



# VILLAGE OF BELCARRA

"Between Forest and Sea"

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May 20, 2020

## Letter to Residents Updating Major Initiatives Underway in the Village of Belcarra

I hope that you and your families are well. In these unprecedented times we are reminded of the importance of family and friends; perhaps the most powerful gift a pandemic tragedy can bestow.

It has been six months since my last progress report. Judging from the volume of misinformation being circulated throughout the Village, it is clear that this update is timely. I will remind everyone to read and listen to opinions with a grain of salt; as Winston Churchill said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on".

For those of you who do not attend Council meetings (or watch the videos online), in this report you will find summaries of data and process regarding the following:

- Assessment of Belcarra's Water System for Fire Fighting
- Update on Belcarra's Fire Hall and its Eventual Replacement
- Financial Update for the Village

These are indeed formative times for Belcarra as we address safety and financial deficiencies. Council continues to be open, transparent and engaging with residents throughout every stage of our processes. We hope each of you will want to get involved, bringing your ideas, skills and feedback to these important conversations. We are stronger together.

## Summary of the Process, People and Data Involved in the Assessment of Belcarra's Water System for Fire Fighting

### In February 2019 the Water Capacity for Fire Protection Committee was Elected

The committee worked diligently for several months and in June 2019 the Chair of the committee, Ian Devlin, presented their interim report to Council and residents.

#### **From the Minutes of the Council Meeting:**

*"The primary goal of the Committee is to assess the existing water system and its capabilities to support all fire-fighting efforts."*

*Activities of the Committee included review of the Village records, meetings with staff with regard to the SCADA and a tour of the water supply, storage and distribution facilities.*

*The Committee met with Chief Jay Sharpe of the Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department and Walt Bayless of WSP (OPUS). Committee members reviewed the Fire Underwriters Survey letter of 2010."*

#### **Notable data/statements from the Water Committee's report:**

*"The Village of Belcarra (VOB) water supply system does not currently meet the Fire Underwriters Society (FUS) recommended fire flow requirements."*

*"The enlargement or replacement of the Tatlow reservoir as required in the FUS reviewed design to meet the FUS minimum fire flow requirements was never performed."*

*"The Committee consequently makes the following recommendations to Council:*

1. *Request an engineering consultant to evaluate and recommend fire flow requirements for the Village of Belcarra based on recognized municipal standards for fire protection.*

2. *Proceed with an engineering evaluation of the current VOB water supply system, storage facilities and distribution system based on both current and future potable water needs and recommended fire flows of the community.*
3. *Identify and evaluate alternatives for additional water supply, funding models and government grants.”*

**The Water Committee’s Full Report is Available on Belcarra’s Website:**

<https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2020/05/2019-06-10-Water-System-Capacity-for-Fire-Protection-Committee-May-2019-Interim-Report.pdf>

As a result of the recommendations from the Water Committee, Council voted unanimously to engage a professional water engineering firm to assess Belcarra’s water system.

**ISL Engineering: Belcarra’s Professional Water Engineering Firm**

With support from Metro Vancouver’s staff, Belcarra selected ISL Engineering (primary contact: Chris Boit) as the water engineering firm tasked with assessing Belcarra’s water supply for fire fighting.

On January 13, 2020 Chris presented his preliminary report to Council and residents. His recommendation to Council was as follows:

*“That staff be directed to submit an application to the Federal Government for Grant Funding for a New Water Reservoir; and That the Village of Belcarra confirm its willingness to provide grant management should funding be approved.”*

Please note: This recommendation was made in advance of ISL Engineering completing its formal report for the following reasons:

- The application deadline for a federal grant was approaching
- The Village was not committing to build a reservoir if the grant was awarded

As a result, Belcarra submitted an application for \$3.8M of federal funding. Belcarra has not yet received a response to our application.

**On May 11, 2020, Chris presented his formal review of Belcarra’s water system for fire fighting.**

**Notable data/statements from the report:**

*“Fire Underwriter Survey (FUS) Guidelines FUS develops fire flow requirements by reviewing buildings within a Municipality and applying statistical analysis, likelihood of fire and the potential to spread the fire.”*

*“Based on the above (chart available in full report) analysis, FUS requires a demand supply of 100 l/s.”*

*“Note, that an important determining factor of flow rate, is based upon Exposure (step 4). This requirement is typically based on the adjacent property, because fire fighters are concerned with limiting the spread of fire to adjacent properties. In Belcarra, there is a large separation between properties. However, it is ISL’s opinion that exposure would be determined by separation from the tree line in Belcarra’s case. As the trees have the potential to spread fire through the undergrowth and canopy to the next property. If the same building were evaluated, with this type of exposure, the following flows are determined:”*

*“If the tree exposure is considered, there is a significant jump in the required flow rate to 167l/s from 100 l/s.”*

*“Typically, in most Municipalities the Civic buildings are generally the largest structures. However, in Belcarra that is not the case and it is not unreasonable to see properties in excess of 9000 sq ft. If such a property were considered, flow rates of approximately 225 l/s would be required.”*

*“The existing Tatlow reservoir has an operational storage volume of approximately 300,000 liters, which is less than the required storage volume required. The existing reservoir can supply 70 mins of fire flow at 90 l/s”*

**And**

*“Based on the terms laid out by the Fire Underwriter Survey, the Village may not be meeting several requirements, namely the required fire flows/storage and possibly a suitable Fire Hall. The Fire Hall may be unsuitable because it does not meet current Health and Safe Codes and Seismic requirements.*

*The Village meets the requirements of appropriate fire force, but it should be noted that the fire fighters are volunteers and not career fire fighters. Therefore, the Village will likely have increased response times to an emergency, which is likely to increase the intensity of incident. Also, as the fire department is not manned by career fire fighters, they could potentially be in a position where the lead fire fighter is not an experienced member of the crew. This could consequently lead to an increase in time fighting the fire, which would result in more water to fight the fire. As the Village relies on Volunteers to fight fires, we would recommend providing the best tools available, as the Health and Safety of these individuals should be paramount, as they do not receive compensation for the risk they expose themselves to.”*

**ISL Engineering’s Recommendation to Council:**

*“Based on the afore mentioned analysis, it is ISL’s opinion that the Village of Belcarra should investigate options for increasing capacity within the water network, to ensure they meet the requirements as set out by FUS.”*

**ISL Engineering’s Full Report is Available on Belcarra’s Website:**

[https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2020/05/5.4-Chris-Boit-Belcarra-Water-System-Report-to-Council-200505\\_VoB\\_fireflow\\_report\\_sealed-002.pdf](https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2020/05/5.4-Chris-Boit-Belcarra-Water-System-Report-to-Council-200505_VoB_fireflow_report_sealed-002.pdf)

You can also watch the video of Chris Boit’s formal presentation and review Council’s and residents’ questions online using the link below. Please forward the video to 1:20:00.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS\\_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be)

**The Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department**

At the Council Meeting on May 11, 2020 Chief Jay Sharpe presented a summary of the two major fires on Turtlehead Road and Senkler Road to Council and residents. This was Chief Sharpe’s fourth presentation including presentations to Council, residents and the Water Committee. Chief Sharpe also answered questions from Council and residents.

**Chief Sharpe noted in his presentation:**

- Concerns about recent statements attributed to him
- That information about the Fire Department needs to come from him or one of the Deputy Chiefs
- The SVFD supports:
  - In-home sprinklers
  - Tree and brush removal
  - Belcarra adopting updated Fire Smart principles
  - Smoke alarms and monitored alarm systems
- The SVFD has been using Class A foam since 1990

To view Chief Sharpe’s presentation please forward to 12:40 in the video link below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS\\_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be)

## **Next Steps in the Planning Process for our Water System**

### **The Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS)**

Staff are working with the FUS to re-assess Belcarra's insurance rating and fire flow requirements.

The FUS Grading Process:

*"Within a water system assessment for public fire protection, the major emphasis is placed upon its ability to deliver adequate water to control major fires throughout the municipality on a reliable basis. What is ultimately available to the fire department is the critical test in the evaluation."*

### **The Water Committee**

In a split vote, Council voted to re-activate the Water Committee to engage with residents, representing questions and concerns to ISL Engineering in advance of the next formal recommendations to Council.

### **Recommended Next Steps from ISL Engineering:**

1. Village to decide if they want to proceed with the construction of a new reservoir
2. Continue applying for Grant funding opportunities
3. Engage Engineering consultant to review potential locations and sizing of proposed reservoir.
4. Apply for use of Crown Land (if required)
5. Complete Concept designs for reservoir
6. Apply for Federal and Provincial permits, such as Environmental assessments, Archeology
7. Complete Detailed designs
8. Complete Tender Documents and issue for tender
9. Select and award to Contractor
10. Construct Reservoir
11. Commission Reservoir and tie into the existing water system

As always, all reports and presentations will be presented publicly throughout the planning process. We encourage you to attend Council meetings (or review the videos online), Water Committee meetings and we also discuss all projects during Town Hall meetings.

## **Update on Belcarra's Fire Hall and its Eventual Replacement**

In March 2018, the SVFD Fire Trustees and Metro Vancouver retained a specialized architectural firm to assess the Belcarra and Anmore fire halls (and provide costing guidance for new fire halls). This significant investment (\$60k) determined that neither fire hall was WorkSafeBC compliant and both fire halls failed seismic testing. This means that our current fire halls are not safe for our volunteer fire fighters or their families and the halls themselves could collapse from a seismic event.

The current SVFD funding agreement between Anmore and Belcarra states that:

- The Fire Trustees (3 per Village, two Councillors and a Mayor) will approve the eventual designs and budgets for the new Fire Halls
- Metro Vancouver will bill the residents of Belcarra for our portion of the cost for both new fire halls

However:

- Anmore and Belcarra are currently renegotiating the agreement
- Once the designs and budgets are approved, Belcarra's residents will have to pay Belcarra's portion of the costs regardless
- Belcarra's current debt is so high that we can't borrow enough money to pay for the new Fire Halls
- Council had the Fire Hall expenses scheduled proactively in our planning budget for the year 2022 but this was removed in a split vote at the last Council meeting.

Council was also just notified by ISL Engineering that the Fire Underwriters Survey (who establishes insurance requirements for municipalities), may judge both Fire Halls to be unsuitable. This judgement may accelerate the date the Fire Halls must be replaced and negatively impact Belcarra’s insurance rating at the same time.

**ISL Engineering Report Notes Regarding the Fire Underwriters Survey and our Fire Halls:**

*“To be credited, apparatus must be stored in a suitably constructed and arranged fire hall.”*  
*“Based on the terms laid out by the Fire Underwriter Survey, the Village may not be meeting several requirements, namely the required fire flows/storage and possibly a suitable Fire Hall. The Fire Hall may be unsuitable because it does not meet current Health and Safe Codes and Seismic requirements.”*

Based on Council’s split decision on May 11, 2020, Belcarra is no longer planning to help offset the costs of our portion of the two new fire halls; residents will be billed directly.

**Village of Belcarra Financial Update**

You may remember the Province of BC’s Financial Report last year that ranked Belcarra’s financial position as 157 out of all 164 municipalities in British Columbia.

- <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, in 2019 only 6 municipalities in all of British Columbia were weaker financially 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 (prohibited across Canada).

**I’m proud to share the following high-level summary of Belcarra’s financial turnaround below:**

VILLAGE OF BELCARRA - KEY FINANCIAL NUMBERS (Historical & Planned)										
	Actual 2015	Actual 2016	Actual 2017	Actual 2018	Actual 2019	Budget 2020	Plan 2021	Plan 2022	Plan 2023	Plan 2024
PROPERTY TAXES - % change on Average Value Home	3.4%	2.8%	3.4%	2.7%	6.3%	15.0%	15.7%	15.8%	15.7%	10.0%
PROPERTY TAXES - \$s on Average Value Home	1,442	1,482	1,532	1,573	1,673	1,924	2,227	2,578	2,984	3,282
TOTAL REGULAR OPERATING REVENUES	1,330,044	1,368,786	1,487,336	1,470,214	1,673,419	1,777,515	1,954,627	2,162,062	2,400,026	2,596,647
TOTAL REGULAR OPERATING EXPENSES	(1,109,263)	(1,103,650)	(1,357,735)	(1,320,281)	(1,462,959)	(1,441,175)	(1,411,316)	(1,448,559)	(1,480,804)	(1,516,098)
NET (DEBT) SURPLUS Water Debt less Reserves/Surplus	(2,627,232)	(2,225,550)	(2,471,851)	(2,483,728)	(2,094,537)	(2,114,979)	(1,494,749)	(741,409)	240,667	1,484,456

You will note that the \$2.5M debt we inherited from the previous Council will be fully repaid in 2023. In fact, 2023 will be the first year ever that Belcarra begins saving proactively to repair our buildings, roads, culverts, water system and other infrastructure. Belcarra will become financially sustainable.

Included in our financial planning, we also:

- Hired a new financial contractor to review Belcarra's financial reporting and make recommendations for improvement
- Restructured the Village's finances to more accurately manage operational costs
- Approved a review of the Village's investment options to ensure responsible investment decisions
- Removed a senior staff position and created a new role providing more administrative and emergency planning support
- Updated several bylaws and contracted resources to ensure cost neutrality and improved services for development applications

Unfortunately, while we are making good progress, we remain unable to pay for the two major expenses facing the Village in the foreseeable future.

- Improving our water system for fire fighting
- Paying for our portion of two new Fire Halls

Property taxes cannot generate the millions of dollars required to fund these projects and Belcarra does not have the borrowing capacity for these projects due to our significant debt. The funds simply aren't available to pay for this essential infrastructure. As a result, when we are forced to improve our water system and build new fire halls Belcarra will have no choice but to either:

- Sell road ends
- Issue a parcel tax to every homeowner

### **How Did Road Ends Enter into the Discussion Again?**

The elected Revenue Generating Committee did a significant amount of work identifying financial options for Belcarra. On July 9, 2019 and September 30, 2019, the Revenue Generating Committee presented reports to Council recommending options for Belcarra to get out of debt, pay for major expenditures and ensure long term financial viability.

### **Road Ends Report**

<https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2020/04/4.1-2019-09-30-RGC-Interim-Report-to-Council-Road-Ends-Policy-Actions-full-report.pdf>

*"In this RGC interim report on Road Ends (RE's), it is suggested Council take a renewed perspective on the revenue potential of these valuable assets. In doing so, the Committee suggests a proactive and assertive approach in communicating with the appropriate authorities to move forward in the development of select RE's that will be beneficial to the entire Village of Belcarra."*

The Revenue Generating Committee recommended Council consider seven of the thirty-one available road ends to sell. In a split vote, Council voted to allow staff to develop a plan for up to three roads ends to be sold.

While Village staff continue to develop a plan for selling road ends, Council has not approved the sale of any road ends yet and will continue to engage residents to gain feedback and alternative ideas for our funding shortfalls.

### **RS-1 Zoning Amendment Report**

<https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2019/07/4-1-1-2019-07-10-Revised-Interim-Report-Revenue-Generation-Committee-RS-1-Zoning-Amendment.pdf>

*"Recommendation to Amend the Zoning Bylaw 510 Section 302 as follows:*

- *One-Family Residential Zone (RS-1)*
  - *Section: 302.5 Subdivision of Land (see attachment (1))*
    - *Minimum lot area: 1012 sq m (0.25 acres)*

- *Minimum lot width: 15.24 m (50 ft.)*
- *from the current: RS-1 Zone:*
  - *Minimum lot area: 2023 sq m (0.5 acres)*
  - *Minimum lot width: 10% of the perimeter of the lot.”*

Regarding the density changes proposed by the Revenue Committee, Council has already approved the budget to formally review Belcarra’s Official Community Plan (OCP) where the entire process in consideration of the above recommendations will be reviewed publicly and in depth.

The election to place residents on the OCP Review Committee was deferred due to COVID-19 but we will restart the election process and OCP planning as soon as we can safely and responsibly proceed.

Reviewing the OCP will be a challenging process for Belcarra but with residents fully aware of Belcarra’s financial position and the millions of dollars required for our water system and Fire Halls, I’m confident that we will reach a middle ground that enables Belcarra to improve the safety and quality of life we work so hard to balance.

### **Belcarra’s Most Recent Detailed Financial Report:**

<https://belcarra.ca/assets/media/2020/05/2020-05-19-Financial-Information-historical-and-projected.pdf>

### **Summary**

In summary, 2020 is a year of planning for Belcarra. For the first time ever, we have a taxation model that is putting money aside to pay for future repairs and replacement of our Village’s infrastructure.

We need to have some hard conversations about how to pay for essential safety infrastructure while we are broke. We will continue to have all of the experts’ reports and data posted on our website for everyone to review and the opportunities presented over and over again for residents to comment, contribute and engage constructively to help keep Belcarra the way we love it. Sustainable, safe and perfect.

Thank you for your support,



Neil Belenkie  
Mayor

### **Online Resources:**

Reminder: The Village website is best resource for:

- Financial reports
- Committee reports
- Expert/Contractor reports
- Port Communications
- Videos of past Council meetings
- Resident notes on our Bulletin Board
- And more

If you are reading this letter online, please click below to access videos of past Council meetings  
May 11, 2020 Council Meeting Video Link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS\\_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS_rXRjzLX4&feature=youtu.be)

To navigate to videos of past Council meetings, you can find them here:

- Go to: Belcarra.ca
- Click on “Municipal Hall” located near the top of the screen.
- Click on “Council Meetings”.
- Scroll down and click on “2020 Minutes and Agendas”
- Click on the camera icon across from 05/11/2020

Municipal Reports are available here:

- Go to: Belcarra.ca
- Click on “Municipal Hall” located near the top of the screen.
- On the drop down menu is “Reports & Information”.
- Click on “Municipal Reports”.