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REPORT TO FIRST NATIONS RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

SUBJECT Intercultural Skills Training for Board Directors

ISSUE SUMMARY

To support CRD Directors in building positive, respectful and reciprocal working relationships with First Nations participating in CRD Board standing, advisory, select committees and commissions.

BACKGROUND

Number 6 in the First Nations Task Force Report's recommendations directs staff to draft a program of future concrete actions to support the CRD's commitment to Reconciliation. While some of these efforts are coordinated by the First Nations Relations Division, the work of Reconciliation falls to all staff and Directors at the CRD.

In order to move forward in a good way, a common level of understanding regarding Indigenous-settler relations and responsibilities is needed amongst CRD staff and Directors. This is in keeping with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to Actions which directs municipal governments to provide education "on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism."

The CRD's Statement of Reconciliation recognizes that commitment to reconciliation alone is not enough and that action is needed to show that the CRD is taking measurable steps towards a better relationship with Indigenous peoples. To this end, through the CRD's inclusive governance commitment, First Nations elected representatives have been invited to participate at CRD standing committees, and some advisory committees and commissions.

As has been shown at other local governments and public institutions in recent years, there is a political and reputational risk to elected officials and staff when Indigenous participation is invited into spaces that do not feel welcoming or safe. Specifically, where there has not been a proactive effort to build cultural competency skills or where steps have not been taken to examine and shift institutional practices that perpetuate systemic racism.

The CRD Board's Diversity and Inclusion statement reads: "The Capital Regional District strives to be a place where inclusion is paramount and all people are treated with dignity. We pledge to make our meetings a place where all feel welcome and respected."

The First Nations Relations Division has organized some cultural training for the previous Board and will be developing cultural competency training for all CRD staff. Offering intercultural skills training for the CRD Board is one component of supporting and operationalizing the Board's Diversity and Inclusion commitment as well as the commitment to inclusive governance.

Rather than focusing on understanding the history and legacy of Indigenous-Crown relations,

which many Board members may have already received trainings on, the intention will be to focus on intercultural skills training such as understanding cultural protocols, recognizing unconscious biases, how to respectfully approach building reciprocal relationships, what to do when mistakes are made, and how to resolve conflicts. By way of a survey, Board members will be canvassed for input on what skills training would be most helpful.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to work with the Board and First Nations representatives to develop and offer Intercultural Skills Training for CRD Directors.

Alternative 2

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

IMPLICATIONS

Intergovernmental Implications

Intercultural skills competency of CRD Board Directors will support implementation of inclusive governance commitments. Building understanding of cultural protocols, unconscious biases and approaches to building reciprocal relationships and conflict resolution will help support committee meetings to be welcoming, inclusive spaces for all participants – a necessary precursor to respectful dialogue and decision-making.

Social Implications

Recent high-profile examples where leadership did not fully embrace the need for intercultural awareness training have led to resignations and negative media. For example earlier this year an Indigenous elected councilor in Terrace resigned after twice unsuccessfully trying to persuade Terrace council to participate in cultural awareness training. She claimed systemic and internalized racism as the reason why her colleagues were not able to respect and understand her diverse perspectives.

At the Royal BC Museum, the Indigenous head of the First Nations Department and Repatriation Program resigned in 2020, claiming the institution was home to discrimination, bullying and white privilege. Since then the CEO has stepped down, and both staff and board are receiving unconscious bias training.

In May 2021, an Indigenous member of School District 61's Indigenous Ad Hoc committee stepped down, citing a pattern of systemic racism and calling for public apologies for the 'cynical and flagrant' use of the word reconciliation by the Board and Administration, and asking for a transparent plan to raise the competency of the Board and Administration regarding ongoing colonialism, patriarchy and systemic racism.

There is vulnerability for CRD directors and staff if all levels of the organization are not actively engaged in deepening their intercultural awareness and taking actions towards better incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion across the organization. This training is one small step that helps demonstrate a commitment to ongoing learning and transformation.

Financial Implications

It is estimated that intercultural skills training for Board Directors will cost \$10,000 in 2021. Funding is available through the First Nations Relations existing 2021 budget; specifically by redirecting surplus funds from the budget allocated for the First Nations Relations Standing Committee as well as the Forum of All Councils.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

This training supports the CRD's Statement of Reconciliation, specifically the acknowledgement of the fundamental right of self-determination to Indigenous peoples and the recognition that beyond commitments, action is needed to show that the CRD is taking measurable steps towards a better relationship with Indigenous peoples.

This training also supports Board Priority 3a-1 regarding looking to First Nations for leadership in understanding how to create new regional planning and decision-making systems together on their Traditional Territories. Increased skill in intercultural awareness will facilitate and enhance how we are able to work together.

This training is also in line with the CRD Board's diversity and inclusion statement.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural skills training will support CRD Directors in building positive, respectful and reciprocal working relationships with First Nations participating in CRD Board committees and commissions. This training will help operationalize the Board's Statement of Reconciliation, commitment to inclusive governance with First Nations, and Diversity and Inclusion statement. Deepening understanding of cultural protocols, unconscious biases and approaches to building reciprocal relationships and conflict resolution will support committee meetings to be welcoming, inclusive spaces for all participants – a necessary precursor to respectful dialogue and decision-making with First Nations.

RECOMMENDATION

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to work with the Board and First Nations representatives to develop and offer Intercultural Skills Training for CRD Directors.

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