without a legal right is using the current aboriginal crisis to gain favour.

I believe in framing the Policy Document you asked the counsel of First Nations or Knowledge Keepers. I understand you may have paid them. In the corporate world that would require "full, clear and plain disclosure". Please direct me to the evidence and citation on your website.

I will state from a first hand interview, that the Islands Trust in claiming consultations with the Nations, that those long standing families of Indian descent on Salt Spring and Galiano Islands had NOT been consulted. In fact, not only have they not been consulted, but also the Galiano family had said much about their past treatment at the hands of the Trust's bylaw officer.

Let me suggest the principle of public access to official documents found in Sweden. "In order to guarantee an open society with access to information about the work of the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), Government and government agencies, the principle of public access to official documents has been incorporated into one of the fundamental laws, the Freedom of the Press Act." Maybe that is a good idea.

5. "I don't understand why the Trust staff are being criticized - they are servants of the public. The only people to blame for the actions of the staff are the Trustees."

C'mon Ben, am I to swallow that stuff? You both are subject to public opinion.

Why do these words appear in the proposed policy statement, "The Local Trust Committees and island municipalities **shall** in their official community plans and regulatory bylaws, ensure..."? That exhortation goes on for some 16 pages of what the local trustees must do. As a rhetorical question, why wouldn't the Islands Trust posit something to the effect "the local trustees apart and separate from the off-island chair may make decisions in collaboration with their neighbours and residents cognizant of the objects of the Trust?" The policy statement is pre-emptive and prescriptive, prepared by the Staff.

Why Ben did it take a Trustee from afar to alert Pender people and others of the re-write? Where were you in directing staff to disclose?

6. "The Trust was established in the 70's to protect our islands from over-development. When you live in a land trust, that means you are subject to more stringent environmental regulations."

Are we?

I bought my property ten years ago. I moved here seven years ago. The same car and boat dumps along Schooner and Bedwell Harbour Roads are still there. For a year I had a contractor clean 50 years of accumulated garbage from my property. Where was the IT then preserving and protecting? The aforementioned remarks are a red herring. You would say, "Not our business" and legally you would be correct, but morally the Islands Trust has done little in my opinion to enhance the landscape or the grounds.

What has the Trust actually done to assess and to help and to motivate property owners to be more green beyond concocting more bylaws and imposing disadvantageous demands on owners?

Why do stories circulate about businesses forced to leave the Islands, about owners forced to remove wharves, or adjust sea stairs at the whim of a Trustee. Why does a farmer have to write a two page, single spaced letter to you to preserve and protect their agricultural business from an "Industrial Designation" on Port Washington Road? Why has a retailer been fingered for a down zone and denied housing for employees in the same area? Why? Because you do not care!

7. "I will vote to slow down our policy statement process..."
Good.

Then you can make a motion to re-purpose the Trust by splitting off the Conservancy, rolling the land planning into the Islands' respective regional districts and merging the mapping function with the CRD.

Then truly elected representatives can be put into positions at a significant salary that if he or she fails to listen to the peoples of these Islands, it will make a meaningful dent in their livelihood.

8. "Trustees voted 14 -12 to review the operational management of the Islands Trust. This hasn't been done since 2006".

That is a good thing. But...

If the Trustees are really community minded why would the Trustees entertain these remarks by Charles Kelly, the head of Great Northern Management Consultants, "In light of the above, the optimal approach would be **not to proceed** with a survey of Island Trust residents, but instead augment interviews with councillors, staff and their parties (including both Trust area residents and "outsiders" with shared interest and other connections to the Trust.)"

In other words, the consultant can rig the analysis by focusing on sympathetic folks and maybe later we will do a general survey. And you observed you did not understand why the leadership of the Trust might be vilified by the residents.

That is a bad thing. Without listening to those who dissent, your reviews are just b-----t. Sorry I spent too many years in Alberta stepping in cow pies.

In Conclusion

In conclusion Ben, who are you trying to win?

You may have seen the movie "Gladiator". It is all fiction of course.

Maximus, the Gladiator, is talking to Proximo, the empresario, on the matter of winning his freedom.

Maximus: You asked me what I want. I too want to stand in front of the Emperor as you did.

Proximo: Then listen to me. Learn from me. I wasn't the best because I killed quickly. I was the best because the crowd loved me. Win the crowd and you will win your freedom.

Who is your crowd, Ben? The Executive who brought you into this muck of contention? The Trustees? Dare I say it that 12 of whom appear to lack judgment or guts or sympathy in failing to endorse a management review?

Or is it all the residents of these fair Islands many of whom pay your fare and expect from you care, kindness and consideration before.....

Here endth the harangue. It is full of misstatements I am sure. And in my defense I close with a motto that hangs above my dresser, "I never make mistakes, once I thought I did but I was wrong!".