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*Dealing with Government - Patrick Brown*

## **Representative Government and the Islands Trust**

**S**tart with a couple of statements of the blindingly obvious. The principle of Representative Government is that we nominate and elect representatives to represent us. That should be obvious, but it means that we do not elect them for their looks or their wisdom, though we hope they have at least a representative quantity of each.

The principle of the Islands Trust is that it is responsible for the preservation and protection of the Islands. This is why the people we elect to the Islands Trust are called trustees.

These two concepts, representative government and 'preserve and protect,' are brought together by the mandate contained in the *Islands Trust Act*. While the procedures that Local Trust Committees must follow are contained in the province's standard municipal legislation—the *Local Government Act* and the *Community Charter*—no other municipal body in the province actually has a formal mandate legislated by the province. This makes a big difference.

### **The Islands Trust Mandate and the Islands Trust Policy Statement**

All municipal legislation (bylaws) passed by Local Trust Committees must, by law, be consistent with the Islands Trust mandate. But it's not always easy for trustees to judge this.

So some years ago, the Islands Trust conducted an extensive exercise in public consultation in order to write a detailed description of what the 'preserve and protect' mandate meant. This document, the Islands Trust Policy Statement, is there to guide trustees in dealing with day-to-day land use planning on the Islands.

Read as a whole, the Islands Trust Policy Statement's thrust

is clear. But, like the Bible, it's possible to extract individual phrases which can be used to justify actions which would not be consistent with the whole. The same is true of Islands' Official Community Plans. They, too, must be taken as a whole.

### **Who to Represent?**

Back to representative government. Sometimes it's difficult for trustees to discern who they should be representing. I'd say: the community.

I know that doesn't sound particularly helpful, so let's expand on it a bit. The community is everybody; it's not an individual or a group. The community doesn't have one opinion; it has many. The community is not a majority; it is majorities and minorities—the masses and the eccentrics.

Representing the community is hard if you think you know the answer; it's easier if you're humble. You lead a community from behind; if you get out in front it'll trample you. You speak to a community by listening to it. You teach by learning.

All of this is standard stuff for the representative who represents, and incredibly difficult for the elected official who doesn't. Representing is both more difficult and easier with a mandate, because the mandate prevents you from blowing in the wind, but at the same time it gives you responsibilities and reference points. It tests your integrity. That's what makes being an Islands trustee difficult; but as many trustees have found, both addictive and rewarding.

### **How About You?**

If that's your kind of challenge, start now: put your name forward for the 2005 Islands Trust election. You may not be brilliant, but you are most certainly representative. ☞

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