



## **Trustee Variation in School District #46**

February 7, 2011

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### **Purpose**

To gather community feedback on trustee variation (the number of trustees and electoral districts to represent the Sunshine Coast) and present options for the Board to consider.

### **Background**

School District #46 has a population of approximately 29,000 spread over 86 kilometres of coastline on the mainland of British Columbia. The Sunshine Coast has eight different local government electoral districts including the municipalities of Sechelt (District) and Gibsons (Town); the self-governing Sechelt Indian Government District; and the regional district rural areas of Pender Harbour-Egmont (A), Halfmoon Bay (B), Roberts Creek (D), Elphinstone (E) and West Howe Sound (F). The Sunshine Coast population is expected by BC Stats to grow to about 37,000 in 25 years.

In 2009–10, the school district enrolment was 3,392, down from approximately 4,700 students in 1997. Projections indicate that enrolment will likely drop by at least another 200 students until 2014 before slowly climbing back up. The district operates 3 secondary schools, 9 elementary schools and one alternative school with multiple sites and programs.

Currently, School District #46 is represented by seven school trustees: one elected for rural areas A and B; two for the District of Sechelt; one for the Town of Gibsons; and three to represent the Sechelt Indian Government District and rural areas D, E and F (See Figure 1).

### **Considerations**

#### **Trustee Workload**

At least in recent years, Boards of Education across British Columbia have noted the challenge of tighter district budgets and more downloaded responsibilities from the Ministry of Education. There is no question that the trustee position on the Sunshine Coast requires a considerable amount of time, study and commitment. It can also be argued that the trustee workload and level of responsibility today is lighter since the removal of full local bargaining in the mid-90s and of the ability to tax in the late 80s. On the Sunshine Coast, the introduction of site-based management and budgeting, and the loss of approximately 1,500 students due to declining enrolment, including over 100 students to the Francophone School District #93, has also decreased board responsibilities.

SD#46 Electoral Area	Number of Trustees	Population (2006 census)	Voters per trustee	'09-10 enrolment in area (exc. SCAS) *	Students per trustee in area (Schools per trustee)
Rural Area 1	1	A: 2,624 B: 2,558 <b>Total: 5,182</b>	5,182	465	465 (3)
Sechelt	2	<b>Total: 8,454</b>	4,227	1,079	540 (2)
Gibsons	1	<b>Total: 4,182</b>	4,182	976	976 (2)
Rural Area 2	3	SIGD: 827 D: 3,307 E: 3,552 F: 2,235 <b>Total: 9,921</b>	3,307	596	199 ( 1)
Range in voters per trustee:		<b>36.2%</b>	Range in students per trustee:	<b>79.6%</b>	

**Figure 1: Electoral Areas and Trustee Ratios**

\*The relevance of these numbers could easily be called into question by the fact that many of the students who attend the largest school in Gibsons, Elphinstone Secondary, actually travel from homes in Rural Area 2. At the same time, however, this fact also certainly begs the question of why Gibsons and Rural Area 2 need to be two separate electoral areas.

“Range in voters per trustee” shows that Rural Area 1 (the highest ratio of 1 : 5,182) represents 36.2% more people than Rural Area 2 (the lowest, 1 : 3,307).

## Enrolment Decline

As mentioned previously, enrolment decline in the district has been considerable, projected to reach a percentage of over –35% between 1997 and 2014. At the same time, it is important to note overall population has grown significantly over this period (20%), and is projected to grow by another 20% by 2025.

## Sunshine Coast Cohesion

Over an area spanning only 86 kilometres, many community members often lament the degree of parochialism in Sunshine Coast decision-making and dialogue, often pitting small communities against other small communities within a close proximity. Parochial stand-offs are frequently blamed as obstacles to collaboration and progress. At the same time, it is important to recognize that there are likely over twenty separate communities on the Sunshine Coast that claim distinct histories and cultures.

## **Loyalty to the Community at Large**

All school trustees are obliged to be loyal “to the community at large and the students in its care” rather than individual electoral areas that voted them into office. Despite this understanding, and the acceptance of it by trustees when they take office, the difficulty to balance accountability to the whole district, and to electors only, is inevitable. At best, it is a mixed message when you are elected by and electorally accountable to only one area in a district, yet are expected to consider and represent the whole.

## **Community Representation**

As noted under Figure 1, there is particular confusion in Rural Area 2 where a secondary school is in the Town of Gibsons, which elects one trustee, but many of the students who attend it come from outlying (but nearby) areas in Rural Area 2, which elects three trustees.

The oddest placement of a smaller electoral area within our current electoral areas is the Sechelt Indian Government District as part of Rural Area 2 with Roberts Creek, Elphinstone and West Howe Sound. The SIGD is not adjacent to any of these areas, and SIGD members tend to go to school, work, shop and socialize in the District of Sechelt far more than in Roberts Creek, Elphinstone and West Howe Sound. Trustee elections tend to attract low voter turnouts in SIGD, perhaps in part due to the confusion of being grouped with rural areas farther down the Coast.

Several years ago, the Sechelt Indian Band applied to the Ministry of Education for a variation to give them their own trustee. Despite support from the board and an extensive consultation process, this request was denied by the Ministry, due to the disproportion of having one representative for 769 voters.

## **Family Groupings**

In 2010, the school district’s budgeting system was reconfigured to a family groupings model where schools in Rural Area 1 were grouped together; schools in the Sechelt area were grouped together; and schools Roberts Creek and south were grouped together. The intent is to provide more equitable opportunities to our students, to pool resources, to engage in more inter-school programming and leadership, and to oversee and allocate budgets more efficiently.

## **Budget Considerations**

While cutting the number of trustees will not save a significant amount of money (perhaps \$30,000 in stipends and expenses) out of a \$30-million-plus budget, the Board has been put in the tight budget position recently where it has had to find savings wherever possible. Schools are having to “pinch pennies” in a far tighter budget system, and the board has had to cut a number of line-item expenditures from the district budget that were far below \$30,000.

## Options

**Guidelines:** Generally, we need to determine 1) whether it is feasible to drop in numbers from 7 to 5; 2) if we should have an “at-large” voting system or continue to be divided into separate regional electoral areas; 3) if we stay in separate electoral areas, can they be divided in a way that makes sense and increases voter parity (one person—one vote).

1. **Status quo.** Is the current system really not working? Trustees have all observed that we’ve received very few complaints or suggestions regarding the number of trustees or electoral areas. (See Figure 1 on Page 2)
  
2. **Adjusted Electoral Areas.** If we adjust our electoral areas, populations can be shifted around but it is difficult to achieve improved “one person one vote” voter parity. The Board has discussed some alternatives for different areas, with both 7 and 5 trustees, but the only one that comes within 10% of achieving voter parity is cutting down to 5 trustees, with one representing Pender Harbour-Halfmoon Bay, and 4 in one electoral area for the rest of the Coast. The Board is open to all suggestions on electoral area adjustments.
  
3. **Seven trustees at large.** Voters would have the ability to select their preferred candidates for all seven positions, and trustees would be electorally accountable to all areas. (See Figure 2)
  
4. **Five trustees at large.** Same logic as #2, but with a reduction of trustees. (See Figure 2)

SD#46 Electoral Area	Number of Trustees	Population (2006 census)	Voters per trustee	'09-10 enrolment (except SCAS, for comparison)	Students per trustee (and schools)
Sunshine Coast	7	Total: 27,739	3,963	3,116	445 (1.6)
Sunshine Coast	5	Total: 27,739	5,548	3,116	623 (2.2)

Figure 2: 7 or 5 trustees at large