

File: 530-01

June 17, 2020

Chair and Directors
Comox Valley Regional District Board

Re: External Committee Updates

Please find below mid-year reports on my two Comox Valley Regional District Board external appointments to the Vancouver Island Regional Library and the Island Corridor Foundation. I am also including a brief report on my AVICC appointment to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans committee on Indigenous and Multi-stakeholder Advisory process on aquaculture.

Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL)

Since last November, I was re-elected as part of the VIRL Executive for the 2020/2021 fiscal year. Over the last few months, two new library construction projects were completed: One in Sayward, the other in Chemainus. VIRL also finalized its budget and requisition to local government participants late last year. While the increase overall was kept under four per cent, an increase in population and assessment values in the Comox Valley compared to peers led to larger tax requisitions for our Valley residents. I brought this issue back to the VIRL executive before COVID, but we did not have further discussion on this as COVID arrived.

In mid-March, all libraries across Vancouver Island were closed, and remain closed with some opportunities emerging for book take-out at the time of writing this report. A full renewal and re-opening process was presented and approved at the May 30 Board meeting, which would see limited return for customers in late summer or fall as best scenario. In the meantime, VIRL staff responded to the closure by going on an intensive outreach and online campaign to promote e-books and other online offerings. This was very successful, with e-usage going up 132 per cent so far.

Heading into the summer, the Executive will be looking at budget assumptions for the year(s) ahead. After some discussion, the board provided guidance to the Executive to consider scenarios of 0 per cent, one per cent, or two per cent increases for next fiscal, and we will also put our minds to the five year financial forecast and projections. A new 10 years Strategic Planning process has been deferred to 2021.

Island Corridor Foundation (ICF)

Since my last report in November, much has happened at the ICF. In February, the ICF went to the BC Supreme Court to defend against the Snaw-nah-as First Nation case, focusing on their request to obtain land title back from the ICF due their claim of lack of usage. We expect to hear back on the Judgement either this summer or early next Fall.

In late April, the BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure released their independent assessment for reviving rail service along the Island Corridor. The assessment provided three options to consider:

1. An option for high frequency, high tech service in the Greater Victoria area;
2. An option for a more traditional service from Victoria to Courtenay, and
3. A further option for service to Port Alberni. The government indicated they would include results of the ICF assessment in the South Island Transportation study before commenting further. That study was scheduled to be released this month (in June).

Overall, the ICF is in good financial shape and does not require public funding to operate as it stands. The board is very much attentive and waiting in anticipation of both the court case, and Provincial commentary after they complete the South Island study. Lastly, locally, there is likely a need for further discussion on the Courtenay train station, and I would encourage the CVRD board and our municipal partners to explore the possibility of looking at heritage budgets in support of needed renovations.

AVICC appointment

DFO Indigenous and Multi-stakeholders Advisory process on Aquaculture

As the last meeting for this group is on June 19, I will present a brief verbal report on the outcomes of this process at our board meeting.

Respectfully,

D. Arbour

Daniel Arbour
Director