

Presented to the Islands Trust Council September 14th, 2011
This submission was written Sunday September 11, 2011
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There has never been a more eagerly anticipated OCP process than the current one on Galiano Island. It is sixteen years since the present OCP, bylaw 108, was adopted. These years have been turbulent times for the island.

In 1995 we forest owners participated in the OCP process with enthusiasm. I remember the difficulty of getting to the steering committee meetings – forest owners did not have houses on their property. We felt like we were living on B.C. ferries in order to attend as many meetings as we possibly could. We believed if we gave this OCP our best shot reason would prevail and once the “planning” process was complete our residential rights to our lands would be returned.

Wishful thinking. The 1995 OCP gave us choices to gain back our residential rights. These choices are now quite famous particularly the choice that allowed the owner to donate 75% of his land area to the Silva Foundation in return for the right to develop the remaining 25% of the forest lot into five acre parcels. A few saw an opportunity and developed their land under this option but most pursued one of the other choices and found that no matter how many hoops they jumped through there was always something else that made their right to a residence unavailable.

By 2000, after five years of attempting to rezone their property, owners began to hear the refrain, “Nothing can be done about the forest lots until we have a new OCP.” Whenever an individual’s frustration became vocal and public we were assured the upcoming OCP “process” would take everyone and everything into consideration and an equitable solution would be found.

In 2005 the Islands Trust lawsuit against three forest lot owners who erected buildings on their lands resulted in the election of Trustees Michael Sharp and Roy Smith. They spent their entire term working on the forest lot problem. When the provincially funded forty thousand dollar consensus process did not end in a resolution they took their findings and proposed bylaws that would give the forest lot owners the right to one home per forest lot. The trust executive voted to veto those made on Galiano bylaws.

In 2008 Louise and Sandy found the funding for the long awaited new OCP. During the last three years they have overseen endless steering committee meetings. The result of all this concerted community effort? We now have a collection of fourteen amended bylaws. The forest bylaw is not among them.

How can it be that the dream of a new conciliatory OCP which would bring harmony to the community has slipped away?

A technicality?

If a new bylaw is passed which has jurisdiction over Galiano's present forest bylaw, the Private Managed Forest Land Act will come into effect as it does everywhere else in British Columbia. The Private Managed Forest Land Act allows a house on every forest lot, however, Galiano's present bylaws predate the formation of the PMFL and therefore they take precedent. If we had a new OCP which included the Forest zone, Galiano would fall in with the rest of the province and the local trust council would lose its power to refuse homes on forest lots.

We have witnessed fifty-three meetings of the forest zone steering committee. All facets of the community have been welcomed into the consultation but the committee's recommendations are now to be shelved.

Forestry is the elephant in the room. It will be ignored in order not to jeopardize the current bylaws.

Galiano could move forward with a new OCP giving one house to the forest lots or Galiano can remain frozen in time facing a new round of lawsuits and continuing to absorb an inordinate amount of the trust's time and money.

The current Galiano trustees have always said the resolution of the forest residency issue was their priority. In fact the trustees who preceded them in 2005 were also elected to bring resolution to the forest conflict. The trust executive stopped those trustees from achieving their goal and now, Louise and Sandy have chosen to perpetuate the conflict.

Last Sunday I heard them being congratulated on the fine job they had done. It is my sorrow that I live amongst people who feel they have won a tremendous victory if they can keep forty property owners from having homes on a Canadian Gulf Island.