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October 29, 2021

To: All local government chief administrative officers and corporate officers

Re: [Bill 26](#)

As you may be aware, on October 26, 2021 [Bill 26](#) was introduced in the Legislature. The Bill proposes amendments to various sections in the *Community Charter*, *Local Government Act*, *Islands Trust Act*, *Vancouver Charter*, *Municipal Replotting Act*, *Powell River Incorporation Act*, *Cultus Lake Park Act*, *University Endowment Land Act*, and the *Municipalities Enabling and Validating Act (No.4)*.

The purpose of this circular is to provide an overview of some of the more significant changes in the Bill, including changes to public notice requirements, public hearing requirements, and a new requirement to consider a code of conduct.

If passed, some of the proposed changes will come into effect immediately (public hearings), while others (public notice and codes of conduct) will not come into force until a regulation is passed, likely in early 2022. For more information about the other proposed changes in the Bill please view the [Information Bulletin](#).

We encourage local governments to begin thinking about how they might incorporate the proposed changes into local government business.

### **Public Notice**

Proposed changes to section 94 of the *Community Charter* would add an option for local governments to adopt a bylaw to provide for alternative means of publication. This change recognizes that local governments are in the best position to determine how to notify and engage community members and provide greater flexibility for them to reach a wider audience.

Where the existing rules are working well for communities there will be no need to change – they can continue to use newspapers for notice. This method of publication will remain the default.

Local governments that want to create their own public notice scheme will need to adopt a public notice bylaw. Prior to adopting a bylaw, local governments must first consider principles of effective public notice which will be defined through regulation which include considerations like accessibility, suitability and reliability.

These changes will be brought into force by regulation in 2022. Once the legislation is in force and the principles of effective public notice have been considered, councils and boards will be able to choose two or more ways (e.g., local government website and newspaper) to meet their statutory public notice obligations.

Additional guidance material will be provided to local governments when the changes are brought into force. There are also several consequential amendments – including changes to regional district and Islands Trust public notice requirements that are summarized in Attachment 2.

### **Code of Conduct**

The legislation would establish a new requirement for all local governments to publicly consider the development of a code of conduct. The change seeks to create a regular process for elected officials to engage in conversations about shared expectations for conduct as they carry out their responsibilities and govern together. This is a next step in ongoing work that the province, the Union of BC Municipalities and the Local Government Management Association have committed to doing together, and the approach was supported by a special resolution endorsed at the Union of BC Municipalities Convention in September 2021.

Within six months of a general local election all municipal councils and regional district boards will have to consider, at an open meeting, whether to establish a new code of conduct or revise an existing one. Principles to guide these discussions will be established by regulation.

If a local government decides not to establish or revise a code of conduct, they will need to make their reasons for this decision publicly available upon request. They will also have to reconsider their decision before January 1 of the year of the next general local election.

These changes will not take effect until a regulation to bring them into force is passed – likely in spring 2022. Additional guidance material will be provided when the changes are brought into force.

### **Public Hearings**

The proposed changes to section 464 of the *Local Government Act* remove the default requirement for local governments to hold public hearings for zoning bylaw amendments that are consistent with the official community plan (OCP). Instead, approval of such zoning bylaws would proceed by default without public hearings, thereby removing the need for local governments to go through the process of waiving these hearings (as currently is required).

In order to maintain transparency in such cases, the amendments will require that a local government provide public notice of the zoning bylaw before the bylaw is considered at first reading by a municipal council or regional district board.

Under the proposed changes, local governments will still have the option to hold a public hearing on a zoning bylaw that is consistent with the OCP, if they so choose.

These proposed amendments are some of the first changes stemming from the [Development Approvals Process Review](#) (DAPR), which aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of development approvals to increase housing supply. For more information about these changes see the [News Release](#).

### **Delegation of Authority for Development Variance Permits**

Proposed changes to sections 489 and 499 of the *Local Government Act* would enable local governments to delegate development variance permit (DVP) decisions to staff, if the proposed variance is minor and pertains to matters specified in legislation, including:

- zoning bylaws respecting siting, size and dimensions of buildings, structures and permitted uses;
- off-street parking and loading space requirements;
- regulation of signs; and
- screening and landscaping to mask or separate uses or to preserve, protect, restore and enhance natural environment.

These legislative changes respond to feedback received during the DAPR consultations that many technical DVP decisions made by local government councils and boards could be reasonably considered by staff. These changes are designed to support increased efficiency of decision making in development approval processes. The enabling nature of this amendment provides local governments with autonomy in deciding whether to delegate DVP decisions to staff.

Local governments that delegate the power to issue a DVP to staff will be required to include in their delegation bylaw:

- a. Criteria for determining whether a proposed variance is minor
- b. Guidelines that the delegate must consider in deciding whether to issue a DVP

These requirements provide local governments with flexibility in determining what constitutes a minor variance and guiding a delegate that is exercising the power to issue a DVP. This approach helps retain council and board oversight of delegated decisions and establishes a fair application process for all applicants. The proposed legislative changes maintain consistency with the approach the *Local Government Act* takes for other delegated land use permits by providing that an applicant who is subject to a decision of the delegate is entitled to have the local government reconsider the matter. However, delegates that exercise the power to issue a DVP will not be required to provide notice under section 499 of the *Local Government Act*.

If you have any questions regarding the proposed amendments to public notice provisions or the new requirement to consider a code of conduct, please contact our Governance and Structure Branch. You can reach the Governance and Structure Branch by phone or email at: 250 387-4020 or [LGGovernance@gov.bc.ca](mailto:LGovernance@gov.bc.ca).

If you have any questions about the proposed changes to public hearings and delegation of development variance permits, please contact our Planning and Land Use Management Branch. You can reach the Planning and Land Use Management Branch by phone or email at: 250 387-3394 or [PLUM@gov.bc.ca](mailto:PLUM@gov.bc.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Faganello". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Tara Faganello  
Assistant Deputy Minister and Inspector of Municipalities  
Local Government Division, Ministry of Municipal Affairs

## **Attachment 1: FAQs**

### ***Public Notice***

#### **Are local governments required to adopt a public notice bylaw?**

No. Under the new local choice framework, local governments may choose to adopt a public notice bylaw *or* if they don't adopt a bylaw, the default notice provisions in section 94.1 of the *Community Charter* apply – these are the same publishing requirements that applied to public notice before amendments were made.

#### **If a local government adopts a public notice bylaw, can one of the means be publishing in the local newspaper?**

Yes. In some communities, local newspapers are still a regularly published resource. In those communities, local governments may choose to continue to use the default public notice requirements *or* choose to adopt a public notice bylaw that includes newspaper publication as one of the two required means of providing notice.

#### **When can local governments start thinking about adopting a public notice bylaw?**

It is anticipated that the amendments to the legislation will not come into force until sometime in 2022. Before deciding on the means of public notice to be included in a bylaw, the local government must consider the principles of effective public notice. These will be outlined in a regulation and are likely to include considerations such as: are the means easy to access; can information be easily retrieved in the future; is the source well-established and reliable.

#### **Will guidance material be available for the new public notice options?**

Yes. Detailed guidance material will be made available to inform local governments of the changes and the public notice options available. Ministry staff will be engaging with local government staff in the development of these materials, which will be available in early 2022 when the amendments are anticipated to be brought into force.

### ***Code of Conduct***

#### **Are local governments required to adopt a code of conduct?**

There is no requirement for municipal councils or regional districts to adopt a code of conduct, but they must publicly consider and decide whether or not to adopt one or review an existing one. If they choose not to create or review a code of conduct, they must be prepared to make available their reasons for this decision.

#### **What do local governments need to consider before deciding whether to establish or review**

### **a code of conduct?**

Municipal councils and regional district boards must consider the prescribed principles of codes of conduct and any other prescribed matters before making their decision. The prescribed principles will be outlined in a regulation and it is anticipated they will be similar to the [foundational principles of responsible conduct](#). Further information and guidance on consideration for codes of conduct will be made available when the new sections come into force.

### **When would the consideration of a code of conduct need to occur?**

The first-time local governments would be required to consider and make a decision about adopting a code of conduct or reviewing an existing one, would be within six months of its first council meeting following the 2022 general local election. If a local government decides to adopt or review a code of conduct, they would not be required to reconsider their code of conduct again until after the next general local election.

However, if a local government decides not to adopt or review a code of conduct, they will be required to revisit this decision sometime before January 1 of the year of the next general local election.

### ***Public Hearings***

#### **Would the public still have the opportunity to provide input on a rezoning where a public hearing is not required?**

Under the proposed amendments, local governments will, by default, proceed without a public hearing process when the rezoning (zoning bylaw amendment) is consistent with the OCP. There would already have been a public hearing for the OCP itself during the course of its approval. However, to further maintain transparency, local governments will be required to provide notice to affected property owners that the zoning bylaw is proceeding to first reading.

While the proposed amendments do not require the local government to provide an opportunity for the public to be heard or to consider written submissions in such cases, as with other proposed bylaws, members of the public are always able to contact their council on any matter through, for example, writing a letter or attending a council meeting. These avenues will remain. When local governments make rezoning decisions without public hearings, they also have the option to undertake other kinds of early public engagement, such as information sessions early in the rezoning application processing stage.

#### **If a local government does *opt in* to holding a public hearing when it is not required, what are the procedural requirements that it will need to undertake?**

If a local government chooses to hold a public hearing on a rezoning for which a hearing is not

required, it will follow the normal public hearing procedures under existing section 465 of the *Local Government Act*, including providing advance public notice that a hearing will take place. Open meeting rules under local government legislation require these types of matters to be considered at meetings open to the public.

**Will guidance material be available for the new public hearing amendment?**

Yes. Guidance material will be developed on local government processes and notice in situations where public hearings are not required.

***Delegation of Authority for Development Variance Permits***

**Will guidance material be available on the delegation of authority for DVPs?**

Yes. Guidance material will be provided after the changes are brought into force.

## **Attachment 2 – Consequential Amendments Related to Public Notice Changes**

### *Local Government Act*

- All references to publication in a newspaper (except s.659(5)) have been removed from the *Local Government Act* and replaced with the requirement to post in accordance with section 94 of the *Community Charter*. This means that all public notices must be posted in the public notice posting places and published in accordance with either section 94.1 or 94.2 of the *Community Charter*.
- Notice for regional district special meetings has changed to twenty-four hours notice (unless waived by unanimous vote). The notice must be posted at the regular meeting place and the public notice posting places and sent to each Director. There is no longer a requirement to mail notice to Directors five days before.
- Before a regional district procedure bylaw can be amended, repealed, or substituted, notice must now be provided in accordance with section 94 of the *Community Charter*. There is no longer a requirement to mail notice to Directors five days before.

### *Community Charter*

- Reference to publication in a newspaper in section 208(3) has been removed and replaced with the requirement to post in accordance with section 94 of the *Community Charter*. This means the notice must be posted in the public notice posting places and published in accordance with either section 94.1 or 94.2 of the *Community Charter*.

### *Municipal Replotting Act*

- Notice of a replotting scheme must now be published in accordance with all of section 94 of the *Community Charter*, not just 94(1)(b).

### *Islands Trust Act*

- Trust Council and Local Trust Committees must now include public notice posting places in their procedure bylaws.
- Reference to publication in a newspaper in section 49.6(2) has been removed and replaced with the requirement to post in accordance with section 94 of the *Community Charter*. This means the notice must be posted in the public notice posting places and published in accordance with either section 94.1 or 94.2 of the *Community Charter*.

### *Vancouver Charter*

- Notices under Part 1 [Electors & Elections] & Part 2 [Assent Voting] must now be published in accordance with section 3 [requirements for public notice] of the *Vancouver Charter*.