

## Commons Coordinating Council Notes August 2, 2022

**Facilitator:** Bob Andrew for the Property Stewardship Team

**Notes:** Judith Roux for the Farm Team

**Present:** Jinny Hayes, Heather Menzies, Deb Ferens, K. Louise Vincent, Cameron Murray, Maya Ruggles, Don Smardon, Robbie Huston, Betty Kehler, Brenda Fowler, Brenda Joy, Doug Scott, Allan Parker

**1. Agenda:** Approved

Suggestion to offer acknowledgement of First Nations at the end of the meeting.

**2. Land Acknowledgement** - Deb Ferens: Reference to Truth and Reconciliation Report w/ call on churches to learn about colonization and indigenous spirituality.

**3. 20-Minute Discussion on Food Security: Part 2.** Facilitator: Robbie Huston

Part 1 was a discussion held at Council on July 5 facilitated by Mary Wilson, which included a global perspective on food security with the impact of war, conflict, and climate change. Part 2 begins with Mary's second question: What is the Commons' role in furthering food security on Gabriola?

A round was held; discussion points:

- On Gabriola Island we are at the end of a food chain and therefore extremely vulnerable to food insecurity. Access to adequate water and good soil on our predominantly bedrock island is challenging and impacts food security, with consequent health issues.
- "Bandaid solutions are not good enough". We have to recognize that we may not be able to depend on ourselves without developing a resilient resource centre which could inventory and unite existing agricultural projects and assess the capacity of the island to grow, conserve and distribute food locally not only seasonally but over the year, with long term planning. Education is essential.

On the Commons we have developed two large community gardens, offering people in the community the opportunity to grow food for their families. We also have the orchard, the experimental Little Field and the Kitchen Garden associated with a large Community Kitchen which offers the means of demonstrating alternative ways of conserving fruits and vegetables and sharing what we know about food security through workshops on the Commons.

There is a potential role for the Commons to be played in collaboration with local organizations already concerned about the impact of Climate Change on food security (e.g., Agi Co-op, Island Futures, Sustainable Gabriola, Health and Wellness Coop, and People for a Healthy Community). Brenda Fowler pointed out that PHC exists on the Commons because of our unique zoning as a Food Depot and our focus on principles of food security and social justice, and they are working on "food literacy". A food recovery program developed by PHC to reduce food waste now sees 40,000 pounds of food per year diverted: 1/3 to needy humans, 1/3 to animal food and 1/3 converted to compost. Future planning on food-waste reduction will involve restaurants and farmers.

Allan Parker emphasized the importance of using permaculture principles to address food security questions on the Commons. He has been a permaculture designer for 12 years:

- get in touch with the natural world
- reclaim earth to maximum potential (produce seedlings and starts throughout the year)
- recognize wild plants as valuable food (purslane, nettles, etc.)
- improve old greenhouse in North Garden with Earthworks passive thermal practices, receiving heat and light over the seasons.
- offered to do workshops

Summary:

- Collaborate with others
- Commons leadership role: centre of education, demonstrations, modeling sustainable practices.

[**Note from Judith:** Long time farmer Bob Martin is also organizing workshops on growing food within the Kitchen Garden. Notice of meetings will follow, with the intention of sharing his knowledge with others concerned by the prospect of food insecurity.]

## 5. Carry-over Items

### A. South Gardens Parking Proposal

Aim: to improve parking and connection to existing boardwalk pathway

The plan was first presented at the July Council and clearly required further discussion. Several comments were made at the presentation and through subsequent communications indicating concerns over the process followed:

Following up with "Next steps" (recorded in July Council Notes)

- Consensus approval: Concern was expressed that the project was presented to Council as a fait accompli, with details already elaborated upon with a contractor in a financial transaction which needed to be approved by the Commons Trustees. The Trustees are working on a Letter of Agreement with this contractor, which includes a drawing. Details of the donation must be made explicit.

Note: See Finance Team Guideline FAQ's: "Fundraising - a stewardship model" (to be added to Commons website.)

- Necessary to tap into the knowledge of the Commons, Experiential rather than theoretical.
- The need for the extensive work as described for the vehicular access was questioned. It is agreed that the semi-permanent high water level results in a seasonal "muddy quagmire", not only for the community members (including school children) using the boardwalk as a passage from South to North Road, but also for the frequent entry of trucks and cars now using the space as a parking lot. Some access to vehicles is required but reducing the access to "as needed" would be a first step in helping to cope with the problem. Building up the level of "solid ground" as proposed seems to be the only process. Connecting the project with the boardwalk is a logical step but may require the extension of the boardwalk to cover the winter period.
- A thorough understanding of the water situation could also be helpful.

[**Note Judith, from the Baseline Report** of the Covenant: Early in the history of the South Gardens two deep pits were dug at opposite corners in the South Gardens. The excavations revealed 5 feet of solid montmorillonite clay beneath 3-4" of diatomaceous earth and no fertile

soil. The excavations were stopped by the sandstone bedrock underlying the entirety of the land at the Commons, including the southeast corner. There is no sign of the deep peat reserves to be found at Good Earth, nor was any existing "soil" in evidence.]

- The water flowing over the clay/bedrock layers enters from Goodhue Creek and is part of the Hogan Lake watershed of Gabriola, with the riparian areas identified as part of the sensitive wetland ecosystem on the Commons. **Final note from Judith:** Every year, drainage of the gardens nearest the SE corner is attempted, with the hope of carrying the excess water "away" from the plots. But there is no "away" from a water level. The best we can achieve is to create a base and raise the soil in the gardens as has been successfully accomplished in the South Gardens.

Note: A letter of agreement on the proposal must be signed by the Trustees (in draft).

**ACTION: Teams to provide input at or before next Council Meeting.**

### **B. Freeze-Dryer (Betty)**

- A letter to selected teams was sent from the Kitchen Stewards Mary and Patrick.
- Specific issues raised at July Council were considered, including need to work with VIHA and Kitchen Stewards, but there is "devil in the details", including requirements from VIHA, heat problems, need for electrical support, etc.; Betty is aware of these.
- Will go forward to Sharing the Commons Team, which wants to help; need a meeting.
- Project is going forward but equipment will be located at Betty's home in the meantime.

Much discussion has led to the understanding that, while the Sharing the Commons team should have been involved regarding the Freeze Dryer, nothing prevents the Good Vibrations Group from working together in the Kitchen (with the Kitchen Stewards).

It was agreed that the workshops can take place with or without the freeze dryer while specific concerns can be dealt with subsequently.

## **6. Team Reports**

### **Finance Team** (Maya Ruggles)

Maya spoke to the process of budgeting by teams: a "necessary but stimulating practice" which requires each team to plan well for the coming year, in order to be able to estimate need for funding. The planning needs to be both long term (with the LRP) and short term, focusing on the details of a project: materials, labour, including ability to achieve it with volunteers or demonstrating the need for certified trades. Knowing this helps the Grant Writing Team; respecting the deadlines given by the Finance Team is important.

The "restricted funds" spread sheet has been brought up to date. This shows the current financial balance available for each team/project, including any reallocations to be requested from the AGES Legacy Fund to complete specific projects.

**Two reallocations have been requested: Please share the following with teams and contribute input before September's Council; does your team approve the following?**

- To fulfill its mandate, the Communications Team proposes to extend news about the Commons to the community through weekly short announcements in the Sounder (similar to the Walking Group). The cost for this has been estimated at \$1,700 for the year. Proposed that it would be transferred from Trustee allocations.
- To finish the Timber Frame, the Property Stewardship Team has asked for \$2,000. This would come from the Capital Fund.

Several projects have been discussed for possible future funding, such as an elevator for the two-story Farmhouse, since shared funding has been available from the federal government for improving "accessibility". The Grant Writing team has been estimating the costs of such a project, but a case for this spending needs to be presented to Council.

It was observed that the "signature" seasonal events specifically providing funds for the Commons need to be revived. Maya suggested it would be helpful to have a Commons-wide talk on key projects. Who would facilitate this discussion?

Budget draft documents to be added to the Field Guide.

Much appreciation to Maya for her clear presentation of financial information on the Commons.

#### **Covenant Team** (Deb)

- Meeting on Aug 3 to discuss next steps with The Land Conservancy.
- Bio-mapping is ongoing to update the Baseline Report. Those interested in participating by "adopting" one of 23 mini-ecosystems can contact Judith at rouxmackay@mail.com or phone 250-247-9948.
- Still waiting for communication from The Land Conservancy. Review of progress on the Cascadia Commons Trust (change from existing Gabriola Commons Society).

#### **Gabriola Commons Trustees** (Deb)

- Held a retreat which Heide and Shelagh attended
- MoU with Poetry Gabriola has been signed; the template for MoUs will be posted to the website with a small narrative.
- Letter from RDN is forthcoming with a request for use of the Commons West Parking lot for parking by the users of the Huxley Park.

#### **South Gardens** (Brenda J)

- AGM is 27 August with a potluck afterwards, 4-7 pm
- Website is paused; volunteer moved off Gabriola.

#### **People for a Health Community** (Brenda F)

- Raised money for a new generator

#### **COVID Group** (Deb)

1. Public Health Orders still in place (see <https://vrc.bc.ca/vrc-communicable-disease-prevention>). Continue to support outdoor use of the Commons spaces (Timberframe, reservoir stage, open grassy areas, etc.)
2. To book these spaces for an event contact Lino at: booksing@gabriolacommons.ca. Remember to include need for access to the Commons Kitchen which is booked separately at kitchen@gabriolacommons.ca.

#### **Property Stewardship Team** (Bob A)

- Plan for finishing Farm Team space within Timber Frame. Note request for reallocation of \$2,000 from Capital Funds.
- Look around – lots being done!

#### **Farm Team** (Judith)

1. "Good Vibrations" group focus: Workshops in the Commons Kitchen led by Betty Kehler, working with chefs trying out different ways of using and conserving harvest in the interest of food security.
2. The Commons has a bumper Blueberry crop this year and sales at the farm gate will begin next week: at the Main parking entrance on Saturday mornings (10 to noon)  
The sale of apples will follow shortly, with the Golden Transparent apples. (We note that the cold weather this spring at pollination time has impacted the volume of the apple crop.)
3. Planning our response to the challenge of food insecurity: Education through a series of talks held in the gardens and through the seasons with instructors Allan Parker and Bob Martin and others organizing through the Farm Team. Look for planning announcements soon for events happening in September.

#### Trails & Green Spaces Team (Judith)

Upgrading the trail systems on the Commons has become a serious project this summer with the overgrowth encouraged by heavy spring rainfall.

#### Communications (Jinny)

No report tonight in interest of time.

#### Camp Miriam Volunteers (Judith)

- Good-spirited work with the campers has permitted us to improve safe access to some of the main trails.
- No further volunteers are needed.

#### Learning Opportunities Team (Maya, Mary)

- good meeting with First Nations representatives
- LOT has completed the 3rd of 3 events planned with Simon Fraser University Research Team and is at a hiatus over the summer.

## 6. Closing

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Next Council: **Tuesday, September 6 at 7 pm**, upstairs in the Farmhouse

Next Facilitator: Bob Andrew for Design Group

Next note-taker: Finance Team

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Take Forward Items:

1. South Gardens Parking and note that this includes a connection to the end of the existing boardwalk. Proposal was attached to the JULY Council Notes [and was also forwarded to Team Reps on August 16].
2. Maya made two recommendations for Reallocation Requests for teams at the August Council mtg. Kindly consider whether you agree or disagree with the following:
  - a) Timber Frame finishing work: \$2,000 to be transferred from Capital Funds
  - b) Communication Team recommends having a weekly posting in the *Sounder* about Commons goings-on: \$1,700 for the year to be transferred from Trustee Funds.