

Councillor Harold Steves, Chair of Richmond Council Committee of Parks, Rec. & Culture,

Dear Harold,

Telephone Conversation with Janet Mason, Provincial Toponymist

I spoke with Ms. Janet Mason, Provincial Toponymist with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands in Victoria this morning, Jan. 24, 2006, about the possibility of re-naming Don Island in honour of Jinzaburo Oikawa.

She said that my letter of Jan. 17, 2006 was the first formal communication on this matter that she had received. She did not keep track of inquiries by phone, fax or e-mail as she had many such communications and they were too numerous to record.

From her comments, I concluded the following...

1. It is very difficult to re-name geographic features that are already named unless there is some urgent reason to do so. For example, if a name includes a racial slur or insults a community or family, this would constitute urgency.
2. It would be easier to have names accepted for geographic features that do not have a name as yet, e.g., the channel between Don and Lion Islands.
3. The history of the geographic feature, i.e. in this case the islands, should be included in the application stating the compelling reasons for the name change or first naming.
4. The local community, in this case, the community of present and past users of the islands and surrounding waterways would be the authoritative groups with regard to historic local names. In the case of the islands, any mariner's or fishermen's groups which plied local waters, on the one hand, and First Nations bands which made use of the islands, on the other would have to be asked to state in writing that there was no evidence of prior names given to the channel between the islands AND whether or not they would object to a specific name being given.
5. She suggested that the GVRD had a process by which land was declared park land and so would be likely to have examined the historical land use of the islands.

I don't know if this is adding any information to your re-naming/naming project or not. I just wanted to bring you up to speed on what I had learned from Ms. Mason, Provincial Toponymist.

From where I stand, it would seem that it would be easier to select a geographic feature that does not yet have a name, such as the channel between the two islands. The existence of river charts with Don and Lion Islands marked on them would be another reason for objections to name changes.

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