

Association for the Protection of Rural Metchosin,
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January 27, 2021

via email

Honourable Mitzi Dean, Minister – Children and Family Development
MLA for Esquimalt-Metchosin
MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Dean:

Subject: Boys & Girls Club Services & Foundation of Greater Victoria – Metchosin Club Property Subdivision Application (3900 Metchosin Road)

We write to you in your capacity as Minister of Children and Family Development and as MLA for Esquimalt-Metchosin about the potential loss of an irreplaceable resource for youth in Greater Victoria. The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Victoria (the Club) plans to subdivide and sell 40 acres of forested, natural space on their Metchosin Club property. This is a vital part of the Club's property, which has been used for over 30 years to provide services to youth.

We are respectfully seeking your direct involvement in encouraging Club representatives to meet with the APRM and other local organizations to discuss its plans and the alternatives to losing this important regional asset. Our own efforts to speak to the Club's executive director and their agents have gone unanswered to date. The Ministry has a large stake in the Club's mission of serving youth and families in Greater Victoria, with over \$15.1 million provided in direct funding over just the last five years, with \$2.95 million being provided in 2020.

The following outlines our concerns with the Club's current plans:

Selling assets is a non-sustainable financial model

We believe that selling vital assets is not a sustainable model for supporting on-going youth programming. The Club's current plans to subdivide and sell this land raises questions about its overall financial management. This is of concern since the Club's operations are funded in large part, directly or indirectly, by taxpayers and by donor-supported philanthropy. Are the Club's plans with this land – in terms of its financial goals – worthy of a closer look by the Ministry?

Is there really "difficulty" in attracting children and youth to Outdoor Adventure Programs?

To the *Time-Colonist* (Jan 22, 2021), Club representatives noted that "in recent years...it has been increasingly difficult to attract children and youth to Metchosin's outdoor adventure programs". Questions arise from this statement: Is the real issue here a lack of interest in "outdoor adventure programs" or a disconnection between management priorities or access

issues for youth to such programs? Are there ways that this situation can be addressed with further discussions with the Club's service partners (municipalities, school divisions)? Rather than rushing to subdivide and forever lose this community asset, we ask you to encourage the Club to discuss options for optimizing outdoor programming for youth on an intact 98-acre site.

The Club's ownership of this land came with a preservation commitment

The Club's 2004 acquisition of the land – done with a first option to purchase from the province – was completed with financial support from your Ministry (as it existed then). This support included timeline extensions to enable the Club to confirm financing arrangements. We believe this support was provided with an underlying assumption that the Club would continue to use the entire property for an enduring public purpose, oriented to regional youth. Although the expectation of enduring public benefit was not formally registered on the property title, ample documentation exists to support the understanding that enduring benefit would ensue.

The Club's Post-Acquisition Commitments to Steward Land and Ecosystems in Perpetuity

Following the 2004 sale, significant representations were made by Club executive to regional stakeholders (including donors to Club fund-raising campaigns), regarding their intentions to responsibly steward the wildland portion of the Metchosin property, in perpetuity. Below are two examples:

- 2004 Press Release:
“Boys & Girls Clubs also understands the importance of the 98-acres of green space to the residents of Metchosin and, indeed, we have identified the property's rural environment as its key asset. It is our desire to maintain the property's 'natural' environment, thereby allowing for recreation from urban life, for all future users. Ecologically sound operating principles will continue to be key in our stewardship of the property.”
- 2007 Re-Zoning Application:
“The “back” 40 acres of our property has remained in a pristine natural state composed of Garry Oak, Arbutus and Douglas fir. There are also small stream and wetland ecosystems contained in this area . . . We are exploring the possibility of pursuing a conservation covenant for this endangered Garry Oak/Arbutus ridge which would ensure this unique habitat for wildlife observation and nature studies would be maintained in perpetuity. To that end we are incorporating this possibility into our current capital campaign as an attractive element to potential donors.”

Loss of an “extraordinary natural environment”

The proposed subdivision and subsequent sale will adversely impact sensitive ecosystems and species-at-risk that have been able to co-exist with outdoor youth programs on the site, for decades. Even the Club recognizes this. In a September 2020 letter to Metchosin Council the Club's representative (Dalyce Dixon) described the property as an “extraordinary natural environment.” As a Metchosin resident, you can appreciate the regard for environmental stewardship many of us are working toward, particularly within the context of a rapidly growing Westshore region.

In their recent press coverage, Club representatives have suggested that, although they expect to receive full market value for the sub-divided 40-acre property, the buyer may decide to purchase it for parkland use. We doubt this. Within our region, the market value of parkland designated property is an order of magnitude less than the value of development holding property. Moreover, where conservation entities become involved in acquisition-related initiatives, significant lead time is required to enable fund-raising.

We respectfully request that your Ministry make contact with Club representatives and request that they meet with regional stakeholders to discuss their plans. We request time to work with the Club to identify and evaluate alternatives to the permanent loss of an irreplaceable regional asset that has supported much-needed outdoor youth programs for decades.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jay Shukin".

Jay Shukin, President
Association for the Protection of Rural Metchosin

cc: Mayor John Ranns & Council, District of Metchosin
APRM Executive