

DATE: July 9, 2020**FILE:** 5280-02**TO:** Chair and Directors
Regional District Board**FROM:** Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer*R. Dyson***RE: Air Quality Update****Purpose**

To provide the Board with an update about the creation of the Airshed Roundtable including a list of proposed invites (organizations/groups) and a recommended process to include members of the general public.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the Board receive this report as information;

AND THAT the proposed Airshed Roundtable invite list and the process to recruit members of the general public included in staff report dated July 9, 2020, be endorsed by the Board;

AND FINALLY THAT staff be directed to send out invitations to the Airshed Roundtable.

Executive Summary

- A regional framework to address air quality issues in the Comox Valley was developed in late 2019. The framework includes an Air Quality Coordinator, Steering Committee and Airshed Roundtable (“Roundtable”).
- In May 2020, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) hired Pinna Sustainability to support the project as the Air Quality Coordinator. This position is funded under the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) service.
- In June 2020, staff and Pinna Sustainability hosted the first meeting of the Steering Committee, which included representation from the City of Courtenay, Village of Cumberland, Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy (MOE), Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), Island Health and Vancouver Island University. Due to resource constraints, the Town of Comox has informed staff that they are unable to participate in the Steering Committee at this time.
- A high-level project plan has been created for the next three years. Some of the key milestones include: establishing the Roundtable, developing and implementing a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy and creating an Evaluation and Monitoring Framework to track progress over time.
- In July/August 2020 staff would like to send out invitations for the Roundtable. A proposed invite list is included in this report for the Board’s review. The Roundtable will represent a broad range of stakeholders including non-profits, citizens’ groups, private sector and government agencies. In addition to these organizations/groups, it is proposed that up to six members of the general public (i.e. not affiliated with an invited organization or group) are on the Roundtable. The six people would be recruited by advertising the opportunity, accepting applications, developing evaluation criteria and having the Board make appointments.

- The first Roundtable meeting is tentatively scheduled for fall 2020.

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David Allen CAO, City of Courtenay	✓
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Background/Current Situation

As confirmed by various studies, the Comox Valley struggles with poor air quality especially in the winter months. The interactions between the causes, impacts, and potential solutions of poor air quality in the Comox Valley are complex. While we know that there are distinct contributors to elevated PM2.5, the pathways to improving air quality touch on personal choice and behaviours, social norms, socioeconomic inequities, government regulation and cultural values. At the CVRD Board’s strategic planning session in December 2018 and at its January 2019 meeting, air quality was identified as a corporate priority and staff were tasked with investigating the formation of a Regional Airshed Advisory Group. Below is a timeline of what has occurred since:

April 2019	SHIFT Collaborative hired and working group established to explore a framework to address air quality on a regional scale
September 2019	Framework established and presented to the Board. Framework includes Air Quality Coordinator, Leadership Group, Airshed Roundtable (with smaller Working Groups on an as needed basis)
December 2019	Through the Board strategic planning process, improving air quality is identified as a key project under the RGS service
January – March 2020	CVRD staff scoped the project and invited members to participate in the Steering Committee (invites based on suggested list in SHIFT framework for the Leadership Group)
March 2020	Board approves staff’s request for resources through the RGS budget to hire an Air Quality coordinator to support the initiative
April/May 2020	Request for Proposal issued and Pinna Sustainability is the successful candidate
June 2020	CVRD staff kicks off the project with Pinna Sustainability and hosts the inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee

Project Plan

A high-level project plan has been developed for the next three years of the project. It is worth noting that improving air quality in the Comox Valley will be a long term endeavour. This project plan represents the length of our contract with Pinna Sustainability (to be reviewed annually), in which we hope to achieve some major milestones. Need for external support for this project could be re-evaluated at the end of the three years. The main milestone within the next three years will be the development and implementation of a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy. This strategy is an important tool when dealing with multiple pollution sources (e.g. wood smoke, agriculture, vehicles

emissions) that cross political boundaries. Improving air quality falls under many different jurisdictions; therefore, a strategy would aim to coordinate activities and may be a mix of advocacy actions (e.g. requesting a government agency change their regulations) and tangible actions (e.g. public education campaign).

Deliverable 1: Airshed Roundtable, Steering Committee and Working Group		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1.1	Formation of the Airshed Roundtable and Steering Committee			
1.2	Schedule and approach for Roundtable and Steering Committee			
1.3	Ongoing meetings and duties			
Deliverable 2: Communications				
2.1	Develop communications strategy			
2.2	Attend other meetings / events to receive or deliver air quality information			
Deliverable 3: Prepare and Implement Regional Airshed Protection Strategy				
3.1	Prepare background memo on state of the air in the CVRD			
3.2	Conduct engagement to develop strategies			
3.3	Prepare the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy			
3.4	Deploy implementation and monitoring framework			
Deliverable 4: Funding				
4.1	Apply for relevant grant opportunities to support the work of the Roundtable			
Deliverable 5: Reporting				
5.1	Prepare reports and deliver presentations to the CVRD Board			

To keep the public and elected officials informed about the above project activities, CVRD staff will be creating a project page on the CVRD website, which will be located under <https://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/projects-initiatives/past-current-projects>.

Steering Committee

The purpose of the Steering Committee is to advance the work, (setting priorities and providing direction), identify knowledge gaps, support strategic planning and act as champions for air quality management. The Steering Committee held their first meeting on June 18, 2020 with representation from the City of Courtenay, Village of Cumberland, MOE, FLNRORD, Island Health and Vancouver Island University. Due to resource constraints, the Town of Comox has informed staff that they are unable to participate at this time. At the meeting, the group discussed their Terms of Reference/ Guiding Principles, the project plan, communications and the State of the Air memo (deliverables 1, 2.1 and 3.1). Next steps for this group are to review the draft State of the Air memo, which will summarize the existing research, progress to date and potential best practices for moving forward. The memo will be presented at the first Roundtable meeting to promote a common understanding before we collaboratively embark on identifying strategies to address air quality in the Comox Valley (i.e. the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy). The memo will be publically available on the CVRD website.

Airshed Roundtable Establishment

The purpose of the Roundtable is to help establish priorities through issue identification, share potential solutions, provide advice and support to the Steering Committee and share information with the organizations / groups that they represent. Staff would like to send out Roundtable invitations in by the end of July to prepare for the inaugural meeting in early fall. Understanding stakeholders may have varied levels of interest or capacity, two options will be presented in the invitation: 1) actively participate in the Roundtable or 2) be added to a list to stay informed of the Roundtable's activities with the option of contacting the Air Quality Coordinator with feedback/suggestions that could be brought to the next Roundtable meeting. SHIFT Collaborative

and the working group developed the Roundtable invite list in 2019 with a few additions suggested by the Steering Committee.

Steering Committee Members (who will also sit on the Roundtable)
Comox Valley Regional District Staff City of Courtenay Staff Village of Cumberland Staff BC Ministry of Environment FLNRORD Vancouver Island Health Authority Vancouver Island University K'ómoks First Nation – invited

Proposed Roundtable Invitations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Town of Comox Staff, with option to re-join Steering Committee at any time 2. First Nations Health Authority 3. Breathe Clean Air Comox Valley 4. Woodstove Industry 5. Firewood procurers 6. Alternative energy professionals 7. Forest industry 8. Privately and community managed forestry 9. Farmers Institutes 10. Fire Departments (Fire Chiefs Association) 11. Comox Senior's Association 12. Comox Valley Community Health Network 13. Comox Valley Community Foundation 14. School District No. 71 15. Hearth, Patio, & Barbeque Association of Canada 16. Chamber of Commerce 17. Active Transportation Representative 18. General Public (up to six people – see details below)

As noted above, the general public is included on the invite list. Due to the already large invite list, which includes citizen's groups and non-profits, staff are recommending a maximum of six members from the general public (3 rural, 3 municipal) be appointed to the Roundtable. In July/August 2020, staff would like to advertise the opportunity, develop a list of evaluation criteria (e.g. person does not already sit on an organization or group invited to the Roundtable), review applications and have the Board appoint members.

Beyond participating directly on the Roundtable, there will be other opportunities for public participation during the development of the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy.

Update on the Wood Smoke Reduction Program

In addition to the establishment of the Steering Committee and Roundtable, the CVRD continues to administer the Wood Smoke Reduction Program. The Program provides rebates for residents exchanging older wood burning appliances to a cleaner heating source and educates residents on smart burning. Since we last reported to the Board in February, the base rebate amount was increased from \$400 to \$700 due to some additional grant funds being available. Residential property owners in West Courtenay or the Village of Cumberland exchanging to an electric heat pump may

also be eligible for a \$2,500 top up. There has been good uptake of the rebate program over the last few months, despite the challenges of COVID-19. Video and radio ads are planned for the upcoming burning season in order to advertise the program and educate current woodstove users on smart burning tips. Up to date information about the program can be found at www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/woodstove. Currently this program is run independently from the Airshed Roundtable, but we will be looking for synergies in the future such as having the Roundtable provide feedback on the structure of the rebate program and education initiatives.

Policy Analysis

The Board identified improving air quality as a strategic priority and as a key initiative under the RGS Service.

Options

Options available are as follows:

1. Receive this staff report and endorse the invite list and process to recruit members of the general public for the Airshed Roundtable.
2. Receive this staff report and direct an alternative action or request.

Staff recommends Option 1.

Financial Factors

The project is housed under the RGS service, in which the electoral areas and municipalities participate. Through the RGS service budget (Function 512), the CVRD was able to hire Pinna Sustainability for the next three years (budget to be confirmed annually) to support this important regional level work. Other funding sources will also be important to implement the actions that come out of the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy. Throughout the project, Pinna Sustainability will assist CVRD staff in seeking and applying for relevant grant opportunities to further support the work.

Legal Factors

The air quality project is actioned under the RGS as improved air quality helps achieve the broader goals of human health and healthy ecosystems. Given that actions to improve air quality may rely on an advocacy/advisory approach, any regulatory changes would be available for individual local governments or senior authorities to consider implementing. Such changes could require bylaws or policies to be effective.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

Clean air is fundamental to human life and healthy ecosystems. The RGS vision statement is impossible to achieve without clean air:

...As stewards of the environment, local governments, the K'ómoks First Nation, public agencies, residents, businesses and community and non-governmental organizations will work collaboratively to conserve and enhance land, water and energy resources and ensure a vibrant local economy and productive working landscapes.

Clean air also relates to supporting a high quality of life through the protection and enhancement of community health, safety and well-being (Goal 7: Public Health and Safety) and protecting, stewarding and enhancing the natural environment and ecological connections and systems (Goal 2: Ecosystems, Natural Areas, and Parks).

This air quality project will assist in achieving the overall objectives of the RGS through a collaborative effort to identify and implement actionable steps or advocacy work to improve air quality.

Intergovernmental Factors

As noted above, the membership of the Steering Committee and Airshed Roundtable includes local government staff together with representatives from provincial agencies such as Island Health, MOE and FLNRORD.

Interdepartmental Involvement

The Planning and Development Services Branch is the project lead with support from Pinna Sustainability and in collaboration with the members of the Steering Committee and Airshed Roundtable.

Citizen/Public Relations

In addition to inviting a number of non-profits to the Roundtable, staff propose to have up to six members of the general public appointed by the Board on the Roundtable.

Staff is preparing a communications plans to ensure the activities of the Airshed Roundtable are shared with the public. In addition, an engagement strategy will be prepared to identify strategies to engage the broader public on the development the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy.