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To: Financial Planning Committee, Islands Trust

From: Friends of the Gulf Islands Society

Regarding: Delegation on 2026-2027 Budget on January 21, 2026

The Friends of the Gulf Islands has major concerns about the direction of the 2026-2027 Budget. We strongly oppose adding any additional staff positions within either the Islands Trust or the Islands Trust Conservancy and urge that budget increases be limited to the rate of inflation.

Over the past several years, the Trust's budget has grown substantially. But we do not see a corresponding improvement in the protection of the natural environment or amenities of the Trust islands. What we do see is a recurring pattern: trustees request more projects each year and the staff respond by requesting additional staff. This cycle must change. Two efforts are needed.

First, staff must communicate to Trust Council how many projects can realistically be undertaken within the existing budget. Second, trustees must exercise discipline in limiting the number of projects they ask staff to pursue. If Trust Council is provided with a clear understanding of how many projects the budget can support, they can then vote – by ballot if necessary - to determine which projects will proceed.

We support the Islands Trust employing a full-time biologist. A biologist could provide essential guidance on bylaws designed to protect the environment (such as appropriate setbacks from waterbodies) and advise on environmental risks associated with granting variances to these bylaws. With a reduced overall workload, space for this position could be created by eliminating an administrative position when an appropriate vacancy arises. When extraordinary costs occur, such as election expenses, reductions must be made elsewhere in the budget.

Another cause of escalating budgets must also be addressed. The current practice is to create business cases that include only a small portion of their true cost because staff time is excluded. This practice must end. Approval of each business case must be based on the full cost of each project, including estimates of staff time needed to carry out the project.

We also question the value of the Water Sustainability Project. This initiative has cost hundreds of thousands of dollars yet has failed to deliver the most basic and necessary information needed, where groundwater is plentiful and where it is not. Now, this project appears to be committing the Trust to substantial ongoing costs to maintain a complex website without addressing the core water supply issues. Furthermore, this project seems to rely heavily on computer modelling while largely ignoring the on-the-ground experience of residents whose wells have failed or have been significantly reduced in capacity. It is unfortunate that so much money has already been spent on this program. But it is better to stop now than to continue investing in a program that is not delivering needed results.

We appreciate that budget approval entails difficult decisions. Sometimes, it takes an outside organization to deliver difficult messages. But the reality is that taxpayers' ability to support the Islands Trust is reaching its limits and we are concerned that this is threatening the public's confidence in the value of the entire organization.