



Trail Head Facilities Online Engagement – Summary Report January-February 2019

March 8, 2019

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1.0 Executive Summary

With the location of the future Comox Valley Water Treatment Plant off Lake Trail Road confirmed, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) undertook an engagement process between Oct. 2018 and Feb. 2019 to inform the public and seek input about proposed recreational facilities at the site, which offers access to Bevan Trail and the Puntledge Trail network. It is important to the regional district to hear from the community so any amenities created meet the needs of those who use or live near the trails in the area.

The public participation focus was two-fold: to INFORM area residents about the project and its potential impacts and opportunities; and to INVOLVE area residents, engagement stakeholders and the general public in determining how to proceed with development of facilities and amenities at the site of the new plant.

Two approaches were used to carry out this engagement:

- *One-on-One Meetings:* Early outreach and one-on-one meetings were held with area residents, project stakeholders and community partners.
- *Online Survey:* A survey was created on ConnectCVRD to allow the public to weigh in with their ideas and opinions about potential amenities at the treatment plant site. In addition to other promotional activities, an online ad campaign was implemented to draw audiences to the survey.

The results of this outreach included interaction with roughly 370 people through both the online and in-person components. About 105 of those were actively engaged – participating in meetings or submitting a survey online.

Themes of feedback included:

1. Desire for the site and trail head to remain as natural as possible
2. Desire for some amenities, including parking, washrooms, drinking water, garbage bins and dog waste bags, but a keen interest in keeping any development minimal and low impact
3. Concerns about motorized vehicle use, litter and vandalism as a result of opening up the trail system
4. General support for establishing a formal trail head at the site

The project team will now provide this information to the three qualified design-build proponents in order that they may incorporate this feedback into the design of the water treatment plant site.

2.0 Introduction

With the location of the future water treatment plant off Lake Trail Road confirmed, the CVRD launched an engagement process to seek public input on proposed recreational facilities at the site, which offers access to Bevan Trail and the Puntledge Trail network.

The treatment plant site offers the opportunity for installing a connecting trail and new facilities to make the existing trails even more accessible to the public. It was important to the CVRD to hear from the community so that amenities could be created that meet the needs of those who use the trails in the area.

Feedback received from respondents is to be used to assist in determining how to proceed with development of facilities and amenities at the site of the new plant. It will be shared with the qualified design-build proponents so that feedback can be incorporated into the design of the treatment plant site.

An equally important objective was to use this opportunity to inform neighbours, stakeholders and the general public about the water treatment project and progress being made.

2.1 ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The goals guiding this engagement were:

1. Provide neighbours and affected parties with information about the project, its potential impacts and opportunities and process for providing feedback.
2. Identify and obtain relevant local knowledge and information.
3. Identify concerns and collect feedback to inform design of the water treatment plant site.
4. Clearly explain how feedback will be received and considered.
5. Build long-lasting relationships, communications channels and overall trust with key stakeholders and influencers.

2.2 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Two distinct processes were used during this four-month engagement process:

1. *Direct, One-on-One Discussions:* Early outreach with impacted stakeholders and community partners, which involved hand-delivering letters to the properties neighbouring the site and subsequent one-on-one meetings with area residents. Project team members met with neighbours, partners and stakeholders to talk about the project, its potential impacts, gather feedback and discuss concerns.
2. *Online Survey Tool:* Using the regional district's online engagement tool, ConnectCVRD, a survey was posted and promoted in order that the larger community could provide input into potential trail head amenities under consideration at the treatment plant site.

3.0 Engagement Results

3.1 FEEDBACK FROM AREA RESIDENTS

Feedback received from area residents and community partners during meetings in the fall of 2018 is summarized as follows:

- Concern with motorized vehicle (ATVs, motorcycles) access as trails and service roads are built out
- Desire to prohibit equestrian use
- Importance of installing gates/ditching to limit access after hours and access by motorized vehicles – also decommissioning of existing trail from Lake Trail Road, again to limit unauthorized access
- Desire to minimize tree loss
- Concern about potential for light and noise pollution
- Clear support for official trail head facilities, with adequate parking

3.2 ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

The broader Comox Valley community/general public were asked to weigh in with their opinions and ideas by responding to a short, nine-question survey located at connectcvrld.ca/WaterTreatment.

Participation in the online survey was encouraged through publication of a news release, issuance of a ConnectCVRD newsletter to registered users, distribution of an email to known project stakeholders, execution of a digital advertising campaign using Facebook/Instagram from February 8-20, and placement of posters on the trail head and throughout the local community.

3.2.2 RESULTS BY SURVEY QUESTION

The online survey ran from Jan. 14 to Feb. 25, 2018 offering a six-week window for those interested to contribute. In total, 356 visitors clicked to the online survey site, and 96 submissions were received from registered users. Results are broken down below.

Q1 We are considering some options for educating residents about the new water treatment plant, the history, environment and protection of our watershed, including the cultural significance of K'ómoks First Nation lands and the history of the Bevan Town site. Please rank the following options in order of preference. - please note, not all options need to be selected.

Options listed in order of preference:

1. Information kiosk
2. Covered shelter + place to rest
3. Information boards staggered along a trail
4. Gathering area to be used by school groups + others

Q2 What other ideas do you have that would be effective in helping us to educate about the watershed?

- Covered shelter with information panels underneath
- No dumping signs, monitoring and collection of garbage
- Leave forests and trails as natural as possible
- Keep signage at trail head – otherwise takes away from natural beauty
- No signage or interpretive information is necessary – provide info in the form of a brochure or website
- Information on how to stay safe on the trails (e.g. AdventureSmart)
- Parking and washrooms
- Presentations by naturalists
- Minimal impact to trees

Q3 If you don't think educational opportunities are needed please tell us why.

- All ideas are good and needed – people need context
- Educational opportunities are important but they are expensive – the experience of being in nature is more important
- Majority of users will be local and educational materials aren't necessary
- Leave forests and trails natural
- Concern with upkeep and keeping costs/spending to a minimum
- Users can access educational materials from website
- Concern about potential for vandalism

Q4 We are considering some basic amenities for this site. Please choose which amenities you feel are important.

Listed in order of responses (# of responses):

1. Garbage bin (91)
2. Washroom facilities (79)
3. Water bottle filling station (74)
4. Dog waste bags (72)
5. Wheelchair accessibility (60)
6. Interpretive trail to Bevan (47)
7. Pet watering station (41)
8. Interpretive trail to new water treatment plant (38)

Q5 Are there any additional amenities that you would like to see at the trail head?

Other suggested amenities included:

- Horse trailer parking and horse friendly trails
- Gate for closing to keep out ATVs and after-hours partiers
- Shared trail for bikes
- Off leash dog area (mentioned 3 times)
- Good trail map of all surrounding trail systems with hiking times/distance (mentioned 3 times)
- Benches along the trails for elders and disabled people (mentioned twice)
- Lighting in parking area

However, a larger number of respondents didn't want to see any amenities, expressing "less is best" and requesting that footprint of parking lot and amenities be kept to a minimum. Concerns were expressed about the potential for litter, vandalism, partying and motorized vehicle use.

Q6 Residents accessing the Puntledge Trail Network from this location are currently parking at the side of the road. We would like to create a safe area for trail users to park. What size of parking lot do you think is needed to accommodate users of this trail?

Listed in order to responses (# of responses):

1. 20 spots (49)
2. 40 spots (39)
3. 60 spots (6)

Q7 We are looking at ways to best utilize the excess excavated material for non-motorized activities from our Water Treatment Plant construction site. Which option do you think would be the best use of this material?

Listed in order of responses (# of responses):

1. Planted berms (35)
1. Recreational opportunities (35)
2. No opinion about use of materials (19)
3. Other – please describe your idea (7)

Q8 Please describe your idea here.

Ideas suggested included (7 total responses to question):

- BMX bike track
- Look out area
- Outdoor gym
- No motorized vehicles
- Use excavated material to enhance current trail system – shore up muddy sections of trails
- If area is natural, planted berms don't seem appropriate
- No changes

Q9 Which recreational opportunity most interests you?

Listed in order to responses (# of responses):

1. Mountain biking (17)
2. Hiking (13)
3. Other (3)
4. Equestrian (2)

3.3 THEMES OF FEEDBACK

- *Desire for site and trail head to remain as natural as possible:* The most consistent comments were centered around interest in keeping the trails and surrounding area as natural as possible, with minimal tree removal and minimal signage so as not to take away from the natural raw beauty of the area.
- *Desire for low impact development – “less is best”:* While there was support for the introduction of some amenities, such as parking, washrooms, drinking water, garbage bins and dog waste bags, there is a desire to keep the footprint of the parking lot and any amenities as small and natural as possible. Concern was also expressed about the cost of installing extensive amenities and upkeep.
- *Concerns about motorized vehicle use, litter and vandalism:* Those responding expressed concern about the potential for vandalism, litter and after-hours partying as a result of opening up the trail system, but were open to the installation of gates/ditching to keep the site and trail head access secure.
- *Support for establishing a formal trail head at the site:* Respondents and area residents expressed support for establishing a formal trail head at the site of the new treatment plant, complete with minimal amenities and extensive map of surrounding trails, including hiking times/distances.

A full breakdown of the online survey results is included as an appendix to this report.

4.0 Conclusion

The engagement exercise received a good level of public participation and generated valuable feedback on the types and extent of amenities to be developed at the site of the new water treatment plant. Based on the feedback and comments received, the CVRD can move forward with confidence in providing the three design-build proponents with clear direction on design of the water treatment plant site.

5.0 Next Steps

- *Follow up with survey respondents and project stakeholders:* Ensuring that the results of this public engagement are shared with survey respondents and project stakeholders is key to building trust and positive long-term relationships. A summary of the survey results will be shared with registered participants on ConnectCVRD, through the newsletter function.
- *Share feedback with design-build proponents:* The project team will share this information with the three qualified design-build proponents in order that they may incorporate this feedback into the design of the water treatment plant site.
- *Prepare for the next stage of the project:* With this engagement complete, the project team will turn its attention to preparing for the construction phase of the project, which includes development of a communications strategy to keep the community informed of project progress and identification of potential opportunities for further engagement.

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