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Our Perspective - Our Vision for the Islands Trust Area

We often hear the word “vision” associated with the Islands Trust’s mandate in the context of “what are our intentions, where are we heading, and how are we getting there?” But we don’t necessarily understand what that means because it has never been adequately expressed. The words “preserve” and “protect” when referring to the unique amenities and environment, are not nebulous; nor were they chosen without careful consideration.

The islands and the small communities were entirely different in 1974 than they are now. While the BC legislature did not believe that they would remain as they were, the concern was that the valuable characteristics of the islands would be lost without some form of intervention and guidance. The Trust Act was intended to be the vehicle to ensure that the rural and natural character of the islands would be preserved and protected.

To “preserve” means to maintain in the present condition. To “protect” means to maintain over the long term. While the intention was not to halt development or freeze human activities, it was to **manage** future development and activities, **limiting** them if required, to ensure that the unique amenities and environment were not adversely affected or lost.

It’s curious that people come to visit or live on these islands because of these very unique amenities and environment, but not all embrace the idea of preserving or protecting them. In fact, some believe any attempt to “preserve and protect” will injure their interests or investment. It may be that this concern is due to a lack of vision and a clear explanation of how that vision can be achieved. It is likely that many cannot visualize what these islands were like years ago or would be like today without the vision of the Islands Trust Act and its framers.

If we are to “establish a vision for the future of the Islands Trust Area that reflects the values of the residents of the Trust Area and of the Province generally”, we have to accept some essential ground rules and be prepared to forego some of our expectations. If the mandate is to be achieved, it is us who need to compromise, not the values associated with a “preserve and protect” mandate.

Residents of island communities in 1974 were far more self-reliant and at the same time, far more dependent upon neighbours. Services were few and this led to a higher level of self-sufficiency. Homes were of simple design, and smaller in size due mostly to

modest incomes. Properties were generally larger but an increasing number of smaller lots were being created. The local economy was not robust and trading in goods and services predominated. Specialized tools, equipment, or machinery were more often borrowed than purchased. Not everyone got along but everyone came to help when needed.

While acknowledging that our communities have changed with time, some of these characteristics do survive, particularly on the less populated islands, and some can be revived. Preserving the rural and natural character, and protecting the amenities and environment is as simple as accepting the character of the islands, rather than creating the lifestyle and development that exists in urban areas. That includes maintaining the scale and style of buildings which reflect the history of our communities. It means developing property with less disturbance and which require less maintenance. And it will mean more consideration for the impact that new development may have on existing properties.

Preserving and protecting these islands' unique amenities and environment should not be an alarming proposition, nor should it be interpreted as interfering with anyone's ability to live comfortably. But it will and should give pause to those considering purchasing property in a Provincial legislated protected area.

Humans have a history of changing nature to suit only themselves. The Islands Trust Act gave us the opportunity to do something outside of our personal interests - by cherishing a very special place and doing whatever we can to preserve and protect it.