

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REGIONAL DISTRICT CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY TITLE:

*Leading and managing change during:
Restructure of the Comox-Strathcona Regional District;
Transition to the Comox Valley Regional District and
Post transition of the Comox Valley Regional District*

PREPARED FOR:

*Ministry of Community, Sports and Culture Development
Board of Examiners*

PREPARED BY:

*Debra J Oakman, CMA
Chief Administrative Officer
Comox Valley Regional District*

SUBMITTED:

March 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1) Executive Summary.....	3
2) Introduction	6
3) Background.....	7
4) Restructure planning: July 13, 2007 to February 14, 2008.....	8
5) February 15, 2008 to March 31, 2009 – Year 1 – Transition.....	10
6) April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010 – Year 2 – Transition.....	14
7) April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011 – Post-transition.....	17
8) Conclusion.....	19

APPENDICES:

- A. Minister of Community Services letter dated July 2007
- B. Governance Structure
- C. Minister of Community Services letter dated December 2007
- D. Meyers Norris Penny (MNP) - Service analysis sample
- E. BC Emergency Resource Management System (BCERMS) sample
- F. Bull, Housser and Tupper, checklist
- G. Meyers Norris Penny, checklist
- H. Gantt chart sample
- I. Professional affiliations
- J. Organization statistics
- K. List of audits and review
- L. Confidential – third party assessment of incumbent leadership:
 - George Paul
 - Rob Roycroft
 - Doug Allan
 - Todd MacDonald

1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case study is based on the July 13, 2007 provincial government announcement of the restructure of the Comox-Strathcona Regional District. The case study is reflective of the administrative challenges faced from the moment of the provincial government restructure announcement on Friday, July 13, 2007 through to the inaugural board meeting of the newly incorporated Comox Valley Regional District held on February 15, 2008; the two year transition period from February 16, 2008 to March 31, 2010 and the post-transition period between April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011. Each period is presented separately in order to recognize the evolution of change; the corresponding leadership and administrative challenges faced and the role and responsibilities that I, as the candidate for the Executive Management Certification, had.

From 2007 I held the position of general manager of corporate services, and deputy chief administrative officer. On February 15, 2008 I was appointed the acting chief administrative officer for the Comox Valley Regional District and subsequently appointed the chief administrative officer effective August 2008.

Challenges

Highlights of the administrative leadership and management challenges included:

- Analyzing the issues
- Maintaining service levels
- Maintaining board relations
- Building relations
- Establishing priorities
- Securing personnel resources
- Establishing external relations
- Identifying financial resource requirements

Extra-ordinary leadership and management challenge:

Comox Strathcona regional solid waste service – this service was identified during the restructure planning stage to become a service provided by the CVRD but extending outside of its boundaries to encompass the former larger regional scale of Comox Strathcona. Challenges included personnel resources, outdated 2003 solid waste management plan, compliance issues with existing landfills, landfill capacity limitations, political interest in pursuing current waste management opportunities (waste to energy and organic composting), depletion of landfill closure reserves, finance and personnel resources, ability to meet the unique and varied community interests of this larger geographic area and a governance structure that joined the two distinct regional district board of directors into one governing body under one legal entity being the CVRD.

Other challenges faced by the CVRD during the restructure, transition and post-transition period included:

- Fall 2008 local government election resulting in significant changes for the CVRD board of directors;
- Staff resignations/retirements;
- Emergency events (flooding, dead rats, boil water order);
- Elephants in the room, hidden agendas, real or forced collaboration, power struggles; and
- Conversion of Royston water and fire improvement districts to CVRD service areas.

Leadership

Highlights of administration approach, tools, strategies, and key success factors:

Leadership administration approach:

- Early and ongoing identification of critical success factors – allocation and assignment of resources based on priorities, monitoring change progress, and maintain ongoing communications.
- Develop, recommend and implement strategies to address issues to meet provincial and regional board priorities.
- Identify organization human resource skill set requirements and recruit for the future.
- Develop a team approach.
- Develop, recommend and implement policies to guide the board and the organization.
- Plan annual celebration to recognize people, events and successes.
- Develop strategy to tackle difficult issues head on.
- Build organization culture of continuous improvement through reviews, support of a healthy workplace, and personal role modeling.
- Develop and implement performance management process for exempt staff.
- Develop and implement chief administrative officer salary administration policy for exempt staff.

Project team approach:

- Restructure planning: utilized standard emergency management framework (BCERMS) to assist with identifying critical activities, assign roles and responsibilities.
- Transition: utilized project management process and Gantt chart tool to identify critical paths, assign roles and responsibilities.
- Post-transition: utilized strategic planning process with focus on outcomes.

Communications:

- Embrace communications as a critical success factor – acknowledging and managing internal and external communication needs: board, public, staff, management, province, first nations, media.

Resources:

- Delegate responsibilities and be clear as to specific tasks/accountability.
- Outsource for project specific tasks.
- Search and apply for external funding opportunities.
- Develop long range financial plans.

Key success factors:

Establishing a consistent approach to addressing issues, utilizing project management tools, embracing opportunities, working long hours, remaining calm, recognizing events, evolving with change, recognizing and celebrating success, people and events, remaining positive, acknowledging loss, fears and concerns, focusing on results, establishing an educated, experienced and dedicated executive, management and staff team, support from the province, providing the elected and appointed directors of the board with organization orientation,

governance policies and procedures towards building a good governance foundation and assisting the board with their decision making process.

As a leader it is important to stay focused on the political priorities, community and organization needs – keep it professional and don't take things personal.

Conclusion

As a result of the provincial restructure of the former Comox-Strathcona Regional District, the Comox Valley Regional District has evolved into a smaller local government board of nine members (ten effective 2013). The board has adopted the following Statement of Purpose: *'The Comox Valley Regional District is a federation of three electoral areas and three municipalities providing sustainable services for residents and visitors to the area.'* The CVRD is in its fourth year of existence and continues to strive to provide the best possible service to the municipalities of Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and electoral areas of Baynes Sound – Denman/Hornby Islands (Area A), Lazo North (Area B) and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area C).

The provision of service outside of the regional district, being the Comox Strathcona waste management service with the larger local government board of twenty two (22) members (23 as of 2013), has evolved significantly with adoption of a 2012 solid waste management plan to guide the future however continues to be a challenge to administer and financially meet the needs of this diversified geographic area.

As a chief administrative officer, I have learned from this experience and will continue to learn lessons such as:

- Be aware. Your position is looked upon for leadership and direction. What you say and how you say it, does have impact whether you are aware of this or not. Therefore be aware of your words, tone and body language.
- Treat people with respect, listen and hear their concerns, be open minded and solution oriented, be clear and articulate your rationale.
- Develop capacity to assess situations:
 - Know when it is time to step aside and delegate;
 - Know when people are ready for a different approach, a different task or to learn something new;
 - Keep your antenna up when it comes to people, skills and attitude - you never know when they would be the perfect resource to help the organization accomplish a board priority; and
 - Acknowledge when resources are maxed out and strategize how to relieve the pressures;
- Recognize the evolution of change and be ready to respond:
 - board relations, the board of directors evolve over their term/s of office and it is important to acknowledge and respond to the changing needs of the board. Don't become frustrated that you may have already provided information on a specific subject, simply recognize that the directors may now be ready to review and consider the information more fully.

- Recognize staff, listen and be aware of personal needs, egos, skills and work towards an open and trusting relationship.
- Acknowledge the board, community, municipalities, first nations – recognize capacity levels and participation at all levels;
- Return the ‘ask’ – when you’re asking for participation or support from others, try to resource and participate when other government jurisdictions need your participation;
- Seek out and recognize expertise to assist with your decision making acknowledging that at the end of the day, you are responsible and accountable for the decision.
- Recognize the importance of being ‘there’ for the board and staff when they need you.
- Create an organizational culture of reviews, continuous improvement for efficient, effective services and good customer relations.
- Create an organization that celebrates successes and acknowledges/learns from failures

In summary, the lessons learned include the ability to be adaptable, to listen to the needs of the board, staff and the community as everyone works through the evolution of organizational change. To be ready for the leadership opportunities that change can stimulate.

Have some fun! Celebrate events and successes! Acknowledge your mistakes!

I am honored to have been an administrative leader during the restructure, transition and post-transition period of the CVRD. We have all grown, changed and become even more adaptable to meeting the needs of the community. The CVRD executive management team and staff are a talented, professional group of individuals committed to meeting the board’s strategic priorities and sustaining the community assets.

2) INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this case study is to fulfill the requirements of Section 5 of the Local Government Employees Certification Regulation (BC Reg. 324/2005). *“An oral and written presentation to the Board on a topic related to local government administration.”*

The oral and written presentation is to be in the form of a case study to provide a historical perspective of the challenges faced then and how those challenges were met relative to the legislative framework and the management tools available at the time.¹

The following case study focuses on leading and managing change over the three and half year period of restructure, transition and post transition for the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD). The case study is intended to demonstrate some of the dynamics of this challenging situation and how I, with leadership roles and responsibilities, worked through the various issues. Case studies are an excellent tool for others to use in developing their own strategies for difficult and challenging situations.

¹ Government of British Columbia, Board of Examiners, Ministry of Community & Rural Development, Introduction, Executive Management Certificate Papers

3) BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Community and Rural Development on Friday, July 13, 2007 (Appendix A) advised that pursuant to the *Local Government Act*, the Comox Strathcona Regional District (CSRD) would be restructured effective February 15, 2008.

The provincial legislative restructure letter and subsequent Letters Patent outlined the following parameters and mandated tasks to be accomplished during the restructure/transition process:

1. Two new regional districts would be created effective February 15, 2008:
 - a. Comox Valley Regional District
 - b. Strathcona Regional District (SRD)
2. That the Comox Valley Regional District would be the legal entity for services located fully within the geographical area of the Comox Valley and for those services that crossed jurisdictional boundaries prior to the restructure (eg: Comox Strathcona waste management service).
3. That the Comox Valley Regional District undertake the following tasks:
 - a. Provide transitional services for two years to the Strathcona Regional District (one year for Strathcona Gardens recreational facility service.)
 - b. Adopt a Regional Growth Water Service Plan (strategy) by December 31, 2009.
 - c. Adopt a Regional Growth Strategy by December 31, 2010.
 - d. Act as grant administrator for three year grant funding to the K'ómok's First Nation.
 - e. Review and develop report regarding Municipal Participation in Part 26 planning.
 - f. Review and develop report regarding services outside of the municipal boundaries.
 - g. Review and develop report regarding harmonization of development cost charges.
4. That, for the purposes of the solid waste management service, the CVRD shall provide services outside of its jurisdiction to the geographical areas located within the SRD.
5. That, for the purposes of the Black Creek - Oyster Bay water and fire services, the CVRD shall continue to provide services outside of its jurisdiction to the geographical service area located within Oyster Bay-Buttle Lake (Electoral Area 'D', Strathcona Regional District).

In addition the CSRD board identified two specific restructure related tasks that were added to the task list:

6. Complete a regional recreation/culture facilities service study and
7. Conduct a review and update of the general administration/legislative cost allocation policy.

Comox Valley Regional District: Governance structure – The nine (9) member board of directors includes representatives from the municipalities of Comox (two appointed), Courtenay (three appointed), Cumberland (one appointed) and electoral areas of Baynes Sound - Denman/Hornby Islands (Area A) (one elected), Lazo North (Area B) (one elected) and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area C) (one elected). The new CVRD voting strength changed from one vote per 2500 of population to one vote per 1500 of population and repealed the electoral area of Denman/Hornby Island (Area K). (Appendix B)

Comox Valley Regional District – for purposes of Comox Strathcona solid waste Governance structure – The CVRD board expands to a twenty two (22) member board of directors to include elected/appointed representatives from both the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts. (Appendix B)

4) RESTRUCTURE PLANNING: JULY 13, 2007 TO FEBRUARY 14, 2008

The Friday the thirteenth letter arrived via fax as I began deputy chief administrative officer responsibilities during the chief administrative officer (CAO) vacation period. The CAO was the lead on provincial negotiations and directly accountable to the board during this time period. The CAO delegated to me, as the general manager of corporate services the opportunity to take a leadership role in coordinating and planning for the restructure.

The Administrative Task

The administrative task during the restructure planning period was to coordinate matters related to the pending restructure effective February 15, 2008.

The period from the announcement in July 2007 through to February 14, 2008 required extra levels of effort from all staff at the CSRD in order to manage the pending change in a time of uncertainty and conflict. In addition to coordinating the restructure planning process, leadership was required to meet the day-to-day CSRD administrative service needs and to maintain administrative services to the Comox-Strathcona Regional Hospital District (CSRHD) and North Island 9-1-1 Corporation (NI 9-1-1). The following summarizes and reflects my administrative leadership experience as the general manager of corporate services:

Challenges

Complicating factors

- CSRD CAO was accountable as the leader of the organization however a complicated board/CAO relationship increased organizational uncertainty in already uncertain times.
- CSRD board was ‘split’ on many issues and there were many different views of why the province was restructuring the CSRD. (Appendix C)
- Coordinating and managing for the pending provincial restructure date of February 15, 2008 despite significant levels of conflict and some board and staff denial of the pending restructure.

Leadership

General manager of corporate services leadership approach

- Utilization of the BC emergency program model as the foundation structure to coordinate a response for the ‘event’. The structure provided a system’s approach for delegating responsibilities with reporting feedback loops for decision making. Implementing this approach also provided an opportunity to work as a team and develop some staff capacity (practice) using the emergency management model.
- Utilization of legal and auditor checklists to consider transitional issues.
- Delegation of specific roles and responsibilities (examples):
 - Legislative services – coordinated the inaugural board meetings; began implementation to separate CVRD/SRD legal and business matters.
 - Human resources –began implementation to prepare for staff legal transition to two new organizations; planned a staff party to acknowledge (mourn) the end of an era (CSRD) and acknowledge (celebrate) new beginnings (CVRD and SRD).
- Get organized, implement regular meetings, develop an awareness of organization ‘pulse’, implement communication plans with board, staff, public, province, other stakeholders.
- Manage an independent analysis of services as directed by the board to identify future service structure opportunities and costs related to the restructure. (Appendix D).

Specific leadership/management tools/strategies utilized:

- Emergency management – BCERMS: key information elements in managing the event (Appendix E).
- Commissioned legal check list to identify critical restructure and transition issues (Appendix F).
- Commissioned auditor check list to identify critical restructure and transition issues (Appendix G).
- Communication - keep everyone informed using all methods of available communication, internal staff messaging boards, website, public ‘Q and A’ format and regular staff reports to the board. (CSRD was not using social media at this time)
- The use of local professional improve theatre group to ensure there was lots of laughter at the end of an era (CSRD) and ‘beginning of a new era (CVRD) staff party!

Summary

The legal and auditor checklist provides a perspective of the types of details staff needed to consider to dissolve the CSRD and create the two new organizations. Using the emergency management system as a planning tool for this significant event encouraged continuous process for status updates on all aspects.

There were many facets of leadership and coordination during the restructure planning stage and while this was occurring it was critical to maintain and demonstrate a professional approach on all business matters. Critical success factors included a focus on the details such as planning for the celebration of the two inaugural board meetings that would acknowledge and celebrate both of these

significant events with the intent to create a positive beginning for both organizations. Both events included official ceremonies with invitations to provincial and local dignitaries appropriate for each regional district. This was definitely the ‘storming period’ of organization change for the regional district (CSR D).

5) FEBRUARY 15, 2008 TO MARCH 31, 2009 – YEAR 1 – TRANSITION

The first year of the Comox Valley Regional District began on February 15, 2008 with the inaugural board meeting held in Courtenay in the morning followed by CVRD staff travelling north to Campbell River to conduct the inaugural board meeting for the Strathcona Regional District in the afternoon.

The Administration Task

The primary administration task was to lead the CVRD organization through this first year of restructure transition while providing transitional services for the SRD. As the CVRD acting CAO effective February 15, 2008, leadership tasks included providing administrative policy advice, assisting the board with transitioning to a Comox Valley focused organization, recommending new procedural bylaws, governance policies and considering various logistics related to the greater CVRD (Comox-Strathcona waste management) board, developing action plans to meet the provincially directed tasks with specific deadlines, maintaining administrative services to the CSRHD and NI 9-1-1 and managing staff morale in a time of high uncertainty.

Challenges

Complicating factors

- Two regional district CAO vacancies effective February 15, 2008:
 - I was appointed the CVRD acting CAO effective February 15, 2008 and subsequently recruited as the permanent CAO effective August, 2008. I continued with the responsibilities of the general manager of corporate services until January 2009.
 - Direct appointment of internal candidate was supported by majority of the board with the decision based on educational qualifications, experience with local government and the need for continuity for the organization undergoing significant change.
 - SRD appointed an interim CAO February 15 to March 31, 2008 – an experienced retired CSR D general manager.
 - SRD appointed the second interim CAO April 1, 2008 – an experienced retired municipal CAO.
 - SRD subsequently appointed a permanent CAO early 2009 – an experienced regional district CAO.
- CVRD administrative management and staff team accountable to CVRD CAO while providing services to two regional districts CAO’s and two boards.
- CVRD provided administrative support to two different physical meeting locations (Courtenay and Campbell River, 22 km’s apart).

- With one vacancy and the resignation of two senior managers the senior management team was reduced to three from the original six members. Each of the three members agreed to take on more responsibilities to oversee existing programs and services. Other key managers and the executive assistant gave incredible extra efforts during this time period.
- There was a recruitment time lag for CVRD vacancies until a permanent CVRD CAO was appointed to allow for the organization structure to be reviewed, new job descriptions developed and before the recruitment process could be completed.
- A tight timeframe to develop and finalize separate budgets for each of the regional districts, many unknowns and uncertainties.
- Significant provincial projects with clear mandates and timeframes for completion.
- Managing the day-to-day workloads, implementing the transition of services to SRD, initiate the provincial legislated tasks, building external relations, maintaining staff morale, improving customer service relations, maintaining financial accountability and staying healthy.
- Local government elections November 2008.

Leadership

Acting CAO / CAO administration leadership approach

As the CVRD acting CAO as of February 15, 2008 the first action was to assess the situation and determine priorities. An assessment of the situation included reviewing board priorities, organizational work plans and provincial directions. This initial assessment determined the following list of issues and priorities to be addressed in addition to the provincial parameters and tasks (not listed in order of significance).

- Board recruitment of permanent CVRD chief administrative officer;
- Organization resource inventory (management/staff resignations/retirements creating loss of corporate knowledge and skills);
- Regional sustainability strategy planning project in progress;
- Regional sewer master planning project in progress;
- First Nation relations (practically non-existent);
- Comox Valley local government relations;
- Provincial relations;
- Community relations;
- Kensington Island Properties – significant development OCP/rezoning application;
- Gas’N’Go development permit application – court challenge;
- New Public Sector Accounting Standards – Tangible Capital Assets implementation;
- Extraordinary leadership opportunity – an invitation to participate with Harmony Foundation in sharing lessons learned through the development of the Comox Valley sustainability strategy to the Mayors Training Institute in Beijing, China.
- Comox Strathcona regional solid waste service – review and update 2003 solid waste management plan in progress;

- Comox Strathcona Regional Hospital District – significant North Island hospitals project (Campbell River and Comox Valley two new hospitals, budget \$600 million, CSRHD cost share 40%);
- North Island 9-1-1 Corporation – RCMP contract for services agreement; new City of Campbell River fire dispatch manager; technology manager recruitment; tower site acquisitions.

I was particularly conscious to balance the need to make decisions in order to move forward on both provincial and CVRD board directives with the need to respect and protect, what I felt, would be key issues for the new CAO. For example any recommendations for the new CVRD organization structure and allocation of staff resources I felt would be best deferred until the permanent CAO was in place. This decision to hold off on a review of the organization structure and recruitment enabled the senior management team to consider what resources were available and begin the task of delegating specific tasks and/or obtaining external resources for project specific tasks.

Leading the tough decisions – an example of the leadership decisions that needed to be made quickly included a recommendation to the board for the direct award of a contract valued at \$250K. Given the provincial deadlines, the experience, education of the consultant this was the right decision to make, however one that is not done without risk given that local government best practice, CVRD policy, board, staff and the public all prefer and normally recommend a competitive bid process.

Specific leadership/management tools/strategies utilized:

Project management: A Gantt chart (Appendix H) was utilized to identify critical deadlines and competing priorities during this first year of transition. Delegation of specific tasks was an important leadership action.

Communications: A commitment to continuous communication with all parties, internally and externally, ie: board, public, management, staff, media was instrumental during the transition.

The board identified building a relationship with the K’ómok’s First Nation as a priority for the new CVRD. A priority that required taking on direct responsibility to lead the organization in a cultural shift to bring about change in perceptions and to find opportunities to work the First Nations. One of the significant changes made was to route all First Nations communication such as, land use referrals, service specific letters (parks, sewer, water, etc) through the office of the CAO. This ensured a coordinated corporate approach towards building relations. Correspondence was reviewed for appropriate tone and acknowledgement of First Nation concerns. A personal, face-to-face communications approach was important in developing relations with K’ómok’s First Nation. We have learned together to focus on the issues, to share learning’s and respect the unique challenges, organizational mandates and jurisdictional responsibilities. The board supported a recommendation to provide funding for a First Nation liaison position. K’ómok’s First Nation provided supervision and office space for the position. The board chair supported inviting the band manager to UBCM sessions relating to First Nation relations.

Review and assessments - A change management approach to the transition was implemented with key policies and bylaws reviewed to reflect the new CVRD governance structure. Specific board policies were drafted to assist the board with governance change and to set the foundation for future boards. These policies included board development and orientation. A key to the success of reviewing and updating the board governance policies and establishing a good foundation was the fact that the first nine months of year one transition was with the experienced (Comox Valley) board members from the former CSRD.

Upon permanent appointment as CAO for the CVRD, the organization structure and recruitment was top priority. I initiated three organizational and structural reviews each with a specific objective:

- To identify existing exempt staff capacity;
- To identify any gaps in organization structure from a service delivery perspective; and
- To identify any improvements in effectiveness and efficiency.

These reviews assisted in developing and recommending a new organization structure effective January 2009. The new organization structure also required a review and update of the CVRD exempt staff pay band system.

Several key reviews and changes to board policies provided the elected officials with a governance structure to assist them with governing the new CVRD. One of the first tasks as the new CAO was to complete a critical review and update of the officers' bylaws that speaks to the board delegated authority to the CAO. The officer bylaw adopted by the board established the parameters of authority for the CAO and administration team to work within. The officer's bylaw specifies the board's authority relating to the recruitment of the CAO and delegates the authority for all other employees to the CAO. This bylaw represents clarity for the board and CAO regarding roles and responsibilities. One of the incumbent CAO recommendations was to amend the officer's bylaw to address the issue raised by a few elected officials regarding direct appointment of a CAO. The amendment provides the board with a policy to conduct an external process for the recruitment of future CAO's.

Other key governance foundation processes/practices included the establishment of a Board/CAO covenant, an annual CAO performance management process (tied to the employee contract to ensure both parties remain committed to the process), the establishment of weekly chair/vice-chair meetings and monthly board/CAO relations meeting.

Summary

In summary, accomplishments during this first year of the transition reflected a highly motivated leadership team willing to put in long hours towards creating and sustaining the new CVRD organization. It is estimated that approximately one (1) full time equivalent in additional time was given by the executive management team.

6) APRIL 1, 2009 TO MARCH 31, 2010 – YEAR 2 – TRANSITION

This second year of the Comox Valley Regional District transition began to reflect a return to busy but more manageable workloads for most administration services, the exception continued to be the intense levels of work and efforts of the finance administration staff.

The Administration Task

The administration task was to lead the CVRD organization through the second year of restructure transition while providing transitional services for the SRD, administrative services to the CSRHD and the NI 9-1-1. This was also the first year following local government elections (November 2008) the direct administration needs of the CVRD where becoming the primary focus with extensive attention on providing the new board of directors with orientation; policy advice, governance development opportunities and strategic planning. The new board, along with staff, were very focused and involved with implementing action plans to meet the provincial mandated projects by their respective deadlines.

Challenges

Complicating factors

- Majority of CVRD board newly elected or first time appointed to regional district;
 - Five directors changed at the CVRD board table
- Election platform – CSRHD restructure should have seen more substantial reduction in staff at CVRD;
- Deadlines looming for regional growth strategy; regional water supply strategy;
- Legal challenges Sierra Club and K'ómok's First Nation regarding development permit for gas station (Gas'N'Go application).
- The Comox Strathcona solid waste management plan review had taken on a life of its own and despite what had been previously presented as simply 'an update' became obvious that the issues with this service and the 2003 plan were extensive including:
 - New governance model not accepted by new solid waste board, comprising of CVRD and SRD board of directors;
 - Village of Cumberland very dissatisfied with CVRD (CSRHD) responses to Village concerns regarding a landfill within Village boundaries;
 - SRD communities interest in transportation equity;
 - Campbell River landfill reaching capacity within two years ; Comox Valley landfill reaching capacity within five years;
 - No First Nation consultation plan;
 - Manager resigns and recruitment exceptionally challenging for engineers with solid waste experience – CAO determined to recruit a leader in solid waste with management experience, education. Outcome resulted in recruitment from the United States (US) and this resulted in significant human resource department support to work through the logistics.

- Majority of CVRD (solid waste board with SRD directors) newly elected or first time appointed to regional
 - 10 directors changed at the 'greater' CVRD board table to govern Comox Strathcona waste management service (and CSRHD)
 - The orientation of the 2009 CVRD (CSWM) board members for this specific service became extremely challenging as the SRD directors continued to be frustrated with the CVRD providing the governance and administration of this service. The board meetings were extremely difficult on board and staff alike with ongoing detailed questioning of administration, financial processes and operational program priorities.

Leadership

The CAO administration leadership approach

The administration leadership approach taken during this very interesting and intense transition period was to utilize the key foundation policies created with the first CVRD board of directors in 2008 to provide guidance to the various situations as they occurred. These foundation policies included board development, orientation, procedure bylaw and the corporate officer bylaw. It was extremely important during this transition period to be a leader in 'full attendance' in order to respond to the needs of the parties, being the:

Board of directors: governance, policy, outcomes and accountability.

Staff: promoting respectful workplace policies, encouraging staff to support each other, ensuring staff had access to the CAO for leadership, timely decision making and overall support.

Community: responsive, transparent and accountable.

I encouraged and promoted a professional culture, taking the 'high road' when necessary; I held staff pre-meetings to prepare for various challenging meetings and held post-mortems; I encouraged staff to be solution oriented versus getting swallowed up in the problems/issues facing the organization. I worked with the executive management team to identify professional development opportunities, and where we just couldn't take the time to be away, we hosted webinars.

I utilized United States and Canadian public administration organizations such as International City/County Management Association (IMCA), Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), Local Government Management Association of BC (LGMA) and the Certified Management Accountants of BC (CMABC) to network (Appendix I). This proved to be instrumental in assisting me with thinking out of the box on issues and keeping grounded by following the issues and trends occurring throughout Canada and the US.

I promoted and encouraged directors to attend Local Government Leadership Academy (LGLA) and attended as well, to support and learn good government practices together.

Specific leadership/management tools/strategies utilized:

- Development of exempt staff competencies. Three primary competency categories established: leadership, service orientation and personal effectiveness
- Recruit for the future, the organization needed leaders that could build relationships with a focus on customer service.
- Performance management system – implemented performance development for all exempt staff. This transition period represented the first full year reporting period on exempt performance plans. All plans were to be completed and submitted as of June 30, 2010 and no wage adjustments were considered until performance plan completed for the review year (April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010).
 - The performance plan review year was recommended to coincide with the financial planning year to acknowledge that many projects are not completed within the calendar year. Additionally, the reality of workloads between January and March each year would not support the focus of attention and the importance of performance management.
- CAO annual performance development plan.
- Board strategic planning – was developed based on the elected officials three year term of office, utilizing an external consultant to identify a statement of purpose, goals and objectives.
- Organization strategic planning – it was important to develop the specific linkages from the board strategic plan goals and objectives to each of the organizations branches. I considered this critical in order to begin developing the CVRD as an organization, to give the staff a process to connect to and work through as the organization culture and direction was being formed.
- Direct involvement and participation with chief administrative officer steering committees for regional projects including growth strategy, sustainability strategy, water supply strategy, master sewer plan.
- Participating in the K'ómok's First Nations three day 'Recognition and Reconciliation, Shared Understanding' workshops (March 31, April 27, May 27, 2009). These workshops were planned and developed by the K'ómok's First Nation, and included participants from across the community with the common link being a relationship building with K'ómok's First Nation. It was considered a significant investment of time that demonstrated the importance of the relationship for the CVRD and K'ómok's First Nation. A very positive step for the CVRD and its relationship with K'ómok's First Nation.

Summary

In summary, the second year of transition began to see the CVRD develop its own culture and direction. However for the Comox Strathcona solid waste service this was a period of incredible intensity, we were definitely experiencing the 'storming' period of change management for this extended service outside the CVRD boundary. As we moved through this storming period it became obvious that some specific governance policies would assist with the issues being raised by the elected officials. For example a CVRD (CSWM) financial planning policy was adopted to meet the needs of this greater regional governance board.

7) APRIL 1, 2010 TO MARCH 31, 2011 – POST-TRANSITION

Post transition may really be considered ended as of June 30, 2010 when all the CVRD financial transitional services provided to the SRD officially ended. However, the finance administration staff continued to be extremely challenged well into the spring of 2011 in managing workloads as a result of putting on hold various financial related tasks during the two year transition period and then in 2011 implementing new local services as a result of the conversion of the Royston Improvement District.

The Administration Task

The administrative task was to lead the CVRD organization into the post transition year with a 100 per cent focus on meeting the needs of the new organization. Administrative tasks included providing administrative policy advice and board development opportunities for the CVRD board of directors and completing provincially directed tasks and CVRD board strategic goals while maintaining administrative services to the CSRHD and NI 9-1-1.

Challenges

The complicating factors

- Legislative service reviews initiated:
 - General administration service review initiated by the Village of Cumberland;
 - Comox Valley water supply service review initiated by the City of Courtenay;
 - Comox Valley sewer service review initiated by the City of Courtenay;
 - Comox Valley recreation service review initiated by the City of Courtenay.

The four reviews all shared a common theme, being the question of whether the new CVRD was providing efficient and effective services with the underlying concern that the new regional district should have been reduced to half its size when ‘split’. (Appendix J)

- CUPE collective bargaining agreement expired December 31, 2010;
- United Steelworker collective bargaining agreement expired January 31, 2011;
- Comox Strathcona waste management service:
 - continued struggles with some board dissatisfaction of governance structure and administration service delivery;
 - inadequate staff resources to meet service needs;
 - recruitment challenge relating to regional solid waste management, a significant challenge to find suitable candidates with education and experience;
 - landfill closure issues;
 - critical need to expand and focus on the update and completion of the solid waste management plan.
- CAO appointed to Ministry of Health, North Island Hospitals Project Board as CSRHD representative – first non-provincial staff appointment to a provincial capital project board;
- City of Courtenay emergency flood event and excavation of CVRD corporate office building;

- Ministry asks the CVRD to consider establishment of new local services to address the request of the Royston Improvement District to dissolve. Services included water distribution, street lighting, waste collection/recycling and fire protection.
 - Water and fire services included several complicating issues such as outstanding service agreements and overdue payments to the Village of Cumberland.

The administration leadership approach

- Make recruitment of right candidates to meet the needs of the organization a priority - due diligence in recruitment practices – consider Canadian candidates first and then expand recruitment search into the United States. US recruitment is complicated and requires prove of lack of skilled Canadian candidates.
- Change management and recognizing the evolution of the organization;
- Develop CAO exempt staff administration pay policy: two key factors both based on performance:
 - annual pay band increment approved by the board – exempt staff eligible if performing at same level as previous year;
 - incumbent performance within the pay band – incumbent could be eligible for adjustment within the pay band if performing at a higher level and budget allows.
- Continue with focus on building First Nation relations –celebrate the success of Comox Valley local government and K’ómok’s First Nation protocol agreement
- Focus on the priorities:
 - Deadline to complete regional growth strategy – adopted March 31, 2011;
 - Deadline to complete regional water strategy;
- Maintain professionalism and take the high road;
- Engage external consultants to conduct independent review of general administration functions from an effectiveness, efficiency and capacity perspective (Appendix K).

Specific leadership/management tools/strategies utilized:

- Strategic Planning
- External review of administrative cost allocation policy
- External review of administrative function
- Annual commitment (signatures) to board/CAO covenant
- Performance management

Summary

In summary, the post transition period represents the organization change management cycle referred to as ‘norming’, the CVRD including the Comox Strathcona waste management service began to have a feel of normal operations. Even the legislative service reviews, although stressful and a significant impact on workloads, seemed part of the ‘norm’. As the CAO, the service reviews reflected a necessary process in order to address ongoing comments, statements regarding the size and efficiency of the new CVRD.

Current Status

CVRD has evolved and strategies like the regional growth strategy have provided a land use planning foundation, certainty for future growth opportunities and have facilitated improved relations with the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland. The CVRD is embarking on a partnership with K'ómok's First Nation and Village of Cumberland for a south sewer project to address long outstanding environmental concerns and future development needs relating to sewer in the Baynes Sound, Cumberland area. There are several improved relationships including with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure working towards the implementation of agreements on regional growth strategy and rainwater management and improved relations with Union Bay Improvement District.

CVRD (Comox-Strathcona waste management) board adopted a 2012 the solid waste management plan. Improved relations with Ministry of Environment with landfill closure plans being developed. Relationship with the Village of Cumberland improves with a proposed host community agreement acknowledging their concerns with future expanded residual waste management for Comox Strathcona community residual waste and the CVRD (CSWM) is partnering with Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland on a compost pilot project.

8) CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the restructure of a regional district is a significant provincial initiative requiring involvement from the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, electoral areas and participating municipalities with the regional district chief administrative officer taking a strong leadership role and involvement of all staff.

The outcome of the restructure for the Comox Valley Regional District has, overall, been very positive in that the smaller geographical area provides the opportunity to focus on the regions priorities.

Lessons that may be taken away from this experience and case study include the support of a short transition period from the 'separation (divorce) perspective' but a need to recognize that it will take the new organization three to five years (or two election cycles) to develop into a new vision of the board and a culture led by the CAO. Organizations that go through this type of significant change management process require additional financial and personnel support. Restructure of a local government needs to include a provision for an external recruitment process of a new chief administrative officer. This should be completed prior to the restructure with provision for the incumbent of the local government invited to apply. This may mean an added expense of severance for the restructured local government CAO and added expense of the recruitment process however this would provide for clarity in regard to the chief administrative officer's leadership role and responsibilities.

The new local government auditor general could play a role in future provincial governance restructures with the external review of efficiencies and effectiveness of governance structure and services both before and after a restructure. This may assist in reducing the need for legislative service reviews and the added stress of these processes during a time of significant change management. This may also assist the provincial government with providing relational and accountability for local government restructure.

The Comox Valley Regional District is fortunate to have dedicated communication personnel and excellent professional, educated and experienced staff that, without whom, the restructure, transition and post-transition would not have had the same outcomes. With a great deal going on an organization needs good people and the confidence to support, develop and encourage them through the difficult times. The following annual report is reflective of ‘maintaining services’ through the restructure, transition and post transition periods.

- [2008 CVRD Annual Report \(link to web\)](#)
- [2009 CVRD Annual Report \(link to web\)](#)
- [2010 CVRD Annual Report \(link to web\)](#)
- [2011 CVRD Annual Report \(link to web\)](#)

As a leader it is important to stay focused on the political priorities, community and organization needs – keep it professional and don’t take things personal.

As a chief administrative officer, I have learned from this experience and will continue to learn lessons such as:

- Be aware. Your position is looked upon for leadership and direction. What you say and how you say it, does have impact whether you are aware of this or not. Therefore be aware of your words, tone and body language.
- Treat people with respect, listen and hear their concerns, be open minded and solution oriented, be clear and articulate your rationale.
- Develop capacity to assess situations:
 - Know when it is time to step aside and delegate;
 - Know when people are ready for a different approach, a different task or to learn something new;
 - Keep your antenna up when it comes to people, skills and attitude - you never know when they would be the perfect resource to help the organization accomplish a board priority; and
 - Acknowledge when resources are maxed out and strategize how to relieve the pressures;
- Recognize the evolution of change and be ready to respond:
 - board relations, the board of directors evolve over their term/s of office and it is important to acknowledge and respond to the changing needs of the board. Don’t become frustrated that you may have already provided information on a specific subject, simply recognize that the directors may now be ready to review and consider the information more fully.
- Recognize staff, listen and be aware of personal needs, egos, skills and work towards an open and trusting relationship.

- Acknowledge the board, community, municipalities, first nations – recognize capacity levels and participation at all levels;
- Return the ‘ask’ – when you’re asking for participation or support from others, be sure to try to resource and participate when other government jurisdictions need your participation;
- Seek out and recognize expertise to assist with your decision making acknowledging that at the end of the day, you are responsible and accountable for the decision.
- Recognize the importance of being ‘there’ for the board and staff when they need you.
- Create an organizational culture of reviews, continuous improvement for efficient, effective and customer relations.
- Create an organization that celebrates successes and acknowledges/learns from failures and

Have some fun! Celebrate events and successes! Acknowledge your mistakes!