



News and Stories

Pandemic puts new Campbell River Library on pause

September 28, 2021

The Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) Board of Trustees have hit pause on a new library in downtown Campbell River.

At the September 25 Board meeting, Trustees voted in support of continuing to operate out of the current library location for the next 12 months. Skyrocketing construction and labour costs resulting from the pandemic were the major influencers behind this difficult decision. Over the next 12 months, VIRL staff will explore all available options to revive the new library project in the future.

“This was certainly a difficult decision,” says Chair of the VIRL Board of Trustees, Gaby Wickstrom. “But we could not, being fiscally responsible, move forward with this project under the current construction and labour markets. While the Board is disappointed, we remain committed to and confident in finding a viable solution to build a flagship branch for Campbell River and the North Island.”

The library will remain in its current location for the next year on a month-to-month lease. During this time, VIRL staff will continue to consult with community representatives, assess future options, and make informed recommendations to the Board on a path forward.

“A new library as a cornerstone of Campbell River’s downtown core and cultural district remains a priority for us,” says Colleen Evans, VIRL Trustee and Councillor with the City of Campbell River. “The difficult reality is it simply is not the right time to move forward with a project of this size



hope. I will continue to advocate for a new library in Campbell River and trust that the VIRL Board of Trustees will not lose sight of the important role a new library will play in our economic development goals and ongoing community growth.”

Planning for the new library began in 2019. With support from Campbell River Council, the plan was to demolish the existing building and construct a 20,000 sq. ft. facility on the same site. The total budget, secured through a Municipal Finance Authority (MFA) loan, was \$14 million, with \$9 million allocated for construction and the remainder for furnishings, IT infrastructure, consulting, shelving, and more. The City of Campbell River had committed to providing a no-cost lease to VIRL, demolishing the existing facility, and to servicing the site with sewage, water, drainage, and CR Municipal Broadband service.

“As most people know, I have been an enthusiastic supporter of libraries and of having a new branch built in Campbell River,” says Brenda Leigh, SRD Director, VIRL Board Past Chair and current Trustee on the Executive Committee. “Our Strathcona Region supported the proposed new branch by offering a \$14 million Loan Authorization after receiving public approval a year ago. I am confident that our Vancouver Island Regional Library will continue to work hard over the year to examine our options so that we can deliver a much-needed new and improved Library in Campbell River.”

In April 2021, the results of a Class D costing indicated that construction costs alone would surpass \$16 million. A second costing was commissioned in May, based on a revised design with scaled back features. This assessment also came back with projected construction costs up to five million dollars over the budgeted amount of \$9 million.

Also at the September 25 Board meeting, VIRL Trustees agreed to a one-year hiatus on all new Capital Projects in 2022. This will provide VIRL an opportunity to reevaluate Capital priorities as costs begin to rebound after historic pandemic highs. Some projects will continue in 2022 because the projects were well underway at the time the hiatus was enacted.

For information on VIRL’s Capital Projects, visit the Capital Projects page.

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