



VILLAGE OF BELCARRA

Mayor Neil Belenkie

First Year Summary of Progress Report



November 5, 2019

As the first year of our new Council's term concludes, it is an appropriate time to provide a comprehensive update summarizing the key initiatives, early results, challenges and ongoing work being done by Council, staff and residents.

The following are the four areas of priority focus for this report:

- Strengthening Belcarra's financial position.
- Improving our water system for fire fighting.
- Making Belcarra safer.
- Council and staff providing a concierge-level of access and service for residents.

For those who attend Council meetings (and other weekly/monthly public engagement sessions), you will be aware of much of the information included in this update. I am often surprised however by residents who ignore information available directly from staff and Council and instead rely on rumours from people completely disconnected from real sources... Without fail, the rumours are incomplete and/or inaccurate and when frustrated residents discuss their concerns directly with Council or staff only then do they realize that the correct information was publicly available all along.

I encourage residents with any interest in Village services, operations, vision, information and events to contact staff, Council or myself directly. We especially appreciate feedback and ideas about how to make Belcarra better for everyone.

Without further ado...

Current Financial Position of Belcarra

- Belcarra's financial position relevant to all other municipalities in British Columbia:
 - 157 out of 164 (1-strongest, 164-weakest)
 - <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/facts-framework/statistics/statistics>
 - Please refer to the Changes in Net Financial Assets Link – Schedule 404 Column N indicates “Net Financial Assets (Net Debt) at Year End”.
 - According to this provincial report, only 6 municipalities in all of BC are in a weaker financial position than Belcarra.
 - <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-municipalities-surpluses-money-1.5266647>
 - CBC article quote: (Belcarra) was one of only two (municipalities) in all of B.C. last year (2018) to have both a deficit and a cumulative debt.
- A financial summary comparing Belcarra to similar sized municipalities in BC was published on our website in May 2019.
 - <https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2019/06/REPORT-Financial-Information-for-Public-May-15-2019.pdf>
- New financial data is constantly being posted to Belcarra's website.

Key Financial History – How Did We End Up With:

- High debt
- Low reserves
- Millions of dollars currently required to protect Belcarra from fires
- And more...

Previous Councils were proud of the fact that Belcarra's property taxes were consistently among the lowest in the province.

- Unlike other municipalities, funds were not set aside every year for future repairs and replacement of Belcarra's infrastructure.
- This means that we have no financial reserves dedicated to:
 - Upgrade our fire fighting water system to the same level as every other municipality in the region.
 - Replace our Fire Hall, (which has failed its seismic testing and requires replacement).
 - Repair or replace our Village Hall.
 - Repair or replace our public work's structures.
 - Repair or replace our culverts and drainage system.
 - Repair or repave our roads.
 - Repair or replace our potable water system.
 - And more...
- Installation of Belcarra's \$9M+ potable water system was more than \$2M over budget.
 - Leaving residents with our current debt burden of \$3,599,016
- The cost to update Belcarra's residential Zoning Bylaw.
 - Consultants were paid \$254,063 to support the Zoning Advisory Committee process in 2017 and 2018.
 - Note that these fees were paid out of Belcarra's operational reserves budget.
 - There is a statutory law requiring Belcarra to maintain a minimum of \$750,000 in financial reserves (six month's operating budget).
 - Council voted to pay the consultants out of this reserve fund, depleting our reserve fund to its current \$395,054 (3 month's operating budget).

What Are We Doing Now to Strengthen Belcarra's Financial Position:

Fiscal responsibility:

- Council raised Belcarra's municipal taxes by up to 8.3% in 2019.
 - This translated to a 6.46% increase in total tax revenue to Belcarra.
 - 2018 total tax revenue: \$688,240
 - 2019 total tax revenue: \$732,713
- Council immediately limited the use of paid consultants, instead forming volunteer Committees dedicated to advancing priority projects whenever possible.
 - Results: Fees paid to consultants:
 - 2015: \$92,812
 - 2016: \$51,049
 - 2017: \$461,532
 - 2018: \$173,260
 - 2019 (year to date): \$116,239

- We created a Revenue Generation Committee to identify, assess, and recommend opportunities for Council to generate the millions of dollars necessary to protect Belcarra against fires, build our required new Fire Hall, and create a sustainable income to support planned infrastructure repair and replacement.
 - This Committee, like the four others, was elected by residents.
- Belcarra, to the best of our knowledge, is the only municipality that voted not to raise our Council's compensation in response to the CRA eliminating a 30% income tax exemption for elected officials.
- We temporarily closed Midden Road to save \$60,000 required for immediate maintenance.
 - A public process will be announced soon to determine long term planning for Midden Road and potential reallocation of the repair funds to another road.
- Belcarra led the successful effort to renegotiate TransLink's rural funding model from 50/50 shared funding model to: 25% funding from Belcarra and 75% funding from TransLink for all new projects.
- Belcarra has engaged a new Financial Services Contractor.
 - Metro Vancouver led the selection process for this new provider.
 - Our new contractor is assessing opportunities for improved financial management, investment options, funding sources and performance reporting.
- In the coming months Belcarra will begin the development of our new Official Community Plan (OCP).
 - The new OCP will frame the vision for Belcarra's future, including potential development, density and commercial tolerance. All of which could provide essential revenue to support the Village for its sustainable future.

What Are We Doing to Improve Our Water System for Fire Fighting:

- We created a Committee to assess Belcarra's Water System Capacity for Fire Fighting.
 - This elected Committee invested an immense amount of time and effort assessing the water system's design, performance data, technology, capabilities, the Fire Underwriters Survey guidelines, physically touring Belcarra's facilities and interviewing staff and the contracted service providers.
- The Committee presented its formal report to Council, including its determination that Belcarra's water system is insufficient for fighting fires and its recommendation that staff engage a water engineering firm to assess and design solutions.
 - The Committee remains a resource for the new water engineering firm but the workload has now largely been transferred to accredited experts in our newly retained engineering firm.
- About Belcarra's new Engineering Firm.
 - Metro Vancouver led the selection process for this provider.
 - The firm's first project is to continue the Water System Committee's work and begin assessing and designing immediate options to improve our fire fighting capabilities. This work is also being supported by Metro Vancouver.
 - Longer term, this firm will be engaged to support Belcarra's goal of meeting the 60 litres/second water flow standard that every other municipality receives in our region.
 - Belcarra currently receives water at a rate of 21 litres per second.
- As soon as the engineering firm presents design options and funding requirements, Council and staff will begin working to secure the funding necessary to support the project.

What Are We Doing to Make Belcarra Safer:

- We are working with the RCMP to reduce speeding in the Village.
 - RCMP ran a Black-Cat radar program to assess our speeding concerns.
 - We purchased 2 RCMP scarecrows.
 - At the request of residents, new stop signs were placed at the intersection of Bedwell Bay Road and Belcarra Bay Road.
- We also continue to work with RCMP to ensure a visible presence in Belcarra, discouraging criminals from targeting our residents' properties and assets.
 - This includes leveraging the RCMP's boat and team to patrol our waterfront.
- We eliminated the role of "Supervisor of Public Works" and created a new role "Public Works and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator"
 - Candidate interviews for this role are underway.
 - This new role requires training and expertise in emergency planning and response and will be tasked with elevating our existing plans and services in the event of any emergencies.
 - This new role will also elevate our team's skills and expertise in administrative systems and reporting.
 - Improving our ability to support grant applications and post-grant reporting requirements.
 - Improving our ability to manage the administrative burden behind all Village operations.
 - This new position is junior to the eliminated supervisor role; also saving the Village money.
- At the request of residents, a new Safe Walking in Belcarra Group will be formed.
 - This Group is intended to engage with residents to generate ideas and opportunities to support safer walking in Belcarra.
 - These recommendations can be provided to staff and Council for formal consideration and implementation.
- We continue to seek funding for additional lighting for bus stops and specific areas identified by residents as high risk.

What Are We Doing to Deliver Concierge Quality Access and Service for Residents

- Belcarra has engaged the Building Inspection Team from Anmore to improve our processes and procedures for building permit applications.
 - We're proud to announce that our inspection team is responding to permit applications within 10 days and we are aiming for a one-week response for every permit application.
 - This new level of service is at zero additional cost to residents.
- A new website was created to provide direct access to information from Council and Staff and to help residents connect with each other.
 - All financial reports, consultants' reports, Committee reports, meeting agendas, news, etc... are available online.
 - Council meetings are now available for review online (video and audio).
 - A Community Bulletin Board page is being created to improve communication between residents.
 - An advertising page is being created to generate advertising revenue.
- In Council Meetings:
 - Every single agenda item is open to public discussion prior to Council voting.
- Monthly Town Hall meetings are hosted by the Mayor to enable question and answer sessions, brainstorming and discourse around all topics of interest.
- Coffee with the Mayor is available every Friday afternoon (please book ahead).

- Staff offer several options for residents to receive emails notifying of general news and/or emergency information.
- Committee meetings are public and all reports are posted to the new Village website.
- We rented an office trailer to provide dedicated space for:
 - Our new building inspection services team.
 - Coffee with the Mayor meetings.
 - Any meetings (staff, residents or committees) requiring privacy.
 - This new meeting space also enabled us to open the Village Hall for public use.
- The Village Hall is open for public use by booking, during regular business hours and based on availability.
 - Coffee and tea are available (merit system) and residents are encouraged to use the public space to connect with neighbors and enjoy this Village resource.
 - We are launching this initiative with a “Friday Social” schedule and will add availability as we move forward.
 - Classes and events (i.e.: yoga) will be hosted at the Village Hall. Please visit the Calendar link on our website to learn more or contact staff to book your event.
- Parking
 - Following guidance from residents at a parking-dedicated Town Hall meeting, a divided Council voted in favour of a new parking plan to manage the increasing burden of visitors to Belcarra.
 - I highlight “divided” because the challenge of managing the burden of visitors (traffic and parking) is not simple, nor easy...
 - Council and staff have received and acted on an immense amount of feedback and will continue efforts to improve management of this growing challenge.
 - Please note, Belcarra is perhaps the last municipality in the lower mainland to be inundated with visitor traffic.
 - Regionally, parking is a huge challenge everywhere visitors want to spend their time (North Vancouver, Deep Cove, Anmore, Kitsilano, all Metro Vancouver Parks, etc...)
 - In the winter, another public engagement session will be hosted to solicit feedback from residents about how to continue to improve parking and traffic management in Belcarra.
- We created Committees to engage with residents regarding Farrer Cove, Belcarra Day, Tree Management and Revenue Generation.
 - These elected Committees are in varying stages of progress. Their meetings are public and scheduled in the calendar on our website. I encourage you to get involved, attend their meetings and contribute your expertise and opinions.
 - All Committee agendas and reports are available online as well.

Belcarra’s Regional Role - Metro Vancouver, TransLink, and the Lower Mainland Local Government Association (LMLGA)

- Sitting on regional Boards and Committees has helped Belcarra to build valuable relationships and gain access to essential resources.
 - Specifically, our regional roles have already helped Belcarra to:
 - Secure new funding opportunities.
 - Receive inexpensive/free expertise and support for municipal projects.
 - Guide regional decisions impacting Belcarra directly.
 - Advocate on behalf of residents.
 - Create inter-municipal service agreements.

- Source new service providers and equipment.
- And more...

Belcarra's Previous Roles:

- Under the previous administration, Belcarra was awarded four regional positions: Metro Vancouver Board, TransLink Mayors Council, Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Relations Committee and the Electoral Area Committee.

Current Roles:

- Belcarra now holds an unprecedented number of positions (8) at the regional level, enabling input and influence in several key areas specific to Belcarra's interests.

Metro Vancouver

- Board Member of Metro Vancouver
- Parks Committee
- Water Committee
- Electoral A Committee
- Mayor's Council

TransLink

- Mayor's Council
- New Mobility Committee (all new modes of transport including ride hailing)

Lower Mainland Local Government Association (LMLGA)

- In July 2019, Belcarra was asked to represent Metro Vancouver on the LMLGA Executive Board.

And yet, there remains a huge amount of work yet to be done...

Challenges Ahead:

- Our new Official Community Plan.
 - Belcarra's OCP was last updated in 2011. Municipalities typically update/rewrite OCP's every 5-7 years to ensure that the vision for the municipality represents both the wishes and needs of residents balanced with the needs of the municipality.
 - Many of the proposed financial solutions for Belcarra will be impacted by the OCP.
 - We are currently seeking an OCP planning expert to guide Belcarra through this process.
- Financial
 - After running a deficit for 2017 and 2018, Belcarra is projected to have a budget surplus at the end of 2019.
 - Much more work is required to secure the funds necessary for essential infrastructure to protect Belcarra. The most expensive items include:
 - A new water reservoir (Projected cost: \$1,500,000)
 - A new Fire Hall (Projected cost: \$4,000,000)
 - Long term financial planning is needed for major projects and ongoing infrastructure repair and replacement:
 - Direct connection to Metro Vancouver's water service (Projected cost: Unknown)
 - Belcarra needs 60 litres/second fire fighting water flow.
 - Replace our Village Hall (Projected cost: Unknown)

- Putting funds aside every year to save for infrastructure repairs and maintenance (Projected cost: \$250,000 per year)
 - For reference, Anmore's annual infrastructure deficit is \$750,000.
- Designated Anchorage Area (DAA)
 - At the recommendation of the Vancouver Port Authority and the District of North Vancouver's CAO and Council, Belcarra has begun leading public information and input sessions regarding a potential Designated Anchorage Area in Bedwell Bay.
 - North Vancouver (Deep Cove) is creating a DAA. Port Moody already has one. The Port and District of North Vancouver are concerned that all derelict vessels, winter storage of vessels and long term boat tenants will move to the only area left in the lower mainland that remains unregulated: Bedwell Bay.
 - Potential benefits of establishing a DAA include Belcarra being able to set the rules for duration of anchorage in Bedwell Bay, punishment for illegal dumping, rules around noise, etc...
 - We have many concerns about establishing a DAA including potential cost, patrol and enforcement, legal liability, and more...
- The Speculation Tax continues to punish cabin owners in Belcarra despite:
 - A road trip to Victoria with four residents to attend Question Period in the Legislature.
 - Formal meetings with the Finance Minister Carole James.
 - Formal and informal meetings with Belcarra's NDP MLA Rick Glumac.
 - Conversations with NDP MLA Selina Robinson.
 - Formal and informal meetings with Liberal leader Andrew Wilkinson and his team.
 - Meeting with Federal NDP MP Fin Donnelly.
 - Too many media appearances to count (TV, Print, Online, Radio, Podcasts).
 - Almost 900 emails of correspondence.
 - Minister Carole James recently committed to letting us know her decision for 2020 this fall, at which time we will revisit our strategy as required.
- Securing year-round access to Farrer Cover – "The North South Connector"
 - Belcarra submitted a request to Port Moody to allow an easement along the BC Hydro cut line between Senkler Road and Farrer Cove.
 - The goal is to connect Farrer Cove with a proper road while providing municipal water service (improved fire fighting capacity), gas and improved communications at the same time.
 - Port Moody responded, requiring multiple levels of approval from Metro Vancouver, Parks and BC Hydro in advance of considering next steps.
 - Lots more work will be required to see this project achieve success.

Opportunities Ahead / Ongoing Work:

- Safety Group
 - A "Safe Walking in Belcarra" Group is being formed to support residents who want to help improve our infrastructure for walking.
 - Staff and Council are always considering new opportunities to improve safety for everyone in Belcarra including:
 - Improved pathways
 - New or improved signage
 - Working with neighboring municipalities, Metro Vancouver, Parks, TransLink, ICBC, and more...

- Waste and Recycle Depot (WARD) Group
 - A “WARD” Group is being formed to improve the services, sustainability, finances and operations of our WARD.
- Multi-Use Court Group
 - A “Multi-Use Court” Group is being formed to support residents who want to activate this Village asset.
 - Council has already voted against investing tax dollars in this initiative, but we are supportive of residents trying to uncover opportunities for future use of this court without Village investment.
- TransLink Pilot Project Opportunity
 - A TransLink information report summarizing Belcarra’s usage and service was posted to Belcarra’s municipal website.
 - https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2019/06/2019-06-05-Belcarra-Transit-Performance_.pdf
 - Resident feedback about our current transit service includes the following:
 - Concerns about safety, especially for children, walking down the roads in the dark and waiting for the bus in the dark.
 - Concerns for children at risk of encounters with bears, cougars and other dangerous animals.
 - Children attending the Middle School in Anmore do not have enough time to catch the bus home prior to the Secondary students being released. Consequently, the older kids are intimidating the younger kids, attempting to sell them drugs and vaping paraphernalia, and exposing younger kids to inappropriate behaviour.
 - Frustration about the amount of transit time required to access the West Coast Express or Millennium Line.
 - Residents are required to travel through Anmore instead of directly to the train stations, adding an extra 40 minutes to their commute each day.
 - The limited frequency of public transit in Belcarra (approx. 30 minutes between buses at top service) is not convenient.
 - Transit to Belcarra is not available late at night for people returning from evening events in Vancouver.
 - And more..
 - I began searching for alternative service models and providers that would meet the expected regulatory hurdles being imposed by the provincial government (Class 4 licenses, hardwired vehicle GPS tracking, minimum insurance coverage, etc...).
 - After uncovering a service provider who could provide improved services to Belcarra, I presented their Belcarra-focused proposal to leadership of TransLink.
 - Key services included in this proposal include:
 - Belcarra residents will receive faster service, directly to Anmore’s schools and Port Moody train stations.
 - This new service model could save TransLink hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.
 - The service would be at no additional charge to Belcarra residents.
 - Notes:
 - This pilot project would not be a “disengagement” from TransLink. TransLink would pay for the project, manage the project, test the new service and TransLink will continue to provide public transit to Belcarra Park via Tum Tumay Whueton Drive.

- I continue to work with leadership at TransLink to begin designing the pilot project, including multiple opportunities for public engagement throughout the process.

The projects and progress outlined above reflect a Council and staff who are doing our best to respond to resident requests. Ultimately, we all want to help make Belcarra a safer, better place to live. There are many more initiatives underway, if you would like to learn more or get involved, please contact staff or attend one of the many public engagement forums available monthly. We look forward to seeing you there.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'NB' or a stylized 'Neil Belenkie'.

Neil Belenkie
Mayor