



STAFF REPORT TO THE BOARD

DATE OF REPORT May 10, 2024
MEETING TYPE & DATE Regular Session Board of May 22, 2024
FROM: Executive Office
SUBJECT: Advocacy to Senior Levels of Government
FILE:

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information with regard to items proposed to be advanced as meeting requests or potentially as late resolutions for the 2024 Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

That it be recommended to the Board that the advocacy actions outlined in the report dated May 22, 2024 be endorsed, as directed.

BACKGROUND

On April 24, 2024 at the Committee of the Whole meeting, direction was received from the committee on topics for staff to report back for consideration as advocacy items for the 2024 Union of British Columbia (UBCM) Convention.

1. Approving Authority for Regional Districts

Approving Officers are statutory decision-makers, appointed under the *Land Title Act*, who ensure that proposed subdivision applications comply with relevant legislation and local bylaws. The Provincial Cabinet appoints independent Approving Officers who work closely with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to rule on subdivision proposals outside municipal boundaries and within regional districts. The legislation does provide an opportunity for the BC Government to grant a regional district approving authority for subdivisions. Staff would caution that although there may be an expectation that this authority may assist to streamline the subdivision process, the responsibilities to liaise with Provincial agencies and local First Nations are extensive and any benefit in reduced timelines would be difficult to achieve.

Approving Officer approval is required for:

- Conventional subdivision plans
- Bare land strata plans
- Phased strata plans
- Strata plans of separate parcels
- Shared interest in parcels
- Air space plans
- Leases longer than three years

Approving Officers consider a wide range of factors when reviewing a subdivision application, such as:

1. Access, land use, lot size and shape
2. Physical, social and economic considerations
3. Development cost charges and park land
4. Works and services
5. Approvals from other agencies
6. Public interests

No recommended action: Prior to considering any request to appoint a dedicated CVRD Approving Officer, there are significant resourcing implications and costs to consider including additional staffing resource requirements, office resources, contingency funding to account for legal matters, establishment of a new service as well as a fee structure.

2. Legislative Reform Initiative

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) continues to lead the Legislative Reform Initiative with the goal of reaching agreement with the Province to update the *Local Government Act (LGA)*. A proposal for targeted work is currently underway and it is recommended that the CVRD Board consider writing a letter of support for this work to encourage both the UBCM and Province to provide financial support and make the necessary staffing commitment to move this forward.

Recommended action: A draft letter of support be brought back to the Board for endorsement and that staff request that CVRD officials be invited to attend if the RDN facilitates a meeting at UBCM

3. Private Managed Forest Lands (PMFL) and Watershed Protection

The CVRD has been advocating for the Province to attend to issues related to PMFL regularly through letters and UBCM advocacy, independently and in partnership with other local governments. It has been expressed that forest management practices on PMFL effect downstream communities and can negatively impacts the quality and quantity of water and ecosystem resilience to the impacts of climate change.

In response to the UBCM 2023 CVRD resolution requesting that the Province review taxation and cost recovery from PMFL to support watershed management and stewardship, the Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship and Ministry of Forests (MoF) responded that, a Watershed Security Strategy (WSS) was currently underway to address impacts on drinking water quality and quantity from timber harvesting and would be applicable to both private and Crown lands. It was also stated that after the WSS was completed, MoF intends begin Phase 2 of the PMFL Review, which would look at opportunities to ensure environmental impacts were minimized.

As noted on the Engage BC website, the WSS is expected to be implemented in winter 2024:
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/watershedsecurity/>

Throughout 2024, staff have been negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Mosaic Forest Management Corporation, who manage forestry operations on privately held lands

in the CVRD. This MOU will result in a staff working group with a variety of potential topics for discussion and collaboration including watershed restoration, monitoring, risk assessment, mitigation activities, access and carbon-related initiatives.

Recommended action: To request a meeting at the 2024 UBCM Convention with the Minister of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship and the Minister of Forests. The meeting purpose would be to provide an update on the critical nature of regional concerns pertaining to watershed security and to request an update on the WSS and Phase 2 PMFL Review, with other Vancouver Island Regional Districts to be invited to attend.

4. Increased enforcement by Ministry of Environment for environmental infractions

The Ministry of Environment (MOE) and Climate Change Strategy employs Environmental Protection Officers in the Compliance and Environmental Enforcement Branch of the Environmental Protection Division. This team is managed by an Executive Director with staff throughout regional offices such as Nanaimo. The Province maintains a Natural Resources Compliance and Enforcement Database that contains information on orders and inspections, available at <https://nrce.gov.bc.ca/>

There are limited resources to address regulatory compliance issues for any public agency. The committee had previously discussed concerns with the level of enforcement MOE is resourcing for the Cowichan Valley and there may be several advocacy options if there are continued concerns with timeliness of enforcement actions and the level of resourcing currently being provided by MOE:

Recommended Action:

1. Request meeting with senior Provincial agency staff at UBCM to confirm actions regarding areas of specific concern.

Other Options for Consideration:

2. Request meeting with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy to highlight areas of specific concern, focusing on watershed health, stewardship and protection, Board strategic priorities.
3. Draft late resolution to be submitted by June 15 to UBCM (*reserved for items unforeseen prior to the February AVICC deadline for resolutions*).

5. Funding for Shelter Space and Emergency Weather Response

The 2023 Homelessness Count for the Cowichan Valley conducted by the Cowichan Housing Association indicates that the number of homeless in the region has risen by 50% over the past six years. A recent review of active caseloads of the outreach teams in the community has indicated a count of more than 450 individuals who are without a home in the region.

On November 29, 2023, the CVRD Board, designated the Heritage Hall at the Cowichan Community Centre (CCC) as an overnight warming space for the unhoused until March 31, 2024. This decision was made at the local level in response to the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA 2023)* which requires specific emergency plans and responses to mitigate the impacts of an emergency on vulnerable populations. Despite a sector-qualified service provider (Lookout Housing and Health Society) being contracted to operate the warming

center and additional security, a marked increase in public safety incidents, including assault, property damage, theft, and arson, have been recorded on the CVRD property and those adjacent.

A consultant is current working for the CVRD to identify an alternative Emergency Warming Center location for winter 2024/2025 by the end of June, 2024. A letter is also currently being drafted to be sent to the Minister of Housing, on behalf of the Mayors in the region to advocate for funding to purchase a site for this purpose.

Recommended actions:

1. Chair to sign Mayor's advocacy letter as proposed, on behalf of the CVRD Board.
2. Request a UBCM Ministers Meeting with the Minister of Housing and the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness to discuss warming center funding, with all CVRD Mayors to be invited.

ANALYSIS

The UBCM annual convention is one avenue for the Board to consider advocacy efforts for both local and regional issues. The deadline for meeting requests with Minister's is June 21, 2024.

There are a variety of other ways in which the Board could advance advocacy activities including:

- Meeting requests with senior government officials throughout the year, potentially more convenient with close proximity to Victoria.
- Establishing regular meetings with the local MLA and MP to discuss advocacy interests and needs, to seek advice and align strategies.
- Work to establish Government to Government Protocols with all First Nations in the region to in part better understand and find synergies for advocacy efforts, for instance regarding watershed stewardship and protection.
- Engaging sub-regionally (such as with coastal communities or those on Vancouver Island) to coordinate efforts of mutual interest such as regarding Private Managed Forest Lands.

Summary of advocacy efforts underway or completed:

- **New Weir on the Cowichan River:** 2023 joint CVRD/Cowichan Tribes meetings with the Premier and work through the Cowichan Watershed Board supported advocacy to secure an additional \$14 million to fund the new weir on the Cowichan River to replace the structure currently owned and operated by Paper Excellence.
- **Emergency Management Act, new requirements for Local Government:** staff and elected officials have been engaging in sessions hosted by UBCM and the Province to provide input to the Province regarding new requirements for local governments, which will significantly increase the responsibilities and workloads on local authorities to manage all phases of emergencies. The Comox Valley Regional District is proposing to write a letter and request a UBCM Minister's meeting to discuss funding needs of local

governments to implement the new requirements and we have so far indicated a willingness to collaborate and support this effort.

- **South Cowichan Governance:** successful advocacy and an application resulted in a funding announcement at UBCM 2023 for \$60,000 to support a Community Issues Assessment for South Cowichan.
- **Road Safety in Rural Areas:** Prioritized by the Electoral Area Services Committee and directed by the Board, a Minister's meeting will be requested to discuss safety concerns and need for improvement in the village commercial core of Shawnigan Lake.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Travel and meeting costs are covered through Board and/or Director expenses.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

The Board Strategic Plan includes a list of seven advocacy items, the majority of which are reflected in this report.

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*)

Prepared by:



Danielle Myles Wilson
Chief Administrative Officer

Reviewed by:

Not Applicable
Not Applicable

Not Applicable
Not Applicable

Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Board:

Resolution:

☒ Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

☒ Chief Financial Officer

Chief Administrative Officer's Comments / Concurrence

Not Applicable

Not Applicable

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – N/A

Attachment B – N/A