



Reference: 262837

April 26, 2021

VIA EMAIL: lschick@cariboord.ca

Margo Wagner, Chair, Cariboo Regional District
Mayor Mitch Campsall, District of 100 Mile House
Mayor Walt Cobb, City of Williams Lake
Mayor Gabe Fourchalk, District of Wells
Mayor Bob Simpson, City of Quesnel
Mayor Lyn Hall, City of Prince George

Dear Chair Wagner and Mayors Campsall, Cobb, Fourchalk, Simpson, and Hall:

Thank you for your letter of March 16, 2021, to Premier John Horgan, regarding incremental funding for Barkerville Heritage Trust's (the Trust) operation of Barkerville Park. As the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development's Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Heritage Branch that administers Barkerville, I have been asked to follow up on the March 29, 2021 reply you received from Premier Horgan.

Our agreement with the Trust does not define the provincial government's financial contribution to Barkerville's operations after 2009 because, at the time the agreement was struck, the board, comprising some of your predecessors, and the provincial government, believed the new operating model would lead to financial independence. History has shown that this was an ambitious goal. As a result, funding is provided each year to the Trust on an ad hoc basis, mediating among the Trust's business objectives, available funds, and branch/division/ministry priorities.

Between 2015-19, during a period of significant public investment in the deferred maintenance of Barkerville, the provincial government provided a level of funding that contributed to the Trust's societal goals and met our responsibilities. Anticipating a return to the lower, pre-2015 levels of funding, in 2018, the provincial government provided \$1.3 million to the Trust to allow for prudent fiscal planning for the out-years while adjusting to the new funding assistance level. We are also pleased to have been able to provide \$2.085 million, in advance of this year's operations, to the Trust as a concrete basis for prudent financial planning.

Heritage Branch's programs and services are intended to provide for encouraging and facilitating heritage conservation throughout British Columbia. Annually, as my divisional budget is allocated, requests such as the Trust's are considered alongside the costs of administering a spectrum of provincial operations including heritage.

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Demand for funding inevitably outweighs supply. For example, the provincial government's recent pandemic recovery-related investment of \$20 million in the Unique Heritage Infrastructure stream of the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program revealed a further \$100 million in demand for investment in heritage infrastructure provincewide. I am pleased to note that the Trust's application for the Theatre Royal rehabilitation at Barkerville received \$631,000 under this initiative.

Should incremental funding of the order that the Trust seeks become available to Heritage Branch, there is already a spectrum of other needs alongside those of the Trust to consider. Nevertheless, Heritage Branch staff continue to work to identify and facilitate access to funds from other sources to service the Trust's broader objectives. Recent successes have included the provision of a grant from the Rural Economic Development Branch that allowed the Trust to buy out sub-contractors and consequently to benefit more directly from the revenues of hotel operation within the park. I also note the Trust has received a Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport grant to facilitate enhanced online access to the site during the pandemic. The team will follow up with the Trust in this regard.

I acknowledge the role that Barkerville plays in the regional economy and am interested to see how the Trust's new executive might guide the organization toward enhanced roles, beyond that of a recreational tourism attraction. For example, Barkerville could serve as a centre of excellence for cultural and natural heritage resource management that could have provincewide impact on jobs and the stewardship of provincially significant heritage infrastructure.

The province has also been working with the Trust over the past two years to provide expert management consulting advice to help guide their operational planning to support financial sustainability. We recognize the Trust's success in remaining financially stable during the pandemic and the well-considered decisions its new executive has made to sustain jobs and the values of the heritage site. I am happy to know that the Trust and the Heritage Branch intend to continue working with the same management consultants to explore the ideas of the new executive and fresh perspectives on the role of the park, and I look forward to hearing more on the outcome of these discussions.

Again, thank you all for your collective support for the Barkerville Heritage Trust and your interest in sustaining this unique British Columbian heritage resource.

Sincerely,



Matt Austin
Assistant Deputy Minister

pc: Honourable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia
Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development
Honourable Melanie Mark, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport



March 16, 2021

VIA EMAIL: premier@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable John Horgan
Premier of British Columbia

Dear Premier Horgan:

Driving a conservatively estimated \$25,000,000 in central and northern British Columbian tourism activity, Barkerville Historic Town and Park (Barkerville, or the Park) is the major tourism engine of the Cariboo Chilcotin region. **At this time, we respectfully request your assistance in resolving the Park's critical budget shortfall of \$670,000 in order to ensure Barkerville's successful 2021 opening and a positive restart of the central and northern BC tourism economy.**

Owned by the Province of British Columbia, Barkerville has been managed on behalf of the Province by the Barkerville Heritage Trust (the Trust) since 2003. The Province's support to Barkerville since the Trust was formed is of course very helpful, and while we do not need to get into details about the funding history, we are advised by both the Trust's Board Chair and its CEO that the level of funding proposed for the coming fiscal year is insufficient.

In fact, we have been advised that Barkerville will be unable to open with full Interpretation and the range of experiences we have come to value and expect. That concerns us deeply. In our view, its opening this spring is essential to the region's economic, physical, and mental well-being. Should the required funding not be made available, the Park will be unable to open and operate at the publicly expected level which will result in a devastating loss of employment, essential services, and public programming.

The Park is the largest living history museum in Western North America, and it belongs to all of us as British Columbians. During the pandemic, Barkerville offered the residents of our regions and the province the comfort of familiarity while also presenting increased and tactile education from the perspective of our First Nations and Chinese peoples. Barkerville's interpretive historians are irreplaceable, having honed their educations and their skills to authentically immerse visitors in the 1860s. In 2020, Barkerville was booked to health-authority approved capacity. It dramatically pivoted its programs to safely host over 22,500 visitors between July and September and is once again facing increased public demand to open its doors. If you can help Barkerville achieve its requested and necessary operating budget of \$2,650,000 through an increase to the committed amount of only \$670,000, Barkerville will be able to open and it is anticipated that attendance will at least double in the summer of 2021.

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We are prepared to pursue discussions with you or whomever you suggest with the view of achieving funding for this upcoming year and predictability of a \$2,650,000 funding for the future.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

Chair Margo A. Wagner
Cariboo Regional District

Mayor Mitch Campsall
District of 100 Mile House

Mayor Walt Cobb
City of Williams Lake

Mayor Gabe Fourchalk
District of Wells

Mayor Bob Simpson
City of Quesnel

Mayor Lyn Hall
City of Prince George

cc: Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development
Honourable Melanie Mark, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Coralee Oakes, MLA, Cariboo North
Lorne Doerkson, MLA, Cariboo-Chilcotin
Mike Morris, MLA, Prince George-Mackenzie
Shirley Bond, MLA, Prince George-Valemount
Kate Cox, CEO, Barkerville Historic Town & Park

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