

Comox Valley Regional District Sewer Extension South

Community Events – Summary Report
February 2024



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Engagement Overview	3
1.1 Approach.....	3
1.2 Community Engagement Goals.....	5
1.3 Promotion	5
1.4 By the Numbers.....	6
1.5 Themes of Comments	6
Conclusion	9
Next Steps.....	9
Appendices	10

Executive Summary

Phase 3 of engagement on the project had a primary focus to introduce the draft addendum report to the public. It kicked off in November 2023, with email outreach directly to project followers, sharing updates from the latest PACTAC meeting and the first 'What We Heard' report.

Community open houses were then held in January 2024. Project details had been refined since the June 2023 open houses, on components like collection system design and costs to homeowners – and it was time to share these updates. In particular, cost estimates were updated from conceptual design (Class D cost estimates) to preliminary design (Class C cost estimates).



The community events included in-person open houses in Royston and Union Bay, and a noon webinar via ZOOM. Staff and consultants were at the events to hear questions and comments from the public, and feedback forms were available in-person and online.

All event materials ([information boards](#), [webinar video](#) and [backgrounder](#)) were made available on the project page. Additionally, a [summary of the addendum report](#) was created to help simplify review of the report.

Between the three open houses, approximately 146 residents participated (118 in-person and 28 online). A variety of tools were used to invite residents to the events, including: direct mail letter, news release, social media posts, email and print ads. An [infosheet](#) summarizing project details was also mailed out with the invitation, and is available online.

Main themes from this round of engagement included:

- continued concerns about high costs for residents and questions about how costs are broken down per property
- residents are becoming familiar with project information; more certainty/understanding about which phase residents are located in and project boundaries
- general hope and support for the project's completion; encouragement to complete it as quickly as possible
- fewer questions/comments about overall project plans; more about specific details like pump station/pipe locations and connections to individual homes

This "What We Heard" report has been informed by the feedback gathered at these events as well as by phone and email. This report will be included as part of the final draft addendum that is submitted to the province.

Engagement Overview

1.1 Approach

November 2023

A Public and Technical Advisory Committee (PACTAC) meeting was held on November 22, 2023 to share the draft addendum report, provide a summary of public feedback from the June 2023 open houses and an update on project plans. A recording of this meeting, and the full addendum report, were posted to the CVRD's project page.

Following this meeting, the 'What We Heard' Summary Report, summarizing public feedback from June 2023, was posted to the engagement page, and an update was sent out to project followers and the project email list. The update included a notification that the engagement summary report was available, an overview of the PACTAC meeting and notice of the upcoming public open houses. Website content was also updated to reflect revised project timing.

January 2024

In advance of sending open house invites, the project page was updated in early January to add a [summary of the draft addendum report](#). The invitation was then also used to drive residents to the engagement page to view the report summary.

Three community open houses ran in late January 2024. The events aimed to inform the community on:

- Summary of June 2023 'What We Heard' report & how public feedback informed project updates
- Updated project costs/costs to homeowners
- Collection system design updates
- Septic deferral program and septic maintenance program updates
- Overview of the draft addendum report to be submitted to the province
- Next steps for the project; including detailed timeline

The events included the following methods of approach:



In-Person Community Open Houses

- Thursday, January 25, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm – Union Bay
- Wednesday, January 31, 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm – Royston

Options to attend an afternoon or evening session were offered to help increase the number of participants. Around six members of the project team were on hand to answer questions as well as two technical consultants. Elected

officials and members of the Public Advisory Committee were also in attendance. The events included:

- 15 information boards
- Handout on Annual Projected Tax and User Fee Increases for Royston and Union Bay
- Handout on the capital cost and capital improvements charge payment options
- Hard copies of the report summary
- Large map printouts highlighting phasing and grinder pump properties
- Feedback forms



ZOOM Webinar

- Monday, January 29, 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm via ZOOM

Darry Monteith, Manager of Liquid Waste Planning, provided a 30-minute overview presentation summarizing the content of the information boards. James Warren, Chief Administrative Officer at the CVRD, Lucy Wiwcharuk, Chief Financial Officer at the CVRD, and Ron Frank of K'ómoks First Nation also presented. This was followed by a Q&A period for participants to pose questions to the project team. There were six panelists available to respond to questions.




Engagement Page Updates

- Information from events posted to page (information boards, webinar recording, project backgrounders and infosheet)
- Feedback form added (open until February 16, 2024)
- 'Key Topics' revised to reflect project updates

1.2 Community Engagement Goals

This project is undergoing an LWMP addendum and the CVRD is required to demonstrate how feedback was incorporated into the final plan. Feedback compiled here will be included in the addendum report submitted to the province in Spring 2024.

The goal of the community events was to INFORM and collect feedback from the community. In addition, the November 22nd Public Advisory Committee meeting falls under COLLABORATE on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum for public engagement (see table below). For more details on the project background, please see previous summary reports.

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

1.3 Promotion

The following blend of tools was used to promote, inform and encourage participation from the community:



Direct-Mail Letter: A letter of invitation was distributed via Canada Post to over 900 Union Bay/Royston households. Also included in the letter was an [infosheet](#) providing an overview of project details.



News Release: A [news release](#) was distributed on January 11 to announce the open houses and webinar.



Social Media Posts: Promotional posts were posted to the CVRD's Facebook, Instagram + X accounts.



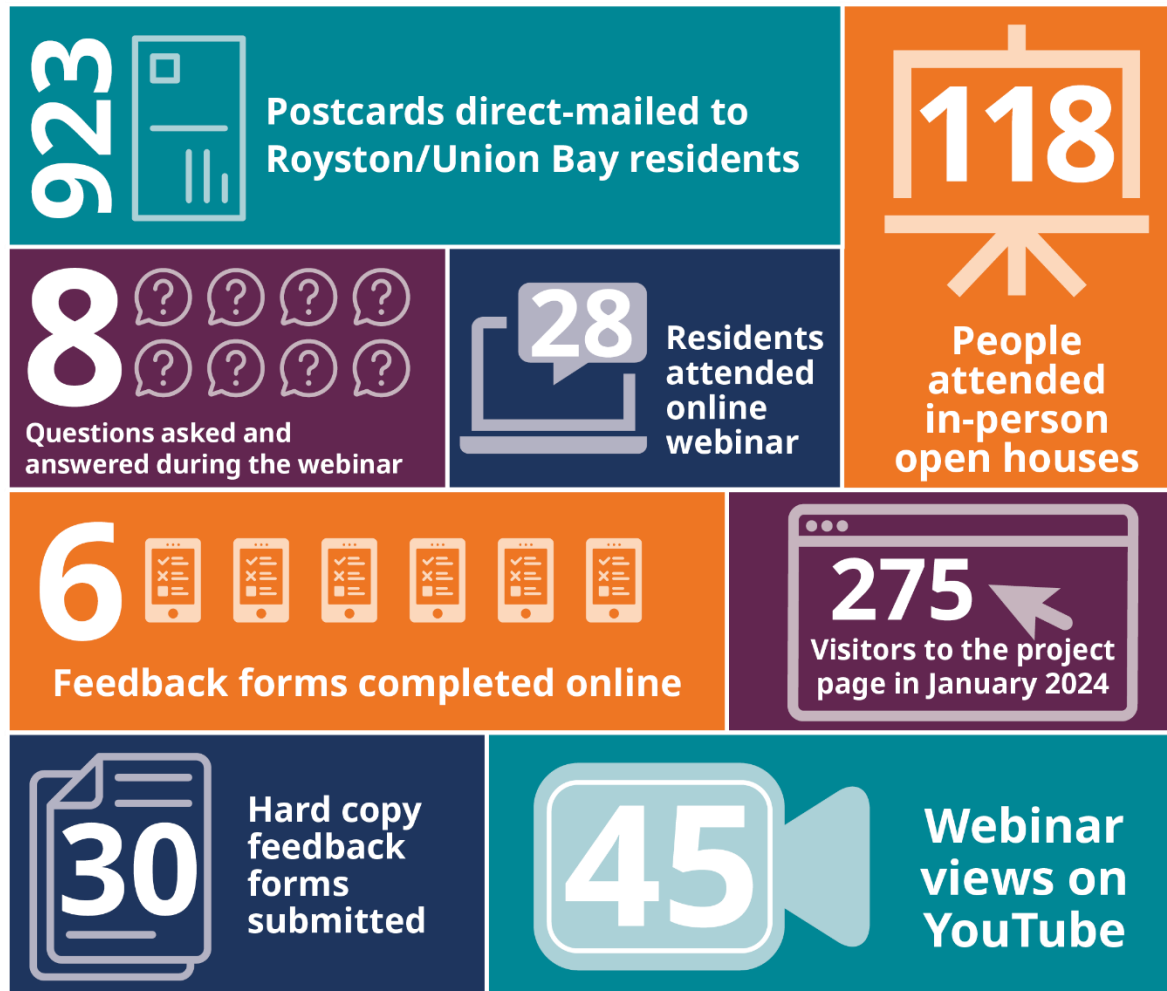
Print Ad: Ads ran in the January 10, 17 & 24 editions of the Comox Valley Record newspaper.



Email: A notice was distributed to the project email list, which includes 320 individuals who have signed up to receive project updates. It was also distributed to 47 followers of the engagement page.

1.4 By the Numbers

The numbers below highlight key data collected leading up to and from the events (until Feb. 16, 2024).



1.5 Themes of Comments

The themes of feedback listed below are compiled from five sources:

- feedback shared with staff members at in-person events
- questions posed by participants during online webinar
- feedback forms submitted at the events and online
- questions/comments submitted via phone and email
- questions posed to online Q&A

Themes are listed in order of interest/popularity.

1. Project costs/costs for residents:

- Concerns about the high costs affecting homeowners, especially for single mothers and elderly residents
- Calls for more grants, options for deferral or financial relief
- Questions about the timeline and payment plans over the next few years; and when residents will start paying for the project
- Questions about breakdown of costs for residents, distinguishing between one-time costs and annual costs
- Clarifications that work on private property is the responsibility of the property owner
- Concerns about contractors charging a premium
- Concerns about pricing people out of homes
- Concerns about potential underestimation of costs, even from those who support the project
- Questions about partner commitment
- Several questions/interest about the option to pay all costs up front
- Concern about costs for subsequent phases being proportional to Phase 1A properties (grant dollars going to Phase 1A only)
- Suggestions for advance notice of upcoming costs

2. One-time costs/specific property-related questions:

- Questions about the factors that influence variation in one-time costs from property to property
- Questions about planning for pipe installation, connections and decisions on access points for homes
- Concerns about complicated routing for connecting sewer lines
- Requests for information on how property updates in the next few years will align with the sewer hookup (i.e. landscaping, fences etc)
- Questions from residents interested in buying/selling properties located in Phases 1A/B (or building on empty lots); wondering about costs and options while waiting for sewer
- Suggestions for CVRD to offer a list of preferred contractors

3. Phasing/timing inquiries:

- Questions about the timing of Phase 1B and residents keen to connect as soon as possible; why Phase 1A properties were selected
- Inquiries about future phases and when they will proceed
- Inquiries about timing to understand whether to invest in septic systems or wait for sewer

- Union Bay Estates: when it will proceed, whether they will pay fair share of costs and seeking reassurances that the developer will not benefit more than residents

4. Grinder pumps:

- Numerous questions about grinder pumps and when they would be required
- Concerns about the cost of grinder pumps and which properties will need them

5. Pump stations: aesthetics and environmental concerns:

- Concerns about pump stations detracting from natural beauty of the area; particularly in Royston
- Concerns about potential negative impacts to Royston neighborhood due to public amenities attracting unwanted activities (if included in design)
- Looking for more information on design, with a hope for local input
- Support to consider locations that are above coastal flood level
- Concerns about odour impacts if pump station located near private residences (Kilmarnock)
- Opposition to the proposed location of the Kilmarnock Pump Station; suggestion to move it further inside the park, away from properties
- Support for playground at Montrose Park, at site of proposed Kilmarnock station

6. Community impact:

- Calls for additional community projects during construction like:
 - a walking trail along Marine Drive built over the new gravity main
 - bike paths
 - expanding waterfront walking trail from Royston south
 - undergrounding power lines
- Questions about the forcemain location

7. CVRD Septic Maintenance Program:

- Uncertainty about the septic regulation program, including who it applies to, what is included/excluded and the role of oversight by the CVRD
- Questions about high-risk areas identified for mandatory inspection
- Some support for the program

8. Decommissioning septic tanks:

- Interest in repurposing old septic tanks for rainwater storage
- Questions about using old septic tanks as grinder pump chambers

9. Septic systems:

- Some inquiries about newer septic systems being exempt from the program
- Notice that Seaview Seniors' Village in Union Bay has had its septic system upgraded recently

Conclusion

This round of public outreach was successful in re-engaging affected community members and driving home the project benefits, components and costs. While it introduced some updated information, much of it was repeated from the first round of public engagement and provided residents a second chance to fully absorb the details of this complicated project. The general consensus from staff attending the events was that there was less concern from the public about the plans and more understanding that it's moving ahead.

As at the last events, cost concerns remain the top issue, followed by questions about phasing and timing for future phases. With the changes to the collection system design, there was much more interest in understanding grinder pumps, including where they'll be required, costs and installation. Residents are beginning to turn their attention to the implementation of this project, and how it will affect them and the community assets that they use.

There was a mix of participants who had attended the last in-person events and those who had not; the CVRD is reaching 'new' residents in person, and continuing to engage informed residents via email and online. The comments/concerns collected at this stage are similar to those heard during the last round of engagement, providing the project team a solid foundation of public input.

Next Steps

- **Spring 2024:** A draft report summarizing the proposed project and all public feedback will be considered by the Steering Committee. Then, the approved draft report will be forwarded to the province and the Sewer Extension South Project will become part of the overall Comox Valley Liquid Waste Management Plan (Regional Sewer Plan).
- **2025:** The final draft of the Regional Sewer Plan will be shared with the community before it is submitted to the province for final approval.
- **2026:** Estimated provincial approval of the plan.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Information Boards

Appendix 2 – Promotion Samples

Appendix 3 – Direct Mail Letter

Appendix 4 – Infosheet

Appendix 5 – Addendum Report Summary

Appendix 6 – Feedback Form

Appendix 7 – Feedback Form Responses

Appendix 8 – Backgrounders