

HALL OF FLAME



PHOTO BY ROBB MAGLEY

Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue Chief Jamie Holmes, right, and Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District board chair Rollie Cook tour the island's future fire hall under construction on Lower Ganges Road Wednesday, Sept. 3. The new hall is being built to heightened "post-disaster" standards, designed to remain operational as a crisis response centre for island emergency services even after an earthquake. Holmes said work was on track for completion by the end of next year.

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Royal Roads UNIVERSITY

HOUSING

Hundreds registered STRs

Final summer for non-resident operators on Salt Spring

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Early data has started to trickle in on short-term rental (STR) properties, as owners and operators have been complying with B.C. legislation requiring they sign up with a provincial registry.

And while a full tally of the vacation rental market in the Gulf Islands likely remains incomplete, Islands Trust officials are slowly getting a better understanding of those operators who have opted to play by the B.C. government's new rules — at least to some extent, according to bylaw compliance and enforcement manager Warren Dingman, who prepared a briefing for an upcoming Trust Council meeting.

Delays with updating registry data are likely understating numbers, according to briefing documents shared with the Trust's Executive Committee Wednesday, Sept. 3, and many of the 667 listings that appear have yet to report any nights where guests stayed in July — or in previous months, according to the briefing — meaning those properties will not be listed in the data portal as "active."

But despite just 18 of Salt Spring's 226 registered STRs considered active, islanders can be assured there were more than 18 properties rented in the month of July. Dingman noted many of the property listings can be found on sites like AirBnB, with calendars indicating the accommodations could be — and likely have been — booked.

Salt Spring had the most individual platform listings, followed by Pender Island with 124, Hornby with 98, Galiano with 61 and Gabriola with 55. Mayne Island had 51 and Denman 33, leaving the remainder of islands (excluding Bowen Island, which reports separately) in single digits.

The total number of registered properties exceeded the number of host names and addresses, most notably on Salt Spring, where 172 names were linked to those 226 properties, and on Pender Island, with 86

names for those 124. That could result from multiple units on a single property, or multiple properties from a single owner — the latter of which will be unlawful on Salt Spring starting Nov. 1, as that island's Local Trust Committee (LTC) this year opted into Bill 35's principal residency requirement.

Bill 35 was passed to discourage residential housing from being used for tourist accommodation purposes, according to the province, and contained an opportunity for individual island LTCs to opt into a requirement that rental operators live on the property being rented.

At the time the briefing was prepared in late August, just 22 properties across the Islands Trust area have been taken down for having an invalid provincial registration. Dingman told trustees last week that the data portal presented some challenges for bylaw staff,

because since the Islands Trust does not issue business licences, the portal does not allow staff to send notices of non-compliance or takedown requests.

"[And] even though we do not issue business licences, 36 operators report having such licences by providing a variety of numbers," according to the briefing, "including the Data Portal Registry number, PIDs, PST numbers, or other numbers that I have been unable to identify."

Some of the operators are listing these numbers as business licences on their platforms, according to Dingman, who characterized the problem mostly as an inconvenience.

"It's just that within the data registry portal itself, the buttons that are there to send takedown notices are only available to those jurisdictions that issue business licences," Dingman told trustees Sept. 3. "I don't see why they can't change that, and we can certainly send that feedback to the ministry."

In the meantime, he said, when issues of non-compliance are found, those would simply be forwarded to the provincial short-term rental enforcement unit.

The briefing also summarized the number and type of bylaw enforcement files so far this quarter — from July 1 through Aug. 20. Across the Islands Trust there were 648 open files, with the largest number of them (165) related to STRs. Of those 165, 85 were on Salt Spring Island, with all other islands having fewer than 20 — most in single digits.

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WARREN DINGMAN

Bylaw compliance and enforcement manager, Islands Trust

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SOCIAL ISSUES

Indigenous leader at next Forum

Ginger Gosnell-Myers at ArtSpring on Sept. 18

BY DRIFTWOOD STAFF

One of Canada's most influential and action-oriented Indigenous leaders is the next guest of the Salt Spring Forum.

Ginger Gosnell-Myers is a member of the Nisga'a and Kwakwaka'wakw nations and was the City of Vancouver's first Indigenous relations manager. According to the Forum, "She played an instrumental role in Vancouver becoming the world's first

official City of Reconciliation and to its Canada 150 celebrations paying homage to Indigenous history and culture."

Her leadership also led to the city recognizing and implementing 28 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and its incorporating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into all aspects of city planning.

For 20 years Gosnell-Myers has researched the experiences of Indigenous peoples living in urban settings, breaking down common misconceptions about them.

She is currently a fellow at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University and is also chair of the Greenpeace Canada board.

The discussion with Gosnell-Myers — titled Urban First Nations: Decolonizing Canada's Cities — takes place on Thursday, Sept. 18 at 7:30 p.m. at ArtSpring.

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