



Meeting Notes from Tuesday, January 14th, 2025 – 10:30am-2:30pm

Attendees

Members (in person):

1. Chair: Elizabeth May, MP (Saanich-Gulf Islands)
2. Paul Brent, CRD Director (Southern Gulf Islands)
3. Gary Holman, CRD Director (Salt Spring Island)
4. David Maude, Islands Trustee (Mayne Island), Vice-Chair of Islands Trust Council, Chair of Saturna and Pender Local Trust Committees
5. Laura Patrick, Islands Trustee (Salt Spring Island)

Members (virtual):

6. Bel Manson, Land Referrals Coordinator (S̓x̓ÁUTW_ (Tsawout) First Nation)
7. Timothy Peterson, Islands Trustee (Lasqueti Island), Vice-Chair of Islands Trust Council, Chair of Salt Spring and Galiano Local Trust Committees
8. Tobi Elliot, Islands Trustee (Gabriola Island), Vice-Chair of Islands Trust Council
9. Dag Falck, Islands Trustee (South Pender Island)

Support Staff (hybrid):

10. Patricia Pearson (Office of Rob Botterell, MLA)
11. Aysha Emmerson (Office of Elizabeth May, MP)
12. Helena Murray-Hill (Office of Elizabeth May, MP)
13. Theresa Coles (Office of Rob Botterell, MLA) – *virtual*
14. Claire Frater (Islands Trust Secretariat) – *virtual*

Welcome

MP May welcomed virtual/in-person attendees, offering a land acknowledgement. Participants introduced themselves. The agenda was agreed upon, namely:

- *Discussion – Marine Matters*
 - *Response to Marine Matters Letter*
 - *Impact of Prorogation*
- *Discussion – Arising Local Issues*
 - *Docs*
 - *Housing*
 - *SGL Primary Care Network*
 - *BC ferries*
- *Break for Lunch*
- *Additional Member Updates*
- *Next Steps and Closing Remarks*

Discussion – Marine Matters

Summary: Discussion began with reviewing the response from the federal government to the “Letter on Marine Matters” sent by MP May’s office March 26, 2024, following the SGI Roundtable on Marine Matters. The potential impacts of federal parliament’s prorogation and upcoming election on the Forum’s advocacy were discussed. Local issues discussed spanned dock leases, the housing shortage and tiny homes, a potential Southern Gulf Islands primary care network, and BC Ferries advisory committees.

Key discussion points are as follows.

Response to the Marine Matters Letter to Federal Ministers

- The letter on cross-cutting marine matters prepared and sent March 26, 2024, received a response December 19, 2024. Though addressed to multiple Ministers, only the Minister of Transport, Anita Anand, replied. Pablo Rodriguez was Minister of Transport when the March 2024 letter was sent. Omar Alghabra was Minister when C-33 was first tabled.
- Forum attendees critiqued the federal government’s response for “taking too long, saying too little.” They discussed possible approaches to placing more pressure on the Ministries to act, considering continued inaction on key issues such as marine buoys, Southern Resident killer whales, and the Vancouver Fraser Point Authority. It was agreed upon that advocacy should focus on areas where the law continues to be broken.
- The idea of creating a Salish Sea Port Authority was revisited; an idea raised in the March 2024 letter to Ministers but not addressed by Minister Anand. Before promoting such an Authority, SGI forum attendees will await word from Indigenous governments about whether they are interested in an Indigenous-lead Authority and, if so, what process they would wish to follow to discuss this prospect.

Action item – *Before the next Forum, MP May will respond to Minister Anand’s reply, with a “sharply worded” letter highlighting issues that went unaddressed or are unresolved. The letter will be resent to*

relevant Ministers (Ministers Anand, Guilbeault, and Lebouthillier). To expedite the correspondence in advance of an election period and associated Cabinet shuffle, the letter will come directly from Elizabeth and SGI Forum members will be cc'ed.

Action item – *MP May will draft a letter to government officials in Washington State with bordering waters (e.g. San Juan islands), inviting them to participate in a cross-border discussion on marine matters, wherein best practices can be shared. The Forum's Marine Matters and follow-up letters will be shared in this correspondence. Date TBD; September 2025 or earlier. MP May's staff will liaise with Laura Patrick and other SGI Forum members regarding Washington State contacts. The draft letter will be circulated and approved by Forum members before sending.*

Action item – *MP May will draft a letter to First Nations seeking their direction on the possible creation of an Indigenous-lead Salish Sea Port Authority and, if this is of potential interest, offering a meeting. The draft letter will be circulated and approved by Forum members before sending to Nations.*

Impact of Federal Parliament's Prorogation

- Bill C-33 would have banned the export of thermal coal from Canada, substantially reducing instances of freighters carrying bulk goods through the Salish Sea, improving the environmental health of marine ecosystems. The bill would have given the Minister of Transport the power to redirect vessels. Due to prorogation, the bill did not advance to a third reading before the House and now ceases to exist.
- MP May wrote to the Prime Minister and other party leaders about the prospect of including Bill C-33, alongside several other bills that have received cross-party support, in the Throne speech for the incoming Prime Minister—and to try to push these bills through parliament before a vote of non-confidence or election takes place and the widely supported bills die. She has not yet received an answer from other party leaders.
- Bruce McConchie's testimony to the House of Commons on the issue of derelict vessels was effective in winning cross-partisan support and discussed as something to keep in mind for future advocacy.
- MP May will not be prevented from attending the SGI Forum as MP during the writ period. Unlike in BC provincial elections, federal MPs are still able to continue their constituency work during a writ period—they are still considered sitting MPs—however, they do not have the same access to the bureaucracy of the federal government.
- The Conservative Party's current leadership promises to backtrack on First Nations (UNDRIP) and environmental issues. Further, the leadership is generally hostile towards cross-party collaborations. These implications associated with a potential, future conservative government were briefly discussed.

Discussion – Arising Local Issues

Commercial Dock applications and Lease Renewals

- Some Island residents and commercial operators have reported issues renewing their dock leases. They have waited years for a decision, and when they follow up with the Ministry are

told the applications are still being processed. However, other, more recent applications, have been processed, highlighting inconsistency.

- Other residents have reported leases being cancelled within six months. There is no clarity regarding the source of the issue.
- A moratorium on private docks has been implemented.
- Ruckle Park Heritage Society wants to re-instate a dock which was decommissioned in 1951.

Action item – *MLA Botterell will bring the issue of dock leases to Minister Neill's attention in an upcoming meeting. [January 31 update: Rob met with Minister Neill last week and she plans to visit the Gulf Islands next month to learn more].*

Action item – *MP May will write a letter advocating to the Heritage Minister for funding for the Ruckle Park Heritage Society. In drafting this letter, MP May's staff will explore whether anyone has reached out to the Constituency Office on this matter.*

Affordable Housing

- No affordable, accessible housing has been built on the Southern Gulf Islands since the 1980s. Salt Spring Island benefitted from some provincial funding that the Southern Gulf Islands have not: provincial funding is currently being used to build 32 units of supported housing on the Island. The Lookout Society on SSI has also purchased property for a boarding house.
- Limited capacity, lack of NGOs, absence of the housing corporation, and high-risk environmental threats that impact insurance rates (wildfires, etc.) are key factors affecting housing supply in smaller communities.
- San Juan County's model for funding housing, wherein half goes towards real estate and half towards addressing homelessness, was suggested as one potential model for the Gulf Islands. Learning from the model was identified as a key point of discussion with San Juan Councilors about during the potential, aforementioned cross-border discussion.
- Creative housing solutions were also discussed, such as a program/app designed to pair young people (who can't afford a home) and elderly people (looking to downside/age-in-place) for co-living—subdividing large homes into multiple residences. Housing Now, a community resource centre was cited; however, the program has faced pushback from landlords who fear property damage from tenants who do not want to move.

Tiny Homes Project: update from Trustee Elliot

- The project is a partnership between Islands Trust and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). They are considering inviting the CRD to join.
- The project's primary goal is to legalize tiny homes on wheels. The project aims to have a preliminary report done before March, and a presentation to VINCC is planned.
- One challenge is getting building inspectors on board with the idea of homes that are not built on foundations—the BC building code does not consider tiny homes dwellings, and the RV industry is not interested in regulating them. The Building and Safety Standards Department has

said that they are looking at modifications to allow tiny and more affordable homes over the next five years, but the challenge is that tiny homes are currently considered vehicles.

- Many existing properties are zoned for secondary accommodations, but building a secondary foundation structure can be expensive for landlords. Tiny homes on wheels could “unlock” such properties by fulfilling housing need at a lower cost, both for unhoused people and for seniors looking to downsize without losing their communities.
- The project is not asking for changes to BC building code. Tiny Homes simply aims to settle on a building standard and approval process. Municipalities and regional governments around the province seem to be waiting for one government to set the standard; if one regional district decides to certify tiny homes on wheels, the BC building code will likely “back off.”
- Mint Tiny Homes is interested in building shells and infrastructure for these homes. Finishing the houses’ interiors would be left up to individual inhabitants.
- The housing policies on the San Juan Islands alongside the community built by Marcell LeBrun were discussed as affordable housing community models (via tiny homes). LeBrun is a Fredericton-based billionaire who has built 99 tiny homes surrounded by supportive community services and employment opportunities.

SJI Primary Care Network

- Saturna and Mayne Islands recently lost their nurse practitioners.
- Mayne Island’s doctor does not work full time, and Saturna lost their only doctor in November 2024. Island Health is discussing a primary care network so that Saturna would be served from Pender Island. However, limited ferry access poses a challenge.
- A water taxi for health workers between Pender and Saturna (a 15-minute ride) was discussed. It would be around \$25 000/year for two roundtrip services a day, which is not very costly.
- Island Health, however, is determined to take the cheapest option (BC Ferries); however, this service would only allow for three hours of service once a week, which is insufficient. In contrast, a water taxi service would allow for seven hours of service twice a week. The taxi could also be made available to homecare nurses.
- It was suggested that MLA Botterell could push for the primary care network to be added to the BC Green’s supply and confidence agreement with the NDP government.

Action item – *MLA Botterell will lead provincial advocacy on this issue, starting with coordinating a meeting with the Minister of Health regarding a primary care network and water taxi service. Meeting will highlight concern over health workers being required to take the cheapest possible transport service, which undermines quality and quantity of care. [January 31 update: Rob met with Pender Health Care Centre on January 29. They applied for the PCN on behalf of the outer gulf islands. It sounds like PCN might not be the best framework for them... Rob will continue to look into this as well as the issue of transportation for health care professionals].*

BC Ferries Advisory Committees

- Attendees briefly discussed the sudden dissolution of BC Ferries' advisory committees. Members contemplated whether this was an issue for the CRD, or if it could benefit from a letter from the MLA. No conclusion was reached.

Action item – *MLA Botterell's staff members solicit more information by asking the MLA whether there was any advocacy from BC Ferries with the provincial government, or whether this is primarily a CRD matter.*

Additional Member Updates

Updates from Islands Trust and Trustees

- OCP Land Use bylaw will be taking effect on Salt Spring Island. A community engagement process is being launched on this issue.
- Islands Trust is embarking to update its Policy Statement, which has not been updated since 1994. They are aiming for a first draft by summer—Clare Frater is taking the lead.

Action item – *MP May will be added to the mailing list to receive a Zoom link for Islands Trust Council meetings.*

CRD Update from Director Holman

- Efforts are underway to get the housing corporation to play a role in the Rural Housing Program. Several regional initiatives are also underway, including transportation (won't apply to ferries) and biodiversity initiatives.
- CRD is exploring the possibility of a First Nations vote on the Board.
- A new electoral area general manager position is being created.
- A new staff report was released proposing possible harbour management approaches, though much still can only be addressed through actions by federal/provincial governments.

Staff Updates – Claire Frater (Islands Trust)

- Requested updates to SGI Forum website are complete.

Next Steps and Closing Remarks

Planning for Future Meetings

- Sometime in mid-March seems to be the preferred date for the next Forum meeting.
- Attendees discussed the following logistics, which will be voted on and confirmed via email: holding meetings bimonthly rather than monthly, having an in-person option for every meeting, reducing in-person/hybrid meeting times to two hours, as well as holding in-person meetings earlier in the morning to accommodate those travelling by ferry.

- The prospect of hosting annual meetings where governments on the Saanich Peninsula and San Juan Islands are both invited, was discussed. The first of these meetings could be planned for once the federal election is over.

Action item – *MP May's staff will coordinate with Islands Trust and the MLA office to ensure the Legislative Assembly isn't sitting in mid-March when the next Forum meeting dates are proposed.*

Action item – *Financial support and budgeting for the Forum from the Islands Trust will be discussed in the next meeting.*

For follow up inquiries regarding the minutes, please contact MP May's office at
Elizabeth.May.C1@parl.gc.ca