



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

DATE OF REPORT March 20, 2024
MEETING TYPE & DATE Committee of the Whole of April 10, 2024
FROM: Economic Development Division
Strategic Services Department
SUBJECT: Vancouver Island University Agriculture Programming Development
2024/2025 Funding
FILE: 6750-20 AG 2023-2025 VIU Ag Development Pgm

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Agriculture Development Program at Vancouver Island University, Cowichan campus and seek approval to continue to fund a part-time position in support of their existing curriculum project for 2024 and 2025.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

That it be recommended to the Board;

1. That the CVRD enter into a two-year contribution agreement for the years 2024 and 2025 with Vancouver Island University for funding of a part-time Agricultural Coordinator; and
2. That \$20,000 be allocated in two annual installments of \$10,000 each from the Function 121 – Economic Development Division 2024 and 2025 budgets to support the Vancouver Island University, Cowichan Campus, part-time Agricultural Coordinator position.

BACKGROUND

On April 12, 2023, Nancy Hamilton, Administrative Coordinator and Dr. Jenny Horn, Agriculture Education Consultant, Vancouver Island University (VIU), Cowichan campus, presented to the Committee of the Whole on the Agriculture Development Program. They requested \$8,500 in funding from the CVRD in 2023 to contribute to a part-time Agricultural Coordinator position to support the existing Micro-Credential curriculum project as well as ongoing program development in the Cowichan region, which requires establishing and maintaining network partnerships, seeking funding opportunities, and then implementing/piloting the programs. It is envisioned that this Project Worker position would become cost recovery by 2025.

On May 10, 2023, with resolution 23-242, the Board approved \$8,500 to be allocated from the Function 121 – Economic Development Division 2023 budget to support the VIU Cowichan Campus to hire a part-time Agricultural Coordinator position, and that the CVRD enter into a one-year contribution agreement with VIU regarding funding for the part-time Agricultural Coordinator, with consideration around funding for 2024 and 2025 to be brought forward as part of the 2024 budget process.

The CVRD entered into a one-year financial contribution agreement with VIU (see Attachment A), and the requirements of this agreement have been fulfilled and exceeded, per the previous staff report.

ANALYSIS

The intent of the request to extend funding is to allow VIU Cowichan to continue to build on their 2023 successes and investments in the development of agricultural programming to continue to build the agricultural micro-credential certificate programs, and begin to offer programming in a more comprehensive and systematic way. It is envisioned that by 2025, the programming will be self-sustaining, with participant registrations covering the costs of the program offerings.

VIU has already advertised programming for the fall and winter of 2024-2025:

- Sustainable soils management
- Agro-Ecological Systems Management
- Organic Vegetable Seed Production

These courses will be offered over 8 to 10 sessions each, and feature a combination of online learning and in-person field days. A conveniently located local farm has been identified as a site for the in-person days for these classes to be offered.

It is anticipated that for 2024 and 2025, the success metrics would be the same as for the 2023 contribution agreement.

A major piece of the overall funding puzzle for this initiative is to support the staffing required to coordinate the multiple activities involved in developing and offering this type of continuing education programming. The request to the CVRD for \$10,000 financial contribution to the staffing costs is meant to help to address some of these challenges.

Staff feel that this is a great example of where incremental local government funding can lead to significant positive impacts on local agriculture, as demonstrated by progress achieved since 2023. Therefore, staff recommend that the CVRD enter into a 2-year contribution agreement, for \$10,000 each year, to support this initiative and investment in the agricultural sector within the CVRD.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

For 2024 and 2025, the \$10,000 annual contribution from the Function 121 – Economic Development Division existing budget is subject to VIU meeting success and impact indicators. For 2023, these included:

- Provide an annual report and presentation on project progress to the CVRD Committee of the Whole;
- Number of annual networking/partnership meetings hosted in the CVRD: 2- 4;
- Continue as the lead institution of the Agriculture Special Interest Group with the Continuing Education and Training Association of BC; and,
- Number of grant applications submitted to support the development and implementation of the suite of regenerative agriculture curriculum: 2-4, or until the curriculum is fully developed/implemented.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Economic Development Cowichan assists in promoting the VIU Agricultural Programs through its website, newsletter, social media channels, and with support from regional agricultural stakeholders.

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Support for developing the agricultural sector was a component of the EDC Strategic Plan for 2018 to 2022. In the development of the EDC Strategic Plan 2024-2029, agriculture continues to be seen as one of the economic strengths of the region.

Supporting food security and building on the traditional industries of the Cowichan Valley were part of the CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2022. In the CVRD's Corporate Strategic Plan for 2023-2026, the emphasis is on innovation in agriculture and other foundational industries of the Cowichan Valley.

Referred to (upon completion):

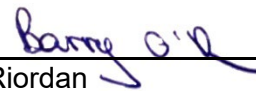
- ☐ Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- ☒ Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- ☐ Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- ☐ Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- ☒ Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Clayton Postings
General Manager, Strategic Services
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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Financial Considerations:

☒ Corporate Officer

☒ Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Financial Contribution Agreement with VIU, 2023