

# LCC Salt Spring

## Letters Published in the Driftwood

### First letter (Brian Webster):

#### A Salt Spring LCC Can Make a Difference

By Brian Webster

We're just a few weeks away from a chance to significantly change local government on Salt Spring Island. On October 15, island residents will vote on whether to establish a Local Community Commission.

But what does that actually mean?

A Local Community Commission (LCC) is a locally elected body that – if we vote to create it – will have authority over 14 of our current local government services. It would replace four existing unelected Capital Regional District (CRD) advisory commissions with one elected body that would have full administrative powers over 11 of those services. That means the power to make all decisions on these services up to – but not including – final approval of bylaws.

For these services – everything from parks and transportation to economic development and recreation – the Salt Spring LCC will set priorities and policies. It will also establish the annual budget, which will then get sent on to the CRD board for its sign-off.

An LCC will increase democratic representation on Salt Spring by bringing more elected voices to the decision-making table. It will improve coordination of services by giving one elected body responsibility for a variety of services, streamlining our current patchwork of commissions and other decision-making bodies.

An LCC will open up local government decision-making and make it more accountable by requiring decisions currently made behind closed doors by a single elected person (the Electoral Area Director) or by the CRD board in Victoria to instead be made on Salt Spring at regularly scheduled meetings open to the public.

Establishing an LCC will address concerns Salt Springers have had about local government and it will do so without reopening past divisive incorporation debates.

In the past, some members of our community expressed doubts about whether the CRD would agree to delegate meaningful decision-making authority to Salt Springers. Those doubts were answered in July when the CRD board voted to approve two bylaws that will give a Salt Spring LCC significant powers over a range of services if we vote YES on October 15. And once established, an LCC could take the lead in working toward further consolidation.

Would a Salt Spring LCC instantly solve all of our community's problems? Of course not. But it would be a big step in the right direction. Creating an LCC does not affect the Islands Trust or its role. Like every other community in southern B.C., we would remain in a regional district. It would neither block nor further the aspirations of some to someday incorporate as a municipality. It would not automatically create any new services or eliminate existing ones. But it would create a single council with meaningful power over a range of local government services and with a mandate to look broadly at what Salt Spring needs and take the lead on making sure our community has the local government services it needs and that they are delivered effectively and efficiently.

Ultimately, voters get to decide on October 15 whether to carry on with the status quo or say YES to an LCC and take a positive step toward better coordination of local government decision-making, increased accountability and more diverse elected voices at the table to make decisions on our behalf.

Brian Webster is a Salt Spring resident, farmer and business owner who helped develop a discussion paper on the possible establishment of a Local Community Commission.

### **Second Letter (Peter Meyer):**

I was disappointed to read Chris Dixon's *In Depth* piece on the proposed Salt Spring Island Local Community Commission (LCC) as it inaccurately describes the LCC and fails to recognize the extensive authority it will have.

The process of developing an LCC proposal was not rushed. In addition to discussion over many years, the past five years has included in-depth analysis and review of governance options, including detailed reports from two community groups in 2018, an even more detailed 2022 discussion paper written for our Electoral Area Director, numerous media reports, public meetings, and opportunities for discussion and comment.

Mr. Dixon suggests that we don't yet know what powers the LCC will have, but that simply is not true. The CRD Board has already passed the bylaws defining these powers, stating clearly that, for 11 of our current local CRD services, the LCC will have what is called *Administrative Authority*. That means that it will have all the powers of the CRD Board except for final sign-off on bylaws. This is not conditional, not uncertain, and not up for discussion sometime in the future. It's right there in black and white.

And in case you are unclear as to what *Administrative Authority* actually means, all you need to do is look at the five CRD commissions that already have such powers. There is no uncertainty about it; these powers are real.

Mr. Dixon glosses over the distinction between appointed and elected commissioners, yet this is a fundamental issue. Right now, all Salt Spring commissioners are appointed, not elected and – most importantly – all these existing commissioners can do is provide advice, which our Electoral Area Director can choose to ignore. An LCC would consist of elected members of our community with the mandate – and the power – to make decisions that the Director (and the CRD Board) cannot ignore or overrule.

It is particularly disappointing that Mr. Dixon says the contributions of volunteer commissioners are somehow diminished through the creation of an LCC. I don't know of any other communities with elected representatives that don't value and utilize the advice of community members, expert or otherwise, and there is no reason to believe Salt Spring would be any different.

If we establish a Salt Spring LCC, we will be replacing our current system (which is essentially an elected dictatorship) with a more democratic, more representative, and more effective council empowered to make decisions in open meetings right here on Salt Spring.

Mr. Dixon wants to start over again with a new process of figuring out how to fix our local government system, ignoring the fact that all community members, commissioners, and others have been welcomed to participate in governance discussions that began shortly after the 2017 incorporation referendum. Many of them did take part, and the committee that reviewed the proposal and discussed the draft bylaws with CRD staff included the chairs or nominees of all four of our current unelected island-wide CRD commissions, as well as others who have been commissioners in the past.

Mr. Dixon wants to keep on talking, forfeiting an opportunity to change a system that is not working. I want to act now to improve governance on Salt Spring. That's why I will be voting YES to a Salt Spring LCC and encourage others to do the same.

**Peter Meyer** is a Commissioner on two CRD Commissions, Solid Waste and Transportation, as well as a member of Island Pathway's *Partners Creating Pathways*.

### **Third letter (Bruce Cameron)**

The Art of the Possible on Salt Spring

Bruce Cameron

September 26, 2022

"Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best"

— **Otto von Bismarck**

Taking inspiration from a nineteenth century German imperialist may seem strange, but as we approach local elections on Salt Spring his words ring true.

This election cycle, we have a full slate of candidates for CRD Director (three) and two Islands Trust positions (eight). And the question of whether to approve the establishment of a Local Community Commission also looms large on the ballot this October.

Think of what is possible if Salt Spring voters say yes to the LCC proposal.

We will have more voices—four commissioners elected by us—to express our concerns and work together toward viable solutions. We will have monthly meetings at which all areas of CRD jurisdiction will be discussed, instead of separate meetings at different times working in silos. We may even be able to exert more control over CRD staff resources and priorities. After all, the CRD administration should work for the island's constituents, not for the Chief Administrative Officer based in Victoria.

Too often, possible solutions proposed to our problems, including concerns over climate change and the lack of workforce and affordable housing, are attacked by local critics on the premise that a better solution will emerge over time. Recently some people have taken aim at the idea of an LCC because, in their eyes, they would rather hold out for "real" change—i.e. incorporation. To them, any improvement in governance would only hurt their cause.

Supporting an LCC does not mean abandoning hopes for more self-government on Salt Spring. Establishing a local community commission may be an imperfect step toward better governance, but if we can improve governance now, let's take that step, not wait for some perfect solution in a decade. The attitude of "incorporation or nothing" is depressingly pessimistic.

Ultimately, there are more optimistic future-oriented thinkers on this island than naysayers. Recent votes to approve the new firehall, support for building the new emergency room, and approval of the Vortex project in the south end, all speak to an air of change.

You may recall the bumper sticker "Don't change Salt Spring, let Salt Spring change you". I have always found that soundbite problematic. While it highlights the transformational quality that draws people to our little island, it has always seemed short sighted to me. The reality is that the only constant *is* change. How we as a community choose to adapt to changes that are coming will define our legacy.

Voting yes to the LCC proposal gives us a chance to navigate that change more effectively.

Bruce Cameron is *President of Return on Insights* and has recently led the successful fundraising campaign for the Lady Minto Hospital expansion as well as the Firehall referendum

#### **Fourth letter (Brian Webster):**

Bob Moffatt's latest anti-LCC letter shows that he has run short on points to criticize the proposed Salt Spring Local Community Commission.

In March, Mr. Moffatt wrote that an LCC would be another layer of government. Untrue, as the proposal calls for it to replace four existing commissions.

He suggested the CRD would never delegate significant authority to an LCC. Wrong, as the bylaws call for full administrative authority over 11 local government services plus oversight of three others to pass from the CRD board to the Salt Spring LCC.

Mr. Moffatt claimed that each LCC commissioner would be paid "as much as \$40,000 a year." Nope. It's about a quarter of that.

He said this kind of delegation was untested. Oops... no. The CRD has long had five other commissions with similarly delegated powers.

He even expressed concern on social media that LCC commissioners would need the same qualifications to run as an electoral area director (you need to be Canadian, at least 18, a B.C. resident for six months and not prohibited due to being in prison or other reasons). Um... almost all Salt Springers meet those qualifications.

Now Mr. Moffatt has 'exposed' a staff report (it's been publicly available for more than two months) estimating costs for staff support to the LCC. That report was speculative and didn't include savings from eliminating four current commissions. More importantly, by creating a single, elected local council with the power to set budget proposals at open public meetings (that's what an LCC is), our community will be able to make tough budget choices out in the open, potentially generating savings far in excess of the costs estimated in the staff report.

The bottom line is that LCC commissioners and funding to cover election costs will add up to about \$70,000 per year, considerably less than two per cent of the budgets the LCC will be responsible for. Any additional costs will need to be approved in open public meetings by the elected LCC. If commissioners don't manage taxpayer dollars frugally, they can be tossed out of office at the next election. That's how democracy works.

Clearly, Mr. Moffatt will find fault with any proposal other than municipal incorporation and prefers to stick with our current flawed system while waiting for another incorporation referendum.

I think most Salt Springers don't want to wait any longer. They want to act now to bring more voices to local government decision-making, improve coordination of services and enhance local control. All of which we will get if we vote yes to a Salt Spring LCC.