



REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: ADM-BRD-350

From: Tyra Henderson, Corporate Officer

Date: November 10, 2022

Subject: Regional Connectivity Service Assent Voting Results

RECOMMENDATION #1: [Corporate Unweighted]

That the Regional Board receive the assent voting results for the Regional Connectivity Service Establishment Bylaw No. 2487, 2022 as follows: 3088 votes in favour, 1389 votes against.

RECOMMENDATION #2: [Corporate Unweighted]

That the Regional Board adopt Regional Connectivity Service Establishment Bylaw No. 2487, 2022.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

As required by the *Local Government Act*, the final voting results for the Regional Connectivity Service Assent Voting were declared on October 19, 2022 (see attached determination of voting results and declaration of voting results). The assent voting passed, with 68.9% of votes cast in favour of establishing the new service. With an estimated 48,575 eligible votes, and a total of 4,477 votes cast, the voter turnout was approximately 9.2%

Twenty-one (21) mail ballot packages were issued for the Regional Connectivity Service assent voting. Only one ballot was not returned. While requests for mail ballots were lower than expected, return rates were exceptional.

The Regional Board may now adopt the bylaw. Once adopted, a thirty-day quashing period must be observed, during which the bylaw can be challenged through an application to the Supreme Court in accordance with the *Local Government Act*, sections 623 and 624. Once the quashing period is over, staff will forward a copy of the adopted bylaw to BC Assessment to ensure they have the information required for taxation to begin in 2023, and to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, for their records.

Should the Board wish to proceed with the implementation of the service in 2023, a third resolution is included in Alternative Options for the Board's consideration, directing that a draft budget be prepared by staff. At the bylaw approval stage, when the Ministry of Municipal Affairs contacted staff to ask whether or not the functions would be initiated in 2023 or later, it was discovered that while BC Assessment advice is that bylaws not adopted by October 1 in any given year will not be active in the subsequent year, it is possible to do so. The Chief Financial Officer has confirmed that a budget can be approved for 2023; however, bylaws that are adopted after the October 1 deadline do not show on the Completed Assessment Roll for the upcoming year. Although an estimate of tax rate can be made without the completed roll information, it may not be 100% accurate. Staff uses the completed roll to estimate tax rates during the budget process, as it provides the total assessment for each function. In

cases where an entire Electoral Area is in the service function, the information is already provided in the completed roll. Service functions with defined areas have a risk of discrepancy as there are occasionally differences in folio data between the PRRD and BC Assessment, and the Completed Roll is used to reconcile. Therefore, the risk of discrepancy is small as four of the services are regional, and the Library service is Area B in its entirety.

In the first year, assent voting costs will be recovered from the function, and the other line items included in the budget.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. That the Regional Board authorize a draft budget be prepared for Function 135 – Regional Connectivity, for consideration during 2023 Budget Discussions.
2. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:

☒ Not Applicable to Strategic Plan

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

The overall cost of conducting the five assent voting processes has yet to be calculated. Costs were shared between the General Local Election and the five assent voting opportunities. COVID funds set aside in 2021 to assist with assent voting opportunities were also used this year in an effort to encourage voters to return to 'normal' activities and get out and vote. Staff costs to run the 19 polling stations are estimated at \$46,000, including meals and mileage. Advertising costs have not been totaled as all invoices are not yet received; however, advertising and outreach costs are estimated at approximately \$90,000. Other costs include ballots, ballot boxes, and other stationary supplies. Once all expenses are invoiced and paid, staff will review costs to inform future budget allocations for election expenses.

The Regional Connectivity bylaw is applicable region wide, meaning that the entire PRRD is the service area/benefitting area for the service, and both rural and municipal properties will be subject to taxation to fund this new service. The maximum requisition in the bylaw is the greater of \$375,000 or a property value tax of \$0.0234/\$1000, applied to the net taxable value of land and improvements. The estimated year one residential tax rate on improvements only is \$0.0136/\$1,000.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):

Preliminary Assent Voting results were not able to be shared at the close of polls on October 15th, as would normally occur. The anticipated volume of votes cast at the larger polling stations (Fort St. John and Dawson Creek) would not have been able to be processed after a twelve hour voting day; instead, ballots boxes were sealed and delivered to the PRRD office in Dawson Creek and counted by a small army of staff starting Monday, October 17th, as permitted under the *Local Government Act* s.178. The declaration of the final results was completed mere minutes prior to the 4:00 pm October 19th deadline and posted to the web page. Elections BC and the Ministry were also provided the election results.

Extensive communications efforts were made to raise general awareness of the assent voting process and the proposed service, far above and beyond the mandatory public newspaper notices. Attached for your information is the 2022 Local Government Election Outreach Report, which illustrates the extensive public notice and education undertaken this election year.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

None at this time.

Attachments:

1. Regional Connectivity Service Establishment Bylaw No. 2487, 2022
2. Determination of Official Assent Voting Results – Regional Connectivity Service
3. Declaration of Official Assent Voting Results – Regional Connectivity Service
4. 2022 Local Government Election Outreach Report