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To: GVRDall

Cc: Chair Dhaliwal; Linda Buchanan; 'gvrdeu@telus.net'; Karlene Bateman

Subject: COVID-19 Weekly Update – April 16th

Dear Staff,

I hope you all remain well, as we reach the end of another week. As we're now over a month into this new situation, I've been thinking both about how we will eventually come out of this time, and also how we will move forward while this continues. It's true that I've never lived through a global pandemic of this magnitude. I have, though, lived through a few emergencies, including ones that impact both the work and the people around me. One of the things that I am more sure of than ever is that all experiences are valid. We're at the point in this crisis in which many of you are going to start feeling tired; this is natural and expected, and completely normal when we've been responding to an event that is anything but normal. Many of you have moved mountains in your response, and achieved incredible things in such a short amount of time. As such, an event of this magnitude takes both a physical and a mental toll; being committed doesn't mean you won't get tired. It's also possible that some of you are still feeling okay, and that others are now finding this tough, or unsettling, or have concerns about what all of this means for you and your family members – not just physically, but also financially and emotionally. Again, please know that all experiences are valid. Please continue to take care of yourselves and each other.

To date, I have been so buoyed by your response, your kindness, and your caring relationships with colleagues. One only has to [look](#) at the [comments](#) on the [Intranet News](#) articles on employee stories related to COVID-19 to witness this.

Here are a few updates for this week, regarding our ongoing COVID-19

responses.

Metro Vancouver Parks and LSCR

Over the long weekend, our Parks and LSCR staff continued to go above and beyond, and as a result, I'm pleased to note that the City of Delta was comfortable with reopening Boundary Bay and Deas Island Regional Parks. Staff continued their efforts around increased signage, safety enhancements and traffic control, and worked successfully to support physical distancing and to communicate the importance of this to visitors. Public feedback was very positive and appreciative of our staff's efforts.

Metro Vancouver Staffing *We are continuing discussions with both unions regarding the flexibility we require, and we anticipate coming to an understanding on a Workforce Adjustment Agreement with each union shortly; this is a shared priority. We are appreciative of both MV unions and staff in sharing this common goal – to find flexible solutions to address the difficult issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. We all recognize this is of utmost importance and we're working hard to get an agreement within the next week or so; we will share more with you on this as soon as it is ready.*

I understand that staff are hearing more about layoffs and furloughs at other organizations. I fully understand that this will cause concern about whether we would take a similar approach. I'd like to assure staff again that my goal is to keep everyone working at Metro Vancouver. We have similarities to other organizations, and yet our revenue streams and our work is different, and accordingly, we will have a different response. As an organization, we've been conservative in past years in regards to staffing and had robust budgeting processes that served us well. We also need our staff to be ready to deliver our critical services – we've already had a significant increase in water demands in the region over the long weekend, and we need to be ready for the summer ahead, as well as prepare our wastewater system requirements for the Fall. Water Services work includes cleaning and disinfecting reservoirs that have been upgraded, completing

*construction tie-ins and disinfection of relocation sections of pipe in North Vancouver and Delta, install refurbished pumps at pump stations, prepare for summer supply, monitor water usage across the region, and conduct maintenance on watersheds and roads in the LSCR. For Liquid Waste Services, essential summer/low flow work includes media and distributor arm replacement for trickling filters, refurbishing of secondary clarifiers and digesters, capital expansion tie-ins, biogas piping upgrades, uninterruptable power supply upgrades, wet well cleaning, drainage culvert repairs, critical pipe and outfall inspection, pump station commissioning and handover, as well as numerous upgrades, replacements and retrofits across the system. In addition, there is much work to be done in all our other departments. We have a lot of important work to accomplish right now *and* in the many months ahead. I can't stress enough how critical our staff are to this work.*

Our Capital Projects We have received some questions about our Capital Plan, and whether there will be any adjustments to our projects as a result of COVID-19. Given the scope and scale of Metro's capital projects, most extend over several years. For the projects that are currently in progress, we have already invested \$1.7 billion in previous years. Our 2020 capital budget is \$1.4 billion dollars, with 90% of that amount funding projects already underway. We have delayed allocation of the remainder, and at this time, we'll only proceed with critical projects that are required. We are reviewing each piece of work and will pause or pull back where needed. Of the work that is in progress, we are both contractually obliged and/or legislatively required to continue, and we also have regulatory deadlines to meet. We want to ensure we have the systems and supports in place – housing units, pipes, pump stations, tunnels, to name a few – to deliver our services to our region's residents.

It's also clear that we will eventually come out the other side of COVID-19, and in addition to containing the impacts of the current crisis, that our provincial and federal governments will want to partner with us to rebuild the economy. Some of you may have seen in the media this week that the federal government is already talking about how to

jumpstart the Canadian economy again, once the current pandemic restrictions are lifted, through the use of billions of dollars in budgeted for and currently unspent funds for large-scale, “shovel ready” capital projects. I am confident that projects through local government, including Metro Vancouver, will be a key part of putting into action the resulting future stimulus plan. I believe we will see initiatives to support economic stimulus through infrastructure in a way that hasn’t been seen since the “New Deal” post the Great Depression and post World War II.

Staff Health and Staff Support *Staff absences continue to be roughly the same as the same time period last year. I’m happy to report that we continue to have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported amongst Metro Vancouver staff; to date, we have experienced one unconfirmed but probable case. That staff member has self-isolated, is now feeling well, and has had no close contact with other employees.*

BC News Release on Local Government Support from Province *On April 16th, the Provincial government issued a press release noting the support they were giving local governments related to the COVID-19 crisis. Key areas included: 1) that provincial school tax remittances (collected by local governments on behalf of the province, and then paid by local governments to the province) can be delayed to provide local governments with temporary cash flow. 2) Local governments can now borrow interest-free from Reserves for any operational needs and 3) Local governments may now carry debt into the next fiscal year. (Until now, local governments weren’t allowed to carry a deficit – only the provincial and federal governments could. This made for difficult decisions in order to always have to balance budgets yearly, and so this step is significant for cash-flow shortfalls that some of our municipalities are facing related to delayed collection of property taxes and reduced revenue due to closures/suspended services.)*

No additional funding for local governments is provided at this time but these financial relief measures are very welcome and a positive step in mitigating the economic hardship for our many member jurisdictions

that are facing significant revenue loss. With the Metro Vancouver Board and the COVID-19 Task Force, our organization will support our member jurisdictions in continuing to provide a coordinated response and coordinated set of actions in communicating with the provincial and federal governments.

Staff Communications Our internal communications team is continuing to feature a series of stories related to our pandemic response and staff stories on our intranet news. An article on our Housing Team's response, and the thanks from the public, can be found on Intranet News [here](#). An article on our IT team's efforts can be found [here](#), as well as Parks and our LSCR [here](#). Thank you to all staff who have participated in these articles; please know I read them all and am very appreciative. As noted earlier, it's also so gratifying to see staff commenting on these articles to give thanks and show appreciation for their co-worker's efforts – thank you. If you have more story ideas, please contact [Internal Communications](#).

Ask Me Your Questions

I've had lots of nice messages from some of you in regards to my emails. I'm genuinely appreciative of every single message. At this point they mostly say thanks (thank you for that, I really do enjoy hearing from staff – including the good, the bad, and even the sometimes ugly). Hearing from some of you has also made me realize there may be many of you who have questions – and I want you to know that I'm happy to answer them. I'm going to participate in an interview later next week for our Intranet News, and I'd like to invite you all to submit questions as part of this interview. Depending on the number of questions received, I may not be able to answer every one but I commit to doing my best and will certainly address all major themes I hear. Please send any questions for me through to InterCom@metrovancover.org. The full list of questions will be collated for me, and I'll answer them in an interview that will be transcribed and sent out to you all. I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay well. Together we make our region strong.

Jerry

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