

Staff Report

Original signed by: City Manager Johnson

Report Date: February 8, 2023

Meeting Date: February 14, 2023 – Joint Advisory Committee

To: City Manager

From: Director of Community Services

Subject: Pool Upgrade Project Update #2

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a monthly update on the Pool Upgrade Project for the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).

CITY/CRD/JAC POLICY

At its meeting on December 13, 2022 the JAC passed the following resolutions:

THAT the North Cariboo Joint Advisory Committee recommend to the Cariboo Regional District Board of Directors, that Staff proceed with additional pool upgrade referendum public consultation, to include the tax ramifications for a pool upgrade with a waterslide;

AND THAT Staff proceed with a June 2023 referendum for a Quesnel and District Arts and Recreation Centre pool upgrade with a waterslide.

THAT the North Cariboo Joint Advisory Committee recommend to the Cariboo Regional District Board of Directors that the 2023 North Cariboo Recreation and Parks Financial Plan be amended to allocate \$50,000 for communications and public consultation for the Quesnel and District Arts and Recreation Centre pool upgrade referendum.

SUMMARY

- The resolutions passed by the JAC at the December 13, 2022 meeting were ratified by the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) Board of Directors at their meeting on January 13, 2023.
- CRD staff are working to confirm a date for the referendum, looking into suitable venues to serve as polling stations, and finalizing the timeline for the statutory advertising and other statutory requirements.
- It is anticipated that the Loan Authorization Bylaw will be presented to the CRD Board of Directors at their February 24, 2023 meeting and that final approval will occur in early April.
- City and CRD Communications and Community Services Department staff have prepared a Communications Engagement Plan for the project which is provided for review and approval by the JAC.
- Key elements of the plan include:
 - Development of City and CRD referendum web pages
 - Development of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to be posted on-line, and distributed as hardcopies at various City/CRD/Community locations.



- Issuing a media release announcing the referendum and the launch of the community engagement campaign.
 - Development of one comprehensive 'referendum explainer' video that will be posted on websites, social media, and used in presentations or displays.
 - Development of a regular "Question of the Week" series on Facebook
 - One information flyer directly mailed to every address in the North Cariboo Recreation and Parks (NCRP) boundaries.
 - Hold three public open houses: (1 in Bouchie Lake, 1 in Red Bluff, and 1 in the City)
- City and CRD Communications and Community Services staff are finalizing a draft FAQ document and plan to bring that document to the March JAC meeting for review and approval.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- A motion was made by the Committee to include \$50,000 in the 2023 NCRP budget for referendum costs and to implement a communications plan.
- No funding has been included in the 2023 budget to advance the design work or to hire a project manager prior to the referendum.

RECOMMENDATION

That the North Cariboo Joint Advisory Committee approve the attached Engagement Plan for the Arts and Recreation Centre Pool Upgrade project and direct staff to proceed with implementation of the Plan.

2023 QUESNEL ARTS AND RECREATION CENTRE POOL UPGRADE REFERENDUM Engagement Plan

An overview of engagement strategies and tactics for a referendum on upgrades to the Quesnel and District Arts and Recreation Centre aquatic facilities tentatively set for June 2023.



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Quesnel & District Arts and Recreation Centre Pool Upgrade Engagement Plan

Background

The North Cariboo Joint Advisory Committee (NCJAC) is proposing major renovations and upgrades to the Quesnel and District Arts and Recreation Centre's aquatic facilities (Quesnel Pool).

The scope of the proposed project includes retention of the existing 25-metre pool, replacement of the tile around the pool; demolition of the existing leisure pool, hot tub, and saunas; renovated universal (family) change rooms; and construction of a new leisure pool, whirlpool, saunas, and a waterslide.

The project's cost estimate is approximately \$35 million. The CRD must gain public approval via referendum to borrow the funds necessary for the work to be done.

Referendum

A referendum will be held in June 2023 for eligible voters to cast their vote on whether to authorize borrowing money (\$35 million) to finance the pool upgrade project. If the referendum question succeeds and the project moves forward, tax rates on residential properties within the service boundary would increase by approximately \$75 per \$100,000, beginning in the 2024 tax year. The maximum tax requisition for the North Cariboo Sub-Regional Recreation and Parks (NCRP) service would also be increased to \$9 Million to accommodate forecasted spending and revenue requirements if the project and borrowing proceeds.

Goals

The engagement plan is not designed to "sell" the project or persuade residents to vote one way or another. It is designed to empower voters to make an informed decision by presenting costs, benefits, and other facts about the project from a balanced perspective.

Our core message is "**get informed and vote**", and follows the mantra of **Inform, Educate, Empower**. Our goals are to:

1. Inform voters and stakeholders about the scope and implications of the project. What is the project? What are the benefits? Why is the upgrade being proposed? What will it cost?
2. Educate voters on the decision they are being asked to make. What are they voting on? What do they get to decide? What are the consequences of either decision?
3. Empower voters to make the decision. Who can vote, where can you vote, what do you need to vote, when can you vote, etc.

Target Audience

Our primary audience is residents within the subregional recreation taxation boundary. This includes any eligible voter living within the service area boundaries, including portions of electoral areas A, B, C, I, and the City of Quesnel. Influencers include local government elected officials, staff, and media.

Objectives

The objective of this engagement plan is to build awareness and encourage participation by eligible voters in a referendum to approve or deny borrowing authority to proceed with the pool renovations. We will also try to raise awareness about local governments and the need for residents to exercise their democratic rights as part of the overall effort:

- Objective #1: Increase the level of awareness about the proposed project over the course of the engagement plan.
- Objective #2: Maintain or increase voter participation. Most recently, a referendum on a reduced scope of work saw total turnout of 1942 voters (versus estimated voting age population of 14,000+).

Key Messages

Key messages for this engagement plan are:

- A referendum will be held in June 2023 (revise to include exact date in future).
- The project has been identified as a priority for recreation in the area by residents.
- Aging infrastructure at the aquatic centre will soon need repair and replacement even if this project does not go ahead.
- Voters are being empowered to decide if the CRD can borrow up to \$35 million for the upgrade.
- An increase to the tax rate is required for increased operating costs for the upgraded pool.

Spokesperson

Designated spokespersons will come from the North Cariboo Joint Advisory Committee, along with appropriate City of Quesnel and CRD staff. The Committee will designate 1 City and 1 CRD elected official to act as the primary spokespersons regarding the project. The purpose of elected officials serving as spokespersons is to address why the project is being put to referendum – why this upgrade, why this scope of work, and why now. Spokespersons are not intended to speak for or against any particular result, but will address the project being “referendum worthy”.

Technical spokespersons will be used for specific information about the performance of systems and operation of various service delivery mechanisms that provide further context to the proposed upgrade.

Technical spokespersons and roles include:

- Alice Johnston, Chief Elections Officer – Referenda process and legal requirements
- Darron Campbell, CRD M/Community Services – North Cariboo Recreation & Parks Service history, taxation, financial planning, borrowing implications
- Richard Gauthier, Recreation Manager – Scope of work for pool upgrades, current facility condition, facility usage
- Jeff Norburn, Director of Community Services – Project implementation planning, project background

Timeline

The following timeline outlines proposed communication timing and tactics for the referendum:

Date	Activities
Feb 14	Final draft of Engagement Plan & FAQ Questions document referred to NCJAC for feedback and comment; municipal and CRD spokespersons confirmed by NCJAC.
Feb 23	Referendum budget to be proposed for inclusion in draft CRD Financial Plan and business plan for NCRP function.
Feb 24	Loan Authorization Bylaw to CRD Board for 3 readings Appointment of CEO & DCEO
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final discussion and review of comms plan with NCJAC Finalize redeveloped education/promotional materials, advertisement drafts, completion of FAQ documents Publish referendum webpage with basic information Order any printed materials required (banners etc.)
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize referendum “trailer” video Referendum question to be approved by CRD Board Media Release announcing referendum Publish all online/print materials Distribute print materials Publish informational video Launch “Question of the Week” campaign
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mail FAQs and referendum notice Book/publish statutory referendum ads Advertise and hold 3 open houses Articles to City of Quesnel Newsletter and UpFront Newsletter
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertise voting opportunities, Get Out the Vote campaign Media release for final results of referendum Assess communications plan outcomes

Tactics

- Media release is sent announcing proposed project
- Project FAQ posted online; distributed at CRD offices/libraries/key community locations
- CRD and City Website is updated with project information
- Voter engagement opportunities announced and advertised (social, print, radio)
- Referendum explainer video (what are you voting on?)
- “Question of the Week” series on Facebook (highlighting Q&As from FAQ over the 2-month period)
- Presentations given at targeted community group meetings, if feasible
- Respond to any media enquiries
- Include update in May 2023 UpFront newsletter

Information Handouts

One FAQ will be developed with information about the proposed project. Closer to the referendum, a referendum specific FAQ will be developed. These will be posted on the CRD and City of Quesnel websites and social media accounts and will be made available in paper form at the offices, at the Quesnel Arts and Recreation Centre, CRD North Cariboo libraries, and at key community locations.

Mailers

A full-colour mail-out focused on the referendum process will be mailed to every home and business within the proposed service area, including key FAQ questions, open house dates, and web links. Efforts will be made to drop off paper copies at key rural locations, such as general stores, etc.

Regular Publications

Information regarding the project and the referendum will be included in the CRD’s UpFront newsletter, the City of Quesnel’s newsletter, and the Quesnel recreation guide, as appropriate.

Website

The CRD and City of Quesnel websites will be used to provide information on the pool upgrade project. The City of Quesnel will host the main project page on its website, with links from a CRD overview web page and “Let’s Connect Quesnel” pointing to the main information page. Main URL to be determined by Quesnel staff.

Information Displays

Information panels will be rotated through the Quesnel Arts and Recreation Centre, Quesnel City Hall, and the Quesnel branch of the CRD library during the referendum period. The panels will provide project and referendum details. Digital displays will be used where available and appropriate.

Posters

Staff will create posters advertising the upcoming referendum to be provided to directors and posted in high-traffic areas within the referendum voting area boundaries.

Social Media

The CRD's and City's Facebook page and Twitter feed will be utilized to provide two-way communication with affected residents, user groups, and businesses. A short 'Question of the Week' campaign will be used to raise awareness of questions in the FAQ document. Social media posts and ads will also be used to remind people to vote in the referendum.

Open Houses

Three direct voter engagement events are planned to occur – one in Bouchie-Milburn, one in Red Bluff, and one at the Seniors Centre. Other venues where we may engage with the public early season farmer's markets, and outdoor events in the spring where designated spokespersons could set up a display, provide information resources, and answer public questions. Open house dates and locations will be advertised in direct mailouts to residents.

Email Outreach

Information updates will be emailed via the City of Quesnel's email distribution list from "Let's Connect" throughout the project as necessary. People can subscribe or unsubscribe via the website or conventional email, which will need to be advertised throughout the outreach campaign.

Media Relations

News releases will be sent to the media to announce important updates and media interview requests will be accommodated as quickly as possible. Pitched media articles may be used to provide further information to the public as well. Leading into the referendum, the goal is to have 1 to 2 media articles outlining core referendum and outreach events along with key issues/messaging.

Advertising

Print, radio, and online advertising will be used leading up to the referendum to encourage residents to get out and vote. Advertising will be coordinated with the legislated referendum advertising to keep information consistent.

Additional Tactics

Other tactics that may be considered for referendum engagement efforts include:

- Awareness messaging on paper receipts from Quesnel pools, rinks, civic receipts. This needs to be discussed with City of Quesnel IT Staff, may be limited by VADIM POS system.
- Awareness and referendum messaging on facility video displays and electronic signage.
- 'QR' codes where suitable, linking to online resources regarding the referendum.
- Video trailer about the project – posted to YouTube with cross posts to Facebook.

Cost Estimates

The CRD and City have allocated a budget of \$25,000 to support the delivery of public education and engagement sessions, referendum advertisements, and publications to support the referendum awareness campaign. This budget anticipates:

- \$10,000 in advertising costs
- \$5,000 in printing and mailing costs
- \$5,000 for information displays and open house sessions
- \$5,000 contingency/discretionary allowance

The above budget does not include other costs that will be borne internally by both the CRD and City for referendum activities, including some printing costs, staff time, and use of CRD and City managed distribution channels (websites, social media, Let's Connect Quesnel).

Evaluation

Evaluation of the success of the engagement plan will hinge on referendum turnout rather than a positive or negative outcome to the vote. Our goal is to foster participation in the process rather than favouring a particular result.

Objective	Measure
Increase the level of awareness about the proposed renovations over the course of the engagement plan.	Total reach, comments, shares, and engagements per post and overall for social media channels used during the engagement plan. Target is for a roughly equal number to the eligible electors who can vote in terms of total reach.
Maintain or increase voter participation compared to the last North Cariboo recreation referendum held in 2021 (in proportion).	Did voter participation stay the same or increase compared to the last North Cariboo recreation referendum? By how much (+/-%)?

Conclusion

The previous referendum presented unique challenges and several learnings. It will be necessary to utilize the new ways of informing the public used during the pandemic alongside traditional avenues for supporting voter outreach to address disparities in internet access and technological literacy. The CRD and City of Quesnel will also need to overcome an overall decline in voter participation. Positive trends in voter participation do provide avenues for optimism, namely with 2,317 voters (29.6% of the electorate) turning out to the 2022 General Election compared to 1,909 voters in 2018.

The ability to provide “bite sized” packets of information to respect the limited time voters have to inform themselves on this project also must be accounted for. User-friendly infographics and other media can provide clear and concise messaging to support public education. Providing information on request to voters will also support efforts to ensure voters participate in the referendum and have their opinion heard on this project.