

March 07, 2025

Dear Chair John Jack

It was a pleasure meeting you at the ACRD Board meeting.

Our Association looks forward to working with the ACRD Directors and staff to resolve issues of concern for property owners and residents in Area D.

You asked how many persons are members of the SLPOA? Although membership numbers increase regularly, we have over 400 members. We aim to have over 600 distinct addresses as members and broad representation throughout Area D.

Why do you think that we have signed up so many members in such a short time?

Landowners and residents founded and joined the Sproat Lake Property Owners Association in response to their increasing frustration and disheartenment over steep tax hikes, excessive regulations, and the sense that the ACRD is ignoring their feedback and input.

Many of our members were active in the Sproat Lake Ratepayers Association, where they advocated in Victoria for the construction of a new bridge over the Sproat River, fought for bylaws to regulate houseboats, and pressed all levels of government on various issues crucial to Area D. Many owners participated in the development of the first OCP which owners and residents wrote under the leadership of Derek Appleton (not Consultants). Many members have participated on various committees over the years, often working hard and developing recommendations and solutions only to find that their work was ignored or dismissed.

In short, we are paying far too much in property taxes for the services provided. We are facing an affordability crisis. Many owners have lived or owned within Sproat Lake area D for many years and are now seniors living on pensions. Most residents live on fixed incomes and cannot afford continued increases in taxes.

We are also very different than other Districts in the ACRD in terms of geography, physical features, and population makeup. We need zoning and regulations that meet our needs and desires.

The poet G.K. Chesterton captured the essence of the issue we are facing. "Men did not love Rome because she was great; she was great because they loved her". Regions with high civic engagement and robust social capital are proven to achieve more effective and efficient governance and have superior economic performance. This in our view is what we must strive to achieve.

Civic engagement is a two-way process. It means we as owners and residents must work with our Regional Directors, committee's and neighbors but it also means that the elected or appointed directors, and ACRD staff must engage and seek out the views of the community, inform the community of potential issues, and act on what the communities want or don't want.

The province designed Regional Districts to be "Voluntary "and "self-organizing" with a short list of statutory or legislative responsibilities that has grown over time. This list of legislated or regulatory responsibilities includes the general government of the region, land use planning in rural areas, hospital capital financing, waste management, emergency management planning and long-term capital financing through the Municipal Finance Authority.

Regional districts were in part created to solve the issue of hospital/health clinic funding, where a local government could not charge user fees for a service that was supposed to be free and needed by all. However, the primary solution for "Wanted" vs "needed" services is to have a system of differential user fees. Those areas that are not voluntarily contributing to the "wanted" service in terms of property taxes pay higher user fees.

Our Association has analyzed the Ministry of Highways 2020 and 2024 transit polls and completed our own polling. Both the Highways and the Association's data demonstrate that over 95% of Area D respondents do not support transit services between the Sproat Lake Campsite and Walmart as

owners/residents would not use the service, and we cannot afford to pay for "unwanted" services. We support the philosophy of "We are all one" when it comes to providing needed regional-wide services such as hospital funding. However, the voluntary nature of the ACRD also allows one area not to participate in a service if it does not want to. This concept needs to be entrenched in the regional service delivery model. Directors on the ACRD board should not be allowed to force other electoral areas to pay for programs/services they neither want nor need. This forced behaviour fuels discontent and strengthened the desire to explore alternative forms of governance. Further, directors need to be held accountable to their constituents and prove that their vote on motions is congruent with what the majority want after completing honest, meaningful engagement with their constituents. There is also concern that many important decisions are made during closed, in-camera, board meetings. We believe transparency and openness are key to a healthy, functioning democracy.

We thank you in advance for considering this letter's many issues and ideas and are happy to speak with you in person.

Respectfully,

Ross Curtis
Chair, Sproat Lake Property Owners Association

Letter approved by the SLPOA Executive 03/03/25

Cc; All ACRD Directors, ACRD CAO