

Airshed Roundtable

July 22, 2020

The Comox Valley struggles with poor air quality, especially in the winter months. The interactions between the causes, impacts, and potential solutions of poor air quality are complex. Improving air quality touches on personal choice and behaviours, social norms, socioeconomic inequities, government regulation and cultural values.

Background:

Over the next three years, the key milestones of the Airshed Roundtable Project are developing and implementing a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy and creating an Evaluation and Monitoring Framework to track progress over time.

- September 2019: The air quality framework presented to the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board. The framework includes an Air Quality Coordinator, Steering Committee and Airshed Roundtable (“Roundtable”).
- March 2020: Staff requested resources through the Regional Growth Strategy Budget to hire an Air Quality Coordinator to oversee the Airshed Roundtable project.
- May 2020: Pinna Sustainability was secured as Air Quality Coordinator contractor.
- June 2020: The Steering Committee met for the first time. They are tasked with advancing the work (setting priorities and direction), identifying knowledge gaps, supporting strategic planning and acting as champions for air quality management. Representatives include staff from the City of Courtenay; Village of Cumberland; Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy; Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development; Island Health and Vancouver Island University. The Town of Comox has declined to participate due to resource constraints and the Village of Cumberland has indicated they have limited capacity. K’ómoks First Nation has been invited, but has not confirmed their participation at this time.
- July 14, 2020: CVRD Board approved distribution of invitations to non-profits, citizens’ groups, the private sector and government agencies to join the Roundtable. In addition, the CVRD Board will appoint up to six members of the general public (application process occurring until July 29, 2020). The Roundtable will meet 3 - 4 times per year and their purpose is to help establish priorities through issue identification, share potential solutions, provide advice and support to the Steering Committee and share information with the organizations / groups that they represent.

Next Steps:

- September 2020: The first meeting is tentatively scheduled for the Roundtable.
- While it is tempting to proceed with some immediate actions this wood stove burning season, improving air quality is complex, controversial and is a multi-jurisdictional issue. Future actions will be determined through the creation and implementation of a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy. Strategy development will commence in 2021 and will help coordinate the actions of multiple jurisdictions for years to come.

- The CVRD continues to administer the Wood Smoke Reduction program (rebate program funded by the Ministry of Environment and Island Health) on behalf of the electoral areas and municipalities. Educational activities are planned for this burning season including a new animated video and radio ads about the impacts of wood smoke, alternatives to woodstoves, smart burning and the rebate program. This campaign is launching this fall.
- Currently, Pinna Sustainability is preparing a State of the Air memo to highlight local research, actions taken thus far and best practices. The memo will encourage a common starting point for Roundtable discussions about the content of the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy.
- For more information about the Airshed Roundtable Project, please see the CVRD website: www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/Airshedroundtable and the recent staff report to the Board:

<http://agendaminutes.comoxvalleyrd.ca/cvrdboardmeetings/default.aspx?MeetingID=3114&PrinterVersion=0&DocumentTypeID=1&AgendaDeadline=7/10/2020%204%3A23%3A35%20PM>