THE CORPORATION OF THE
DISTRICT OF SUMMERLAND
INFORMATION REPORT

DATE: June 26, 2023 FILE: 0810-01

TO: Graham Statt, Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Lori Mullin, Director of Community Services

SUBJECT: Recreation Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That Council pass the following resolution:

> ***THAT the "Recreation Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan" report from the Director of Community Services dated June 26, 2023, be received for information.***

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

To Enhance Our Quality of Life

CULTURAL IMPACT STATEMENT:

Providing recreation facilities and amenities supports community vibrancy and a healthy and connected community.

PURPOSE:

To meet the District's communications consultant for the Recreation Centre Referendum and review the key components of the proposed Strategic Communications Plan.

DISCUSSION:

District staff have engaged Christy Poirier, communications and media specialist, to develop a strategic communications plan and assist the District on the roll-out of communication materials and activities for the Recreation Centre Referendum.

It is recognized that there is a lot of information about the Recreation Centre project that needs to be communicated in order for Summerland residents to make a well-informed decision at the Recreation Centre Referendum, anticipated to be scheduled at the end of October or beginning of November 2023.

As part of the referendum process, staff are committed to delivering a comprehensive information campaign to help eligible voters become aware of the project, its details, financial implications for Summerland taxpayers, and how eligible voters can participate in the referendum process.

The District of Summerland is committed to providing balanced and objective information, in order to assist the public in understanding issues and options. The District's promise to the public regarding the proposed Recreation Centre project and the referendum is to keep them *informed*.

All communication to come from the District of Summerland will be truthful, accurate and factual. Staff members will operate with absolute integrity, credibility and a purpose to serve the community of Summerland. It is with this in mind that a Strategic Communications Plan ("the plan") has been developed on a foundation of truthful communication, avoiding misrepresentation or falsehood, and fostering an environment of transparency regarding the proposed Recreation Centre project and the corresponding referendum question.

Communication Goal

The District of Summerland is seeking to *increase public awareness and understanding* of the proposed Recreation Centre project and the referendum question that will be presented to Summerland electors. Specifically, the District is seeking to *inform* Summerland electors of:

- what would be included in the recreation facility;
- cost information, borrowing terms, and impact for Summerland taxpayers;
- site information and how the facility would fit with the arena and curling club;
- how the facility could be used by many different types of users;
- reasons for recommendation (based on the 2018 Parks & Recreation Master Plan, Facility Condition Assessment, and Recreation Centre Feasibility & Site Fit Study); and
- project information (e.g., timeline for construction, etc.).

Additionally, the District is seeking to have an effect on the *action* of Summerland electors, to become informed about the proposed Recreation Centre project with accurate, fact-based, and up-to-date information, and to vote in the referendum.

Communication Phases and Approach

All communications about the project and referendum will follow guidelines from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Elections BC and will utilize engagement best practices from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The District of Summerland is committed to ensuring the key principles of transparency and the stewardship of public trust are upheld. Throughout the duration of the information campaign, relevant questions and concerns of the community will be addressed. Information that is shared will be accurate, fact-based, and truthful, to allow the public to make an informed decision.

The plan includes four communication phases:

- Phase 1 – Planning and consultation (Spring 2020 – July 2023)
- Phase 2 – Sharing information with the public (August 2023 to the referendum date)
- Phase 3 – Getting out the vote (September 2023 to the referendum date)
- Phase 4 – Continuing the conversation (post referendum)

The plan follows the RACE model, which is a best practice in communication planning. The RACE acronym represents steps in the process related to **Research, Analysis, Communication** and **Evaluation**.

In Phase 1, research, analysis, and communication development is taking place. This phase includes the analysis of input from members of the public, interested parties, and elected officials during the development of the 2018 Parks & Recreation Master Plan, the 2021 Needs Assessment, and the 2022 Recreation Centre Feasibility & Site Fit Study. It also includes analysis of conversations District staff members have had with community members about the proposed Recreation Centre project, to help determine the most frequently asked questions.

In Phase 2, information will be shared directly and indirectly with the public through various communication channels on an ongoing basis, and relevant questions raised by the public will be answered.

The plan follows an *integrated communication approach*, using a healthy mix of contemporary and traditional marketing and public relations techniques in order to reach a diverse audience that is already inundated with constant messaging, advertisements, and information from other sources. This mix includes the use of:

- interpersonal communication (e.g., public information booths and open houses, pop ups, market booths, service club and business organization presentations, local recreation events, staff information sessions)
- news media
- owned media (websites, social media platforms)
- paid advertising (radio broadcast, print, electronic/outdoor signage, digital)
- organizational communication (e.g., Council reports/memos, 2018 Parks & Recreation Master Plan, Facility Condition Assessment, Recreation Centre Feasibility & Site Fit Study, rack card, community posters, District utility newsletters, project infographics)

In Phase 3, referendum details will be shared including voting locations and dates. The second part of Phase 3 will be evaluation – where the community is empowered to make the final decision. Evaluation will include the level of public participation throughout the information campaign and voting process, as well as other insights and measures such as website statistics, budget summary, and an internal debriefing of lessons learned.

Phase 4 is dependent on the outcome of the referendum. If electors vote in favour of borrowing up to $50 million to develop and construct the Recreation Centre, Phase 4 would include ongoing community conversations on topics such as facility design. Phase 4 will not occur if the referendum does not pass.

Messaging

Regular and open conversations and information sharing is critical to ensuring a fair and balanced referendum and that the public has a reasonable opportunity to indicate its views on the matter. It is imperative that key messages are accurate, fact-based, truthful, and easy to understand. The District will provide multiple methods and opportunities for the public to easily access information about the proposed Recreation Centre project, the referendum process, and facts that will empower them to make an informed decision at the polls.

Spokesperson Considerations

The Mayor will act as the official spokesperson on behalf of Council and the Corporation, and will be the primary interviewee for media opportunities in relation to the proposed Recreation Centre project and the corresponding referendum. If required, key spokespeople have also been

identified from the Administration to answer media inquiries and provide fact-based information about the process that has led up to the referendum (e.g., results of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Needs Assessment), details of the proposed facility, and the referendum process itself.

It is anticipated that all Summerland elected officials will be asked questions about the proposed project and the referendum, whether in person while they're meeting with people in the community, or online. To help all elected officials answer questions of the public, Council will be invited to a workshop, outlining key project information. Additionally, a series of frequently asked questions and key messages will be provided to ensure information that is shared is entirely accurate, fact-based, and consistent. Elected officials will also be offered online resources where they can direct residents for further information, if they are unable to fully answer a question that may arise.

Financial Messaging Considerations

District staff have been researching and anticipating questions about funding sources, borrowing timelines, project costs, parcel and property tax implications, and debt servicing. To help Summerland electors become aware of and understand the funding strategy for the proposed Recreation Centre, particular attention will be given to sharing financial information in clear, easy to understand language and formats, multiple times and on multiple communication channels.

Key information: impact for the Summerland taxpayer
If electors vote in favour of the referendum question:

- The District of Summerland will have up to five years to begin borrowing funds for construction of the Recreation Centre.
- The District is not required to borrow all of the funds at one time. Borrowing can take place as required during construction of the facility.
- The funding strategy, which was approved by Council at its June 5, 2023 Council Meeting, directs staff, upon electoral assent, to include the expenditure to pay debt servicing costs for the Recreation Centre project through a leveled 50% parcel tax and a leveled 50% property taxation increase to ensure the full amount of the annual debt servicing costs are funded in this manner.
- To reduce the amount the District would have to borrow for the project, and to reduce the impact for Summerland taxpayers, the District is also actively pursuing major grant funding for the planning, design, and construction of the facility.

Legislative Messaging Considerations

The Strategic Communications Plan ensures the key principles of transparency and the stewardship of public trust are upheld. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Elections BC oversees the legislative requirements and information sharing during referendums and gives permission to municipalities to advertise and communicate information about the matter proposed in referendums in any manner they see fit, including advertising, writing articles, and sending notices to the community. The District's role is to provide accurate, fact-based, truthful, and balanced information about the initiative so eligible electors can make an informed decision about how they will vote.

Implementation Plan

Phase 1 - Planning and consultation (Spring 2020 - July 2023)

- Consult with public, interested parties, and elected officials
- Consult with District staff
- Collect questions and answers for project-related information and financial information
- Plan presentation and community information booth opportunities (provide opportunity for organizations to request presentations)
- Initiate necessary graphic design
- Develop a suite of communication tools such as: a list of frequently asked questions; fact sheet; project infographic; webpage; presentation slide deck; pop-up booth materials; print and digital advertising materials; media releases; rack card; and information stands
- Research pricing and finalize planning for other communication tools and begin writing, designing, and producing the tools (print, web, social)
- Launch and regularly update referendum information webpage

Phase 2 – Sharing information with the public (August 2023 to the referendum date)

- Continue producing communication tools (print, web, social)
- Invite elected officials and District staff to 'lunch and learn' type workshops; provide project information, background materials, digital and print resources, and information on the referendum process to help Council members and staff answer questions from the public
- Participate in community events and business-related meetings where possible, such as:
    - Summerland Steam hockey games – concourse
    - Other local sport or recreation event(s)
    - Summerland Rotary Sunday Market
    - Other summer/fall community festivals/events
- Host open house/information sessions and/or display information at various locations throughout the community, such as:
    - Summerland Aquatic & Fitness Centre
    - Summerland District Hall
    - Summerland Arena & Curling Club
    - School gymnasiums
    - George Ryga Arts & Cultural Centre
    - Summerland Community Centre (Senior's Drop-In Centre)
    - Harold Simpson Youth Centre
- Distribute weekly media releases to share detailed project information and background
- Distribute regular social media posts (include videos showing the state of the current Aquatic & Fitness Centre) to answer frequently asked questions and share project information
- Provide information and updates to local and regional media, answering media questions as they arise, offering guided public and media tours of the Summerland Aquatic & Fitness Centre, and responding to requests for interviews
- Place information boards in key locations throughout the community to share answers to frequently asked questions and offer a link to more information on the established project webpage
- Update the project webpage as new information becomes available

Phase 3 – Getting out the vote (September 2023 to the referendum date)

- Inform the general public on voting opportunities and encourage the electorate to vote, using a variety of tools that include, but are not limited to:

    - Media relations
    - Advertising
    - Webpage
    - Other District-owned communication channels
- Evaluate the results (referendum results, website statistics, social media statistics, feedback)

Phase 4 – Continuing the conversation

- This phase is to be determined, depending on the result of the referendum.

Communication Tools

- Media relations
    - Launch referendum information campaign
    - Provide details about www.rdosregionalconnections.ca information page
    - Announce details of upcoming community outreach opportunities (open houses and community event booths)
    - Weekly media releases to share detailed project information and background
    - Media interviews, as requested
    - Guided media tour of Summerland Aquatic & Fitness Centre
    - Announce voting opportunities (dates, times, locations, eligibility to vote)
    - Mayor's column and podcast

- Owned media and District assets
    - Webpages on District and RDOS owned websites: www.summerland.ca and www.rdosregionalconnections.ca
    - Social media channels (Facebook, Twitter)
    - Weekly DID YOU KNOW and QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK posts on social media accounts, as well as short videos and links to all media releases
    - Static information boards / infographics in District facilities
    - Signage and banners
    - Internal communication channels

- Paid advertising (newspaper, radio, digital, social media)

- Print materials (rack card and business card, poster board FAQs, QR code cards to www.rdosregionalconnections.ca, posters, project infographics)

- Videography

- Open houses and information booths at community events

- Presentation materials for community organizations

The full Recreation Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan is currently under development and is targeted to be completed by the beginning of July. Any feedback or suggestions that Council has to additional items to be included in the Plan is welcomed.

BACKGROUND:

The Recreation Centre has been identified by Council as a priority project. The Parks & Recreation Master Plan community survey indicated that replacing this facility was one of the highest priorities for the community. At 47 years old, the existing Summerland Aquatic & Fitness Centre is at the end of its serviceable life which was confirmed by the 2018 Facility Condition Assessment Report.

Project timelines and milestones:



Staff, with communications support from the RDOS, have been updating project information on the District webpage www.summerland.ca/rec-centre and through the project engagement page https://rdosregionalconnections.ca/summerland-recreation-centre

LEGISLATION and POLICY:

- Part 4, *Local Government Act* (Assent Voting)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Reviewed by Financial Services:

Council will require the approval of the electors to borrow the funds needed for construction of this project. Council has previously directed that a referendum ("assent voting") be conducted to obtain this approval, in accordance with Part 4 of the *Local Government Act*.

To ensure the full amount of annual debt servicing costs are funded staff will create an Accumulated Reserve Loan account to internally borrow sufficient funds to pay annual debt servicing costs, in excess of the annual leveled parcel tax amount and annual taxation increases, from 2024 to 2027, with full repayment of the Accumulated Reserve Loan account by year end 2027.

Based on the indicative interest rate of 4.62% as of June 19, 2023, taxation increases of 3.76%, 3.77%, 3.77% and 3.76% will be needed in order to cover 50% of the estimated debt. Should interest rates change during any of the four estimated debt draws during construction, the projected tax rate increases will need to be adjusted (either up or down depending on how the

interest rate moves) in order to ensure the appropriate amount is collected through taxation to cover off the actual debt payments.

Up to $100,000 is allocated in the 2023 capital plan for the Recreation Centre Project for consulting services, communication materials, and other related project expenses.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. Recreation Centre Referendum Strategic Communications Plan Presentation Slides

CONCLUSION:

Staff continue to complete project milestones working towards the goal of replacing the Summerland Aquatic & Fitness Centre which is nearing the end of its serviceable life and prepare for an upcoming referendum to determine public support.

OPTIONS:

1. Move the motion as recommended by staff.
2. Refer to staff for other options.

Respectfully submitted,



Lori Mullin
Director of Community Services

Endorsed by,



Graham Statt
Chief Administrative Officer

Presentation: Yes ☒ No ☐