

June 18, 2020

Kevin Acton
Chairperson
Regional District of North Okanagan

Akbal Mund
Chairperson
Greater Vernon Advisory Committee

Chair Acton and Chair Mund

The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce is urging the Regional District of North Okanagan to expedite the planning process for the Cultural Centre in Greater Vernon.

Specifically, the electorate of Vernon, Coldstream and Electoral Areas B and C voted in October 2018 to borrow up to \$25 million for a Cultural Centre and the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce endorsed the borrowing referendum. Our concern is that the process is taking some time and the public momentum before and after the referendum has been negatively impacted by this delay.

That said, we believe now is the time to reinvigorate the initiative as the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn will likely result in senior governments placing significant dollars into infrastructure and stimulus projects. Greater Vernon needs to have a plan that is shovel-ready for when funding applications are launched.

We appreciate that a decision was recently made to negotiate with the City of Vernon about a location for a Cultural Centre and the land costs. However, the former Coldstream Hotel property on 31st Avenue was clearly identified during the referendum. There is a concern that going in a new direction with sites now will further delay the project. We also believe that a downtown location is necessary to maximize economic benefits, specifically through new residential and commercial development downtown and bolstering cultural tourism. Culture also plays a significant role when corporations are looking for communities to invest in or relocate to.

We understand that RDNO is reviewing the square footage of the facility as a way of reducing overall costs, and while easing the financial burden on taxpayers should always be a priority, we would hope that the long-term needs of a growing community will be considered. The reality is that any building additions in the future will be expensive.

During recent rainfall, the Vernon Public Art Gallery experienced flooding, a scenario that has occurred many times over the years. No artwork was damaged, but there will come a time when art will be severely damaged or destroyed, and these are items that are held on behalf of the community. Artifacts at the Greater Vernon Museum are also kept in tenuous conditions.

So much can be achieved through a Cultural Centre – downtown renewal, a thriving economy and vibrant arts scene – but to get there, we, as a community, need to remain focused and that requires an expedited process.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Krystin Kempton, President
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

cc. Victor Cumming, Mayor of Vernon
Jim Garlick, Mayor of Coldstream
Bob Fleming, Director, Electoral Area B
Amanda Shatzko, Director, Electoral Area C
Susan Lehman, Downtown Vernon Association
Ruth Hoyte, Coldstream Councillor
Kelly Fehr, Vernon Councillor
David Sewell, RDNO Chief Administrative Officer
Tannis Nelson, RDNO Assistant Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture
Steve Fleck, Greater Vernon Museum Executive Director
Dauna Kennedy, Vernon Public Art Gallery Executive Director
Roger Lamoureux, Greater Vernon Chamber Director