



Boys & Girls Club
of Greater Victoria

March 15, 2021

Remarks to District of Metchosin Public Hearing

By Dalcyce Dixon, Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Victoria

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Mayor and Members of Council, for this opportunity to address you tonight.

My name is Dalcyce Dixon, I'm the executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Victoria, and as you know we have been constituents of Metchosin for more than 35 years.

I am one of two people from our organization hoping to address you this evening. I want to talk about the history of the land, the work of our charity and our contributions to Metchosin, which are relevant to your decision.

Afterward, I am hoping you will hear from the treasurer of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Victoria Foundation, Wayne Jensen, who wants to address a number of concerns directly related to the land use amendment bylaw that is before you this evening. As you will hear from Mr. Jensen, we believe the effect of this amendment runs completely counter to your goal.

And we will leave any legal issues to be addressed by our solicitor Mr. Alexander.

First, some history. Our charity began using the 98-acre property at 3900 Metchosin Road in 1984 and we later purchased it from the provincial government in 2004 at fair market value.

The property was purchased at a time when there were significant youth justice needs that often saw hundreds of youth introduced to outdoor programming. This land provided them with transformational opportunities.

But when Canada changed its young offender laws, over time those programs were effectively eliminated. It wasn't our decision, and yet it had a significant impact on the services we deliver. It was the beginning of an evolution in youth needs in Greater Victoria that has reshaped our program needs for this property.

Today, we continue to operate out-of-school programming on the property and this spring and summer children will once again participate in our programs and day camps.

While we have long waitlists for our programs in other communities, the reality is, the Metchosin Club is our least used. It's not just a transportation issue, as we use our buses to pick up and drop off children and youth in different communities. Today's families tell us they need programming closer to home.



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This under usage was a key determinant for our Foundation Board, which decided the 40-acre non-ALR parcel was surplus to our needs. In 2019, the Foundation made a decision to plan for the eventual sale of the 40-acres as a single parcel, earmarking the proceeds to help provide additional services for children and youth.

All across our region, we are witnessing an increasing number of children, youth and families in need of complex services such as homelessness prevention, substance use treatment and mental health supports. They are some of the toughest challenges facing society and our charity is being called upon to safeguard our most vulnerable citizens. We predict those needs will only increase as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need to provide more services for children and youth sparked the decision to sell this property. A formal process began with the municipality in 2020 and we always expected long timelines. This was not a fire sale – this was a thoughtful decision that we hoped to complete within a two- or three-year window.

When our charity purchased this land, we discussed with the community a grand vision for the property, which included programing for thousands of children, summer camps, youth justice courses and the creation of a social enterprise. It was a time of great promise and vibrancy. Much has changed in the ensuing 15 years. The economic meltdown of 2008, the introduction of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, exponential growth in school district 62 and a huge reshaping of community needs.

All of these factors and many others forced us to adapt and evolve. Just as COVID-19 has fundamentally reshaped our world, so too did the factors I mentioned. Some will suggest we made false promises. But, I believe we progressed and responded to the most pressing needs of our community.

Over the course of more than 35 years, we have diligently cared for this land and we have always strived to be good neighbours and serve our community well. Every year, we welcome school groups, environmental clubs and First Responder trainers to experience the property. I don't think anyone would dispute the fact we have been exemplary stewards of the land, pond and wildlife.

But that stewardship comes with a cost, because this land isn't free. Every year we pay tens of thousands of dollars to maintain this pristine property including equipment, insurance, safety enhancements, buildings, roadways, pathways and professional services such as that of arborists. That diverts resources from our core responsibility to deliver critical supports to children and youth.



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There is an incorrect narrative in the community that if we sell these 40 acres, this will somehow threaten the pond on the property. It is important to note the pond will remain on the ALR part of the property. So despite the rumours we often hear, the pond is not being split in two. It will remain on the balance of the land.

Another popular storyline involves taxation. Today, as we have done many times in the past, we thank this council for granting permissive tax exemptions to the Boys & Girls Club for more than 13 years. As you know, these were not grants or money we received. These were tax exemptions that were based on the annual commitment we made to delivering service to children, youth and families, and our many other contributions to this community. We have always followed your process and delivered well beyond our commitment. We hope this continues and see no reason why it shouldn't.

You will also know that the municipal tax exemptions were based on the merits of our programming for children and youth and were not based on any kind of condition that the land remain in its current configuration in perpetuity. I can find no such provision in the provincial legislation which would allow for that.

We have been here for more than 35 years. But today, the size of this property far exceeds our capacity to retain it in its current state. We have cared for this land, tended to it, and we believe it is now time for someone else to take over. It will allow us to do what we do best – provide critical supports and life-changing opportunities to the next generation.

We had hoped that the change to the Foundation's property would be a process that would evolve over the next few years. But within the last two weeks, everything changed, as our children's charity became the focus of your targeted action. I know Mr. Jensen is going to be discussing that.

Tonight, I encourage you to make a thoughtful choice. You are considering a decision - but it is much more than a land use amendment. On one level, it is a decision that could spark a flurry of development activity on the land. On another level, it could significantly devalue the property, robbing the children and youth of our region of the enhanced services they require - at a time when they need them most.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you.