

# COMMONS COORDINATING COUNCIL

## Notes from meeting on January 7, 2020

Present: Louise Amuir, Bob Andrew, Deb Ferens, Kim Kasasian, Jinny Hayes, Dave Lightly, Heather Menzies, Nadine Mourao, Linda Neilson, Melissa Nobels, Mark Roch, Maya Ruggles, Patrick Roux, Judith Roux, Linda St.Clair, Doug Scott, Don Smardon, Diane Streeter, Monica Turner, K.Louise Vincent, Stuart Wulff. Facilitators: Bob and Don; Note-taker: Judith

Acknowledgement that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation and reminder that the BC Government has recognized the U N Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Acknowledgement also of the Commons' refusal of systemic racism and our expression of support for Camp Miriam, targeted by recent racist graffiti

**Introductions** - welcoming newcomers to Commons Council

**20 minute Discussion:** Review of the Process for Decision-making on the Commons

- Source document (summarized by Deb) Key points:
  - Decisions can be made within a team when they involve only that team
  - Decisions with multiple impacts need to be made through Council
  - An issue not fitting within an existing team may require a task force to be created
  - Blocking - is treated very seriously and can only be done when there could be a financial or ethical impact on the Commons

- Discussion themes:

1. Reputation of the Commons as being slow in its decision-making: is this a myth?

Comments:

- The process can seem to be ponderous, going from Council to teams to Council and back to teams then again to Council for perhaps a final statement.
- Discussing several issues identified for input at the team level can take up valuable team meeting time.
- We should not be governed by time pressure. We need to allow open discussion unrestricted by time.

There can be tension through this process, particularly when issues are time-sensitive.

However, this tension can be positive. There's bound to be tension between rules/structures and the chaotic nature of the creative process. Acknowledge the sense of tension.

- Example raised supporting the "myth": "Tool Library took a year to exist."
- It is also necessary to deal with time-sensitivity (particularly when dealing with issues involving the government and financing.)

2. How to determine the scope of potential impacts of a proposal when making a decision?

Challenge of welcoming newcomers unaware of the Commons structure, process and past history (zoning etc.).

- What happens when a newcomer comes to Council and refuses a decision? This can be frustrating for people with goals in mind. "New" energy can be turned away.

- The Commons seems to some like a closed group and the community may be reluctant to engage because of the "endless back and forth".
- Comment from a self-described "outsider": Appreciation of the non-hierarchical nature of the Commons with the decision-making process based on a culture of openness. It was felt, though, that voting on decisions would ensure a more genuinely non-hierarchical process.
- The need to Identify risks is missing from the document. This is being explored in the stewardship issues for the Covenant.

### 3. Need to know more/ agreement to continue discussion next month

- Suggestion that an annual review of the Commons decision-making would help to familiarize all with the process.
- Support for the "flow chart" developed by Bookings which explains the basis on which requests by groups or individuals to rent the Commons can be assessed (i.e. when supported by a non-for-profit group and not for personal benefit)
- Need to encourage inclusion of all in the discussion, in order not to disenfranchise those uncomfortable about speaking out.
- Agreement that all will review the attached decision-making documents in order to come to the February Council prepared to go deeper.

## **Team Reports** (including decisions about EV Charging station)

- **Property Management Team (PMT)** (Kim) Next meeting:

1. Overview of electricity usage:
  - At 200 amps the house is at full capacity. Advice from electrician that we eliminate some of the unnecessary elements.
  - An energy audit is in process, including input from solar panels (Dave Chorneyko)
  - Intention: to install separate electricity panels, permitting us to identify specific usage.
2. Reservoir project: \$40,000 donated so far by the community and Commons teams!
3. Heating: 2 Heat pumps have been purchased through a "fantastic" deal with Island Futures  
Infloor hydronic heating in the Community kitchen raises problems:
  - Inertia: it takes too long to heat up and to cool down.
4. Vote on EV charging station: No. (Need to maintain it would add to maintenance and paper work. Not needed by the community on the Commons. Would take up 2 parking spaces )
5. Water issues: Small leak (with big impact) in underground piping line between Woodwork Shop and entry at PHC): detected through observation of minute movement in water meter - 4 gallons per minute! Shut down effected.  
(Note Jan. 11 - after Council: A week of searching by hand digging finally located the break and saw it repaired.)

- **Process Team.** (Dave L.). Next meeting:  
Concern for health of team member Muriel Wiens. Concern shared by Council

- **Trustees.** (Linda Neilson) Next meeting:
  1. Financial issues with policies being drafted:
    - How to deal with unanticipated capital expenses? e.g. paid work on website (see Communications Team report)
    - question of "in-kind donations with charitable tax receipt" needs to be looked at.
    - how to deal with Legacy Fund donations which include specific targeted projects?
  2. Concern about South Gardens issues (vandalism, theft of produce), connected to isolation? No legal means of confronting those responsible ("break and enter" charge requires a building or fence "containing fur-bearing animals")
    - RCMP had suggested caretaker in residence. 20-minute discussion topic? Need to review the history of the Commons zoning.

"NO" to EV Proposal: Doesn't fit the Commons mandate; has an impact on admin.)

- **Long Range Planning Team.** (Deb) Meeting Thursday, January 9 at 2 pm  
(see report next Council)

- **House Stewards.** (Deb)  
Dedicated group undertaking regular cleaning, garbage and assessment of ongoing caretaking needed. Appeal for more people!

- **Covenant Team** (K.Louise). Next meeting: Wednesday, Jan. 15 at 2 pm  
Status: Draft of Covenant can be seen on website. Current work is on the Stewardship Agreement (identifying the areas to be monitored by an eventual Covenant Holder concerning the ecological, agricultural and community use of the Land.)  
Currently we are working with the Land Conservancy as potential covenant holders and anticipate a three-way group discussion with the Agricultural Land Commission and TLC.

- **Farm Team FMT** (Judith) New time for meetings: 2nd Thursday of month 10 am  
Security of gardens and safety of gardeners are key ongoing concerns.
  - Doug Scott added appreciation for the South Gardeners, as a vibrant group, working positively on issues. The wording on the entry gate is being reviewed with a more polite and informative sign to be installed. He added that some theft is unfortunately common on community gardens and that motion-detecting lighting is being investigated, with a request to come first to Council.
  - A committee is working on a revision of the South Gardeners Agreement.
 Notice: the Farm Forum will be held at the Community Hall on Saturday, February 15: 12 to 3  
Interest for a deep discussion on "Commons Agriculture"

- **Sharing the Commons Team STC** (Heather). Next meeting: Wed. Jan. 15 at 10 am  
Input on EV Proposal: compilation of comments from different teams: Largely: No thank you! (Not needed on Gabriola, not consistent with Commons' values, requiring additional time to administer.). Heather will convey this decision to Island Futures.
- Conversation on community accessible water suggested interest in creating a task force, with the Commons working with Islands Futures and Sustainable Gabriola.

**Communications Team** (Jinny) Next meeting:

- Colleen McCarthy will be working on the Commons' website, offering suggestions (e.g. need for a mission statement).
- Deb noted we have a long-standing stewardship ethic of not being employers. We can contract out specific jobs requiring expertise/certification, but cannot have employees.)
- Ongoing work on team mandates (annual review needed?)

- **Commons Kitchen** (Monica)

- An extensive deep cleaning took place on Boxing Day (after the massive cooking at the Kitchen for the Spirit Feast).
- The Community Kitchen Team now has 7 members!

REPORTS FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS:

- **People for a Healthy Community** (Nadine, filling in for Brenda).

Busy Christmas! More people are struggling and needing support. Focus on reducing the stigma of PHC clients (with "blind" envelopes):

- Christmas Feast welcomed 250 participants from the whole island (\$1600. donated at the door.)
- Working with GERTIE on program for seniors - SUSO (Stepping Up, Stepping Out)
- Hot lunches on Wednesdays for school
- Social worker on hand to deal with disputes and offer first aid.

- **Tool Library** (Diane)

Volunteer orientation this Saturday (Jan. 11) to be held at the Commons at 1:30

- **Poetry Gabriola Yurt** (Melissa and Mark)

- The floor has been insulated - now feels warm and inviting all year round! (Arbutus matched donations for the insulation)
- Mark wants to know more about the Commons and would like to take part.

**Next: Council:** Tuesday February 4. **Co-facilitators:** Bob and Don  
Recorder: Monica Turner

Note: there will be a follow-up to this discussion at the February Council. Please read the attached document on the Commons structure and decision-making (taken from Field Guide to the Commons)

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE 20-MINUTE DISCUSSION TOPICS:

1. More on the Decision-making process (already intended for February's Council)
  2. Zoning for caretaker
  3. Moving with (?) Stewardship Plan (of the Covenant)
  4. Focus on Community Agriculture (zoning)
  5. Safety and security issues in the gardens
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## **GOVERNANCE** (from Field Guide to the Commons)

### ***Participation***

Governance of Gabriola Commons is by participation in teams and at council.

### ***Commons Co-ordinating Council***

The Commons Coordinating Council is at the heart of the organization of the Gabriola Commons. This Council meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm. It is the place where teams, projects, groups and community members share ideas and information and ensure the health and well-being of the Commons. The discussion is always energetic, creative and collaborative.

Council runs with the following format: 2 facilitators for 6 months each on a 3 month rotation. Everyone present participates in a 20 minute discussion on a topic agreed upon, usually decided at a previous meeting, which is of broad Commons interest. Teams report on their activities. Any decisions taken at Council are by consensus, using the guidelines below.

### ***Organizational Structure and Decision Making***

Informed and effective decision making is possible when inspired by good information sharing and trust. The following principles are kept in mind throughout the decision making process:

- Teams look after their own decisions unless their decision is likely to affect another team or the Commons overall, in which case they will consult and seek input from others.
- We share information and plans with each other in the spirit of generosity and work collaboratively.
- We hold mutual respect as a shared value.

### ***Teams, Projects and Groups:***

Teams are groups of individuals who operate on the Commons with a specific mandate. All Commons affairs are attended to by one or more teams rather than being directed in a top-down manner. Teams function independently on the Commons while co-operating with each other to ensure the organization functions effectively. There are also project groups on the Commons which function as teams throughout the duration of a specific project. Additionally, there are several community groups that are active on the Commons property. Members of these groups are encouraged to attend Council so as to stay informed on current affairs.

## **Team**

A permanent entity that is part of the Commons; concerned with a one or more related aspects of the ongoing functioning and/or development of the Gabriola Commons; has a well-defined mandate and objectives. See website [www.gabriolacommons.ca](http://www.gabriolacommons.ca) for a list of teams and their mandates. Teams are generally autonomous in their decisions, according to their own mandates and budgets. It is very important that teams consider how their decision on any matter will affect another team or the overall Commons and that they bring their activities forward in team reports at Council.

## **Project**

A temporary entity that is part of the Commons for a limited period; usually involves creating or renovating some infrastructure; is monitored through several stages by the Share the Commons Team; has a well-defined mandate specific to the project; may eventually evolve into a permanent team.

## **Taskforce**

A permanent or temporary entity that is smaller in scope and/or duration than a team or project; a spin-off from a team or project and reports directly to the corresponding team or project.

## **Group**

An entity that operates on the Commons property or in conjunction with the Gabriola Commons but that has its own separate identity or registered status.

## **Representative**

This is the person(s) who attends Council to represent their team, group, project, etc. This person is responsible to bring the information their team wants heard to Council and to circulate information from Council to their team and, when required, collect input on that information and for following up at Council with their team's input on issues from the previous Council.

The team representative is trusted to speak on behalf of their team when a time-sensitive decision is required to be made at Council when no time is available for team input.

## **Decision Making**

Decisions which do not affect those outside a single team are made within the team according to the team's mandate, plans and budget.

Decisions which affect multiple teams, groups, projects, etc. are made at Council, using input from other teams, groups, projects. This process is outlined below.

When an issue does not fall within the mandate of a specific team, group or project, or is important to many, representatives can 'draft' a recommendation or decision together.

Occasionally a short-term task force made up of members of various teams, projects, groups or interested individuals may form to research or examine the issue and bring forth recommendations to Council.

## **Decision Making Process**

A team, person, group, project, etc. has an issue that requires a decision to be made that has repercussions outside their own sphere on the Commons:

The recommendation, or “draft”, for a decision comes from the team(s), projects(s) or groups(s) whose mandate(s) the decision falls within as this is the group of people who are the most informed on the given topic and most able to provide an appropriate solution or plan

### **A. Drafting a recommendation:**

Information is brought to the Commons Council meeting by the representative for discussion. A recommendation for a policy, action, etc. may be brought instead of a question or issue (skip to B in this case).

1. At Council the issue is discussed and it is determined if there are other teams, groups, projects or individuals that should be involved in drafting a recommendation for a policy, action, etc.
2. The involved parties form a task force to work up a draft plan of action, policy, etc. using knowledge and input from discussion at Council.
3. The involved parties bring this draft to the next Council meeting for discussion and circulation.

### **B. Circulating the recommendation:**

Representatives circulate the draft recommendation to their team members and collect input. Because this is an inherently slow decision making process it is vital that team reps circulate the recommendation promptly, so that unreasonable delay is not created in decision making.

### **C. Making a decision:**

At the following Council meeting representatives discuss input and the recommendation is either:

- Adopted and made final through consensus (based on input as presented by the representatives).
- Amended and re-circulated for further discussion/input (back to B).
- Dropped if it is found to be unnecessary and/or unpopular.

A final decision is made based on a consensus model as outlined in Consensus Decision Making.

### **D. Circulating the Decision and Follow up:**

The decision and any pertinent information is circulated by representatives to their teams, groups, projects, and also through Council minutes, which may be sent out by representatives and are posted monthly on the Commons website.

Trustees are responsible for updating the Trustee Handbook with new policies or changes to existing policies.

Once a decision is given the “green light” it is imperative that reports and updates are regularly submitted to Council as the project or activity progresses. This communication allows members to be up to date with current goings on and to monitor any changes to the original decision.

We are all responsible to uphold the vision of the Gabriola Commons and adhere to the Gabriola Commons Charter. The Gabriola Commons Coordinating Council is the central decision making body and is at the heart of Commons stewardship.

**The Council meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm at the Commons. Everyone is welcome to attend.**

## ***Consensus Decision Making***

May 6, 2014 Policy adopted at Commons Coordinating Council for use at all Commons meetings except where otherwise legally required.

“Unity does not mean unanimity; it means the best general agreement possible in a reasonable time period”.

### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the proposal.
2. Clarify questions and call for concerns.
3. Amend and modify the proposal through more discussion or, withdraw if there is no support at all.
4. The facilitator of the meeting will then ask for any further changes, reservations, or objections. The following options are ways to indicate a lack of support for a proposal or decision:
  - Non-support – I don’t see the need for this, but I will go along.
  - Reservations – I think this may be a mistake, but I can live with it.
  - Standing aside – I personally can’t support this, but I won’t stop others.
  - Blocking – I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. (See note below)
5. If there are no further amendments or objections, the decision will be accepted.
6. If a proposal is blocked, the decision making process is suspended until a resolution process is activated.
7. Resolution Process:
  - Blockers are given the opportunity to present reasons for blocking which must be clearly stated and recorded.
    - Reasons for blocking must meet criteria that demonstrate the decision would: jeopardize the legal existence of the Commons; place the Commons in an untenable financial position; create irreversible impacts on the land and the environment (Do No Harm), constitute unethical or imprudent behaviour.
    - After an agreed upon time frame to consider the blocking in light of the criteria, the issue is re-introduced for a decision. If the new information does not persuade other members to change the decision, the decision goes ahead.
    - If the block does not meet the criteria but raises some concerns, the group should consider moving forward cautiously with the decision and action.
    - The nature of the block and the blockers will go on record along with the decision.