

# Minute mess

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The people we elect are given the power to set and implement their own agendas. Until the next election, their authority is quite broad. It is not absolute though.

We entrust our governments with power, but they remain subject to long-established and well-grounded rules to ensure fairness and due process. It galls us all when the government breaks the rules: when it hides information, when it misleads us and when it doesn't play things straight. We expect basic rules to be followed. By all. In the recent federal election, Saanich-Gulf Islands did its part to send that message to Ottawa. Now it's time to focus closer to home.

At its April regular meeting, the Salt Spring Local Trust Committee unanimously adopted minutes for a meeting it had held on Jan. 14. These minutes had been delayed for three months, with minutes from later meetings adopted out of order, in violation of the LTC's own meeting procedures bylaw.

Most seriously, the January minutes materially misrepresent what happened on one item of business.

The minutes state that trustee Ehring reported a possible conflict, that the applicant answered a question, that the meeting recessed and reconvened, and that trustee Ehring excused himself from the meeting. Provincial law is clear on this issue: an elected official with a conflict must not participate in a discussion or attempt to influence a decision.

The adopted minutes omit that, before excusing himself, Mr. Ehring spoke to the application being considered and commented that his partner, the owner of a neighbouring property, approved of it. The minutes omit that Mr. Ehring asked the question the applicant answered. The minutes also omit why and when Mr. Ehring left the meeting, both of which are strict requirements of provincial law.

So today we filed a formal complaint with the Executive Committee of the Islands Trust. The complaint is not about Mr. Ehring's conduct in January. That deserves a close look, so we ask the Executive Committee to consider the matter, but we realize it could have been an innocent mistake.

The complaint is really about the cover-up by the LTC. About a year ago, Sheila Malcolmson, the off-island appointed chair of the LTC, wrote in the Driftwood, "Minutes are the official recording of the LTC's proceedings, and are absolutely the right place to record what was decided and why." We agree.

The law, the rules, and simple common decency require that minutes be a true and accurate record of the proceedings of a public body. The LTC should have recorded what actually happened in January, and might have said it was a good faith error. Instead they made a deliberate choice to whitewash the record, misleading the public who elected them. They falsified official history.

Do rules apply to everybody? Are elected officials accountable to the people?

We heard how the electorate in Saanich-Gulf Islands answered these questions. Let's hear what the Executive Committee of the Islands Trust thinks.

**Susan Cunningham, Arlene Dashwood, Jean Elder, Peter Lake, Mark Lucich, Brandi MacKinnon, John Macpherson, Shelley Nitikman, Patsy Siemens,**

**Salt Spring**