



Comox Valley Sewer Conveyance Project

November Project Updates – Summary Report

November 2022



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Executive Summary

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is committed to providing early, open and thorough communication to all area residents and businesses who will be affected by the complex, multi-year Sewer Conveyance Project. To begin connecting with those who will be affected and to start preparing people for construction and traffic impacts, the CVRD held a series of events through November.

The events provided details to the public about the confirmed route and method of pipe installation, archaeological impacts, preliminary information on traffic management planning and details about updated costs, including the upcoming Alternative Approval Process (AAP) planned for next spring. Additionally, there was information about Town of Comox upgrades that will happen simultaneously with the sewer work.

The CVRD used this opportunity to gather feedback from residents on the work to come, and to start making important connections between staff and the public. The project updates involved the following key outreach tools:

- **Information sessions:** Three drop-in style public open houses were held, two at the Little Red Church in Comox and one at the CVRD's Civic Room in Courtenay.
- **Online webinar:** A lunch time webinar was also held via ZOOM.
- **Website updates:** Event information was posted to the project web page on ConnectCVRD, the online engagement hub where background resources are available, along with FAQs, timelines, route maps, etc.

Public participation during this phase was the result of extensive outreach using a variety of methods, including: a direct mail letter, news release, social media, email newsletter and print and radio ads. Roughly 200 participants attended the in-person open houses, with 61 participants attending the online webinar.

The public response was very positive, indicated by the high attendance rate and feedback communicated directly with staff. CVRD and Town of Comox staff heard support and gratitude for the communication methods and outreach so far, as well as received many specific questions around traffic and construction planning.

Feedback from the events will inform construction and traffic management plans moving forward.



1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

The Comox Valley Sewer Service treats raw sewage (wastewater) from homes and businesses in Courtenay, Comox and K'ómoks First Nation. More than 14,000 cubic metres of wastewater from these communities flows daily through a pipe located along the Willemar Bluffs, which poses a significant environmental risk.

The Comox Valley Sewer Conveyance Project will replace this pipe and upgrade the pump stations that move this wastewater to the sewage treatment plant on Brent Road.



The new system will route sewer pipes further inland where they will no longer be vulnerable to damage by waves, rocks and logs, protecting the beaches and waters throughout the Comox Estuary, Point Holmes, Goose Spit coastline, as well as Baynes Sound.

This project is the result of the Liquid Waste Management plan (LWMP), which started in 2018 and involved a multi-stage public consultation process to develop a long-term plan for the sewer service.

1.2 Project Update Goals

The following goals for this stage of public engagement fall under the levels of INFORM and CONSULT on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum for public engagement.

Increasing level of public involvement in decision-making				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Provide balanced and objective information to residents.	Obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions from residents	Work directly with residents to address concerns	Partner with residents to develop a preferred solution	Place final decision making in the hands of residents

The main goal of these events was to INFORM the community about:

- Updates in planning for the project, including timing, construction impacts and the traffic management strategy.
- To provide an update on the costs for the project with notice of an AAP in the spring.

They also intended to CONSULT the community on:

- The traffic management strategy, and collect feedback on the proposed approach. A report will be provided to contractors to inform construction and traffic management plans.

2.0 Sewer Conveyance Project Updates Overview

2.1 Approach

The project update events kicked off in the second week of November and included the following methods of approach:



In-Person Open Houses

These events took place on November 7, 2022 from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm at the Little Red Church (LRC) in Comox, November 10 from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the LRC, and on November 17 at the CVRD's Civic Room from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm.

Information boards were on display, detailing:

- need for the project
- route map
- construction and traffic impacts for four key areas
- Town of Comox improvements
- horizontal directional drilling (tunnelling)
- costs
- timeline

There were between six to eight members of the project team on hand to answer questions, as well as Town of Comox staff and contractors. Comment forms were available for participants to submit to the team.



ZOOM Webinar

An online webinar was hosted by the project team on November 14 from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm via ZOOM. CAO Russell Dyson provided a 25-minute overview presentation echoing information from the open houses, which was followed by a Q&A period for participants to pose questions to the project team.



Website Updates

Event information, including poster boards and a recording of the webinar, was posted on the project web page for those looking to take another look at information, or for those who could not attend.

2.2 Promotion

The overall success of the events was the result of a blend of tools used to promote, inform and encourage participation:

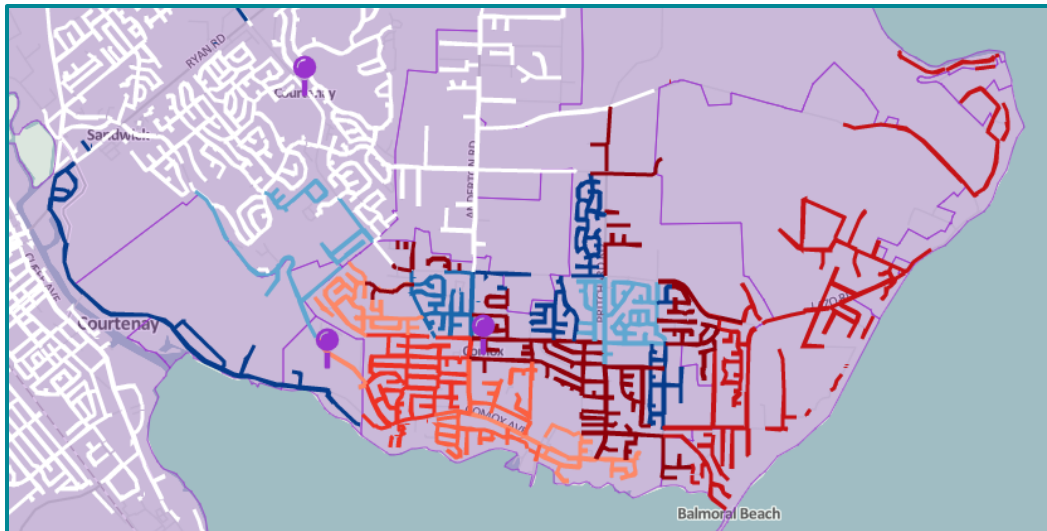


2.3 By the Numbers

The numbers below highlight key data collected during promotion and from the events.



The map below highlights the distribution area for the 8,226 letters that were mailed:



2.4 Themes of Comments

The themes of feedback listed below are compiled from three sources: feedback relayed directly to staff members at the in-person events, questions posed by participants during the online webinar's Q&A and comment forms submitted at the events.

There were several specific notes that will warrant review, but the following themes emerged through direct feedback and should be considered in traffic and construction management planning. Themes are listed in order of interest/popularity.



Traffic/Detour Routes:

- Concerns about impacts to traffic on Back Rd. and traffic management in this area
- Concerns about travel times to ferries/airport and to businesses in downtown Comox during business hours
- Concerns about impacts and increased traffic to side streets/alternate routes (Jane Pl., Aitken St., Glacier View Dr., Ellis St.), including concerns about safety (speed, narrow streets, children)
- Questions about specific timing for work and closures
- Suggestions for public access to webcam showing traffic in busy construction areas



Town of Comox Improvements:

- Concerns about safety/pedestrian access in roundabouts; suggestion for information campaign to inform drivers on the proper use of roundabouts
- Questions about size of roundabouts and need for two in the same area; also, lots of support for new roundabouts
- Questions about moving power poles and suggestions for burying power lines on Balmoral and Beaufort

- Inquiries about specifics on Balmoral and Beaufort sidewalk projects (location, encroachment etc.)
- Appreciation for packaging Town improvements with project to minimize impact



Access/Direct Impacts to Homes:

- Concerns about access to individual properties/driveways during construction, as well as multi-unit buildings (ex: Manor Drive, Emerald Shores); specific concerns about emergency vehicle access at multi-resident dwellings
- Questions about direct impacts to property sewage outputs; i.e. will there be an impact to the movement of wastewater from residences during construction



Cyclist/Pedestrian Access:

- Many suggestions for use of safe surface materials on temporary bike paths; i.e. gravel is a hazard
- Questions about whether there will be alternate bike/pedestrian routes during construction (on Comox Rd., Comox Ave). Many in favour of safe cycling/pedestrian access through construction routes.
- Suggestions to add a permanent cycling/pedestrian lane on Comox Hill
- Some specific suggestions around crosswalk/sidewalk placement in Stewart St. and Brooklyn Creek crossing areas



Groundwater Wells/Lazo Area:

- Concerns about impacts to shallow wells in the area, and effects to water access from digging
- Comments about leaking/broken pipe not being detected and/or impacting groundwater wells



Access/Direct Impacts to Services/Businesses:

- Concerns about access to marina, library, golf course, GP Vanier Secondary school
- Concerns about impacts to businesses along Comox Ave, and construction deterring potential customers from outside areas
- Concern about 2hr parking limits on Comox Ave, when other road parking is unavailable due to construction



Other Common Questions:

- Timing and sequencing of work along the route (where and when)
- Details of spring AAP and current average sewer costs vs. estimated cost to taxpayer
- Whether developers will contribute financially to the project
- Capacity of new system to handle population growth
- Engagement with K'ómoks First Nation and specifics of archaeological investigation
- What will happen to the existing pipe once decommissioned

In addition to the feedback and inquiries listed above, many attendees communicated their appreciation for the events and for the proactive communication to date. There was encouragement for continued engagement and open communication with the public as the project moves ahead.

3.0 Conclusion

The high attendance rate and active engagement from residents at the four November events illustrate the potential for successful future communications on this project. Feedback gathered at these events, specifically around traffic impacts and detour routes, will be critical for the project team working on planning in the next phase. Access to homes and businesses, as well as for pedestrians and cyclists, are also key potential impacts for residents.

In addition to this input, staff received important feedback on presentation materials and map displays that will help improve communication methods during the construction phase.

The work done to date has established a solid base for collaboration with City of Courtenay, K'ómoks First Nation and Town of Comox to get word out about the coming project. It has also established an important connection with community members and illustrated what project communications will look like in the coming years.



4.0 Next Steps

In 2023, the CVRD will take several steps to update the community on the project, and to start preparing residents for construction to come:

- **Sharing new updates when applicable:** The project team will continue to provide updates on the project as needed, including about the Spring AAP. There will also be a focus on growing the project update contact list and further promoting ConnectCVRD as the hub for project information.
- **Public information campaign and pre-construction open houses:** This will take place in early spring, to share details of the traffic management plans and to prepare the public for construction starting in the summer.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Event Display Boards

Appendix 2 – Webinar Presentation

Appendix 3 – Social Media Post Samples

Appendix 4 – Print & Radio Advertisement Samples