



**REPORT TO THE ELECTORAL AREA SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2017**

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**SUBJECT**     **Consideration to Approve the Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan**  
**ISSUE**

To consider whether to approve the Experience the Gulf Islands (ETGI) Concept Plan.

**BACKGROUND**

In March 2016, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board approved a Community Works Fund (CWF) request for \$60,000 (\$35,000 from Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) CWF and \$25,000 from Salt Spring Island (SSI) CWF) to hire a consultant to prepare the Concept Plan. ETGI is an integrated geotourism, community and economic development and transportation initiative of the SGI Community Economic Sustainability Commission (CESC) and the SSI Community Economic Development Commission (CEDC) working together. The two Commissions have jointly developed an Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal Document and Map.

The ETGI Concept Plan was to validate, then fully develop the scope, vision, goals, partnerships, themes, overall program direction, experiences and infrastructure identified in the Experience the Gulf Islands proposal document; rationalize and integrate the ideas in the proposal document into a solid inter-island geotourism program; prioritize actions and infrastructure; and establish a sound foundation and requirements for an implementation plan (Appendix A).

This report outlines the results of this project.

**DISCUSSION**

ETGI is an inter-island community tourism initiative for the SGI (Galiano, Mayne, North and South Pender, Saturna) and SSI, to develop and promote authentic experiences for residents and visitors to the area.

Designed to build from and support existing island tourism and community development initiatives, ETGI represents an innovative, broader strategy that looks to coordinate and enhance community tourism planning across the region as a whole (i.e., both the SSI and SGI electoral areas); explicitly recognizes and seeks to realize the larger social, environmental and economic contributions of community tourism; and looks to build an archipelago-wide mobility network and organization for developing the unique experience that is the SGI.

**ETGI Vision**

The Concept Plan articulates a shared and attainable vision of the future. The Vision maintains the preserve and protect ethic that is the foundation of all planning on the islands, and the prime operational directive of the Islands Trust.

*An accessible, interconnected archipelago of living, working communities in the Salish Sea, so close to major urban centres and yet worlds apart. A special place in every season where residents and visitors alike continue to learn about and experience the diverse places, people, arts & culture, histories and conservation ethic that makes the islands unique.*

**ETGI Goals**

The Concept Plan outlines five core community goals which were developed and prioritized by project stakeholders and participants. The goals were first developed through the ETGI Proposal and refined during the Concept Plan process. They were also influenced by, and closely align with, existing planning and development objectives found in plans and strategies from area

governments (Islands Trust, CRD, Official Community Plans) and other community strategies and initiatives (e.g., community economic development strategies).

The goals were used to evaluate and organize community tourism opportunities and ideas into a more structured and phased timeline. In time, they can be used to monitor the implementation of ETGI as measures are identified to track them.

- Increase local economic diversity and year-round employment opportunities.
- Build sustainable, low-carbon, inter-island and on-island transportation connections and linkages that limit or lower on-island car traffic.
- Enhance and expand inter-community, organizational and government partnerships.
- Expand enriching experiences of our island communities, histories, cultures, food, arts, and natural environment.
- Support and promote inter-island and on-island environmental stewardship and protection initiatives.

### **ETGI Development Process**

The Concept Plan marks the second step in a three-step initiative. The first piece of work was completed in 2014 with the preparation of the ETGI Proposal document. The Proposal introduced the experience tourism concept (which had been used to support a similar project in the Lower Mainland called Experience the Fraser) and established ETGI planning teams on each island who were involved in its creation. The second step, the Concept Plan, refines the Proposal based on expanded community, partner and stakeholder input, to create a more structured and strategic plan. The third step will involve putting the medium-term projects the Concept Plan identifies into action.

**Figure: Experience the Gulf Islands – a three-step process**



### **ETGI Concept Plan**

With funding from CRD and the support of a consulting team led by EcoPlan, the project was led by local residents who were organized into ETGI teams on each of the islands. Other Gulf Islands community tourism stakeholders also participated in the development of the plan.

The Concept Plan provides:

- A summary profile of the SGI and existing community tourism in the area.
- A guiding, shared, inter-island vision for the future of community tourism in the area.
- Community-defined and prioritized tourism development goals to help guide activities to achieve the inter-island tourism vision.
- A community tourism strategy, with short, medium and long-term actions identified.
- A “long-list” of preliminary community tourism opportunities identified by participants through the project that could be implemented or further developed in the longer-term.
- An overview of next steps required to move the Concept Plan towards implementation.

The initiative is supported by parallel processes to improve mobility to and between the islands (CRD Regional Trails Strategy, Integrated Service Review [community bus & inter-island passenger ferry]), as well as studies that support more detailed development of existing and potential experiences (e.g. SGI Educational Assessment).

The Concept Plan was presented at a community forum on October 17, 2016 and general support was received from participants.

At the February 16, 2017 SSI CEDC meeting the Concept Plan was presented to the Commission, and at its meeting of March 16, 2017 the SSI CEDC passed a motion of support:

*“That the Salt Spring Island Community Economic Development Commission support in principle the Experience the Gulf Islands (ETGI) Concept Plan, dated October 2016, recognizing that the ETGI Concept Plan will be optimized when satisfactory inter-island water transport is developed and linked to a safe bike and pedestrian trail system on Salt Spring and the other islands; and the Commission further advises that it is necessary to document all of the features of the Gulf Islands that are attractive to visitors.”*

At the March 9, 2017 SGI Community Economic Sustainability Commission meeting, the Commission considered the Concept Plan and passed at motion of support:

*“The SGI Community Economic Sustainability Commission endorses the Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan dated October, 2016 and requests the Electoral Areas Services Committee recommend adoption by the CRD Board.”*

## **ALTERNATIVE**

That the Electoral Area Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan be approved.
2. That the report be referred back to staff for further review based on Committee direction.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### Financial Implications

The implementation of the strategies outlined in ETGI Concept Plan will require a combination of CRD service funds, community based funds and funding from grant opportunities. Strategy 1-A calls for the establishment of an inter-island ETGI Committee to support coordination and ongoing direction setting and ETGI implementation. The organizational structure and funding mechanism has yet to be determined. Once established the Committee will identify the timing and funding of the Concept Plan strategies. The strategies directly aligned to CRD service areas are:

- Strategy 6-A – Coordinate with parallel planning initiatives (e.g., Regional Trails Plan and Transportation Services Study)
- Strategy 6-B – Continue developing local trail network and connections to regional trail network

The SSI/SGI Regional Trail plan is being prepared and a draft should be considered by the public this fall. Funding of the regional trails will depend upon the detailed trail design and implementation plan to be developed once the plan is completed. A new funding source will also be required to implement a passenger-only small craft linkages ferry (Strategy 6-D).

### Social Implications

ETGI is a community-tourism initiative to enrich the lives of residents and visitors through outdoor recreation and direct contact with the land and water, communities, people, events and heritage of the Gulf Islands.

Environmental Implications

The Concept Plan identifies the need for sustainable, low-carbon transportation infrastructure to support the economic development initiatives in the Plan and this infrastructure will provide opportunities for improved active mode share such as walking and cycling, support community bus and inter-island passenger-only ferry services, resulting in reduced vehicular traffic on the islands and lower vehicle emissions.

**CONCLUSION**

The ETGI Concept Plan refined the ETGI Proposal and based upon expanded community, partner and stakeholder input to create a more structured strategic plan. The Concept Plan provides a summary profile of the SGI and existing community tourism; a guiding, shared, inter-island vision for the future of community tourism; a community-defined and prioritized tourism development goals; a community tourism strategy, with short, medium and long-term actions; a “long-list” of preliminary community tourism opportunities and an overview of next steps required to move the Concept Plan towards implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Electoral Area Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan be approved.

Submitted by:	June Klassen, MCIP, RPP, Manager Service Delivery Southern Gulf Islands
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P.Eng., MBA, General Manager, Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

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Attachment: Appendix A – Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan