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## REPORT TO FIRST NATIONS RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2024

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**SUBJECT**     **Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative Summary Report**

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To share the Capital Regional District Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative Summary Report with the Board, and to highlight the key themes and recommendations in the Report.

### **BACKGROUND**

As part of 2023 service planning, the CRD Board approved a one-year Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative to strengthen relationships with First Nations in the region; understand how each Nation would like to collaborate with the CRD; co-create mechanisms that support respectful, reciprocal engagement; and, identify priority topics to inform the development of a CRD Reconciliation Action Plan. The initiative included capacity funding for nine First Nations. Jemma Scoble Consulting was retained to support staff with implementing this initiative.

In April 2023 a letter from the Board Chair to First Nations outlined the initiative, offered capacity funding, and invited each First Nation to meet with the CRD at the leadership level. Over the past year, CRD has met and engaged with all nine First Nations on the topic of government-to-government relations.

The Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative Summary Report (Appendix A), produced by Jemma Scoble Consulting, summarizes the engagement process undertaken and feedback captured from these discussions along with additional input captured from earlier pertinent discussions with First Nations. It includes the work CRD has advanced to date with First Nations and shares an overview of similar work in other jurisdictions.

The report identifies the key themes heard in the feedback from First Nations and makes recommendations to inform the CRD's next steps in pursuing a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Key themes heard included:

- A desire for a new relationship;
- An interest in formalizing the relationship;
- Implementation of UNDRIP;
- The need for a flexible approach;
- A challenge with capacity and a need for resources;
- The importance of Nation-to-Nation dialogue; and
- The need to build the relationship around CRD core services.

The recommendations in the Summary Report are to:

- Prioritize reconciliation with an intentional approach to funding;
- Prioritize reconciliation with resources and time;
- Develop and implement protocol agreements and MOUs with First Nations;
- Move forward with collaborative development of a Reconciliation Action Plan; and
- Continue to build on a principled approach to engagement with all First Nations within CRD's jurisdiction.

The summary of what we heard has not been reviewed by First Nations and will be shared in upcoming meetings. Ongoing dialogue will continue to build on what was heard to further inform and support relationship-building and collaboration on the Nations' priorities.

In recognition that the work of government-to-government relationship building continues past the one-year timeframe of this initiative, and that funding is critical to support this work, the CRD Board has already extended the capacity funding for government-to-government relationship building with nine First Nations. In 2024 service planning, this funding was added to the annual budget on an ongoing basis, subject to annual Board approval. The Board also approved the addition of one new staff member to the CRD's First Nations Relations Division, to be hired in 2024.

Funding to support the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan was approved in the 2022 annual budget, and then postponed to first strengthen the relationships with First Nations and better understand what they would like to see incorporated into a Reconciliation Action Plan. The next step to developing a Reconciliation Action Plan will be to engage in further collaboration with First Nations, Board Directors, and CRD Divisions on the key recommendations of the consultant's report, to co-create a guiding document for the organization.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### *Alternative 1*

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff incorporate the Government-to-Government Relationship Building Summary Report themes and recommendations into the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

### *Alternative 2*

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### *First Nations Reconciliation*

One way to demonstrate respect for First Nation governments is to integrate and action their feedback and avoid repeatedly asking for input on similar topics. Where non-Indigenous governments focus more on 'ticking the box' of an engagement process and less on putting what was heard into action, this can understandably be frustrating for First Nations and contributes to a lack of trust in non-Indigenous governments.

In this Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative, CRD staff and consultants tried to avoid asking questions where input had already been provided, by gathering related input from Nations via previous discussions, current engagement on other topics, and what is happening in other jurisdictions, as well as engagement on this initiative.

Incorporating what was heard into the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan can demonstrate not only that the CRD is listening, but also that the CRD is prepared to implement tangible actions in support of strengthening respectful government-to-government relationships with First Nations.

Through this initiative, First Nations clearly identified that tangible, operational actions are the way the CRD can demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation. Alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples remains a foundational expectation of all First Nations.

First Nations expressed appreciation to the CRD for offering capacity funding to support the relationship, for the renewed approach to government-to-government relationships, and for the commitment of leadership and staff time and effort towards developing MOUs.

The outcomes of this engagement initiative demonstrate that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to government-to-government relationships, and that a sincere, considered, and flexible approach can lead to productive and forward-facing conversations.

#### *Financial Implications*

There are no financial implications. The development of a Reconciliation Action Plan can be undertaken within the existing First Nations Relations budget.

#### *Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

The Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative is directly linked to the implementation of Board Priorities 4a and 4b, to hear more from First Nations as to how they would like the CRD to approach reconciliation, and to collaborate with First Nations to build and strengthen new processes for government-to-government decision-making and service delivery. The Summary Report also supports Corporate Plan initiative 15a-3 by providing key themes and recommendations to inform the development of an organization-wide Reconciliation Action Plan.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Government-to-Government Relationship-Building Initiative Summary Report summarizes the First Nations engagement process undertaken and feedback from First Nations on how the CRD can strengthen government-to-government relationships with the Nations. It also includes an overview of work CRD has advanced to date with local First Nations and shares a scan of similar work in other jurisdictions. The report identifies the key themes heard in the feedback from First Nations and makes recommendations to inform the CRD’s next steps in pursuing a Reconciliation Action Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That staff incorporate the Government-to-Government Relationship Building Summary Report themes and recommendations into the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Submitted by:	Caitlyn Vernon, MES, Manager, First Nations Relations
Concurrence:	Kristen Morley, J.D., General Manager, Corporate Services & Corporate Officer
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Appendix A: Capital Regional District Government-to-Government Relationship Building Initiative Summary Report