Peaks Island Independence Committee : IIC Newsletter, February 2006

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PETITION SIGNATURES VERIFIED! PEAKS LOOKS AHEAD TO NEXT STEPS-
Thank you to everyone who signed petitions requesting a public hearing with the city of Portland to discuss the pros and cons of self governance for Peaks Island.

As all of you know and I must say, PI. does not have 1109 registered voters, as the city claims—that is more than all the year round people on the island - man, woman, and child. The 2000 census shows a total population of 925. The city says they have 208 inactive voters that haven’t voted in many years—I say add another 132 to that—for a total of 340—mostly those who have moved away, but also include 8 Cushing Islanders that are not in the secession territory, eleven deceased and 2 that are listed twice. That brings the total down to 769 actual registered voters.

The city clerk has certified 595 of the signatures, which exceeds the required 50%. It is significant that about 76% of active voters have elected to explore the possibility of PI. separating from Portland and becoming our own town.

The IIC also wants to thank the 312 year round taxpayers who live here part time that support our effort to explore the same as above.

Judy Piawlock

For more information, to comment, or to submit questions contact Communications committee Chair Howard Pedlikin at 766-0067 or at Howardiiic@mainetrr.com.

PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCES SCHOOL STAFF PLANS TO REMAIN EMPLOYED BY CITY

In a surprise announcement at the Education Committee public Forum on 1/12, Peaks Island School principal Kelly Hasson announced that school staff will not work for the Town of Peaks Island, should secession occur.

In published news reports after the meeting, Principal Hasson stated that the staff does not want to lose salary, benefits, seniority, and retirement that they currently have with the City.

IIC Education Committee chair Mike Langella responds, "I think that announcement is premature. We haven’t yet had discussions with school staff about these issues. Peaks Islanders strongly value our school, and I’m confident that the new town will offer competitive salary and comprehensive benefit packages to attract the best staff. Peaks Island children deserve the best."

Nancy Jordan, Town Treasurer and former School Board member for Long Island expressed surprise and disappointment with the Peaks Island staff response. "We had more than 60 applicants for our two teaching positions," she states, "We implement equal or better contract terms than the City of Portland."

The IIC recommends that all parties keep an open mind at this stage of the process. IIC Education Committee member Lynne Richard explains, "We appreciate school staff’s loyalty to their present employer, the City of Portland. We believe, however, that working for the Town of Peaks Island will present some exciting and attractive opportunities for staff to consider."

HELP! The IIC hopes to continue providing information to all Peaks Islanders, via frequent mailings such as this. To keep costs down we have purchased a bulk-mailing permit. You can help in two ways:

1. send us your email address to receive the newsletter electronically, and/or
2. send us a donation! Any amount will help. Send to: IIC, PO Box 154, Peaks Island.
THE IIC ONLY WANTS TO HEAR FROM PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT SECESSION, RIGHT?

No. It is very important that the IIC hear all points of view. We are charged with investigating secession, and we need to understand all of the possible outcomes and repercussions. We welcome all information, whether delivered personally at a meeting, on the boat, or by email or mail. We hold monthly meetings that are open to all so that there is a formal opportunity to contribute, but we encourage informal contributions, too.

RECENTLY, THE PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCED THAT THE TEACHERS WOULD NOT WORK FOR THE TOWN OF PEAKS ISLAND. WILL WE LOSE OTHER PORTLAND CITY EMPLOYEES SUCH AS THOSE WITH PUBLIC WORKS?

We believe that announcement was made without full knowledge of the issues. The secession committee will work to better communicate with city employees working on Peaks to assure them that their jobs will still exist after Peaks Island becomes a Town. We will need teachers, public works, fire, police, library services, etc. The IIC will recommend that the Town of Peaks Island meet or exceed current salary and benefit packages, and that working conditions are maintained or improved.

TAXES ARE REALLY A STATE PROBLEM. HOW CAN SECESSION SOLVE THAT?

It's true that our secession can't solve the state tax problem. However, we believe that the ability to determine our own expenses can reduce our local burden. Presently, 40% of our tax dollars fund city services off island. Most people don't mind paying a fair share for those services, but the latest increases have placed an unfair burden on Peaks.

WHAT HAVE THE CITY OFFICIALS OF PORTLAND DONE TO CAUSE SUCH STRONG ANTI-CITY SENTIMENT?

The IIC is not anti-Portland. We recognize that the city has made their best efforts to balance the needs of the City and the needs of Peaks Island. However, we feel that those efforts have fallen short and that local rule can better meet the needs of our citizens.

We use the analogy of a young adult moving out of their parents' home. There comes a time when it makes sense for that young adult to strike out on his or her own, to more fully develop their potential. That doesn't mean they hate their parents, it's just time for independence. We would like to maintain a close relationship with the City of Portland; they have much to offer if they so choose.

WOULDN'T THE TOWN OF PEAKS ISLAND JUST DUPLICATE THE SERVICES OF PORTLAND? WHY MAKE A CHANGE?

Of course, if we didn't think we could improve our present government and services, there would be no need to pursue independence. At this point in the process, the IIC is researching the actual costs of running the island. We need to understand expenses and income before we can plan additions, deletions, or changes in programs and services. The numbers are encouraging so far- it seems we can afford to run a top-notch town while keeping property taxes in check. Once all the numbers are known, it will be time for the creative exercise of envisioning operations and management of the Town of Peaks Island.

THE STATE IS MOVING TOWARD MORE REGIONALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT. ISN'T SECESSION CONTRARY TO THOSE GOALS?

We think islands can work together as a type of region to meet our sometimes unique needs. We could certainly consolidate for purchasing, some services, and sharing of resources.
WHY DID THE IIC HIRE A LOBBYIST?
During Peaks Island’s last secession attempt, the city hired a lobbyist who succeeded in defeating, by one vote in the Senate, Peaks Island’s right to negotiate terms with Portland and to vote on separation from Portland. This time we want to be on at least equal footing with the City, whose lobbyist will be arguing against Peaks Island’s independence.

IIC FORUM PLANS
IIC Committees will soon be ready to present findings to Peaks Island residents. To reduce the number of meetings, we’ll be combining some topics. Watch for posted schedules for the following:
* Land Use
* Water/Wastewater
* Public Safety:
  Police and Fire
* Public Works
  Harbor Services
* Social Services
* Government
  Finance

STEPS TO SECESSION
1. PETITION FOR PUBLIC HEARING
2. PUBLIC HEARING - CITY AND PEAKS
3. ADVISORY REFERENDUM ON PEAKS
4. ADVISORY REFERENDUM - CITY (OPTIONAL)
5. CITY COUNCIL VOTE
6. MEDIAION
7. LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL
8. ISLAND REFERENDUM (OPTIONAL)

ARE PROPERTY TAXES THE REASON BEHIND THIS SECESSION EFFORT?
It’s true that the IIC formed after the City Council’s refusal to delay the latest property tax increase. But, it was fueled as much by the Council’s behavior at that meeting as by the tax decision - behavior that underscored the differences between Peaks Island and the City.

Recall that, after that Council meeting, dozens of residents attended meetings at Brackett Church to brainstorm methods to respond to increased taxes and to keep our island viable. Other groups were created there, too - including the Peaks Island Tax Assistance group.

There are many, though, who have hoped for another opportunity to consider self-governance since the last attempt failed. Those IIC members bring the benefit of experience to this effort. At the same time, there were important lessons to be learned from the past; including the potential for division between neighbors if we’re not careful.

After Peaks Island becomes a town, we will still have to pay taxes, but we can choose the amount of taxes and the way it is spent. We seek to control our own destiny; to make choices about our schools, our public works, our police, fire and rescue, land use, and other important local issues. Secession is the process; we are seeking the result - self-governance.

DOES THE IIC RECOMMEND CLOSING THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
No!! A recent article in the Forecaster reported that, but the reporter did not check the facts. Our school is not too expensive to run, and we do not support sending Island youngsters to school on the mainland.

IIC COMMITTEE CHAIRS
Mike Richards, Moderator
Judy Plawlock, Treasurer
Christina Foster, Secretary
Mike Langella, Education
Art Astarita, Land Use
Howard Pedlikin, Finance
Mary Jane Burnette, Government
Linda Capone-Newton, Government
Cevia & George Rosol, Public Services
Jeff Robbins, Public Works
Betty Heller, Fire Services
Michele Tranes, Police
Marjorie Phyfe, Library, Social Services
Pete Mayo, Harbor Services
Howard Pedlikin, Communications
Robert Stek, Fundraising
Frequently Asked Questions
Answered by the Island Independence Committee

**After the last attempt, didn't the Legislature pass laws to make it illegal for Peaks to secede?**

They made the process difficult, but not illegal. The new laws created a process by which the City and the secession territory must carefully research the issue, and provide for public input. In the end, after exhausting all efforts to come to a mutual agreement with the City of Portland, Peaks can submit a bill for vote by the Legislature that would make us a town.

**Last time, the secession process was very divisive. How can this time differ?**

The IIC is highly aware of this, and we address it every time we come together. We recognize that there are many views on all Peaks Island issues, and we absolutely do not want the secession movement to cause long-term divisions between neighbors and friends.

Our guiding principle is that we all want what's best for Peaks. Whatever the outcome of this movement, we strive for the goal of improving Peaks Island. If we all respect each other's right to have and voice our own opinion, we can avoid negative judgements of each other.

**Who would run the town of Peaks Island?**

Residents will have the opportunity to decide which form of government would best suit Peaks. Other small towns use Boards of Selectpersons, Town Councils, or a Town Manager.

Peaks Island has an enormous amount of talent, dedication, creativity, humanitarianism, and intelligence among its residents. The IIC believes that we could be a model small town.

**We have trouble getting along now; wouldn't self-governance create more problems?**

We believe that ownership of the decision-making process will allow us to solve problems more quickly and with solutions tailored to our specific needs. Democracy means that sometimes an individual will be in the majority and sometimes they won't, but we are excited by the possibility of having that majority consist of Peaks Islanders.

**Meetings:**

First and Third Thursday of each month, usually at the community center at 7pm.

**For more information, to comment, or to submit questions contact Communications committee Chair Howard Pedlikin at 766-0067 or at Howardic@maine.rr.com.**

**What are the odds that we will be successful?**

If we are thorough, and if the majority of Peaks Island residents support the idea of secession, we believe we can make a successful case at the state level. It will take hard work and the services of a lobbyist, but we strongly believe we can prevail.