

March Boot Tales Director's Update

Mark Lebell, SCRD Director for Roberts Creek

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Daffodils, irises, birdsong and longer daylight hours emerging...could it be we're tilted a bit more towards the sun these days? Time to be planning our summer garden plantings. There's a two-week March School Break coming up ending with Easter Long Weekend...here's hoping for some good weather and outdoor fun for all.

Volunteer Corner

Some recent discussion around the Board table has been focused on enhancing the SCRD's public engagement practices. Ironically, perhaps because of a choice of headlines in the press, some have interpreted this as a move away from listening. While I have expressed concern with regards to changes to some advisory committees, it should be noted that our Chief Administrative Officer, Janette Loveys, "wrote the book" on the Capital Regional District's Public Participation Framework. I'll put a link to it on my website for those interested.

Having committed to engaging with a broad cross-section of the community during my term, I look forward to building on new approaches while maintaining avenues for input from those who have a hard-earned place-based understanding of our community and its surroundings. Note that our unique Roberts Creek Official Community Plan Committee, and the statutory Advisory Planning Commission are not within the scope of the review, and will continue to be valued sounding boards for me, for which I am deeply appreciative of the contributions of their members.

It's Budget Season

As I write this, we sit between Rounds 1 and 2 of the SCRD Budget Process. Staff have brought Budget proposals forward that are either "Mandatory", "Strategic Plan Related", "Within the Integrated 5-year Plan" or "Low Cost/High Value". Note that as part of the new approach to engagement, Staff will be doing a Budget information session in Roberts Creek in early April. It will be a good opportunity to ask questions of Finance Staff. Watch the SCRD website for Budget timing and updates as well.

Here are some details with regards to some of where we are sitting as of now. Note that the below is subject to change in the second round of discussions.

Regional Solid Waste Projects- Pender Landfill Post Closure Costs, Pender Transfer Station Costs, Water Sampling at former Gibsons and HMB Landfills, Landfill Scale Software, Islands Cleanup, an Organics Management Strategy Consultation are items that have led to a 4% increase in Solid Waste Taxation.

Public Transit- A deficit here due to Provincial changes, and a decrease in fare revenue will likely be funded through Reserves and an 11% increase in Taxation in this service.

Economic Development- funding our share of what looks to be a \$250,000 annual coastwide commitment will mean a significant increase in this Area D function. Depending on the formula, RC usually pays between 10% and 12% of total taxation for something like this.

Water – The well-publicized water infrastructure changes will be paid from user fee and parcel tax rate changes that have yet to be finalized, but would likely sit between 1% to 4% increases.

Nearly all other “Functions” are down over last year. This has led to optimistic reports of the possibility of a tax decrease this year. However, to offset a beneficial property assessment roll (most other Areas assessments rose more than RC’s), we have our own local challenge...

...Our **Roberts Creek Firehall**, which was built in 1972, with additions in 1984 and 1992, is in need of some attention. As part of the Asset Management Program a facility audit was recently commissioned. The replacement cost of the building was estimated at \$1,900,000, and overall the building was rated in good condition.

However, the audit revealed some significant concerns, to the tune of approximately \$337,000 over the next 5 years, with a recommendation to replace the upper roof immediately. Further remediation to floor finishes, the lower roof, domestic water distribution, piping and wiring are included in this estimate. Fortunately, the function has been accumulating reserves, but these reserves will need to be supplemented by an increase in taxation, and this is a service funded solely by Roberts Creek taxpayers. In addition, new mandated levels of training for our Volunteer Firefighters will need to be funded through this function.

Provincial Funding Shortfalls

The Provincial Government recently announced its fourth consecutive balanced budget, and an anticipated surplus of \$377 million. There are many who applaud this achievement, and the goal of operating debt-free by 2020 has its appeal. However, how does this play out in our community?

Recently, the Board asked for a report on the degree to which the SCRD is asked to financially support programs that were previously or currently funded by the Province. Here is a partial list:

Police Based Victims Services, Extreme and Cold Weather Shelters, Restorative Justice Program, Senior’s Housing Programs, Seniors Peer Counseling, Parents and Tot Groups, Marine Rescue Societies and Auxiliaries, Arrowhead Center Society, Shoreline Mitigation Groups, Invasive Species Eradication Groups, Sunshine Coast Tourism, Salmonid Enhancement Society, Youth Outreach, Tetrahedron Park Road Maintenance, A GP for Me/Patient Navigator, and Wildsafe Bear Aware.

Are these types of programs important to our community? Without a doubt. Do they leverage our generous volunteer sector? Nearly always. Do they fundraise locally? Quite likely. Do they apply for grants from other sources? Very often.

Are they within the SCRD’s core mandate? Should we be funding them with a “regressive” property tax?

For a Board that has “Facilitate Community Development” as one of 7 Strategic Priorities, taking a reasoned, transparent and community-driven approach to supporting these programs is an important goal. The Board is looking to transition towards a budgeting approach in the area of Community Development that involves more broad public input. This won’t happen overnight.

In the meantime, we will continue to advocate for sustainable funding of these programs with the province as opportunities present themselves. In the next few months, staff will be presenting both an Advocacy Strategy, and a Community Group Development Framework for the Board’s consideration. Did you know that Capilano University is offering a Community Capacity Building Program this Fall here on the coast? Email kcoyne@capilano.ca for details.