

**SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS ELECTORAL AREA
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION**

Minutes of a Meeting held February 5th, 2018 at 9:00am

Mary Winspear Centre 2243 Beacon Ave. Sidney, BC

- Present:** **Commission Members:** Brian Crumblehulme (Mayne Island), Priscilla Zimmerman (Saturna Island), Michael Hoebel (Galiano Island), Ben McConchie (Pender Island), David Howe, Director, Ben Maberley, Director Alternate,
- Guests:** Kristen Morley, Katja Berninger-Dobie, Ina Timmer, Derek Masselink, Jeff Weightman, Aldous Sperl and Andrea Mills. Melody Pender, Recorder

Approval of Agenda: MOVED by Brian Crumblehulme, **SECONDED** by Priscilla Zimmerman that agenda be approved.

CARRIED

Adoption of minutes of April 27th, 2017 minutes.

MOVED by Brian Crumblehulme, seconded by Priscilla Zimmerman that the minutes of April 27th, 2017 be adopted as presented.

CARRIED

Broadband: Mike Hoebel gave a brief history of the initiative and an update on its current status. There are currently 4 commercial Internet Providers for the islands, Telus, Shaw, Beacon Wireless and Xplornet. The highest speed currently available in the islands is 30 Mbps and it is dependent on the location. In December 2016 the CRTC issued a policy statement declaring that “broadband access Internet service is now considered a basic telecommunications service for all Canadians” and the CRTC set a target of 50 Mbps speed for fixed broadband services. This is 10 times the previous target of 5 Mbps. There is an increased bandwidth demand and the major carriers (Telus and Shaw) have no plans to expand the areas or to increase service levels. There is discussion between Beacon Wireless and SaturnaNet to possibly partner or the SaturnaNet Co-op broadening its service area to the other SGI’s and forming a new SGI Co-op.

In January 2018 the federal and provincial governments announced \$45 million in funding to connect 154 BC coastal communities to an underwater high speed fibre optic backbone running from Haida Gwaii in the north to Victoria in the south. Strathcona Regional District will receive \$33 million of the funding and be responsible for installing the backbone from Northern Vancouver Island to Victoria. Telecommunications carriers and ISP’s would continue to be responsible for the connections to the home. There was apparently no consultation done with the CRD in advance and 16 communities in the CRD were identified however Galiano and Mayne Islands were excluded. Steps have been taken to get them included. The project is likely to take 3 plus years before infrastructure is built. Ben Maberley cautioned that this project could run out of money before it reaches the southern gulf islands.

Dave spoke about the importance of having broadband on the islands in order to attract and retain young families to the island. Several stories were shared of losing young families due to lack of internet speed.

Solar Co-op: Mike Hoebel reported over the past few years there have been a number of projects on Pender and Salt Spring to install solar panels using a combination of local fundraising and donations, government and other grants, both volunteer labour and commercial installers. In 2017 the SGI CESC funded an assessment of the solar energy potential of public buildings on each of the islands and we now have a good sense of where the best sites are and what the costs are.

A Gulf Islands Renewable Energy demonstration and education centre is currently being developed at the Galiano Conservancy's Millard Learning Centre, which will have a greatly enhanced solar system, thanks to Dave Howe's support and significant funding from the CRD's Community Works Fund.

There was a group of property owners on Galiano that did a bulk buy of 300 solar panel and associated solar equipment installed by the owners and other volunteers with some professional help. Publicity about the success about the bulk buy has generated much interest from other groups on Galiano and other islands would like to create another opportunity to bulk buy.

In response to this demand, and in the interest of promoting a renewable energy future on the islands, a new co-op has just been formed and registered, named the Salish Sea Renewable Energy Co-operative (SSREC). Its purposes are: to promote, support, and/or facilitate the installation of low-carbon renewable energy systems; to advocate for low-carbon renewable energy policy by governments and public agencies; and to support training and education related to low-carbon renewable energy systems.

The first project of the new SSREC will be to coordinate the bulk purchase by its members throughout the SGIs of solar equipment and also installation services. It is anticipated that this bulk purchase of equipment and services will be in the \$1 – 2 million dollar range. A longer term project for the new co-op is to develop community solar systems, also known as “solar gardens” or “solar farms”.

There are several challenges facing the solar agenda in BC. Lack of tax or other incentives to install solar systems in this province, lack of cooperation from BC Hydro and the cost of permits for solar grid-tied systems in BC, which is up to 10 times greater than in other provinces. One of the purposes of SSREC is advocacy, and this has already begun with development of policy recommendations for government, and meetings with provincial ministers.

There is tremendous potential for building a low-carbon future on the Gulf Islands, including not only local clean energy generation, but other clean technologies such as electric vehicles. We need the CRD to embrace and support this vision and become a champion to move it forward with the provincial and federal governments.

The new co-op is intended to bring the islands together, they are doing a presentation on Mayne Island and Bowen has also asked for a presentation.

Education/Edu-Tourism: The SGI Community Resource Centre was created to be the resource base for all the SGI's with satellite rooms/offices on each island. The CRC applied for a Rural Dividend fund to fund an edu tourism pilot program on Pender that could be transferred to the other islands. Lisa Fleming and Shannon Brayford are the Project Managers.

During the Listening Tours education had been brought up as something missing on the islands. We approached several island colleges and universities and are currently in talks with UVic regarding bringing virtual classrooms to the islands.

The SGI Tourism Consortium has a representative from each islands chamber and is a marketing tool for the off and shoulder season. The Destination BC grant requires matching funds and the CESC has been approached in 2017 for \$4,000 which had been discussed last year and for 2018 they asked for \$8,000. The Commissioners met several times and decided to split the funds between the SGI Tourism Consortium and the CRC Pender Island project.

MOTION: Brian Crumblehulme moved the SGI CESC approve \$8,000 for the SGI Tourism Consortium \$4,000 for 2017 and \$4,000 for 2018, seconded by Priscilla Zimmerman.

CARRIED

MOTION: Brian Crumblehulme moved the SGI CESC approve \$4,000 for the SGI Community Resource Centre for 2018, seconded by Priscilla Zimmerman.

CARRIED

There was discussion regarding the satellite centers on each island and how the internet connectivity would affect them.

It was asked if the CESC could ask the CRD to work on their behalf to help the SGI's move closer to better broadband. It is baseline infrastructure for the SGI's.

MOTION: Priscilla Zimmerman moved to ask the CRD to immediately engage their IT department to act on behalf of the SGIs, Saturna, Mayne, Galiano and Pender Islands to consult with the communities and make recommendations on the best ways to bring reliable high speed internet to the SGI's in the next 6 months, seconded by Ben McConchie

It was cautioned that the CRD IT department itself may not have the expertise they need. If the CRD doesn't have the expertise they should know where to find it. The CRD needs to make this a priority and be the advocate to the provincial and federal government as well as TELUS and Shaw. If the new norm is 50 Mbps as established by the CRTC then that is a right for everyone and someone needs to step up on CESC behalf and hold them accountable, what are they doing to make this happen to the underserved areas?

MOTION: Priscilla Zimmerman moved to ask the CRD to make it a top priority to provide internet service recommendations for the SGI's in six months, seconded by Ben McConchie.

The CRD is a government entity and cannot be endorsing one business over another. Making a recommendation of one service provider over another is not within the mandate.

MOTION: Priscilla Zimmerman moved to ask the CRD to make it a top priority to provide internet service implementation recommendations according to CRTC standards for the SGI's in six months, seconded as amended by Brian Crumblehulme.

CARRIED

SGI Calendar: Zorah gave a brief background to Heartwood and the reason for creating the SGI calendar. The islands offer many wonderful events for visitors and residents. Zorah wanted to make it happen and was able to acquire some grant money to host on the Heartwood website. She was introduced to the Experience the Southern Gulf Islands website southerngulfislands.com and their calendar which at this point only features SSI and a bit of Pender. Katja explained that feeds can be set up to import from other calendars and so far only Salt Spring Island Chamber and the Pender Island Chamber have done so. It is supposed to be an all island events calendar and they have been reaching out to the islands to have more feeds. There is also the ability to enter events directly on the website. It is very time consuming to enter events and researching where the events are located on social media and would be more effective to hire one person to research and enter events that could feed into the Consortium site.

MOTION: Brian Crumblehulme moved that the SGI CESC approves \$6,000 for entry of events and education into a centralized southern gulf islands profile calendar, seconded by Priscilla Zimmerman.

CARRIED

Food and Agriculture: Dave was approached to support a Food and Agriculture plan and said he would do so if it included all the islands. A bid was put out and Derek was selected to develop the plan. Started with what kind of agricultural activities happen across the gulf islands, then a steering committee was established with a member from each of the islands, land use inventory which included water demand model. In order to execute the Food and Ag plan a co-op was thought to be a model that may work.

Zorah was approached by Dave to implement the Ag plan with some seed money from Vancity. They wanted to make it all about the food producers and we could get a community works grant. So they applied for Collaborative Community planning for food producers and others. Zorah went through proposed mission of the co-op, implementing the AG plan.

The SGI's need to get resources vs helping them sell more. Being a nonprofit food co-op they are able to apply for funding. Members of the co-op could be the key food producers from each island. A project the food co-op could take on is at each islands Saturday market, they would hire one of the other farmers who is able to sit at the markets to sell the farmers product and be paid to do it. It frees them up from having to sit at the market if they don't want to. Another project could do with soil. The money could be used to pay for the transportation of soil amendments and negotiate bulk ordering prices. One more project could be to buy needed machinery and have shared use of it per island. Setting up an e-commerce system for pre ordering is another idea. Zorah's job now is to go through the projects and find the projects that they could do practically and be ready to apply for the grants as soon as they come up.

Transportation: Kristen reported that the RFP was sent out for the Inter Island Transportation business plan and they are currently evaluating the proposals. It will be jointly funded.

Andrea gave an update on the busses on the islands. On Pender the ultimate goal is to have an electric bus however due to the terrain a fuel vehicle and capacity of the island. There was concern about not having a coordinated regional bus service if inter island water transport is being coordinated. The islands are working towards collaborating better together and possibly coming under one umbrella.

There was discussion on how to transition the commission into an execution committee or board or stay as it is but have a commissioner on each co-op board.

If the Commission is considering moving towards a service under the CRD it would require an increase in taxation and a referendum would be required.

Ben McConchie discussed the importance of the commission in engaging the community. He suggests a second Listening Tour and to continue engaging island residents.

SGI 2020:

Pender Island: Ben reported the Listening Tours were very successful and on Pender he tried to engage each group of the community by talking with them beforehand. It is very important for the CRD to continue to engage the community even if there is criticism. It would be good to do more of them.

Galiano Island: Mike reported the Listening Tours were not as successful on Galiano. There wasn't a lot of work put into the lead up of the tours. There was a lot of distrust of the CRD, distrust of the terminology, suspicion of social engineering and what they felt was incorrect factual information and therefore it was all incorrect.

Mayne Island: Brian was a little disappointed in the turn out. Engagement was good. Many people approached Brian after the tours and were very positive.

Saturna Island: Katie did a great job on Saturna. Priscilla reported that Saturna is in worse shape than the other islands so they have less to protest! There was a lot of work done before the tours and a very good turnout for a small Island.

Priscilla expressed concern for Saturna's economy with the proposed fuel dock shut down and extension of the dock. Ben Maberley responded that they are still in negotiations and unable to discuss much. They have a public meeting coming up on Saturna shortly to invite the residents to discuss what can be done moving forward.

Discussion followed on a possible SGI gas co-op and offering job training programs. Also opening some positive transportation corridors so inaccessible islands are no longer inaccessible. Dave mentioned that creating jobs is not the mandate of the Economic Commission. Creating the infrastructure is.

Further discussion on the SGI 2020, Ben Mc would like the commission to consider another listening tour or similar format, going back to the islands and let them know what we are doing. From Galliano's viewpoint, if it doesn't come up from the community then it isn't legit, therefore Mike would like to see what is "coming up" from Galiano and see if we can match it with what we are doing.

Brian suggested the commission meet again and discuss the SGI 2020 and come up with what to let go and what to move forward. Mayne Island was very receptive and said it was good work and keep it up. Priscilla commented that one of Saturna's biggest issues from the Listening Tour was affordable housing. Andrea suggested if affordable housing is a common issue on the islands perhaps that could be a focus to start off with.

Affordable housing on the islands was discussed and the different housing projects. Previous affordable housing issues were looked after by people on the island by giving young people a break on purchasing land or houses i.e. no down payments. Other initiatives like Galiano Green and Pender's Plum Tree Court.

The information from the Housing Needs Assessment will be voted on this month and should be available at the end of the month.

David asked if there is anything new from the SGI 2020 as an initiative outside of a single SGI website for new and existing residents. Mike suggested the islands' working together or continuing to work together i.e. the insurance umbrella is a really important initiative.

Melody and Ben M are working on the insurance umbrella for the SGI's and will put together an email for the commissioners to forward to their groups.

Andrea Mills put out a formal request to the other islands to be part of the SGI Community Resource Centre or let her know if they can recommend someone from their island that may be a good fit. Melody requested a list of each islands groups and societies contact information so she can make contact with them regarding insurance and other joint island projects.

David Howe motioned to adjourn, seconded by Brian Crumblehulme

Adjournment at 2:25pm