

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee

Date: 2025-12-04

From: Christina Vugteveen, Manager of Parks

Subject: Fraser Valley Amateur Radio Emergency Services Society – Communication Tower Site Licence Agreement

Reviewed by: Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services/Deputy CAO
Jaime Van Nes, Director of Legislative Services
Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board authorize its signatories to enter into a five-year site licence agreement with the Fraser Valley Amateur Radio Emergency Services Society to allow for the continued presence of a communication tower located in Sumas Mountain Regional Park.

BACKGROUND

There are six communication tower sites within Sumas Mountain Regional Park. The lands which the towers are on is provincial public land; however, the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) has a long-term lease with the Province that allows the FVRD to enter into agreements with tower owners for use of the site. The various towers belong to Trans Mountain, Telus, BC Hydro, TRK, Freeway Communications and Fraser Valley Amateur Radio Emergency Services Society (FVARESS). The towers vary from the sizable eifel (free-standing) variety serving large service providers such as BC Hydro and Telus, to smaller guyed towers of smaller companies and one not-for-profit group. Staff have been working with industry specialists and the tower owners to create updated agreements to reflect current rates and standards.

DISCUSSION

Staff have consulted legal and technical professionals regarding the current sites and the creation of an updated agreement template. This includes current safety and inspection requirements specific to the industry, more detailed diagrams and descriptions of the equipment, and information about additional users on each tower. During the legal and technical review process, staff reached out to contacts at other municipalities, regional districts, and the Province regarding their agreements, rates, and practices, and were able to obtain assistance from those agencies.

The Fraser Valley Amateur Radio Emergency Service Society (FVARESS) is a registered not-for-profit organization formed in 1994 by amateur radio operators from across the Fraser Valley. With support from local municipalities, the group developed the VE7RVA repeater site on Sumas Mountain, including its facility, access road, and towers. Designed to operate completely independent of the electrical grid, the site has relied on solar and generator power since its inception. For more than 30 years, FVARESS volunteers, drawing on diverse skills in radio engineering, electrical systems, and mechanical maintenance, have sustained and improved the site. Supported by community partnerships and local contributions, FVARESS continues to maintain this critical off-grid communication hub, ensuring reliable connectivity between the Fraser Valley, Metro Vancouver, and eastern Vancouver Island during emergencies or commercial network failures.

The most recent agreement with FVARESS has expired. A review of rates involved speaking with other regional districts, municipalities, private sector, and the Province of British Columbia. As a result, the recommendation is to enter into a site licence agreement on a no-cost based on FVARESS being a non-commercial Radio Communication provider and potentially involved in emergency assistance. This follows the historical arrangement of a no-cost agreement which has been the case for the past 30 years. The new agreement would be in place January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2029, with an option to renew for an additional 5 years (January 1, 2030– December 31, 2034).

COST

There are not costs associated with this licence agreement.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommend approval of a 5-year site licence agreement with the Fraser Valley Amateur Radio Emergency Service Society for their communication tower in Sumas Mountain Regional Park.