

Community Update for Cowichan Station/Sahtlam/Glenora Electoral Area E

May/June 2022

The CVRD is back in swing after two years of disruption as a result of covid and multiple local emergencies. Remote working and zooming have become normal. There are many new faces and many vacant seats at the CVRD so patience is helpful.

Some new initiatives/issues that need your attention and input are summarized below. Keep checking [Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](https://www.planyourcwr.ca) and the [Cowichan Valley Regional District | Official Website \(cwr.ca\)](https://www.cwr.ca) for more information.

Please feel free to call or email me anytime with questions – I will try and answer or point you in the right direction. Alison.Nicholson@cwr.bc.ca 250 510 3544

FireSmart and Emergency Preparedness

What can you do to be prepared for Wildfire? Heat Waves? Drought? Storms and Flooding? Earthquakes?

- Start by signing up for an automatic emergency alert - see [Alertable](#)
- Be fire smart –see [FireSmart in the Cowichan area | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cwr.ca\)](#)
- Prepare your home –see [Emergency Preparedness | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cwr.ca\)](#) Plan with neighbours - [Local Emergency Response Neighbourhoods \(LERN\) Program | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cwr.ca\)](#)
- Volunteer – see [Volunteer | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cwr.ca\)](#)
- Information and reports on Natural Hazards here [Natural Hazards | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cwr.ca\)](#)
- Sahtlam Firehall, which serves the Sahtlam area, is the only CVRD firehall in Area E. Eagle heights, Glenora and Cowichan station are served by Duncan and Cowichan Bay firehalls.
- The Sahtlam Firehall is overdue for a fire service review and building renovation or replacement plan. Malahat is being done in 2022 and Sahtlam will likely get underway in 2023 if not before.

Official Community Plan Modernization – see [Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](https://www.planyourcwr.ca)

- The official community plan is a set of policies that informs how land use and development will proceed. The policies are implemented through the zoning bylaw.
- The current OCP and zoning bylaw for the electoral areas is being modernized to better address critical issues like attainable housing and the climate crisis.
- Draft policies are available for review and work is underway to identify priority areas for more detailed planning. Additional work is underway on agriculture

- Sahtlam and the Eagle Heights/Koksilah Business Park have been identified as two priority areas for a detailed local area or neighbourhood plan; the Koksilah Watershed has been identified as needing specific planning re water/environment
- Input is welcome and needed as you know your area best. Check out [Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](#) and please provide comments to Alison.Garnett@cvr.bc.ca .
- In early November 2022 there will be a community OCP Idea fair.

Water and watersheds

- Most of us get our water from a well on our property or in the case of Eagle Heights from Duncan's and Dogwood Ridge community wells. Surface and ground water are interconnected so it is critical that we understand and care for water on a watershed basis.
- Cowichan Watershed - Work to address water and fish issues in the heritage Cowichan River have been underway for several decades.
- The low flows in Cowichan River will hopefully be alleviated when the weir is raised; the weir engineering is now complete! see [Cowichan Lake Weir Design – Cowichan River Water Supply](#)
- A partnership of Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst and CVRD is working to acquire grant money and a conservation license to raise the weir 70 cm.
- Koksilah Watershed – recent studies concluded the whole watershed is very degraded which has led to regular critical low summer flows. [Twinned Watersheds Project - Cowichan Watershed Board](#)
- Whole of watershed restoration approach along with water conservation/storage measures and land protection is needed.
- Cowichan Tribes and Province are embarking on a g2g water sustainability planning process which gives us some hope but no immediate fixes [Home | Koksilah Water](#)
- In support of planning process, UVic has started a new 5 year project (Xwulqw'selu Connections) to shed light on surface ground water connections as well connections of people with watershed – volunteers appreciated – anyone interested in helping with sampling during the summer and/or a modelling exercise in fall please contact jshepherd@uvic.ca .
- In the meantime everyone is encouraged to do their part to not waste water and to protect and restore natural areas particularly wetlands and streams which help store water for those dry summer months– our farmers are depending on it.

Managing Waste – see [Waste Reduction through Three-Stream Curbside Collection | Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](#)

- Over the next few years CVRD plans to move to 3 stream (garbage, recycling and organics) waste pick up in all electoral areas. We do not have way to deal with our waste (e.g. a landfill) and disposal costs just keep going up. This initiative will help reduce the amount of garbage that we ship off island for disposal.
- Staff need your input on the logistics. What are the issues – bears? smell?

Active Transportation- see [Regional Active Transportation Plan | Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](#)

- Plan is underdevelopment to support investment in active transportation infrastructure
- Aim is a plan that identifies routes people use to get around on foot and bicycles etc., how to improve connectivity and safety and what would be the priorities for investment.
- Doing actual projects is a challenge: Expensive, need an agreement with MOTI, need to address drainage, often roads are not wide enough to accommodate a bike lane or separate pathway, and sometimes the province does not own the road right of way.
- In Area E we have done preliminary work to understand the challenges for two areas:
 1. The Eagle Heights neighbourhood (Miller/Koksilah/Allenby roads) because it is densely populated, close to town and dangerous for pedestrians. Engineers recently surveyed the road and provided recommendations on locating a roadside pathway. There are significant and expensive drainage issues to address because of the instability of the Allenby Road slope.
 2. Koksilah Road from the HUB to the Trans Canada Highway to connect to the Wilmot Road pathway to Cowichan Bay Village. The survey found portions of the road were in private ownership and that issue would need to be fixed before any progress could be made.

Internet and cellular connectivity – see [Cowichan Internet & Cellular Connectivity Strategy | Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](#)

- Strategy is being developed for the region to support access to senior government investment in underserved areas (In March 2022, \$830 million grant funding was announced to support shovel ready projects that will improve high-speed Internet access).
- Strategy based on community input and inventory of existing infrastructure/access to identify priority gaps – These have been identified as Thetis and Penelakut islands, Ditidhat First Nation, Cowichan Lake Area and Cowichan Station. These areas will be the focus of more detailed community connectivity plans.
- Target completion of strategy is August.

Parks and Trails

- Community Parks in Area E continue mainly in a maintenance mode because of staffing shortages.
- New climbing apparatus for Currie Park is planned thanks in part to the Sahtlam Firefighters.
- Cowichan Valley Trail took a hard hit in the Sahtlam area due to last November's storm. Work is ongoing to repair the three sections. [Microsoft Word - 2022-05-19 Important Notice - CVT Ongoing Closures UPDATE \(cvrd.ca\)](#)
- Roadside pathway engineering feasibility survey has been completed for Miller/Indian/Koksilah road area. Next step is community consultation to discuss route options and stormwater management challenges.

Housing

- Cowichan Housing Association – see [Cowichan Housing Association - Helping House Cowichan](#) receives up to \$750K/year from the CVRD to provide expertise to organizations developing affordable housing projects and to leverage grant funding for those projects.
- CVRD is developing a workforce housing strategy. See [Workforce Housing Strategy | Plan Your CVRD \(planyourcowichan.ca\)](#)
- Housing is also a key issue being addressed in the OCP modernization process

Regional Recreation – see [Regional Recreation | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cprd.ca\)](#)

- This fall there will be a referendum question regarding phasing in a regional approach to planning and funding the nine main recreation facilities in the valley.
- The goal is a more equitable and consistent funding model for the region.
- Each jurisdiction would contribute based on the usage by the residents for each facility. Usage statistics would be updated every five years.
- Area E would see an increase of about 7% over the three years.

Roads

- Roads in electoral areas are the responsibility of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI)
- Emcon Services is the road maintenance contractor for MOTI
- To report road maintenance issues please call 1-866-353-3136
- General concerns can also be directed to MOTI staff – new Area Managers for our area are: Francois Laurent (southern Area E to Boys road) and Owen Page (north of Boys Road)

And....because Glenora asked, some notes on.....

Taxes

- Unfortunately nothing is free and taxes keep rising but did you know that you can pay your property taxes monthly instead of being whacked by a big bill each July. All you have to do is set up a rural property account online with [eTaxBC](#) to make automatic payments semi-monthly or monthly from your bank account.
- In general we are faced with rising costs due to:
 - Inflation
 - Higher construction costs
 - Global supply chain issues
 - Soaring insurance rates
 - Rural and remote area challenges – access to skilled workers and economy of scale
 - Specialty markets (ice arena chillers in wake of Fernie deaths)

- Rising wages
- Local governments are also being required to do more and more as:
 - senior governments cut costs, local governments are pressured to fill service gaps – e.g., groundwater monitoring wells
 - regulations are strengthened (e.g., water treatment requirements increase, fire department training and emergency preparedness standards raised etc.)
 - demand for new services increases – e.g., pickleball courts, more transit
 - the population grows meaning more planning, more services, more staff....
- Kicking the can down the road – historically local governments did a poor job of documenting their assets and their condition. The standard policy was not to tax in advance of an actual expense so it was hard to plan and keep pace of the real servicing costs. We are playing catch up now.
- Wildcards – covid and climate change– climate change in particular requires significant investment to transition away from fossil fuels and to adapt and prepare for wild weather, rising seas etc.
- In 2022 the funds budgeted by the CVRD to deliver services in Area E were \$2,854,869 (the total requisition) which is an increase of \$77,615 from 2021. [2022 Budget | Cowichan Valley Regional District \(cvrld.ca\)](#)
- This total requisition is divided up among the various property owners based on:
 - the class of property (e.g., residential, managed forest, business, agriculture etc.) and the corresponding tax rate for that class, and
 - the assessed value of each property.

Classes, tax rates and assessments are determined by BC Assessment.

- In addition to the total requisition required to deliver services, from one year to the next a change in the number of properties in a class, the tax rate of a class as well as the property assessment will affect the amount of tax paid.
- For example, from 2021 to 2022 the managed forest land taxable value per unit declined by 10.42% which transferred costs to the other classes notably the residential class which is the biggest.
- It is also important to note that the average residential property assessment in Area E went up by 36.7%. If your assessment went up by more than 36.7% you would expect your taxes to rise more than average.
- Rural taxes are complicated and hard to predict!