Commons Coordinating Council (CCC)

Written Reports to: council@gabriolacommons.ca

Notes of Meeting of November 4, 2025

Facilitator: Bob Andrew

Notes: Jinny Hayes

Timer: Don Smardon

Also Present: Patrick Colvin; Diane Conrad; Betty Kehler; Kristin Allan; Kim Kasasian; Brent O'Malley; Marcy Stogryn; Maureen Wild

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Welcome & Agenda accepted

2. Acknowledgement:
Diane quoted Robin Wall Kimmerer (author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*) focussing on the interdependence of people and land.

3. Team Reports

Property Stewardship Team: Kim (written report)
• Hedge trimming will be Nov.15 (Sat), subject to weather; Simon will do it and is to be paid. Volunteers needed; Please bring hedge trimming tools if you have them.
• Putting in a new door to the Conversation Room; Partially complete. Moved back to facilitate access to one bathroom, ie, between the 2 bathrooms.
• The electrical upgrade in the Community Kitchen is finally completed, and came in within the amount we received in grants.
• The main driveway potholes have been fixed - properly this time instead of the usual make-do job.
• Someone has donated a huge amount of netting (for eth orchard, etc.).

North Gardens: Maureen (verbal report)
• New sign by Kim.
• There is one allotment available (see *Sounder*), 3 new gardeners. One derelict plot has been regenerated and divided in two.
• 2 donations: some slabs for gardens and garden tools from the Gabriola Garden Club.
• Also, wood off-cuts have been made available at the Paisley Place building site.

• Fundraiser for the Commons and the PHC Children's Gardening Program: A Tribute to Joanna Macy, eco-philosopher, activist, scholar & author; at the Haven on Nov 16, 2-4 pm.

Juicing: Betty (verbal report)

• Betty is trying to retire from Juicing; finished for this year; raised $3K.
• Have been deer in the orchard and needs new fencing.
• The juicer was replaced this summer, but what. To do with the old one? **A:** Goat Barn storage
• Betty thanked Diane for her help with the program.
• Jinny praised Betty for the significant boost to the Commons public image that's a product of her work with juicing for Islanders.

Wood Task Group: Diane (written report)

There was a difference of opinion between the Trustees and members of the task group (who disagreed on due process, with the Trustees acting on that disagreement); this led to what was basically a cease and desist from Folklife Village management regarding work at the Gathering Place and Heather's (hopefully temporary) withdrawal from Commons participation, the Woods Task Force is on pause and will regroup to see where our work will go from here.

We are still visiting with the folks from the Gathering Place weekly but not picking up garbage nor making any further plans at that site. We still have $1,500 in donations which we're deciding how to use.

• Moving forward, the group proposes that it morph into a Commons Outreach Team to continue our work. We need advice on how we do that?
ACTION: Jinny to advise.
• We'd also like to organize some education sessions for Commoners around addictions and mental health and how to engage respectfully and compassionately with individuals who frequent the Commons who are struggling with addictions and mental health issues.
Action: Work Group TBA

The Yurt Keepers: Kristin (written report)

• The Yurt Keepers is now a team of 3 people. Our newest member is Mercedes Jayne. The word is slowly spreading, and people are keen to support this endeavour.
• Fundraising continues, eg, the skin is now 15 years old. In the next month, we have 2 musical fundraising events happening in the yurt:

Saturday, Nov 22nd will be AnSah Medicine Music (SahRah Kerfoot and Andre Nobels) **and** Saturday, Dec 6th, Wild Little Spring (Vickey Bowes and Mikey Swallow) and Colleen Reid. Tickets will be available later this week at Nature Spirit Earth Market.

• Wood Stove: Frank, of Jim Chimney, has offered to pick up the new stove in Nanaimo, install it and inspect it free of charge for the Commons. The installation date is this Friday, November 7th.
• Rental of Yurt: The homeschooling group is thrilled to be able to gather in the yurt on a weekly basis.
• Work Bee: Last Saturday, a group of 7 volunteers enclosed underneath the yurt with scrap plywood cutoffs from the Paisley Place project, collected by Betty and Bob. We must create an access "door" panel ASAP and then the entire thing is secure underneath. This idea came about after some safety concerns for users of the yurt arose. There has been ongoing camping and unsafe debris discovered underneath the yurt for quite some time. When the weather dries up in late spring, we will have a painting bee to create some attractive art on the plywood.
• The exterior stove pipe was straightened to meet the requirement of 2" clearance from combustible materials (exterior of yurt canvas).
• Wood shed will be built in Spring; for now, storing wood in orchard shed. This project will need funds through grants and donations.

Community Kitchen Stewards: Brent (written report)
• The electrical upgrade is finally complete! It only took about 9 months from start to finish but it did come in under budget by about $2500 😊
• The damage to the roof that was done by PHC has been repaired but the roofers noticed a substantial amount of other work that should be done at some point. PST has been notified and we are accepting quotes from contractors.
• The propane tank was recently filled at a cost of $1500. Since November 2024 the tank has been filled 4 times for a total of $5200. This is undoubtedly directly attributable to the fact that the pilot lights are on 24/7. We need to replace at least one of the stoves as soon as possible. Brent is looking at options.
• Other regular renters and workshops are pending.
Q: Should slaughtering of chickens and rabbits
A: No; special equipment is required; potential workshop on butchering.
Q: How much is a new stove?
A: This is a conversation only right now, but replacement would be approx. $8000; there would be resale of the existing 1 or 2.

Trustees: Bob (written report)
• Had a retreat and a written report is appended, below; parts of the agenda addressed how to read financial reports, moving the draft Covenant forward, paid work on the Commons, and the Community Kitchen.
• Community Woodworking Shop: $20K of nearly new machinery was recently donated; needs running. This could increase the usefulness of the Workshop but it really needs more

space to conduct the education sessions that could be offered. The Woodworking Guild is excited and will help

• Structural report on the Goat Barn has been submitted; it could indeed become a public events space, so now we need ways to move forward on this with the community.

• PHC 3-year lease has been signed; took 8 months.

• Heather Menzies has submitted her resignation from the Trustees.

Q: Can anyone sit in on a trustee meeting?

A: Yes, but please let them know. Meetings are 3-5 pm on the last Wednesday of every month (eg, Nov 26).

Communications: Jinny

• Since Heather is in hiatus from the Commons right now, could we please look at the meaning of, and a possible change to, the website's opening statement: "The Gabriola community sharing space and responsibility for it …. Be part of this." It is not enticing, nor does it seem to capture the essence of what the Commons is.

• Could this be replaced with something like: "Collaborative promotion of food sustainability, environmental protection and community benefit"?

Discussion: Could revert to our Council and teams-approved byline, Where land and people meet. **ACTION:** Jinny to send out to teams in covering note with these minutes. Ideas welcome!

4. Other Topics

Reminder: 20th Anniversary Celebrations: Jinny

1. Part with Ground Up carrot cake on Nov. 8 at 1-3 pm at Commons; Heide, Bob and George to speak.
2. Shelagh Huston talk as part of Museum Speaker Series: "Where Land and People Meet" at Gabriola Golf Club, Nov. 9 at 2 pm.

Kids on the Commons: Kim

• The Commons could be a better play space and many young children visit. We need a really good playset.

Discussion: Liability issues must be considered; washroom is required; will need set up and a maintenance plan. Suggest: ask the home schooling group for help with this.

Modification in Commons Decision Making Process: Kim

• There was a modified approach was used twice lately in the usual process of sending a matter out to teams and for feedback before a decision is agreed upon. In both cases, an "exclusion approach" was used, ie, "if your team has any objections please let XXX know". This saves time and is useful in time crunches.

Discussion: Might help overcome the "Commons goes slow" image in the community; may be seen as a modification of our existing approach (revised last year by ad hoc working group on Governance (see posted on wall in Big Room).

Closing

The meeting ended at 8:50 pm

Next CCC meeting: December 2, 2025 at 7 pm – Facilitator and Notetaker TBA by Council Stewards

APPENDIX: Gabriola Commons Foundation Trustees' Retreat

October 18, 2025

Attending: Bob Andrew; Dave Lightly; Gloria Filax; Mary Wilson; Brent O'Malley; Kristin Allan; Marlo Firme, Rob Stephenson (by Zoom)

Regrets: Colleen Reid

Topics discussed

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Documents attached

- Project/Team Spreadsheet sample
- 25.10.16 Gabriola Commons Covenant and Stewardship Plan Intro.pptx
- Finance Team Policy – Grant and Project Writing Proposal v4
- Fundraising – A Stewardship Draft v 6.3
- Goat Barn 675 North Road – Structural Assessment-RO

Reviewing Financial Statements

Each month, the Finance Team prepares three documents: a Balance Sheet; a Statement of Income and Expense; and a Project/Team Spreadsheet.

Gloria Filax presented an overview of the income/expense statement. She noted that as a first step, it is valuable for trustees to become familiar with typical income and expenses. The finance team provides comparative statements (comparing current month or quarter to same period previously). Reviewing comparisons will also enable trustees to spot unusual financial activities to query.

The Balance Sheet provides a snapshot of the Commons' financial position at a moment in time; the Statement of Income and Expense shows money flowing in and out each month. The spreadsheet is another approach to showing income and expenses, focusing on the financial position of teams. Mary Wilson presented an overview of the spreadsheet, which allows teams to track their income/expenses, and to be aware on a month-to-month basis how much money they have available.

A sample of a page from the spreadsheet is included in the email to trustees with this document (project/team spreadsheet sample); year-end balance sheet and income/expense statements are available here:

https://www.gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/GCF-Financial-Statements-March-31-2025.pdf

Questions and discussions focused around long-range sustainability; donors tend to be aging out, and grant income is unpredictable/unreliable. It was noted that people donate when they feel connected; so expanding Commons involvement is also valuable for financial stability.

The Commons Covenant

George Szanto and Virginia Hayes presented an update on the Covenant at the recent AGM, noting that the current Covenant team is retiring, having created the Covenant draft currently being reviewed by the Islands Trust local committee as possible covenant holder. For our retreat, Rob Stephenson's focus was to investigate what the Covenant means for those who are trustees (see attached ppt presentation, for an excellent high-level description of what must be done – 25.10.16 Gabriola Commons Covenant and Stewardship Plan Intro.pptx).

The current draft of the Covenant (which cannot be considered final until signed by a covenant holder) is available here:

The baseline report referred to in the Covenant is available here:

https://gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Baseline-Report-Overview-Watermark-2018-10-27.pdf

Dave Lively recommends that everyone refer to the Covenant Act, provincial legislation, as guidelines in considering ways the Covenant could be applied, or could be broken. (DAVE: Please provide a link or name of the document here – notetaker can't find a Covenant Act.)

It was noted that it has been a challenge to find a covenant holder because it is an unusual covenant, addressing agricultural, ecological and community aspects of the Commons. (Most are for land conservation, or preservation of agricultural land, not for protection of multiple purposes.) The Islands Trust is partway through their review of the Covenant, and have asked for some changes.

Current status: We are awaiting the Island Truste statement of requirements for the Covenant. Jinny Hayes agreed at the AGM that she would help move the Covenant forward.

Building human capacity/paid staff/volunteers/options

Bob Andrew led this part of the discussion. He noted that the Commons runs on a volunteer basis; however, licensed trades are required do some tasks such as electrical, plumbing, etc., to meet legal/insurance requirements. We are therefore shifting over from being a voluntary organization entirely to being an organization that pays sometimes; there is not a lot of clarity around this. Concepts of involving more people working on the Commons has also led to some flexibility around money; for instance, there was a plan to run the orchard on a crop-sharing basis. Overall difference in paying versus not paying lies in staffing; we do not have an executive director, or paid staff, the way some organizations do. That is a serious line to cross, and needs to be examined carefully. Paid staff shifts the boundaries financially and in other ways.

Trustees noted various points connected with paid staff:

- Presence on the Commons is another issue. If there was someone living on the Commons (as a caretaker? Or with housing, such as the originally-proposed elders' eco-village) might improve things.
- Question: is payment for tasks up to the individual teams? Response: Finance must be aware, and it must be clear where the money is coming from. A document, Grant and Project Guidelines, is attached — it describes the documentation required. In addition, the Fundraising Stewardship document, outlining considerations for Commons fundraising, is also attached.)
- The hedge is an example of something that was once done by volunteers, and now is being done by someone who is paid.
- Sub-contractors, who have their own relationship and responsibilities for taxes and manage their own Human Resources issues, are different from individuals working directly for the Commons on projects. There are tax implications and requirements if individuals are characterized as employees by the CRA. The finance team is continuing to investigate this and will be meeting with our accountant to discuss what, exactly, constitutes an employee.
- Noted that there are ethical and other obligations concerning employees, even if they are directed by volunteers -- and that this adds to the load on volunteers. (These obligations are often handed by Human Resources departments.)
- Noted that it may be possible to write grants in such a way that the grant pays someone to do a particular task;
- Grants with contracts can increase community involvement through the process of choosing best people to do a contract;
- Concern with whether we see ourselves as employers; being landlords with PHC challenges our relationship and sense of self; taking on the role of being employers may also be fraught with problems.
- Would be a good idea to come up with a model of compensation for work.

Where we are /have been

Mary Wilson led this part of the discussion. The document (Where we've been: selected Commons activities) doesn't represent all the things that have been accomplished at the Commons during the past twenty years; it's

intended to demonstrate the varied roles trustees have played in various projects, from basically nothing to doing a lot.

Discussion points made:

- The Commons is complex, and a lot of different things happen. The team structure helps manage the chaos.
- Query: Is it the role of the trustees to step in if things are not happening? Noted that at this moment, someone has to relight the spark of community engagement, and when there is a gap in a particular sector, yes, it is our role to step in.
- Noted that it is important to think of the long term. Trustees may sometimes have a role in getting things going, but should be ready to move on and let someone else take over.

What lies ahead

Afternoon discussion explored three projects — one well-established, one on the cusp of change, and one a long-standing dream for the community — thinking about the trustee role, but also about the projects in general.

The Community Kitchen

Brent O'Malley led the discussion on the kitchen.

- The kitchen is a significant income generator
- We could likely easily double the revenue; it's currently used two full days per week, and generates approximately 12,000 per year
- * Brent as kitchen steward would like to see more workshops -- canning, butchering, etc. Currently there are not any cooking courses offered; we could do more of that. Dave did do a paella workshop there and there have been others including Araveydic cooking and Bannock-making.
- Farmers are interested in using the kitchen for value-added activities. Need for more collaboration between the gardeners and the kitchen.
- Currently the Agricultural Co-op is looking at a major expansion, including a commercial kitchen. Brent would like to see us collaborate more with them, rather than seeing them build their own kitchen.
- Need to figure out creative finances to make it more accessible for people to use (it fees expensive for individual kitchen-users, though the cost is very low compared to off-island commercial kitchens. The Island Health inspector commented to Brent a year ago that there is a comparable kitchen in Nanaimo that offers similar facilities for $1,000 per day.)
- Need to figure out places to eat what is created in the kitchen -- there was a long dream of having a "dining hall" connecting the kitchen and the goat barn
- Storage is also a challenge for the kitchen; when things are created, where can they go? Storage issues are already at "an argumentative level."
- Noteworthy that we are running the kitchen largely on volunteer labour; important that the fees cover kitchen costs, without reliance on Commons donors.
- Is it possible to have a base cost for people doing value add products and then we get a portion of the revenue?

- There needs to be a perception of fairness *for* the kitchen too -- if Farm to Table, for example, is charging $40 per plate, it seems unjust that the kitchen make only $100 per day. Profit-sharing might be more fair in cases like this.
- * Immediate short term goal: get more kitchen stewards.
- * Next steps: connect with agricultural coop
- * Noted that the kitchen is a good area to explore as part of the idea of enhancement of community engagement.

The Workshop/Woodshop

Bob Andrew led this discussion

- A long-standing dream has been to have the workshop become a community workshop
- A huge in-kind donation, approximately $20,000 worth of tools, has been given to the workshop.
- We are not the providers – that is, PST will not be the group managing a community shop — but the Commons is able to make the space and tools available.
- Working with external groups and people new to the Commons requires orientation and understanding. External groups need to recognize the Commons goal of inclusive rather than exclusive use — that is, anyone who can safely do so should be able to use the shop under whatever terms are set – it should not be restricted to members of a particular organization, for instance. The Woodworkers Guild is now interested in working with the Commons; In the past, the wooden boat school was interested but they wanted the workshop to be set up exclusively for them, something that won't work with the Commons model.
- We will need workshop stewards, and they will need to come from somewhere.
- Workshop users will need to know what they are doing to use the tools safely; there are some models of community workshops and they will need to be investigated.
- Trustees will have to be aware of the liability issues
- There will need to be legal agreements for use; acknowledging personal liability and so on.

The Goat Barn

Bob Andrew led this discussion of this project.

- There has been a long-standing desire in the community to turn the Goat Barn into a performance space.
- Problems in the past have come from organizations who wanted to use the space, but have it be available only for them.
- The Property Management Team hired an engineer to do a structural survey and give indications of what would have to be done to upgrade it to performance standards. That report has now been received. (See attached.)
- The building needed upgrades that were known and made; it now has a new electrical service, and some years ago it got a new roof.
- At this point there needs to be a community group formed to take the project on, working under the auspices of the Commons and within the Commons model of inclusivity.
- Bob's rough guess for bringing it to a public space is at minimum $150,000 - 200,000. It could of course be much more expensive.
- What will be the role of trustees in this project? Multi-faceted: to make sure we don't get over our heads, pay attention to liability insurance, provide guidance for fundraising, ensure clarity around non-exclusive use.

Moving forward-- next steps

General notes, plans and possibilities

Increase Community Engagement

- Kristin, Rob, Brent, Colleen
- This could include community engagement around the kitchen as a test case
- Noted that we need a better communication team to do outreach to the community; we need more trustees in general. If Marlo steps off, we need #7, 8, 9 and 10. Perhaps outreach/communication team should involve building the table of trustees larger. Rob agrees.

Trustee training

- -There may be AGES money available for a workshop on board stuff (the guy who did the workshop for the chamber)
- The Chartered Professional Accountants: Canada provide a handbook for board members of non-profits that may be useful: https://www.cpacanada.ca/business-and-accounting-resources/strategy-risk-and-governance/not-for-profit-governance/publications/not-for-profit-governance-fundamentals
- Educating potential trustees on their responsibilities, and reminding them of the importance of having fun,

Other plans and ideas to consider

- Long range plan -- on the website -- should be revisted and tweaked again
- Does the Commons want to expand? There is a possibility of wetland expansion at the back (owned by Carl Boehm at the moment) -- possibility of approaching owner and offering a tax receipt
- A workshop on legacy donations might be a good idea – could be held jointly with other organizations
- Next steps for the goat barn -- pull out earlier documents to see what earlier thoughts were
- Need to reinvigorate the council
- Need to develop a master email list and possibly a newsletter.
    - Mary has emailed the former newsletter-sender to see if the old list exists
- List of team contacts on the website? (Note: currently there is an email for each team, which goes to a person designated by the team, rather than an individual name.)