

Dear Mr. Bryson, CRD Chair

I am writing in support of the motion submitted to the CRD Directors by Mr. Ben Isitt, Victoria City Councilor and CRD Director. I have been a resident of Salt Spring Island for nearly ten years and have kayaked around Grace Islet in Ganges Harbour over the course of many summers. As an anthropologist, naturalist, and kayak guide in the region I have had the pleasure of teaching many visitors to the area about First Nations culture history and early European settlement, as well as contemporary events involving native and non-native relations and environmental issues.

Before moving to Salt Spring I was a professional archaeologist in Washington State for nearly two decades and was responsible for archaeological projects, cultural inventories, analysis, and report writing. On the basis of my work the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) made decisions about the “significance” of cultural resources and, when necessary, I drafted mitigation plans to limit or eliminate destructive impacts. Consultation with relevant tribal members was always part of the development process (per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act 1966).

In my role as webmaster for the Salt Spring Island Residents for Responsible Land Use (SSIRRLU) I have had the opportunity to read much of the documentation relating to the archaeological resources and private development of Grace Islet, including archaeological reports, permit applications, and correspondence between the landowner and local and provincial offices. This documentation will soon be made available on the SSIRRLU web site (www.savewalkerhook.com). Furthermore, as an archaeologist I am able to evaluate management decisions that impact prehistoric heritage resources, with respect the guidelines of the Heritage Conservation Act (RSBC 1996), the purpose of which is to “encourage and facilitate the protection and conservation of heritage property in British Columbia.”

Admittedly, my review of the documentation surrounding the development of Grace Islet is not exhaustive. However, I have seen ample evidence that the development process contravenes many of the sections of the HCA. The failure to have archaeological monitoring on the island during land clearing in May/June of 2012 is but one example. I would like to draw particular attention to Section 4 of the HCA entitled “Agreement with First Nations.” Section 4(1) states “The Province may enter into a formal agreement with a first nation with respect to the conservation and protection of heritage sites and heritage objects that represent the cultural heritage of the aboriginal people who are represented by that first nation.” While the HCA does not state that the Province is under obligation to do so, it is an incontrovertible fact that the decision NOT to enter into such an agreement can only be made upon consultation with affected First Nations and

local communities. An outside body that has no understanding of, or attachment to, a specific heritage resource can not be solely responsible for determining the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of said resource. Rather, the outside body must make this determination on the basis of archaeological and historical research, as well as personal testimony with the living ancestors and community members to whom these heritage resources have intrinsic value.

From my review of the documentation the Penelakut First Nation has been very vocal in their opposition to development on Grace Islet. As you know, Grace Islet is within the traditional territory of the Penelakut who recognize the island as a sacred burial ground of their ancestors. Robert Morales, Chief Negotiator of the Hul'qumi'mun Treaty Group (representing six local First Nations: Chemainus, Cowichan, Penelakut, Lyackson, Halalt, and Lake Cowichan) is also on record as opposing this development. Local Trustees of the Islands Trust are on record as opposing the development on Grace Island per their constituency on Salt Spring Island. Even local MLA Gary Holman has directly requested that Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, and Natural Resources Operations, exercise his power to revoke the site alteration permit and to work with local First Nations' to resolve this issue. In light of such written and vocal opposition to this development it is clear that there has not been sufficient consultation to develop a satisfactory solution agreeable to all affected parties. Given this, it seems unconscionable that an application for heritage site alteration was approved in the first place.

Having made my point, I would like to urge you to vote in favor of adding the aforementioned motion to the CRD agenda. Approval of this motion is consistent with the desires and actions of the community, both non-native and native, that is served by the Capital Regional District.

Respectfully,
Kris Wilhelmsen, MA
Salt Spring Island, BC

cc: CRD Council