January 15, 2019

Ref: 242303

Mark Andison
Chief Administrative Officer
Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
202-843 Rossland Ave
Trail, BC V1R 4S8

Dear Mr. Andison:

Thank you for your letter of October 11, 2018 regarding possible courses of action in relation to a review of governance issues for the Big White community. It was a pleasure meeting with you and Regional District of Kootenay Boundary Board members at the Union of BC Municipalities Convention. I apologize for the length of time it has taken to formulate a response to your request for information.

The Ministry acknowledges that the community at Big White is growing and that some members of the community are interested in exploring alternative forms of governance. Ministry staff met with members of the Big White Community Development Association (BWCDA) several times over the past few years to discuss various issues of governance and service delivery. I understand from our most recent meeting with the Association, in May 2018, that some progress has been made in relations between the Regional District and the BWCDA; at the same time, some frustrations remain with issues such as a lack of a community hall, access to grants, and the potential establishment of a local community commission.

While the BWCDA has indicated interest in an incorporation study as a first step to address their concerns, it would be prudent for the Regional District to first explore if solutions may exist within the current governance model. Municipal incorporation is a complex and costly process which requires majority consent of the local electorate to proceed. As such, there needs to be clear evidence that both the community’s governance issues are best solved through incorporation and that the community is willing to support a potential change in governance. In the case of Big White, neither the issues nor the perspectives of the broader community are well understood at this time – for example, there may be different perspectives between the many non-resident electors who spend time at Big White and resident electors who live in the community year-round.

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Reflecting on these uncertainties, the Ministry suggests that as a first step in a governance review process, the Regional District could consider undertaking a preliminary community issues assessment study. The purpose of this community issues assessment would be threefold:

1) to better understand the current state of governance and service delivery at Big White;

2) to clarify and/or prioritize the issues that are most important to the broader community with respect to local governance and service delivery; and,

3) to gain more insight into the perspectives of the broader community with respect to potentially moving towards a different model of local governance.

The community issues assessment process could include the collection of baseline local governance information, such as community profile and property assessment data, service delivery arrangements and cost recovery methods. A public and stakeholder outreach process that presents initial findings of the study would further aid in identifying key issues related to local governance and service delivery as well as clarifying views on any potential change in local governance. Interviews with key local interests such as representatives from BWCDA and Big White Resort might be considered. Recommendations for next steps based on the findings could also be sought.

It is recommended that a community issues assessment not be conducted concurrently with an Official Community Plan (OCP) review. In terms of sequencing, the Board could approach this from one of two viewpoints. On one hand, a review of the OCP may help to inform and solidify Big White community values and perspectives in preparation for completing a community issues assessment on local governance matters. Alternatively, baseline information collected during a community issues assessment may serve as useful input into the OCP process. That choice is the Board’s to determine.

Given that the Big White community is located entirely within the Big White Resort’s Controlled Recreation Area, the timing and sequencing of a community issues assessment and an OCP review should also consider the scope and timing of any updates to the Big White Master Plan and Master Development Agreement being contemplated by the Resort. All processes would involve outreach to the community and other stakeholders and there may be synergies arising from coordination with the Resort on these matters.

Should the Board wish to seek provincial grant funding, the first step would be to provide the Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a letter that briefly describes the proposed community issues assessment purpose, scope, benefits and costs, timelines and deliverables, along with a formal Board resolution to request funding. The Ministry's ability to fund studies is budget and demand-dependent.

If Minister Robinson agrees to fund the study, Ministry and Regional District staff would then develop a jointly-agreed terms of reference (TOR) for completing the study. This TOR serves as the foundation for a formal cost-share agreement between the Regional District and the terms of reference which includes contractual obligations for the study.
I hope that you and the Board find this response helpful. If the Board intends to proceed, Ministry staff are available to help guide the Regional District through this process. To that end, your primary contact at the Ministry for this initiative is Brad Smith, Senior Planning Analyst, Governance and Structure Branch. Mr. Smith can be reached at (778) 698-3228 or via email: Brad.Smith@gov.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

Marijke Edmondson
Director, Governance Structures

pc: Rolly Russell, RDKB Board Chair
    Vicki Gee, RDKB Electoral Area E Director
    Brad Smith, Senior Planning Analyst