

ACRD seeks 'age-friendly' designation

Plan would enable Alberni Valley seniors to age in place

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Alberni Valley News

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) is applying to the provincial government for recognition as an "age-friendly" community.

During an ACRD board meeting on Wednesday, June 24, the board heard from planner Amy Anaka as she presented the regional district's Age-Friendly Plan, developed over a period of eight months with guidance from an Age-Friendly Working Group. The group engaged with the community through a survey and an age-friendly workshop, hosted on Feb. 6 of this year.

The goal of the plan, said Anaka, is to keep Alberni Valley residents aging in place and living in the Alberni Valley.

Census data shows that almost 22 percent of ACRD residents are 65 and older, which is higher than the provincial average of 18.3 percent. In the Alberni Valley electoral areas (Beaufort, Beaver Creek, Cherry Creek and Sproat Lake), 45 percent of residents are 55 and older.

"With this aging population, the ACRD recognizes there's a need to plan to support this aging in place," said Anaka on Wednesday.

Results from the ACRD's age-friendly survey show that there is plenty to celebrate. Seniors cited many opportunities for community participation and recreation—including the Echo Sunshine Club, Friendly Phone Service and North Island College's ElderCollege classes.

"That's something to celebrate," said Anaka.

"We have a lot of things that are already underway in the Alberni Valley."

But seniors also had a number of concerns related to health care supports and communica-



The Alberni Valley Age-Friendly

Working Group meets (before the COVID-19 pandemic). (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

tion. One of the biggest concerns was around transportation. An overwhelming 97 percent of respondents said they are still driving themselves to get around.

"That's wonderful that they're able to drive themselves," said Anaka. "But what happens when they no longer have their driver's licence or they're not physically able?"

When asked where they saw themselves in 10 years, 73 percent of respondents said they would like to be living in their own home.

Based on these results, the Age-Friendly Plan included an action plan with 12 priority actions to implement:

1. Integrate the Age-Friendly Action Plan into staff work plans and annual reporting.
2. Form an Age-Friendly Stakeholder Advisory Committee.
3. Develop an implementation and funding strategy related to the Age-Friendly Plan.
4. Advocate and promote alternative transportation options

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— Amy Anaka

focused on seniors in the Alberni Valley.

5. Develop an Age-Friendly Design Policy and Checklist to audit existing and plan for new ACRD-owned parks and infrastructure.

6. Apply for funding to expand integrated programming and intergenerational community hubs to reduce social isolation of seniors and their caregivers.

7. Launch a virtual volunteer bank, matching people's skills and interest to the community's needs.

8. Update and implement strategies to involve more seniors and people with disabilities in intergenerational neighbourhood emergency preparation, information dissemination and safety programs.

9. Develop a Community Resource Directory with age-friendly branding, and create an awareness campaign related to the Age-Friendly Plan and related actions.

10. Undertake a housing needs assessment and report.

11. Promote increase of bench dedication program and explore the inclusion of alternative wheel-friendly trails, providing inclusive trails for all ages and abilities.

12. Support more cultural inclusion and begin a dialogue with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupacasath First Nation regarding seniors' initiatives and possible win-win initiatives.

The ACRD board of directors voted on Wednesday to endorse

this plan and implement these priority actions. The board also directed ACRD staff to apply for Age-Friendly BC Community recognition from the province and BC Healthy Communities.

This recognition means that the regional district will be promoted through BC Healthy Communities publications as an age-friendly community.

"Basically it's bragging rights," Anaka said.

The recognition will also allow the ACRD to apply for future funding.

The District of Tofino received age-friendly recognition back in 2017, and Tofino mayor Josie Osborne said the municipality has found its Age-Friendly Plan to be helpful in other community planning matters.

"I can't believe how much it comes up and how much we refer back to our age-friendly plan, and how informative it's been in strategic planning for the municipality," she said. "This is a really foundational document."

Largest dividend cheque ever: AVCF

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going to be used. "This year's \$2 million dividend clearly demonstrates that we can successfully manage sustainable forestry practices while enhancing the livability in our community," she said later.

This is the largest dividend cheque the community forest has provided to the city since the AVCF was formed in 2009. That year the AVCF entered into a 25-year community forest agreement with the Provincial Ministry of Forest and Range, which provides for the exclusive rights to harvest Crown timber and non-timber resources. The agreement offers two distinct areas for the AVCF: the Sproat Operating Area and the Taylor Operating Area.

The community forest tenure is held and operated by the AVCF Corporation, which is 100 percent owned by the City of Port Alberni. There is a board of directors appointed by the city and includes representatives from the community, Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations.

Past dividends have helped support initiatives like the Community Investment Program, which assists not-for-profit organizations in enhancing their ability to provide services or activities within the Alberni Valley.

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