

MEMORANDUM

TO: Gerald Christie, Manager Development Services
Columbia Shuswap Regional District

FROM: Allan Neilson
Neilson Strategies Inc.

DATE: July 29, 2019

SUBJECT: **ELECTORAL AREA D BUILDING INSPECTION — PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES**

INTRODUCTION

In early 2019, the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD) determined to proceed with the expansion of the CSRD Building Inspection Service to include the whole of Electoral Area D. The exact date on which the service is intended to take effect in the Electoral Area has yet to be finalized; however, the CSRD noted that it expected to implement the service in early March, 2020.

In an effort to provide property owners, residents, builders and other stakeholders with opportunities to learn and ask questions about the new service, the CSRD undertook a public information program over a four-week period beginning late June, 2019. Neilson Strategies Inc. was engaged by the CSRD to assist in the design and delivery of the program. This memorandum outlines the program structure and reports on the input received.

INFORMATION PROGRAM

The information program consisted of the following components:

- *Written Materials* — A set of written materials was produced to outline, both in detail and in summary form, the key elements of the service initiative. Materials included:
 - a twelve-page *Overview* of the initiative
 - a *Frequently Asked Questions* sheet that anticipated and answered a series of questions that property owners and others may have of the initiative

A digital version of the *Frequently Asked Questions* was made available online. Paper copies of the *Overview* and *Frequently Asked Questions* documents were provided at three open houses (see below). The availability of materials was advertised through social media, in local printed media, and on the CSRD's website, beginning late June, 2019.

- *Website* — The CSRD used a portion of its main website to profile the service initiative. The *Frequently Asked Questions* was available for review on this part of the site; all key events in

the information program were listed. Viewers could use the site, as well, to provide comments on, and ask questions about, the initiative. People were directed to the website through social media advertising, in print media notices, and in materials presented at the public open houses.

- *Public Open Houses* — The CSRD hosted three open houses in July, 2019, for property owners, residents, builders and others in Area D. The open houses occurred as follows:
 - Falkland Community Hall
Monday, July 8, 2019
 - Rancho Elementary School
Tuesday, July 9, 2019
 - Silver Creek Community Hall
Tuesday, July 16, 2019

The open house details were advertised in the community publications, online, and using social media.¹ Each open house featured a self-directed portion during which attendees were able to review large poster boards on elements of the service, and ask questions of the Electoral Area D Director, CSRD staff, and the consultant. Each open house also featured a presentation on the service by the consultant, and a Q & A portion. Attendees at the events were invited to leave written comments using forms available, submit comments online using an electronic comment form, or send emails directly to CSRD staff. Attendees were also invited to take handouts of the *Overview* and the *Frequently Asked Questions*.

The Falkland event drew 65-70 members of the community. At Rancho, a total of 35-40 persons turned out, whereas 85-90 people attended the event at Silver Creek. Some people attended and spoke at more than one of the meetings.

INPUT RECEIVED

Property owners, residents, builders and others were given opportunities to provide input online through the CSRD website, and at the open houses directly to the CSRD representatives present, and using written comment sheets.

Written Comments

In total, 13 comments cards were submitted at the three open houses (almost all from the Silver Creek event). Thirty (30) online submissions were made over the four-week information period. Of the combined 43 submissions, all but three expressed the view that the initiative is neither required nor wanted. The following common themes ran through the submissions:

¹ The open houses were advertised in the same way as the 2017 and 2018 open houses were advertised for Electoral Area B, C, and E during the information program that preceded the expansion of the Building Inspection Service to those areas of the Regional District.

- electors in Area D deserve an opportunity to vote on the initiative through a referendum
- the cost of the service to residents who needed to apply for permits would outweigh the benefits to individuals and the community
- other service needs in the Electoral Area should precede any initiative to introduce building inspection
- any building inspection service should be voluntary to those who wished to obtain a permit
- there are many farmers in Area D who would be particularly penalized by new requirements
- there is no need for building inspection in Area D; there is no problem to fix
- people in Area D build to code already and hire their own inspectors to ensure compliance and building safety
- the initiative to introduce building inspection is an effort on the part of the CSRD simply to raise more tax dollars (i.e., a "tax grab")
- people choose to live in Area D because of the absence of building inspection and other government regulations
- building inspection would be expensive and unnecessary; it would erode the freedoms and quality of life in the area
- if it is introduced, include more exemptions (e.g., focus on the construction of entire houses) and extend the implementation grace period (e.g., up to five years)

Verbal Input

Several questions were asked and comments provided during the Q & A portion of the open houses. At the Falkland event, questions and comments focused on the specific types of instances in which building permits would, or would not, be required. Some attendees expressed opposition to the service; most persons present, however, wished to understand how the service would work in practice.

The nature of the questions and comments at the Rancho and Silver Creek open houses was quite different from that of the Falkland event, as was the tone of the discussions. At both Rancho and Silver Creek, several residents questioned the value and need for building inspection; a number were passionate in their opposition to the service initiative. Stated benefits related to enforcement of land use regulations, building health and safety, consumer protection, and other issues, were dismissed by many of the attendees. The inability to vote on the service through referendum was a significant point of contention.

To be sure, not all attendees expressed opposition — indeed, one person explained to others her reasons for support. In all, however, supporters of the service and those who may be unsure were overshadowed and outnumbered by those who oppose — and in several cases, vehemently oppose — building inspection in Area D.

CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS

Residents of Area D were asked to provide input on the building inspection initiative in writing through the CSRD website and using comment cards, and in person at the three public open houses.

Residents made good use of both opportunities. Based on the input received, it is clear that there is considerable opposition to the CSRD's initiative to expand the Building Inspection Service to Electoral Area D.

The CSRD's service initiative is based in part on the Board's desire to introduce an effective enforcement tool for Area D land use regulations. In unincorporated areas of the Regional District, the CSRD continues to struggle with land use infractions (e.g., construction in setback areas, encroachments on adjacent properties, construction of secondary buildings on single lots) that are difficult and expensive to enforce "after the fact". Building inspection was presented as a tool to enable the CSRD to identify and deal with potential infractions before they occur. This community benefit did not persuade many of the residents who attended the open houses, or those who submitted comments, of the need for the service. Nor did service benefits related to the health and safety of new and renovated buildings, stronger consumer protection, and other items.