

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee

Date: 2024-04-11

From: Kelly Lownsborough, Director of Corporate Services & CFO

File No:

Subject: UBCM Excellence in Governance Award application

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board support **the application to UBCM's Excellence in Governance Award** for the FVRD Financial Plan's public engagement and transparency.

BACKGROUND

Annually, the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) recognizes and celebrates UBCM members that have implemented projects or programs that demonstrate excellence in meeting the purposes of local government in BC through their Community Excellence Awards. The awards are designed to profile promising practices and to encourage local governments to learn from the success of other members in order to implement changes in their own communities.

The Excellence in Governance award category recognizes UBCM members that utilize governance processes and policies that are outcomes-based and consensus oriented; support and encourage citizen participation in civic decision-making; are efficient, equitable and inclusive, open and transparent; and exemplify best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long-term thinking. This may include projects focused on staff, elected officials and/or the community at large. Based on the criteria, staff are proposing a submission based on the Board's direction to increase engagement and transparency in **relation to the FVRD's Financial Plan**.

DISCUSSION

The Excellence in Governance category acknowledges programs, policies and processes that exemplify good governance by supporting citizen participation in civic decision-making, being inclusive, equitable and consensus-based, and exemplifying best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long-term thinking.

The FVRD's Financial Plan engagement, awareness, and processes meets the criteria due to our community focused approach that we started for the 2024-2028 Financial Plan process. To explain in short, our past public consultation practice was to invite residents through newspaper ads to attend Board meetings on budget approval. With the complexity involved in the development of Regional District Financial Plans, the budget impacts to residents, and the technical jargon associated with the topic, a change in approach was encouraged by the Board and necessary to build local knowledge on budgets.

Staff embraced the opportunity of an improved and inclusive approach to Budget. The first step was to employ the FVRD Have Your Say (HYS) platform as the location for primary public participation. The HYS platform transformed complex financial details and technical jargon into plain language and clear and concise reference materials. Available reference materials for residents included:

- financial plan overviews for electoral areas, regional and sub-regional budgets
- frequently used terms
- introductions by each Electoral Area Director to their respective electoral area budgets
- local services and parcel taxes documents
- estimated residential tax impacts for each of the six member municipalities
- a budget timeline with links to documents and meeting agendas, minutes and recordings
- work plan prioritization
- a budget orientation and navigation tool document
- info graphics
- the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan
- email links to FVRD finance staff

The HYS site also hosted a survey to determine how residents wanted to learn about the budget process; a portal to ask questions; and ongoing budget planning updates.

Our Financial Plan efforts are deliberately holistic; to engage staff, elected officials and members of the public in a meaningful way that is easily understood with a complete focus on transparency and accountability. For the most recently adopted Financial Plan, FVRD has provided the highest level of transparency and public participation opportunities. The HYS – 2024 Budget project was formally launched in September of 2023, with a soft launch in August.

The FVRD's Financial Plan & public participation journey is being featured in the Government Finance Officers of British Columbia Spring newsletter and is a topic at its upcoming annual conference; it was also recently showcased in an international local government branding panel.

COST

There are no costs associated with this application.

CONCLUSION

Annually, the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) recognizes and celebrates UBCM members that have implemented projects or programs that demonstrate excellence in meeting the purposes of local government in BC through their Community Excellence Awards. The awards are designed to profile promising practices and to encourage local governments to learn from the success of other members in order to implement changes in their own communities. One of the award categories is Excellence in Governance, which recognizes UBCM members that utilize governance processes and policies that are outcomes-based and consensus oriented; support and encourage citizen participation in civic decision-making; are efficient, equitable and inclusive, open and transparent; and exemplify best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long-term thinking.

Based on the criteria staff are proposing to submit an application based on the Board's direction to increase engagement and transparency in relation to the FVRD's Financial Plan.

COMMENTS BY:

Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer: Reviewed and supported.