



SOUTHERN CORTES COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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Feb. 28 2019

To the Board of Directors of the Strathcona Regional District:

As the president of the Southern Cortes Community Association, I am here today on behalf of the SCCA membership and also speak for the 70% of Area B electors who voted last October in favour of a final referendum on funding for Manson's Hall and the Whaletown Community Club's Gorge Hall.

I would like to thank the Board for voting at your last meeting to respond publicly to a number of the questions in the 32 individual letters submitted by Cortes Islanders before that meeting. I would especially like to thank your Chair, Michele Babchuk, for taking the time to go to Heriot Bay and be interviewed by Cortes Radio and for working with your Chief Administrative Officer David Leitch to provide written answers to some of the questions raised about what you have done and not done in the process of handling the October referendum issues and the litigation against our elected regional director.

As you have heard today, there are 10 times as many Cortes Islanders who are upset by what has happened in the last few months as those who wrote to you individually. There are issues that were not adequately addressed in your message to the community, and I would like to present some thoughts about two of them:

- 1) The relationship of Director Anderson to the community hall service initiative.
- 2) The influence of a determined group of anti-tax lobbyists on other directors.

First, in the Chair's message to the community, you mention that the hall tax initiative in 2010 failed to obtain public consent through the alternative approval process. Since it only takes 10% of the registered electors to defeat an AAP proposal, it was easy for the opponents of taxation to get enough signatures and generate enough letters to the board to block that path. Having been through that experience, Director Anderson made it very clear to the SCCA that she would not bring the issue back to the board unless we could show that there was very strong support for it in the community.

The SCCA membership voted to approach the SRD again in 2017 as a result of the BC Gaming Commission's decision to stop providing grants for operating expenses to BC's non-profit organizations. The SCCA had qualified for gaming grants for those core expenses for many years and the loss of that income prompted members to circulate a petition "in support of funding for Cortes community hall through taxation and to hold a referendum to know the wishes of the Cortes community." In less than a month, 463 residents and/or property owners signed and the SCCA submitted the petition to Director Anderson and to the Regional Board in September.

The SCCA made a presentation to the Electoral Services Committee at its October 2017 meeting and the petition was received along with a NO petition signed by 212 people.

We note that at times it has been implied or openly stated that a core funding service for Cortes Island's community halls was Director Anderson's personal initiative. Nothing could be further from the truth.

From the outset, in our view, Director Anderson has been careful to maintain neutrality, saying she would follow the will of the community. All of the appeals to the Regional Board for support have come in the form of petitions, delegations and letters from the voters of Cortes Island, not from Director Anderson. We believe she has been doing what she was elected to do: Bring her constituency's issues to the board.

We feel it is critically important not to confuse Director Anderson's support for a *referendum* with an advocacy position for or against a *tax service*. Our Director simply wants us to be allowed to have a vote on this issue, as the majority has requested.

It is noteworthy that the other candidate in the October election, George Sirk, did sign the SCCA's original petition before he became a candidate and pledged in his election campaign to follow through on the outcome of the referendum. In the voting, Director Anderson was re-elected with 353 votes to 286 for Mr. Sirk. The community hall service referendum received 443 YES votes to 191 NO votes. It is clear from these numbers that at least 90 electors who voted for Mr. Sirk voted YES on the community hall question, and a clear 70% majority of voters in favour.

Our second concern is the hidden lobbying of other Regional Directors.

In spite of the fact that a significant majority of Area B electors support moving ahead, the fundamentals of democratic process have been and are still being blocked by a small group of anti-taxers who have acted as if the referendum issues were Director Anderson's initiatives and have circumvented our elected director and furthermore lobbied other directors off the public record.

We feel it is inappropriate to base Directorial votes on our local issues on information that is with-held from public record, leaving us unable to respond.

We do not understand why Board members from other communities, who are not elected by us, and whose communities are in no way impacted by our strictly local issues, feel that its appropriate to determine if Cortes Island residents should or should not be allowed their democratic right to vote on this or any other matter.

The SCCA cannot comprehend and the Board has not explained how your lack of understanding of the implications of the litigation against Director Anderson justified delaying the community hall service process?

We have read the content of the petition to litigate against Director Anderson, and sought legal advice regarding the baseless attack on the integrity of our community organizations. Regardless of the petition's quality or intent, or of any future response to it on our part, it makes *no claims related to the October referendum issues*.

We are dismayed that a clearly partisan attack on our Director is considered a good reason to shut down Cortes Island business in progress. As it is, it appears that a mere 14 people can abruptly terminate governance for a thousand people, simply by filing a slipshod petition to litigate.

The Board of the SCCA is disappointed that the lobbied directors have not reached out and given our community associations the opportunity to present a fair and balanced view, address misconceptions and personal bias, correct incomplete or misleading information, and participate in developing a understanding of the issues for everyone's benefit.

Thank you to the SRD for your move toward each director having an SRD email address and using those individual accounts for board business rather than their personal emails. We hope that the board will continue to work toward more transparency in how it arrives at decisions and will provide the public with a clear understanding of the legal advice you receive later today in your session about Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy.

Our two Cortes Island halls are at the heart of community life on Cortes. They both host cultural events, public meetings, celebrations and memorials, dances and recreational activities, weddings, classes and community services for all ages that bring people together and to help maintain the health and well-being of our residents and visitors.

Mansons Hall shelters the only licenced playschool, main post office, a café, the Friday Market, Cortes Womens Center, pottery studio, yoga studio, thrift store, food bank and land for FOCI's office. We fundraised and purchased to old Quadra Credit Union trailer, it became North Island College, and now home to CRTZ Radio. The SCCA manages the skatepark for SRD Parks, and volunteers maintain Mansons Cemetery

The non-binding referendum unsurprisingly confirmed — by 443 to 191 votes — that the Area B electorate still wants the opportunity to finally decide on whether or not to fund our community halls with our property taxes.

Clearly a significant majority of Area B electors, residents and property owners value the existence of our community centres and want them to be maintained for future generations.

We appreciate the chair's acknowledgement that the October referendum on the community hall service clearly supports having another referendum on a well-defined bylaw, and we look forward to working with staff to provide up-to-date information that will make it clear to Area B electors what the service will pay for and what it will cost.

We ask the Board to assure the community that you will lift our tabled business, and move forward immediately with the process to define Bylaw No. 341. Please expedite the final binding referendum, so Area B electors can decide *for ourselves* whether we wish to support our community institutions in the same way that taxpayers in the overwhelming majority of similar jurisdictions — including Areas and municipalities represented at this table — support their own community centres and recreational facilities.

Thank you.

Julian Ayers, President
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Manson's Landing, B.C.