

Editorial

BUDGET-IMPACT ANALYSIS

WEST SHORE VOICE NEWS

WEST SHORE VOICE

Unintended consequences of the speculation tax

● **There are all types of people in this world.** Some like their comfort zone big and soft. Others don't mind taking risk to the edge no matter what it takes. Most folks fall somewhere in the middle -- requiring a baseline of security and then with that not minding a bit of personal contribution in order to facilitate some overall social gain.

Such is the mix that any government -- in this case the BC NDP Government -- needs to balance right in order to get the best results. Helping people in need? Most people are all for that. But grabbing pieces of financial flesh here and there from people who fly high at the top of the financial food chain comes with political risk.

The buzz-phrases in business and politics nowadays is to shrug and deal with those after-the-fact "unintended consequences". The phrase might be new, but that's always how it's been. In the string theory that is life, no one can foresee all the implications of any decision they make, including the well-intentioned ones. Determine your best shot, take it.

The new housing taxes in BC that are intended to 'curb speculation' may shore up general government coffers to help support new social program initiatives. But there could be negative effects, that on balance will produce less-than-zero benefits. People who come to their second home in resort areas of BC spend what most of us call 'tourism dollars', and most BC resort and rural areas are hungry for that. When resort or tourism goals fall within areas that are not fully remote or technically rural (e.g. Bear Mountain in Langford, and the economically

Education: Local News

SD62 Board waives site acquisition charges for Sooke affordable housing project

by Mary P Brooke

>> **SD62 Trustees who voted in favour** of waiving SSAC fees, in support of the Knox affordable housing project in Sooke (from left): Chair Ravi Parmar; Vice-Chair Bob Phillips; Trustees Neil Poirier & Denise Riley.



All the way around, a tough call.

>> **SD62 Trustees who voted against** using education funds to directly support the Sooke-area affordable housing project: (from left): Wendy Hobbs, Dianna Seaton, and Margot Swinburnson.



● **There have been some difficult decisions** made by the Sooke School District 62 (SD62) board over the years, not the least of which were the impacts of longstanding government cutbacks that affected classrooms and teachers, exacerbated by the west shore ultimately becoming one of BC's fastest-growing communities for young families in particular.

Movement to a board decision on large issues occurs over weeks and months, sometimes years. The February 27 SD62 board meeting deliberation about whether to waive school tax fees to support an affordable housing project in Sooke brought out more discomfort for trustees and senior staff than seen for almost any other deliberations in the past six years. Even the most complex of budget issues have not had so much said, and so much left unspoken.

The issue was whether SD62 -- which is responsible to deliver public education to families in Langford, Colwood, Sooke, Highlands, Metchosin and Juan de Fuca -- would waive school taxes for the Knox Vision Society 42-unit apartment-unit housing complex in Sooke. In terms of dollars, the request would mean a savings of \$23,436 for the Knox Vision Society, or about 2% of their construction budget. That might seem like a drop in the bucket within a large project, but for SD62 that is money not going directly to educational obligations, which is the mandate of a school district board.

SD62 Treasurer Harold Cull explained to the board that if they were to approve the waiver, that the \$23,436 would be that much less received as School Site Acquisition Charges. That's money for buying land upon which to build new schools (not coming directly out of classroom budgets).

Fast-forward, the motion to waive the fees did pass -- Knox will get the \$23,436. But it was a tight vote, with trustees Wendy Hobbs, Dianna Seaton and Margot Swinburnson voting against the motion. Voting for the motion were SD62 Chair Ravi Parmar, Vice-Chair Bob Phillips, Neil Poirier and Denise Riley.

Overall, the opposing views included that education dollars should remain within serving the direct needs of providing schools and education. "Stick to your knitting," was how Trustee Seaton put it at one point. Additionally, Cendra Beaton (rep for Canadian Parents for French) said the decision would not go over well with parents in the west shore.

What wasn't said around the board table -- but spoke loud and clear through uncomfortable body language and winding pre-vote commentary -- is that there was something 'off' about this request from a church society-turned-developer. Something didn't sit right with the request itself, let alone the requirement to respond. One trustee noted that the District of Sooke has openly and strongly supported the affordable housing project as part of helping their community (Sooke waived about \$171,000 in development cost charges toward the Knox project), that other municipalities (noting Langford) and other affordable housing developers (noting Pacifica Housing) have not requested assistance from SD62 for projects in Langford. The BC Government recently announced its commitment of \$5.5 million toward the Knox project in Sooke.

No raise for SD62 trustees

● **At their board meeting** on Tuesday evening February 27, SD62 school trustees voted to not increase their Trustee Remuneration and Professional Development amounts, Chair and Vice-Chair Stipends, or per diem and mileage rates for next year. There was a subsequent motion to look at a system of 'graduated lifts' so that trustee stipends might go up in accordance with some sort of cost-of-living or similar measure. That motion failed, 5 to 2.

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hopeful municipality of Sooke) that will impact owners of getaway and vacation homes. To avoid the speculative tax these owners of second homes (who leave those properties vacant in between visits) may start pulling up stakes. In which case the spinoff effects of their spending becomes lost to surrounding communities. And those freed-up homes are not necessarily even in the normal affordability bracket for others.

WestShoreVoiceNews



Strong interest in this article on

The Knox Vision Society 42-unit affordable housing project on Church Rd at Wadams Way in Sooke (mid-February). WSV file photo

SD62 Trustee Margot Swinburnson explained her dilemma: "It was uncomfortable for me personally. The main reason is that I wholeheartedly support the build by Knox. But I could not ethically support it as a school trustee, guarding our funds for education. So I was very torn about it," she told *West Shore Voice News*.

SD62 Vice-Chair Bob Phillips points out that BC's School Site Acquisition Charge (SSAC) regulations do allow for non-profit housing (including facilities own/operated by a Society) to be exempted from SSAC's. And yet there was a lot of pushback on this during the Board discussion.

It is only recently that SD62 and other growing school districts have enjoyed the relief resulting from new BC NDP government funding to hire more teachers and relieve other 'cost pressures' in the education delivery system. The scars of working through tough-times budgets in years gone by has left a mark on senior staff and most trustees that reminded them of how every dollar counts.

If it can be said that the dollars toward the Knox project (which started as a seniors building then shifted to a broader affordable housing mission statement) will truly help more families with school-age children better afford to live in Sooke, there is some justification for the trustees who voted in favour of the motion.

But there was no discussion about requiring accountability for the receipt of funds, such as requiring a report on how many families with children will be ending up in the larger suites (the building will have 15 1-bdrm units, 24 2-bedroom units, and three 3-bedroom units).

People and communities need affordable housing, but this board truly struggled with whether funding support for that should come from education funds. On top of that, Cull noted that the NDP Government's new Medical Services Tax now being levied on corporations and entities with payrolls

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over \$500,000 (like the school board) will likely produce a 1% increase in staffing costs for 2018-2019.

Money is a reality in education. It takes money to buy land for schools, and of course it takes money to pay teachers and supply the classrooms with all the many things it takes to deliver the modern curriculum.

The February 27 decision at SD62's evening board meeting shows the tip of the iceberg over how educators, government and probably now also parents are starting to explore the many aspects of how affordability policy -- in this case in the realms of housing and education -- are playing out in the financial decisions that underpin everything.


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No BC Hydro rate freeze in 2018 but other assistance coming

West Shore Voice News

● **It was an NDP election promise in 2017.** But this week the BC Government had to tell BC residents that there would be no one-year hydro rate increase freeze that was promised for April 2018 to March 2019.

On March 1 it was announced by Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources Minister Michelle Mungall that the BC Utilities Commission said 'no freeze' -- i.e. rate increases as already set in motion by the previous government will go ahead. She was "disappointed" but indicated other ways to help out with affordability.

"We completely understand the affordability crisis so many families face, and will be taking action quickly to address the need to reduce electricity costs for those who need it most," said Mungall. "Government will work with BC Hydro and customer groups on a lifeline rate program. It could mean that people who have demonstrated need would have access to a lower rate for their electricity."

"In addition, starting in May, BC Hydro residential customers who find themselves in an emergency -- such as loss of employment, unanticipated medical expenses or pending eviction -- will be eligible for a grant toward their outstanding BC Hydro bill. The grant is up to \$600 and does not need to be repaid," it was stated in a ministry news release.

BC Hydro Emergency Grant starts May 1

Measures considered helpful -- and are already in place within the BC Hydro billing system -- will be continued: **payment plan** arrangements to spread out the high levels of winter electricity billings; **equal payment plan**; and online electricity **tracking tools**. Low income conservation programs will continue.

To lower electricity costs for BC businesses and industries, the provincial sales tax (PST) on electricity is being phased out. Following the 50% reduction that started January 1, 2018, PST will be fully eliminated on non-residential electricity as of April 1, 2019. Residential electricity is already PST-exempt.

"Eliminating the PST on electricity will translate into savings of more than \$150 million annually for BC businesses. This will help them create more jobs for British Columbians, expand into new markets, and reinvest in new technologies," it was stated in the energy ministry release. However, Canada is generally in a climate of reluctant investment, according to many economic pundits.

A comprehensive review of BC Hydro "to make it work for people" will "identify changes and cost savings to keep rates low, while ensuring BC Hydro has the resources it needs to continue to provide clean, safe and reliable electricity". Scope and process for the review is expected in the coming weeks.

Although disappointed with the BCUC decision "we understand the commission's concerns and will work to address them, while implementing ways to make life more affordable for BC families," Mungall said. **WSV**

BC Greens want wild salmon secretariat

West Shore Voice News

● **A secretariat responsible for wild salmon** is something the BC Green caucus would like the BC Government to set up, similar to consolidated efforts for response to climate change and conflict of interest.

"Wild salmon are a foundational BC species of vital importance to our economy and to our communities," said Adam Olsen, Green spokesperson for natural resources and agriculture. He says the NDP often drew attention to the issue when in Opposition. Greens want action to help restore wild salmon stocks to levels that support a healthy environment and a thriving wild salmon fishery.

BC Green Leader Andrew Weaver, says: "Even the Premier acknowledges that the questions posed to his government this week demonstrate serious inter-jurisdictional and cross-ministerial challenges." Funding and adequate authority could help streamline and coordinate all the work being done and stand as a united representative in negotiations with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). "Responsibility for steelhead and wild salmon is presently split among six government ministries in addition to DFO," added Sonia Furstenau, BC Green spokesperson for environment. **WSV**

Feb 2018: a few high-price sales pushed up Langford & Sooke averages by more than \$90,000

West Shore Voice News

● **The west shore is considered the most affordable region** in Greater Victoria, prices averages for single family homes shot up like a rocket in February. In fast-growing **Langford** there were 46 house sales averaging at \$805,315. That's up a full \$93,068 from January's average sale price of \$712,247.

In the more suburban **Colwood** area in February there were 22 house sales averaging at \$754,259 -- a slightly less scorching increase... but up \$32,485 from \$721,774 last month.

In **Sooke** there were 27 house sales averaging \$602,919. That's \$91,482 higher than last month when the average house sale was \$511,437.

These steep increases cannot in any way reflect natural inflationary forces. Those who can afford homes are snapping them up. As well, more home sales are the higher-priced new construction, and a few homes at a higher price-point did sell last month (skewing the average upward).

The Victoria Real Estate Board's HPI benchmark value for all West Shore houses was \$605,100 in Feb 2018, up only slightly from Jan 2018's \$601,700.

Meanwhile, the overall average sale price for a single family home in Greater Victoria was down \$49,318 in Feb 2018 (showing at \$876,397 compared to \$925,715 in Jan). Of 236 sales in February in Greater Victoria, 40.3% took place in Langford, Colwood and Sooke (compared to 70.9% in January). All figures from stats at www.vreb.org **WSV**

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Federal Budget 2018 strong on gender equality, narrow on housing

West Shore Voice News

● **This being one year ahead** of a federal election year, political pundits expected the 2018 federal budget delivered February 27 to be light on big financial shifts or promises, and it was. But the much-touted dose of gender equity analysis was huge.

For achieving gender equality, there are changes for paternity leave and plans for closing the gender wage gap in federally-regulated workplaces. The Status of Women funding boost of \$100 million over five years is to expand grant for projects aimed at advancing gender equality; \$1.8 million over two years is to develop a strategy to engage men and boys with the issue. A national framework to address gender-based violence at universities and colleges got \$5.5 million over five years. Over five years, \$19.9 million will go to a pilot apprenticeship incentive grant to provide women with up to \$6,000 while training in male-dominated skilled trades (e.g. welding or pipe-fitting). Female entrepreneurs are supported with access to financing from the Business Development Bank (\$1.4 billion over three years); \$105 million over five years goes to regional development agencies to support women-led businesses with soft skills (e.g. mentoring, networking).

The tinkering with housing initiatives is targeted -- addressing first nations supports, and providing loans to developers for the construction of rental apartment buildings to address the needs of low and middle-income urban Canadians. Nothing was aimed directly at addressing the skyrocketing price of housing that is well beyond average incomes for most Canadians. **WSV**

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Cops for Coffee: mingling in the neighbourhood

West Shore Voice News

● **On Pink Shirt Day**, February 28, eight senior members of the West Shore RCMP held their first 'Coffee with Cops' in the west shore community.

Teaming up with an independent local cafe for the social experiment, the one-hour casual interaction between police and public was held at Poncho's Coffee House on Goldstream Avenue in central Langford. The cops paid for coffee for anyone in the cafe that hour!

It was an opportunity for people to engage in a neutral setting with the RCMP officers that serve their community, explained Cst Matt Baker, who four months ago became the West Shore RCMP Detachment's media relations officer. He has worked in detachments large and small.

"No one is forced to talk to us," said Baker. "It's casual, we're trying to break the stigma," he said.

Among the West Shore RCMP Detachment officers on hand for the coffee event were Inspector Larry Chomyn, S/Sgt Raj Bandhu, S/Sgt Tom Beck, and Cpl Heinz Kraus (traffic commander). Some joined customers at their tables, to learn about any issues or concerns (or accolades) that people wanted to share with the RCMP.

Cst Baker explained that the Coffee with Cops idea was tried in Toronto and started working its way across the country. "It's big in Surrey," he said.

If the event is deemed to have worked out well for the officers in Langford, there will be more Coffee with Cops events every two months... next in Colwood, View Royal, Metchosis and Highlands. **WSV**



West Shore RCMP officers mingled with patrons at a local coffee shop in Langford on Pink Shirt Day. They promoted the event on social media ahead of time.

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State memorial service for Dave Barrett, OC, OBC, former premier of British Columbia. Sat Mar 3 at Farquhar Auditorium, UVic, 3800 Finnerty Rd, Victoria. 10am. Open to the public. Live webcast: <http://news.gov.bc.ca/live>

Online book of condolences: <http://ow.ly/37bd30ixe0H>

Childhood Stress & Anxiety - Building Resilience. Mon Mar 5. Free presentation at EMCS, 6218 Sooke Rd, but registration required. Community welcome to join elementary school parents of children age 5 to 11, caregivers & staff. 6:30 to 8:30 pm. www.sd62.bc.ca/parents/speac/

Juan de Fuca 55+ Spring Craft Fair. Sat & Sun Mar 10 & 11. 9-3. Jdf 55+ Activity Centre, 1767 Island Hwy.

Brookes Westshore school info session. Tues Mar 13, Kinsmen Fieldhouse behind Jdf Arena, 1767 Island Hwy. 6:30-8:30 pm. westshore.brookes.org

Royal Bay Secondary School student career day. Wed March 14. <http://royalbay.web.sd62.bc.ca>

EMCS Grad Fashion Show Wed Mar 14. 7pm. (2nd show pending for Mar 15). Tix \$10 at Sooke Shoppers & EMCS.

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Sooke Mayor & Council Open House. Thurs March 15 6:30 to 8:00 pm in Council Chambers. www.sooke.ca

SD62 School Spring Break west shore & Sooke. Sat March 17 through Easter Monday Apr 2.

Easter Long Weekend: Fri Mar 30 - Mon Apr 2.

Easter Eggstravaganza Sat Mar 31. 10:30 am to 12 noon at SEAPARC in Sooke. Crafts, bouncy house, Easter egg hunt 10:30am (age 1-4), 11:15am (age 5-7). Entry by donation to Sooke Food Bank.

SD62 schools re-open Tues Apr 3 after break.
Viva La WestShore 2018. Fri Apr 27. 7 to 11 pm. Olympic View Golf Club. www.westshore.bc.ca

#BCTECHsummit May 14-16 in Vancouver. www.bctechsummit.ca

Kingfisher Preschool Family Fun Day Sat May 26. Sooke Family Resource Society, 6672 Wadams Way. Send your SFRS stories to info@sfrs.ca

Colwood Campus Plant Sale - May (date tba). 2139 Sooke Rd, Colwood. Fundraiser for Westshore Center for Learning & Training grad.

BC Minimum Wage goes up to \$12.65 starting June 1, 2018.

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Wounded Warriors fundraising run

West Shore Voice News

Now having supported the Wounded Warriors PTSD trauma support program for four years, the City of Langford and Bear Mountain Resort co-hosted a recognition event at the resort on Sunday morning, February 25. About 80 people attended.

Langford Mayor Stew Young announced a combined donation of \$5,000 to Wounded Warriors from the City, developers, Bear Mountain Resort, bringing the group's 2018 fundraising total to \$70,000.

A seven-day run by a group of veterans dealing with PTSD covered over 600km starting at Port Hardy and ending in Victoria. On Sunday their last day of the run, the team left Mill Bay at 8 am, made a stop at Bear Mountain as the first users of the new Bear Mountain Parkway, then stopped at Save On Foods, Langford Legion and the View Royal Fire Department.

That was followed by a small ceremony at the Afghan War Memorial in downtown Victoria, then a run to the finish line at the BC Legislature, for closing ceremonies. The weather was cold with some snow and rain, but bright.

A Wounded Warriors program called COPE (Couples Overcoming PTSD Everyday) was developed by LCol (retired) Chris Linford, his wife Kathryn



The federal government's Budget 2018 announced a tax credit for the cost of Psychiatric Service Dogs, like this one quietly attending the Wounded Warriors fundraising finale at Bear Mountain Resort, February 27.

and Dr Tim Black, PhD, R Psych. The Linfords retired to Sooke several years ago, where Linford found time to pen a book on his PTSD experiences. That helped launch the COPE program.

COPE is offered in English and French. In its first year, the program was offered four times. That's now up to nine times, says Linford. Wounded Warriors receives about four applications daily for support programs, including from emergency nurses, corrections officers and sheriffs. Linford said people have "embraced the process of being well".

First responders such as police, fire and ambulance workers have been asking for more supportive programs that military veterans have had access to.

Mayor Young commended Wounded Warriors executive director Scott Maxwell for working to see first responders within the scope of federal funding support, suggesting that some provincial and federal funding could be expected for Wounded Warriors in the coming year.

The federal budget on February 27 included expansion of the Medical Expense Tax Credit for Psychiatric Service Dogs, recognizing the role of these dogs in helping people cope with conditions like PTSD. Costs for these animals are now recognized for 2018 and future tax years. The measure will directly benefit veterans and others in the disability community who rely on comfort dogs, including first responders with invisible disabilities. **WSV**

Full house at Sooke post-tsunami alert info session

West Shore Voice News ~ with notes from Sooke ESS

In followup to the January 23 Tsunami alert, Sooke Council heard from Sooke Fire Chief Kenn Mount at Council on January 29 about how the wee-hours response to the alert was handled (including direct notification in low-lying areas and dealing with a panic response from some residents who showed up at the fire hall). Council also heard about a option for partnership with a notification system used by the CRD "as the best means to support residents as many have signed up for this subscriber-based system already".

On February 20, a well-promoted emergency preparedness info session drew a full house of about 115 people. "We hit the maximum occupancy load and had to move ESS staff into the lounge to be in compliance of the Fire Code," says Mount. The presentation included the need to manage self-evacuees and "a method of getting in front of bad misinformation" that residents had obtained from overseas and non-credible Internet resources. "Residents are reminded to listen their local officials, and that depending on smartphones is not the only means of getting credible information. Boots on the ground during a need to really evacuate is how we will ultimately manage a tactical evacuation," says Chief Mount.

The ESS team also discussed self-preparedness. Maps showing wave modelling were helpful, to show people where they live in the region, if they are in an inundation zone, and how they can confirm their elevation. **WSV**

Full house at the Post-Tsunami Alert Emergency Info session at Sooke Municipal Hall, February 20.

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TRAFFIC INFO - LANGFORD ON THE MOVE

Mon March 5. At the Millstream Overpass, permanent closure of one exit lane from Veterans Memorial Parkway (from the Goldstream side of town) to Hwy 1, leaving one lane open.

Current, to Apr 30. Construction of improvements to the Millstream Overpass at Veterans Memorial Parkway. Some traffic closures/delays (except Fridays ahead of long weekends, and Mondays of long weekends).

Current, to mid-June/July. Jacklin Rd closed (Jenkins to Terlane) to facilitate nearby construction efficiencies. Detour through the Belmont Market construction site on the new Division Ave.

Current, to summer 2018. Leigh Road at Langford Parkway Railway Crossing. Completion of Leigh Road Railway Crossing to Langford Parkway.

Current, until mid-summer. Traffic interruptions for sewer installation along Bray Ave, Carlow Rd, Linda Lane (west of Jacklin Rd & Goldstream Ave).

For other short-term traffic advisories, visit www.langford.ca



City of Langford
www.cityoflangford.ca

Millstream Overpass lane changes

West Shore Voice News

Traffic loads in Langford around the Millstream Overpass have changed over recent years.

On Monday, March 5 at the Millstream Road Interchange, one of the northbound right turn lanes heading onto Hwy 1 (Trans Canada) to Victoria will be permanently closed.

The curb lane will remain open for traffic, while the adjacent lane will taper into the curb lane past the intersection with Peatt Rd/Strandlund Ave.

It's a way to accommodate the dual left turns for southbound Millstream Rd. There is a heavier traffic load from the McCallum Road big-box store commercial side (and future additional residential development) of the intersection (which also handles Victoria-bound traffic from the Bear Mountain area).

City of Langford Engineering says traffic studies support having one lane taking traffic from northbound Veterans Memorial Parkway (from the

Millstream Overpass construction area to April 30



Goldstream side of town) onto Hwy 1, instead of two. The Millstream Overpass Improvement Project includes the southbound additional left turn lane as well as pedestrian and cycling improvements. Construction is now into spring 2018, aiming for completion around April 30.

"Please obey all traffic control personnel and drive with caution in the work zone," says Langford's Director of Engineering, Michelle Mahovich. **WSV**

Colwood slams Langford over rec centre funding

A zinger of a statement was issued by Colwood Mayor Carol Hamilton on March 1, saying Langford was not meeting its financial obligation to West Shore Parks & Recreation (WSPR) which is jointly owned and operated by Colwood, Langford, View Royal, Metchosin and Highlands. An agreement sets out a formula for different levels of financial obligation from each of the municipalities based on resident use of the facilities and services.

A good west shore corporate citizen, Langford still pays the largest share of revenues into WSPR (\$2.5 million per year) but "Langford cannot be a cash cow for something that is not managed properly," Langford Mayor Stew Young said March 2. Two years ago when the WSPR budget hit \$5 million, Langford identified operational inefficiencies at WSPR causing an unfair financial burden on Langford taxpayers who already support their own facilities built in the last several years (including arena, bowling alley, City Centre, Goudy Field, Westhills Stadium). Hence Langford not approving the WSPR budget for the last two years. "We've told (WSPR) that their budget doesn't make sense. They do nothing with their reserves," says Young. In Langford the recreation budget breaks even or better "because we chase revenue... we're open for business," says Mayor Young.

This year Colwood Council has also not approved the 2018 WSPR budget (now at about \$6 million) because it shows the facility running at a deficit. Mayor Hamilton says continuing to run WSPR at a deficit will certainly mean service cuts and likely force the shut-down of the WSPR within five years.

Colwood supports WSPR by foregoing property taxes on the property at a value of \$736,267. **WSV**

