

DATE: December 3, 2021

FILE: 1855-03 EP Grants

TO: Chair and Directors
Electoral Areas Services Committee

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: BC Safe Restart Grant Program Funding – Second Instalment Allocations

Purpose

To propose and set allocations for the additional \$402,000 BC Safe Restart funds prior to the December 31, 2021 deadline as set by the BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs as a follow up to the Electoral Areas directions received at the November 2021 Electoral Areas Services Committee meeting.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the Electoral Area Services Committee recommends to the Comox Valley Regional District Board that the \$402,000 additional BC Safe Restart grant funding be allocated to support the initiatives as presented in the December 3, 2021 staff report.

Executive Summary

- In the fall of 2020, the Province distributed approximately \$415 million “COVID-19 BC Safe Restart grants for Local Governments” for local operations impacted by COVID-19. This funding was to support local governments as they dealt with increased operating costs and lower revenues due to COVID-19, in addition to community support and emergency response planning.
- The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) originally received \$723,000 in funding in November 2020, with a further \$402,000 in March 2021, for a total grant of \$1,125,000. With the initial BC Safe Restart funding, the CVRD provided funding to community groups to help respond to community needs, conducted a Regional Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and managed its services in a fiscally prudent manner while continuing to deliver core services, upgraded IT, delivered on capital projects and responded to community needs.
- Electoral Area Directors’ ideas for funding were considered throughout the summer to help inform the recommendations in this report.
- Given this second funding, the allotment was provided solely to the 27 regional districts throughout the province in an effort to address their specific COVID-19 related financial shortfalls and pressures. The recommendations of this report attempt to invest in and support rural area services for long-term benefits, act on the most urgent needs, respond to real needs, but not exclusively, and support services delivered by both volunteers and CVRD. The categories for BC Restart Value include:
 - Community Halls = \$200,000
 - Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Program = \$30,000
 - Harmston EOC upgrades = \$40,000
 - Comox Valley Community Foundation Food Security = \$50,000
 - Community Self-Service Online Tools = \$42,000

This report provides materials that include some rationale and analysis of the grant funding opportunities. Aligning board priorities with those rural opportunities has resulted in the recommendation noted above. The board may consider providing alternative direction and guiding staff towards a different level of grant funding or a different focus for those funds.

Prepared by:

K. Douville

Kevin Douville
Acting Chief Financial Officer

Concurrence:

D. DeMarzo

Doug DeMarzo
General Manager of
Community Services

Background/Current Situation

The Province of BC has provided up to \$415 million for local government operations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the provincial formula for allocating funds, the CVRD was initially awarded \$723,000 in November 2020, as part of the \$415 million, distributed at that time to municipalities and regional districts throughout the province. In March 2021, the CVRD was awarded an additional \$402,000 as part of the \$10 million (2.5 per cent) in remaining funding that was allocated solely to the 27 regional districts.

The eligible costs towards which this additional funding can be allocated continue to include:

- Addressing revenue shortfalls;
- Facility reopening and operating costs;
- Emergency planning and response costs;
- Bylaw enforcement and protective services like fire protection and police;
- Computer and other electronic technology costs (to improve interconnectivity and virtual communications);
- Services for vulnerable persons (e.g. persons living with disabilities, mental illness or addictions, persons experiencing homelessness or other vulnerabilities); and
- Other related COVID-19 service delivery impacts.

The first instalment of \$723,000 was allocated as follows:

- Emergency operation preparedness and community support - \$200,000:
 - Community partnerships and vulnerable population response through the EOC - \$100,000;
 - EOC technology and systems upgrades - \$100,000.
- Promoting local food security and supporting vulnerable populations through the Comox Valley Community Foundation - \$100,000;
- Information technology resilience to support safe work, public engagement and effective service delivery - \$100,000;
- Rural fire department support for increased preparedness and personal preparedness equipment - \$40,000;
- Recreation facilities, including the Comox Valley Sports Centre and Aquatic Centre, offset revenue losses due to decreased capacity and increased operational costs for cleaning and staffing to follow Public Health Orders - \$223,000;
- Rural community halls support for reducing virus spread, such as non-touch amenities - \$24,321;
- Unallocated funds retained for emerging 2021 events such as food aggregation and promoting local food security - \$35,679;

When considering allocations for the second instalment of BC Safe Restart funding totalling \$402,000, staff continued to review our Rethink Comox Valley strategy and the priorities identified through the CVRD’s strategic planning process to propose contributions to projects/initiatives that align with the grant program’s eligible cost criteria. Staff have also considered the direction provided by the Electoral Area Directors’ at their May 10, 2021 meeting and conversations during the summer.

With the above in mind, the following allocations are now being recommended.

Community Halls

At its May 25, 2021 meeting, the CVRD Board approved the following motion:

“That \$40,000 of the second installment of the BC Safe Restart Grant of \$402,000 be allocated for the construction of outdoor washrooms at the Black Creek Community Centre, Merville Community Hall and the Union Bay Community Club.”

Community halls throughout the region continue to be impacted by revenue shortfalls versus pre-COVID-19 years as we now surpass the twentieth month of the pandemic. Some community halls are also seeing a sharp decline in annual membership fees. The Community Services Branch has conducted preliminary outreach with community halls to ascertain if any continued shortfalls in revenues will be further detrimental to their recovery plans going into 2022, whether operationally or resulting in delays to needed asset management renewal and/or replacement. These impacts are expected to be identified in each community hall’s annual budget submission and will be brought forward for formal consideration as part of the 2022–2026 financial planning process.

In anticipation of these requests for further support, allocations to the rural community hall services, as outlined below, are proposed:

- Fallen Alders Community Hall (Royston) - \$6,500.00:
 - To assist with improvements to ventilation and window installation as risk mitigation measures to COVID-19. This work has been completed.
- Baynes Sound Community Facilities Support Service, function no. 672 - \$80,000;
- Puntledge North Community Facilities Support Service, function no. 676 - \$80,000;
- Denman Island Community Facilities Service, function no. 675 - \$16,750; and
- Hornby Island Community Hall Service, function no. 670 - \$16,750.

Another example of recent requests is mould remediation from Fanny Bay Hall and various kitchen upgrades from other halls to promote resiliency in the event of a disaster or more up-to-date kitchens to serve the growing needs.

BC Safe Restart Value – Community Halls = \$200,000

Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Programs (NEPP) Support

NEPP can assist neighbourhoods to become more resilient to disasters by identifying potential hazards and their impacts, preparing a neighbourhood response plan and, utilizing CVRD resources for guidance. As such, the support is envisioned to support existing NEPP programs and create new ones. This will be done with additional part-time staffing support as a dedicated resource and procurement of minor capital items.

BC Safe Restart Value – NEPP = \$30,000

Emergency Operations Centre upgrades

Continued upgrades are required for the EOC at Harmston. The cost to retrofit a post-disaster building has proven to be higher than originally budgeted and an additional \$20,000 is requested through this program to help restart our services to the community. This is primarily focused on IT upgrades and the radio room.

BC Safe Restart Value – EOC = \$40,000

Food Security Initiatives

To provide further financial support in 2022 to initiatives that facilitate and promote local food security through improving food system support. The delivery of this funding could once again be done through the Comox Valley Community Foundation with a separate grant call in early 2022. The foundation has indicated they would use the Food Policy Council to help with recommendations and formulate the grant conditions to focus on supporting long-term system/capital improvements changes rather than one-time direct food purchase and distribution.

BC Safe Restart Value – Comox Valley Community Foundation Food Security = \$50,000

Community Self-Service Online Tools

To support the purchase and implementation of a possible suite of online tools that will enable rural area citizens to access and manage their accounts any time of day from anywhere with reduced to minimal contact, particularly in light of COVID-19. Whether it's through our current financial ERP provider, Central Square Technologies (iCity/Vadim), or alternative applications being considered are:

- Enabling the viewing of, and payment, to utility billing and accounts;
- Applying for and renewal of pet licenses;
- Building permit applications and inspection requests;
- Viewing of accounts payable and receivable history and online payments.

BC Safe Restart Value – Community Self-Service Online Tools = \$42,000