

A Year in the Life of an Area Director

A great deal of what a CVRD Area Director does is invisible to a member of the public unless an issue touches them directly. Here is a brief summary of what a year might bring to the attention of a Director, based upon my Shawnigan 2012 experience. Behind each listed item lies a set of stories too detailed to include here. The fact is that many issues that face the region arise from outside forces, such as the retreat of senior governments from traditional funding of environmental stewardship, the fragmented federal and provincial jurisdictions in the Shawnigan watershed, the march of international economic conditions or trends in demographics.

As well, nothing much gets done by one person acting alone. All of the Shawnigan engagements recorded here have involved the combined efforts of teams including my Alternate Director, other Directors, CVRD staff members and numerous public-spirited volunteers.

Formal Committees and Commission Assignments

Committee assignments are an automatic charge on each Area Director's time and energy. All the regular business of the region is conducted in committee or commissions prior to decision-making at a Board meeting. Issues of budget, services provided, zoning challenges, variance requests, by-law compliance, regional grants-in-aid, issues needing attention of the Board, litigation and land purchases and many other issues are the stuff of regular business that takes much of the attention of Directors. For example, my 2012 assignments included:

- CVRD Board (monthly)
- Electoral Area Services Committee (twice monthly)
- Engineering and Environmental Services Committee (monthly)
- Regional Services Committee (monthly)
- Soils Relocation Committee (periodic)
- Transit Committee (monthly)
- Communications Committee (monthly)
- South Cowichan Water Study Committee (periodic)
- Regional Parks Commission (bi-monthly)
- Shawnigan Lake Community Centre Commission (monthly)
- Kerry Park Commission (monthly)
- Economic Development Commission (monthly)
- Cowichan Watershed Board (monthly)

Responsibility for other Formal CVRD Agencies

Each Director has a number of Commissions for which they are responsible and for which they appoint members and monitor budgets and programs. In Shawnigan they are:

- Shawnigan Parks and Recreation Commission (monthly)
- Area B Advisory Planning Commission (monthly)
- Kerry Park Commission
- Shawnigan Lake Community Centre Commission

Regular Public Access

Each Director develops the public access vehicles that fit their own style of engagement with their constituencies. Some employ newsletters or social media. In Shawnigan, I tend to prefer direct communication and therefore employ:

- Director's round table public meetings (first Monday of each month)
- Office hours in the Village (MWF 11-1)
- Direct visits with constituents on an appointment basis
- Attendance at community events
- Participation in Civic group meetings
- Maintenance of the Director's web site with contact link

Major Local Government Conferences

Directors take advantage of major local government meetings to raise issues that need provincial government attention and to familiarize themselves with the governance rules required by the Local Government Act under which Regional Districts are established. In 2012, these opportunities included:

- Union of BC Municipalities (Victoria)
- Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities (Uclulet)
- Local Government Learning Academy (Richmond)

Routine Issues

There is a constant round of routine business issues that must be given attention, some are specific to each local area but many arise in the other electoral areas that require regional decision making by the Area Directors. Very few decisions are made by a single Director acting alone. Some are within the jurisdiction of the Regional District and some lie with senior governments. Where direct intervention cannot be provided, Directors try to influence other levels of government on behalf of their constituents.

- Region wide subdivision, re-zoning and variance applications
- Grants in aid to local volunteer associations to support their regional and local projects: provision of scholarships to public high schools
- Citizen complaints: road maintenance, snowplowing, signs on poles, dogs, feral cats, backyard burning, noise, motorized traffic impact on trails and parks, smart meters, by-law infractions, chickens, boating infractions, AAP process concerns, growing property tax loads

- Community policing
- Shawnigan Creek Cleanout AAP
- Site visits to the subject property of subdivision, development and variance applicants

Major Issues

Every year brings major issues of service and infrastructure or environmental challenges that need resolution by the CVRD Directors acting as a group. Some are specific to an electoral area and some span the interests of all the local area and municipal representatives. Ones that affect Shawnigan include:

- Funding of Regional Recreation Facilities: eg. Sportsplex operational deficit, Island Savings Centre long term reconstruction, Kerry Park renovation, single tier access to the Cowichan Aquatic Centre
- Waste Management Infrastructure: eg. Ecodepot, Garbage and Recycling System changes, Fisher Road licensing appeal and litigation
- Contaminated Soil dumping in regional watersheds: multiple licensed and informal sites, negotiations with the MOE, Ministry tours, contesting the SIA application and Evans operation on Koksilah Rd., legal survey of SIA perimeter to determine any ongoing encroachment on CVRD parkland
- Watershed private land logging impacts, particularly their cumulative impact on basin dynamics that affect the water quality of Shawnigan Lake and their effect on the visual landscape
- Air Quality issues arising from broadcast burning and winter wood stove use
- Public Hearings: Bamberton, SIA Public Meeting, several in Shawnigan for subdivision and re-zoning proposals
- Water System Upgrades: Shawnigan North water system renovations, Carlton System takeover, System extensions to serve new properties
- Subdivision Controversies: Shawnigan Station expansion, Worthington lakeshore development, forest land conversion applications outside the village containment boundary
- South Cowichan OCP By-Law Amendments
- Municipal Incorporation discussions with government
- Fire Hall expansion at South Shawnigan to cover new subdivisions
- CVRD annual budget and taxation levels
- Transit Service Gaps in west and south Shawnigan
- Looming necessity of refit of Kerry Park

Parkland Issues

Parks and trails are one of the major areas of expenditure for the CVRD. Acquisition and management of parkland is an ongoing focus of area-based land use management.

- Shawnigan Lake Road End acquisition and management
- Assessment and design of parkland amenities arising from development
- Memory Island use infractions
- Conservation of the Koksilah old growth stand on TimberWest land
- Beach Estates Greenbelt encroachment

- Long term eye on the Quarry lands and Kingsett Lake as a potential public amenity

Discretionary Initiatives

Each Director has a slate of projects that they would like to see accomplished in their term of office. Mine for Shawnigan include:

- Shawnigan Watershed Roundtable, establishment, meetings, tours, integration of agencies and studies; inauguration of the Shawnigan Basin Society as the funding arm of the Roundtable and an Ecological Design Panel to assist with enlisting scientific expertise in shaping responsible development in the watershed
- Village Development Council establishment, planning for village rejuvenation, acquisition of Elsie Miles Property by the CVRD and creation of a Shawnigan Gathering Place in the heart of the Village
- Village Office service in collaboration with Inspire Arts Initiative and other local volunteer organizations that enhances the capacity of the associations and at the same time brings the CVRD operation closer to the people it is intended to serve
- Tackling issues of summer lake use and ailing septic fields

Celebrations and Events

Directors attend as many local events as time permits, both to support the groups that sponsor them and to be publicly available for informal discussions as people gather. In Shawnigan in 2012 they included:

- Subaru Triathlon
- Canada Day
- Armistice Day
- Arts and Music Street Festival
- Shawnigan Village Christmas Light Up
- Volunteer Appreciation Dinner at Kerry Park
- SIA application local neighbourhood meeting, Public Open House and CVRD Public Meeting

Community Liaison

Directors work with a host of existing organizations and try to maintain working relationships with them over the course of a year. In some cases this might involve regular meetings with the association to share information and deal with issues, provision of targeted grants in aid or support of specific initiatives and external grant applications being pursued.

- South Cowichan Chamber of Commerce
- Shawnigan Lake Business Association
- Shawnigan Resident's Association
- Shawnigan Basin Society
- Shawnigan Improvement District
- Inspire Arts Initiative
- Shawnigan Station Strata Council

- Goldstream Heights Residents
- Shawnigan Historical Society
- Cowichan Station HUB (which serves a portion of Area B)
- Ecovillage
- Elkington Forest
- South Cowichan Community Policing
- Shawnigan Detachment, RCMP

Media Exposure

Directors strive to keep their constituencies informed about area activities and issues that reach the regional Board for resolution. As issues arise and are dealt with by Directors individually or as a Board, local media commonly seek interpretations and interviews as part of their news-gathering. In 2012, for me they included:

- Area Director's web site with articles, video clips, news items on current issues – many recorded on Google
- Email send outs for groups dealing with the Shawnigan Watershed and Village Development initiatives
- Shawnigan Focus articles - monthly
- Shawnigan Times articles - periodically
- Radio Interviews: Sun FM, CBC on the island, CBC Almanac
- Newspapers: Cowichan Citizen, Cowichan News Leader Pictorial and Times-Colonist interviews

Other Engagements

As an ecologist and educator by profession, I maintain efforts to stay engaged with the larger issues of society.

- Recent speaking engagements include: to the Greater Vancouver Regional District on Species at Risk; to the Professional Biologists AGM on Ecosystems and Economies at Risk