

Considerations Related to Salt Spring Becoming a Municipality

The following is an abbreviated version of a list developed by the SSI Restructure Committee to help residents decide if the advantages of incorporation would outweigh the disadvantages. The longer version, which includes much more detail, is included with the Executive Summary of consultant Tom Reid's report. Each person will have a different set of priorities and concerns when assessing the merits of an island municipality.

Abbreviations: CRD—Capital Regional District MoT—the Ministry of Transportation
The Trust—The Islands Trust UBCM—Union of BC Municipalities

ISSUES/ BETTER OR WORSE?	CONSIDERATIONS
GOVERNANCE	
AUTONOMY/ ACCOUNTABILITY <i>Improved</i>	Although Salt Spring would still have ties to the CRD, Islands Trust, and the province, almost all decisions related to island planning and services would be made locally by seven elected council members. Many major decisions are now made by off-island bodies.
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ FOCUS <i>Opportunity for improvement</i>	There would be opportunity for a greater level of community involvement. Residents would be more able to attend meetings at which decisions would be made.
INFLUENCE WITH THE PROVINCE AND OTHER OUTSIDE AGENCIES/ BODIES <i>Improved</i>	<p><i>With provincial ministries and outside agencies:</i> In BC, a mayor's influence is much greater than the individual or collective influence of CRD and Trust representatives. Salt Spring's ability to influence decisions would increase with both the mayor and Trust advocating on our behalf. Additionally, UBCM, which Salt Spring would join, provides a direct avenue to provincial ministries and other levels of government.</p> <p><i>On regional matters:</i> Consultation would occur more easily than under the current system as Salt Spring would have a formal body (i.e., the municipal council) and staff to discuss issues with.</p> <p><i>With BC Ferries:</i> As municipalities have more "clout" than rural areas, a Salt Spring municipality would have more influence with BC Ferries through the municipal council and UBCM.</p>
REPRESENTATION <i>Quantity improved; quality debatable</i>	Seven municipal council members would provide broader community representation and more viewpoints and perspectives than our current system with three elected officials.
ACCESSIBILITY OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES <i>Improved</i>	Councillors would be more accessible to electors than off-island directors of the CRD, MoT personnel, etc.
PRESERVE AND PROTECT MANDATE AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ISLANDS TRUST	
LINKAGE WITH THE TRUST <i>Continued, but different in form</i>	<p>Linkage with the Trust would be maintained, but in a different form.</p> <p>The Official Community Plan (OCP) and all other land-use planning bylaws would be inherited by the municipality. Any amendments would have to reflect the Trust mandate.</p> <p>With the "double direct" method of electing "municipal trustees," electors would choose who represents them on the Islands Trust.</p>
"PRESERVE AND PROTECT" MANDATE ON-ISLAND	The municipal council would have to uphold the Trust object "to preserve and protect" and the Trust Policy Statement. It would

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<p><i>Opportunity for improvement</i></p>	<p>have more tools available than the Local Trust Committee to uphold the mandate.</p> <p>In addition to the Trust mandate, the Letters Patent include the following clause: “AND WHEREAS the guiding principle of the community in incorporating the Salt Spring Island Municipality is to preserve, protect, and enhance the island’s unique amenities and environment, recognising the community’s rural character and the importance of balancing environmental, social and economic sustainability in all community decisions,” which would guide the actions of any future councils.</p>
<p>“PRESERVE AND PROTECT” MANDATE IN ENTIRE ISLANDS TRUST AREA</p> <p><i>Maybe worsened</i></p>	<p>As about \$400,000 of the Salt Spring taxes that now go to the Trust help support the Trust’s planning services on less populated islands, the Trust’s ability to fulfill its mandate on other islands could be significantly reduced. The Trust’s ability to fund the “preserve and protect” mandate as it applies to broad community plans would be less affected than for more minor aspects of development on other islands.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL/ TAX IMPACTS</p>	
<p>PROPERTY TAXES</p> <p><i>Increased</i></p>	<p>If existing service levels under a municipality continued as they are now, with no increase or decrease, it is projected that annual taxes would rise about \$105 (phased in over eight years at \$13/year) per average Salt Spring home assessed at \$245,000.</p> <p>As road improvements on Salt Spring have been under-funded for years, a municipal council would almost certainly decide that a capital program for roads and drainage improvement must be undertaken. An additional \$7.5m capital roads program to halt further deterioration of island roads would mean an additional tax increase (over and above the \$105 basic increase projected) of \$87 for a total tax increase of about \$192 (phased in over nine years at \$24/year) per average Salt Spring home.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL RISK</p> <p><i>Perhaps worsened</i></p>	<p>The province could continue to off-load more of its costs onto municipalities; similarly, it could also increase rural tax rates under the current system.</p> <p>Seven accessible representatives instead of three, and more decisions made locally, would mean that there could be greater pressure to increase service levels, which could lead to tax increases.</p>
<p>PLANNING COSTS</p> <p><i>Reduced</i></p>	<p>After three years, a Salt Spring municipality would be able to hire or contract its own planning services. Assuming the same level of service, this would be much less costly than the present arrangement.</p>
<p>ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS</p> <p><i>Increased</i></p>	<p>Total administrative costs paid out of Salt Spring taxes would increase, although these would be controlled locally.</p>

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FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY <i>Improved</i>	In a municipality, the budgets of each function can be mixed and merged, making it possible to be more responsive to changes in service needs during the year and to react to emergencies and other unusual circumstances more quickly than a rural community.
ACCESS TO GRANTS <i>Improved</i>	Municipalities are eligible for grants to a much greater extent than are rural areas. Municipalities have greater staff and resources to investigate and apply for grants.
FINANCIAL VALUE TO COMMUNITY <i>Improved</i>	Salaries and expenses related to a municipality would be expended as much as possible on-island, which would benefit our island economy more than the current situation.
ABILITY TO GENERATE REVENUES <i>Improved</i>	Licenses, permits, and tickets, not possible now, could all generate revenue for the municipality. (See also "Autonomy" on page 1.)
POLICING COSTS <i>Island's share of costs increased</i>	Service levels would remain the same, however, municipal status would increase the local share of policing costs faced by island residents. A municipality's share of policing costs would rise even higher if/when the population reaches 15,000. (The population is now about 10,000.)
SERVICES/ PLANNING	
COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF SERVICES AND PLANNING <i>Improved</i>	There would be improved coordination and integration of most local services, including land-use planning, as most would become the responsibility of a Salt Spring municipality. "One-stop shopping" would be of benefit to residents who now have to go to or communicate with different bodies to get information or arrange or pay for services.
SERVICE FLEXIBILITY AND SPEED <i>Improved</i>	A municipal council would be able to respond more quickly and effectively to the need for new or improved services, or to an emergency.
SERVICE QUALITY <i>Opportunity for improvement</i>	A mayor would have much more support (from staff) and might have more time to devote to service delivery problems than a CRD director. Under a municipal system, service staff would probably be local residents, thus more available than under the rural system.
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS AND COORDINATION <i>Opportunity for improvement</i>	Under a municipal system, with all staff and decision-makers on-island and in the same office, long-term planning could be much more effective. The coordination of planning and development should improve significantly, with decisions centralized in one office by one planning body, and made based on local knowledge.
ABILITY TO ACHIEVE OCP OBJECTIVES <i>Improved</i>	Many of the objectives included in Salt Spring's OCP are difficult to achieve under our rural form of governance, but would be possible as a municipality

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	Some OCP objectives that would become possible under a municipal government could not be achieved without increasing revenues or taxes, or reducing services in other areas.
<p>RATE OF DEVELOPMENT</p> <p><i>Debatable</i></p> <p>NOTE: Salt Spring's OCP and other development rules already allow for substantial growth.</p>	<p>With a municipality, the approval process would be simplified, in part because there would be fewer referrals required to other bodies.</p> <p>A municipal council could encourage development as a way of generating revenues, particularly if it got into financial difficulty (but only within OCP rules).</p>
<p>ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL</p> <p><i>Opportunity for improvement</i></p>	<p>A municipality would have greater ability to tighten environmental regulations and coordinate policies for environmental protection.</p> <p>Councillors who are not supportive of the Trust mandate and/or more focussed on the delivery of services could be less interested in environmental issues.</p>
ROADS AND DRAINAGE	
<p>ROAD QUALITY</p> <p><i>Opportunity for improvement, but only with tax increase</i></p>	<p>The maintenance and repair of island roads would become the responsibility of the municipality. It is almost certain that Salt Spring roads will continue to disintegrate unless we incorporate. Although a municipal government would have the decision-making ability to improve island roads, this could not be done without significant dollars, thus a probable tax increase.</p>
<p>ABILITY TO SET LOCAL ROAD STANDARDS</p> <p><i>Improved</i></p>	<p>The community would be able to set road design standards specific to this island.</p>
IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS AND SERVICE AREAS	
<p>THE OPERATION, MAINTENANCE, AND ADMINISTRATION OF SERVICE AREAS</p> <p><i>Opportunity for improvement</i></p>	<p>Operations, maintenance, and administration would be more efficient (more timely, more responsive, more coordinated) with a single organization. Water taxes and fees could rise in some areas and fall in others.</p>
<p>ABILITY TO SET STANDARDS</p> <p><i>Improved</i></p>	<p>A council could set standards for operation and maintenance that would better protect Salt Spring water users.</p>
<p>ELIGIBILITY FOR INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS</p> <p><i>Improved</i></p>	<p>Former water improvement districts would be eligible for infrastructure grants, making capital improvements more affordable than under the rural system (where no grants are available).</p>
<p>WATERSHED PROTECTION</p> <p><i>Improved</i></p>	<p>A municipality would have the ability to coordinate and implement comprehensive drainage plans, though this could be expensive. A municipality would also have enhanced tree-cutting regulation powers, except in FLR and ALR land.</p>