

DATE: May 5, 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

Purpose

To introduce funding opportunities associated with community recovery and the COVID-19 pandemic, for the assignment of additional funds provided under the BC Safe Restart grant program.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT \$402,000 funding provided from the second instalment of the BC Safe Restart Grant be primarily distributed to support community halls, Seal Bay park upgrades, neighbourhood preparedness and emergency and rural fire halls supplies.

Executive Summary

- The Province distributed a COVID-19 Safe Restart Grant for Local Governments which provided \$425 million 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) received \$723,000 of funding in November 2020, and an additional \$402,000 in March 2021 for a total grant of \$1,125,000. With the initial 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, upgrade IT, deliver on capital projects and respond to community needs.
- The pandemic is resulting in significant impacts to CVRD service delivery through 2021 including reduced service levels, reduced revenue and a refocus of priorities specifically with regards to parks and recreation related activities.
- The recommendations of this report attempt to invest rural areas 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.

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 guide staff towards a different level of grant funding or a different focus for those funds.

Prepared by:

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Background/Current Situation

The Province of BC has provided up to \$425 million for local government operations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the provincial formula for allocating funds, the CVRD was awarded \$723,000 in November 2020. In March 2021 the CVRD was awarded an additional \$402,000 for a total grant of \$1,125,000. Eligible costs 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.

Further, the Province identifies other funding opportunities for services that include community infrastructure, transit and application-based opportunities to support “development services” and “strengthening communities”. Staff continue to pursue these application-based grants.

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

- Emergency operations 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 sports centre and aquatic centre offset to 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

For the second instalment of \$402,000 recently received staff have reviewed Rethink Comox Valley and the priorities identified through the CVRD's strategic planning process. Staff have also considered the existing and future work plans to ensure the available funds are dedicated to creating a more resilient service delivery model, ensuring rural community partners realize benefits and consideration is given to future potential situations.

Community Halls

Outdoor washroom requests not funded by a shortfall from the comfort stations service. Requests from the islands may also be considered. Outdoor washrooms provide a critical role during the current pandemic and possible future pandemics by encouraging the longer use of outdoor space, reducing inside interactions for activities already outside or new outside programs and allowing those facilities with daycare operations better safety and cleanliness. They also provide support to vulnerable populations.

Additional requests from community halls have considered upgrades to HVAC and ventilation to support improved air quality and flow. Staff can continue to work with community halls to help partially fund these upgrades at relevant locations.

Community Halls are surpassing one year with limited revenue. Outreach in November 2021 is proposed to determine if the shortfall in revenues is detrimental to restarting in 2022. If so some funding can be considered to address this shortfall.

Safe Restart Value = 100,000

Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Programs (NEPP) Support

NEPP can assist neighborhoods to become more resilient to disasters by identifying potential hazards and their impacts, preparing a neighborhood response plan, utilizing CVRD resources for guidance.

As such the support is envisioned over the next two years 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.

Safe Restart Value = \$52,000

Seal Bay Park – Accessible trail upgrade

The Seal Bay Management plan highlighted accessible trail upgrades and with the uptake in park use during the pandemic creating spaces for people with physical disabilities is of great importance. Trail design will take place over the next year with construction planned for 2022 to complement the parking lot upgrades. Community Works funds were previously approved for this project for 2022.

Safe Restart Value = \$250,000

Fire hall support

All rural fire halls have had increased costs for safety equipment to follow COVID-19 protocols. This savings will be a direct benefit to the rural tax payer by reducing the operating tax requisition. Specific disbursements to each of the four rural fire halls will be determined in conjunction with each fire chief and dependent on the outcomes of the community hall support.