

Gabriola Sounder, December 20, 2016, pp 4 & 10.

Somewhere in the middle...

Dear Editor

It has been a while now since the Potlatch Properties re-zoning proposal (GB-RZ-2016.1) was made to the Islands Trust, and I am a little dismayed that despite many expressions of points of view, commentators continue to see this proposal as a 100-to-0 contest, leaving the trustees (or is that referees?) to decide. Isn't it really a 51-to-49 contest, or if you prefer 49-to-51 ?

Those on the "yea yea" side are avoiding recognizing that the mandate of the Islands Trust is to preserve and protect, which presumably means protect from development; yet, what they are advocating is development. Sure it's only a little bit of development - just another cut among thousands. What could be wrong with that?

Those on the "never in a thousand years" side are failing to recognize that rezoning forest land to park land is protection, which is as close to preservation as we can get.

In advocating their various positions as strongly as they do, some advocates are revealing blind spots. For example, I don't see how building a road and houses on what used to be forest land can lead to a reduction in the island's greenhouse gas emissions. Really?

I don't see how reading the legalistic fine-print of policy documents, essential though that might be, can lead, in itself, to a final balanced position. A contract after all is simply an agreement among parties, and if the parties want to amend it, they can, bearing in mind that the Islands Trust's mandate requires off-island residents of BC to have a say too.

Does "density neutral" really mean "population neutral"? Thanks to those fine-print readers, it doesn't seem so. And do we have to have so many zones that few can understand them?

I don't see how preservation necessarily means leaving alone forests, which by themselves would burn to the ground every seventy to two hundred years. Does the RDN, the potential park managers, have a fire management plan? They probably do, but just for the sake of argument, I'll imply they don't. Isn't it up to the managers of commercial forests to take care of this for us -- in their own financial interest?

I'm personally not enamoured of signaged, urban-style parks, with lots of parking of course. What's wrong with using growing forests as wild places used by those that have taken the trouble to learn how not to get into trouble in the woods? A Canadian talent. No?

But, nevertheless, acquiring a park for the community is hard to knock. And having the other half of Coats Marsh would be too, if it weren't a little bit short of a full half. Along with the yea-ers and nay-ers, don't the frogs and cardamine angulata in the marsh have a say too?

Is asking the proponents to give more, a "gimme-gimme", or is it the only way to bargain when one side has a business plan and the other doesn't. Called bartering I believe. Generous or mean? How can we tell without probing?

I fail to see how a society that can build iPads using nothing much more than sand as the raw material, can fail to be able to figure out how to store winter water for use in the summer. Or how anybody can know what a well will yield until they've dug it. Or why, if we really have to have a road, we have to have this particular discussion at all.

The bottom line here, is that the community would like more land, but cannot, or does not wish to, pay for it (don't mention the medical clinic or fire hall). So as an alternative to paying, the proponents want, as recompense and perhaps a little profit, to develop (contrary to the Islands Trust mandate) and to increase the island's population (which a lot of people don't want).

It is a very reasonable, fair-minded offer, which we are free to accept or reject. But it's a choice requiring thoughtful discussion and consideration of goals. "Yeah yeah" and "nay nay", in my view, don't help any more. Let's not leave the trustees as the only ones wrestling with this.

Sincerely