



Noba Anderson, Director
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Dear Fellow SRD Board Colleagues
February 18, 2020

I greatly appreciate the Board's support for my motion at the last meeting to defer third reading of Bylaw No. 382 - 2020 to 2024 Financial Plan and Capital Expenditure Program. This time has afforded me a spaciousness of thought that has given rise the following proposal.

I would like to propose that we re-instate the 'Special Projects' staff position and fund it beginning in this budget cycle.

At the January 15th Board meeting, the Board received my Director's Report about outstanding Cortes work items that have been on the book for a long time. I stated "As I contemplate how we might make adjustments to the 2020-2025 Financial Plan to better serve our constituents, I have been reflecting on our organization's ability to complete its work." After mentioning that there were a number of long-standing work items that were not getting attention, I asked staff if this "was unique to Cortes and was assured that this issue was indeed systemic throughout the organization. I then asked if staff would therefore be bringing this to the attention of the Board during budget discussions so that we could collectively grapple with resourcing work differently, increasing budget or staff or consulting capacities, or... I was informed that staff would not bring this matter forward and that if I wanted these matters raised that I would need to bring it forward in a Director's Report." In my report's conclusion I said, "I suggest that it warrants a significant conversation at this Board table about resourcing our staff to undertake the work which we assign them to do. I would ask that we have this conversation as part of the budget process underway right now." (I have attached this Director's Report below for your reference.)

Apart from a comment made by the Chair noting my concern about our organizations' stretched ability to resource projects, there was no discussion at the Board table or suggestions from staff about how we might address these corporate-wide issues either through the budget process or in any other fashion.

I then brought forward to the next EASC meeting on February 12th, in another Director's Report, more details regarding one of these many specific work items. The matter that I offered for discussion was an 11 month old Gas Tax application made by the Linnaea Farm Society which had not yet received any staff attention. In my report I said "Each of our respective rural areas have hundreds of thousands of gas tax dollars available for community use, but only if we have the staff will and capacity to work on these files. There are other gas tax applications that I am expecting from Cortes organizations. I would like any available clarity on how the SRD will be able to manage these requests going forward. Just last month,

the Cortes Island Senior's Society submitted an expression of interest for gas tax funds... When I inquired as to their timeline, they indicated that they were looking for funds that they could access by May/June 2020. Although this application was supported by the Cortes Gas Tax Committee, I had to turn them away given the SRD's inability to respond to requests in a timely manner."

"In my report I asked the following two questions. **How we can fulfill our end of the Community Works Fund Agreement that we hold with the UBCM? What changes need to happen within the SRD so that we can move on these files in a timely manner?"** Again, my intention was to have a discussion and find creative solutions. (That Director's Report is also below for your reference.)

However, rather than any comment from staff on how we might address this impasse due to a lack of staffing, and rather than any discussion from my fellow directors, my three rural colleagues moved **THAT this item be deferred until after the CAO's report has been delivered**, rendering my questions and suggestions entirely mute. No discussion was allowed. No suggestions were permitted... and so without any further action the SRD's rural Gas Tax funds, unless allocated internally, are frozen.

So, during our current budget deliberations I would like to suggest that we re-instate the 'Special Projects' staff position. The last time a Gas Tax grant was awarded to a third party, the SRD had a 'Special Projects' staff position that was able to work on the Board's direction. This was a position that was hard won and so well used! This 'Special Projects' position enabled us to make valuable headway on the Board's Strategic Priorities. The Strategic Priority that eventually took all of that 'Special Projects' position's time was the Connected Coast project. It was precisely this flexible and responsive position that allowed us to move into this exciting new space... although the 'Special Projects' position was then never backfilled, and all those extra things, like Gas Tax applications, have not had a desk to land on since.

So, I suggest that we re-instate the 'Special Projects' staff position and fund it beginning in this budget cycle. Pulling from the 2019 Information Technology FTE Position Business Case supported at the time by the Board, it entailed a first year salary and benefit allocation, plus a one-time desk and computer purchase, of \$42,750. In the second year the allocation was \$72,930, and so on.

I would therefore recommend:

THAT the 2020-2024 Financial Plan include a Special Projects staff position of \$43,000 for 2020, \$73,000 for 2021 and the appropriate annual salary thereafter, to be funded by general taxation in Function 110 – General Government services.

Sincerely,



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Dear Fellow SRD Board Colleagues

January 8, 2020

As I contemplate how we might make adjustments to the 2020-2025 Financial Plan to better serve our constituents, I have been reflecting on our organization's ability to complete its work. I certainly do not track Board direction for initiatives in other communities or regionally. I do, however, try to keep aware of Cortes Island-related work as directed by the Board, either through specific resolution or through the financial plan or historical work plans. There are a number of such Cortes files that have been on the books for a long time and remain incomplete. Months ago, I met with senior management to discuss a number of these files and was assured of a timely response. After not hearing back, I brought these matters to the attention of our CAO who, just before the holidays, honoured my request for a phone call to discuss. I outline some of those Cortes-specific files below to illustrate my concern. On the phone call there was no dispute that these Cortes matters had been unattended to or unfinished for a long time. I then asked our CAO if this inability to get to core files in a timely manner was unique to Cortes and was assured that this issue was indeed systemic throughout the organization. I then asked if staff would therefore be bringing this to the attention of the Board during budget discussions so that we could collectively grapple with resourcing work differently, increasing budget or staff or consulting capacities, or... I was informed that staff would not bring this matter forward and that if I wanted these matters raised that I would need to bring it forward in a Director's Report.

Management Reports: I am concerned that work directed by the Board is not always being tracked. It is not always clear whose desk various files are on, what their status is, or even if someone is aware of them. We used to get management reports from the CAO, tracking various items. This is no longer the case and I think it is time to re-instate this practice.

Org Chart: Our CAO said that part of the work load problem is often our inability to fill staff vacancies in a timely manner. The Board used to annually receive an updated org chart, indicating staff vacancies. I would like also to see this practice re-instated so that the Board can have a better understanding of where our challenges lie.

Work Plans: Under previous administrations it was the practice, at least for rural-related work items (especially in the shared planning and parks departments) for EASC to vote on multiple-year work plans. Given this administration has a different approach, I would at least like to see an annual work plan presented to the Board for receipt so that we can have a sense of what work items we can expect will get attention in the years to come.

To illustrate my work load concern, I share with you a few examples of Cortes business (none of which are Cortes 'pet projects' as is often stated at the Board table) rather all are

absolute core local government functions. For most of these items I have been hearing that they will happen ‘this year’ for many years.

The Cortes Zoning Bylaw Review is now going into its 10th year of being on a Planning Department work plan, obviously spanning many administrations. I would submit that rural land-use planning is one of the very reasons Regional Districts exist; it is core and central in every way to what we do, and a community’s zoning bylaw is its bedrock document. Best practice says these plans should be updated every 5 years, although I would submit that every 10 years is more realistic. Our dates back to 2002. It is also best practice to update the zoning bylaw quickly after the update to an Official Community Plan. The Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 2012. That’s 18 and 8 years respectively. This means that Cortes is left with outdated regulations regarding the quickly changing landscape of vacation rentals, tiny homes, affordable housing and marijuana production and sale, just to list a few. The Board also directed that there be an identification of Cortes lands appropriate for industrial zoning. This work too has been rolled into the same update. Over a year ago, the Cortes public rejected a very flawed proposed new bylaw and there has been no communication to the community about the matter since.

The SRD Planning Fees and Charges - The update to this 2008 Bylaw, which is a foundational document for the whole planning department, has been a top staff priority for many years as core internal work; yet to date remains incomplete.

Cortes Garbage Commercial Accounts Bylaw 2851 from 1986, updated in 2005, indicates how much money commercial garbage producers pay for garbage disposal at the Transfer Station. After the CVRD split, the matter of Cortes commercial accounts became an SRD jurisdiction. The now 15 year old annual flat fee method allotted to each commercial user is no longer relevant in so many ways; it’s totally outdated, based on no logic that anyone can remember, and is a static account list when indeed the users change. The update to this bylaw has been on the work plan now for at least 5 years, yet remains incomplete.

Cortes Curbside Recycling Education – Although the Cortes transfer station, which accepts the Island’s garbage and recycling, is the jurisdiction of the CVRD, the curbside collection is an SRD service. In my decade in office, I can only remember one occasion, in 2015, when the SRD and CVRD combined efforts to put out some education material to the public about our curbside program. When Multi-Material BC (now Recycle BC) began subsidizing our community collection program in 2013, we decided to not pass on the savings to the users for two main reasons. Firstly, to see how the whole program played out financially, and secondly to deliver a robust public recycling education program. Only one issue of one flyer was distributed in 2015. Again, I have been told that the reason this budgeted priority has not been implemented is due to staff resources and the inter-jurisdictional nature of the garbage and recycling services on Cortes.

Cortes Parks Regulation Bylaw – The development of a Cortes parks regulatory bylaw has been on the Parks Department work plan for many years. When the Board was presented with a proposed Whaletown Commons specific regulatory bylaw in early 2016, after the purchase of that park, it directed that no further action be taken on Cortes Island park regulations until a further staff report on the development of a comprehensive Cortes parks

bylaw be presented to the Board. That was nearly four years ago, and the Board has seen nothing since. This leaves all Cortes parks but one completely unregulated. This is a foundational piece of missing regulation.

Cortes Cross-Island Trails: This project was developed certainly by 2013 and formally incorporated into the Area B Parks work plan I believe in 2015 with \$60,000 allocated from the Cortes Gas Tax funds in support of this work. One possible trail linkage was explored by staff and then abandoned. A second one was developed in 2017/18 with SRD permitting and oversight but built entirely with local volunteer effort. Nothing has happened since and there are other trail connection priorities. It has been clearly communicated that the bottleneck in advancing this initiative is staff resourcing.

Cortes Septic Education and Septic Sludge Processing – Cortes is part of a Liquid Waste Management research service which has budgeted professional fees, since at least 2014, to support both septic education on Cortes as well as an initial investigation into the viability of processing pumped-out septic sludge on Island. In the 11 years I have been in office, Cortes has not received any staff attention through this service and the request for septic education and the investigation into local septic sludge processing still remains on the books as a priority for this service. I would think that, as one of the two participating areas in this service, that some of Cortes' interests would be addressed in this timeframe. I have often been told that we have not advanced this matter due to a shortage of internal capacity.

Linnaea Farm Gas Tax Application – Given that few SRD services exist on Cortes that could usefully avail themselves of the Gas Tax funds allocated for Cortes use, we have a history of awarding funds to Cortes third-party agencies. Although we have undertaken a few such projects, the SRD has still not developed any kind of application guide or internal policy around Gas Tax spending, although it has been on the CFO's work plan I believe for at least five years. In March of last year, the Board directed that staff review the application from the Linnaea Farm Society to determine if it is eligible for Gas Tax funding. This is even though the applicant is a Charity who is applying for the same heat pump system that the SRD previously funded to another Cortes charity. One would think that this would be a half hour report to write. However, after inquiring many months later about the status of this report, I was told that there was no dedicated staff able to address this work, and so it remained on the CAO's desk, yet unattended.

I bring these examples to the Board's attention to add examples to my opening concerns about our organizations' inability to complete core work. Again, I have been assured that this backlog is not just a Cortes phenomena but rather systemic within the SRD corporation. If this is indeed the case, I suggest that it warrants a significant conversation at this Board table about resourcing our staff to undertake the work which we assign them to do. I would ask that we have this conversation as part of the budget process underway right now.

Sincerely,



Noba Anderson, Regional Director



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Dear Fellow EASC Directors
February 5, 2020

I write to follow up on a Director's report (see attached) that I submitted to EASC dated March 4th, 2019, requesting support for a gas tax funding application from the Linnaea Farm Society for a heat pump system for the Linnaea Education Centre. I stated that the SRD has already funded two heat pump projects on Cortes in both the Manson's Hall and the Gorge Hall, so the nature of the project is already well understood and supported by both the SRD Board and staff.

In the absence of any template from the SRD, this application was submitted using the application form developed by the Cortes Gas Tax committee and went through the rigor of that committee's evaluation matrix and received their support.

In my report, I asked for support for the following motion:

THAT the Committee recommend that the Board support in principle the gas tax funding application submitted by the Linnaea Farm Society for a heat pump system in their Education Centre to be funded through the Area B Gas Tax fund, and that staff be directed to develop a funding agreement for the Board's consideration.

In the discussion that ensued, members of EASC expressed concern with the eligibility of the Linnaea Farm Society as an applicant stating that it was thought that Linnaea was a private business. Although I addressed the concern clarifying that Linnaea was indeed a charity, the motion that instead passed was:

THAT the matter be referred to staff to determine if the matter is appropriate and eligible for gas tax funding.

The matter then went to Board, and the following motion was passed:

THAT the matter be referred to staff to prepare a report for the Electoral Areas Services Committee.

If the report from staff was simply, as recommended by EASC, to 'determine if the matter is appropriate and eligible' I offer the following information in the hopes that this matter can be advanced.

1. The application form lays out the eligible and ineligible expenditures as per the UBCM's Community Works Fund agreement with the SRD. The Linnaea application clearly states in response to question 18 that of the 'eligible gas tax categories' they are applying under the 'Community energy systems' category. The application is for a heat pump system. We have already funded two such projects with gas tax funds.

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2. The Linnaea Farm Society is a registered Canadian Charity. They included their charitable number in their answer to question 4 in the application. It is S-27497 Charitable Tax # 140416355RR0001. The SRD's 2014-2024 Community Works Fund Agreement with the UBCM allows for funds to be transferred to Third Parties. They define a "Third Party" as "any person or legal entity, other than Canada, British Columbia, UBCM or an Ultimate Recipient, who participates in the implementation of an Eligible Project by means of a Contract." We have entered into third party agreements with the Whaletown Community Club (a Society), and the Southern Cortes Community Association (a Society and also a registered Charity).

There seems to be no doubt that this application is "appropriate and eligible for gas tax funding." This staff report would have been a quick one to write. Even if the report from staff was intended to be of a more robust nature, I submit that 11 months is too long to wait. Each of our respective rural areas have hundreds of thousands of gas tax dollars available for community use, but only if we have the staff will and capacity to work on these files.

There are other gas tax applications that I am expecting from Cortes organizations. I would like any available clarity on how the SRD will be able to manage these requests going forward.

Just last month, the Cortes Island Senior's Society submitted an expression of interest for gas tax funds. Their letter included the following:

This is an expression of interest to apply for funding towards the expansion of the Seniors Village in the eligible Gas Tax Grant categories of: community energy systems, disaster mitigation (emergency power) and drinking water system implementation.

As you know, 4 additional cottages are planned to start construction in 2020 in partnership with BC Housing who will only fund basic rental housing. We would like to make these 4 new units more energy efficient by meeting the new Step 4 code with window, door and heating system upgrades, plus the option of solar panels for hotwater heating and potentially emergency power. We also need to implement a water treatment system from the new well that was drilled last year, which will provide drinking water to all 10 cottages.

When I inquired as to their timeline, they indicated that they were looking for funds that they could access by May/June 2020. Although this application was supported by the Cortes Gas Tax Committee, I had to turn them away given the SRD's inability to respond to requests in a timely manner. They were rightly quite frustrated and wrote "*How frustrating for Cortes to have hundreds of thousands of dollars set aside specifically for us in the SRD's bank account – with no way to access for our local projects!*"

How we can fulfill our end of the Community Works Fund Agreement that we hold with the UBCM? What changes need to happen within the SRD so that we can move on these files in a timely manner?

I also ask again for consideration of the original motion submitted to you 11 months ago.

THAT the Committee recommend that the Board support in principle the gas tax funding application submitted by the Linnaea Farm Society for a heat pump system in their Education Centre to be funded through the Area B Gas Tax fund, and that staff be directed to develop a funding agreement for the Board's consideration.

Thank-you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Noba Anderson, Regional Director