



October 18, 2023

Mayor Bob Wells and Courtenay Council

I am writing to you on behalf of the Comox Valley Social Planning Society Board of Directors in support of a letter the Pride Society of the Comox Valley sent regarding 2024 Permissive Property Tax Exemptions.

The City of Courtenay has partnered with the Social Planning Society on a BC Healthy Communities grant titled ***Bringing an Equity Lens to Public Policy*** project. Equity is the fair distribution of opportunities, power, and resources to meet the needs of all people, regardless of age, ability, gender, income, education level, culture, or background. Developing policies and practices through an equity lens can be guided by the following questions.

- Who will benefit?
- Who will be excluded?
- What contributes to or creates the exclusion?
- What promotes inclusion?

One of the Cardinal Directions of the Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP) is Equity and the OCP states “this OCP challenges some traditional planning practices that can result in policies, programs, and regulations that disproportionately impact and stymie the progress of some *equity-priority groups*. Through policies on topics ranging from *affordable housing* to public participation, this OCP applies an equity lens and seeks to honour the lived experiences of all of Courtenay’s peoples “(page 21).

While we strongly support and appreciate that the City of Courtenay gives Permissive Property Tax Exemptions, it seems the example that raises concern for the Pride Society requires the City of Courtenay to look at criteria for exemptions through an equity lens. This could prevent equity-priority groups and people being discriminated against or systematically excluded by organizations receiving local government support through tax exemptions.

if we were to look at the distribution of these exemptions through an equity lens some different criteria could be used to decide on eligibility. For example, criteria could be included that asks for an organization’s values related to human rights for equity-priority groups or how the organization includes diversity and equity in their work.

These kinds of criteria are used by many funding organizations for non-profits currently. For example, the Comox Valley Community Foundation asks organizations to “describe ways their organization actively brings an equity lens to its work” on their Community Enrichment Grant applications. As we have with other equity projects, the Comox Valley Social Planning Society would very much like to collaborate with the City of Courtenay to develop criteria for Permissive Property Tax Exemptions.

We stand with the Pride Society and their concerns about the organization that will likely receive a tax exemption this year and request that the City create criteria that promote equity to not inadvertently give exemptions to organizations that cause harm not only to LGBTQIA25+ people but all equity-priority groups in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne Schroeder', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joanne Schroeder
Secretary, Comox Valley Social Planning Society
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