

EXCHANGE



EXCHANGE is a quarterly magazine published by the **Local Government Management Association (LGMA)** of British Columbia. It's about sharing information, exchanging ideas on best practices, enhancing professional development and building networks. Reach us at www.lgma.ca.

WINTER 2021



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES P14

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND COVID-19 P15

PENSION PLAN CHANGES P20



Workplace Mental Health: Managing the Shifting Landscape



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T: 250.712.1130
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EXCHANGE

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LGMA Office:
Suite 710A
880 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2B7
Telephone: 250.383.7032
Email: office@lgma.ca
Web: www.lgma.ca

Contact the Editor:
Email: editor@lgma.ca

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Pension Plan Changes: Major Update Planned for Municipal Pension Plan

The first major update to B.C.'s Municipal Pension Plan in five decades is under way. Read about the proposed changes anticipated to take effect on Jan. 1, 2022.



The pandemic will end, and the overall culture and health of organizations will largely be based on the work done now to support employees.

The crazy COVID days continue. It feels like a rollercoaster, with some sudden drops that take our breath away, unanticipated twists and turns, and a general feeling of nausea as we wonder when this ride will end. While the brief respite during the flattened curve in the summer was helpful, watching case numbers rise and seeing a return of restrictions is difficult. So it's not a surprise that health and safety fears and mental health issues are becoming more prevalent.

Unfortunately, hunkering down and hoping things will settle down on their own isn't realistic – especially when you are responsible for delivering essential services. Local governments don't have the option of just shutting down operations, and their employees are expected to show up for work and meet the needs of their community. The problem is those same employees are likely experiencing personal challenges – like kids or elderly family members who are cooped up or having to stay home more often, scary notices about COVID cases in schools, illness and fears about catching and spreading COVID-19, and the mental health impacts of dealing with a crisis that has been going on for months without a break.

The result is that local governments are facing the need to support employees, apply new workplace safety requirements and ensure that business operations continue without interruption. Fortunately, there is a lot of support and advice from experts to help navigate and apply viable solutions. In *Workplace Mental Health: Managing the Shifting Landscape*, experts in mental health and wellness and human resource management professionals share insights into how the prolonged pandemic is affecting employees, along with tips and resources for employers. They also highlight both the risks of not meeting employee mental health needs, as well as the benefits in the long-term, including more robust mental health support programs.

The impact of increased health safety concerns while requiring employees to come to work and maintain services is discussed further in *Business Continuity and COVID-19: Balancing Employee and Organizational Needs*. In particular, the pandemic has highlighted that while there is a difference between actual safety and the perception of safety, health safety concerns are affecting employees and need to be addressed. This involves more extensive communication to provide staff with details about the measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID, including regular updates as new information arrives and expanded protocols are put in place. As well, instead of just the legal requirements for duty to accommodate measures, there is a growing recognition that good management practice means we may need to be more flexible in how special accommodations are applied on a short-term basis.

With the continued pressure on local governments and their employees, it seems that we need to build on the advice from Dr. Bonnie Henry to “be kind, be calm and be safe” to include “be flexible, be patient and be accommodating” whenever possible. The pandemic will end, and the overall culture and health of organizations will largely be based on the work done now to support employees. Fortunately, there is a lot of great advice on how to take the right steps today to provide for effective business continuity and a more secure future.

Therese Mickelson, ABC
Editor



Look after yourselves, be safe and most importantly keep your chin up and continue to ride the wave!

As I look back on the last few months, we've seen and done a lot. We've gone through a general election here in B.C., celebrated Thanksgiving, Halloween and Remembrance Day, and Christmas will soon be upon us as well. We also watched the results of the United States general election with great interest. And we've done all of this in the midst of a continuing pandemic. That nasty COVID-19!

If you believe what you read in the news media, we're either in the fall spike that was predicted when the pandemic first started, or we are now in the second wave. Regardless of how you refer to it, COVID and its impacts are here for a while yet. In response, many of us as local government professionals have truly learned what it means to become resilient. More and more, we are now understanding how to "ride the wave" of a crisis that has kept us in emergency response mode longer than any other major disaster in recent history, and it is likely affecting us both personally and professionally.

Riding the wave is a term that was explained to me many years ago by a peer. The thought is that our work is a never-ending bunch of issues or things to deal with, one after the other – some more important or urgent than others. Resiliency is about learning how to stay on our feet as we ride the wave, as well as the one that is coming right after it. The next wave may be smaller, it may be larger; nevertheless, it will be coming. This has certainly been our experience with COVID-19. While we know that this pandemic will end at some point, many in local government, and dare I say anywhere in the province, are having a difficult time dealing with this new reality.

Your LGMA is no different. It also has some issues coming at it, and the LGMA Board and staff are determined to ride this wave. The stability of the LGMA will be of concern going into 2021 and beyond. Revenue is dropping – significantly. While this is the case, the LGMA – like local governments – is adapting, being flexible and learning to understand how it can continue to provide the great programs for which it is so well known. The LGMA continues to offer programs, webinars and seminars, etc. to assist you as local government professionals to continue to be resilient, adaptable and flexible to meet the continuing needs of your community members. Strong communities make a strong B.C., and that is good for everyone.

This is a good time to remind members and non-members alike that your LGMA has many programs that may be of assistance for those who feel that they may need extra support, want to learn new ways to manage themselves and their staff, need help dealing with day-to-day pressures, or perhaps to offer support for their peers through online chat or group sessions. See page 23 for upcoming programs scheduled for 2021, and page 14 for some of the tips and resources available to help with the COVID-19 impacts on our workplace and local government employees.

I encourage you to take advantage of these sessions, to look after yourselves, to be safe and most importantly keep your chin up and continue to ride the wave!

Bill Flitton
President



Staying mentally healthy, as difficult as that may be or has been for some, is how we will prevail and be successful, no matter what lies ahead.

Worry and stress seem to be the theme of many of the conversations I've been having with friends, family and colleagues the past few months. And it's not surprising, given what we are all living through in this most unusual of years. Who could have predicted all this? As we near the end of 2020, out of curiosity, I decided to go back and see what the astrologers had predicted for the year.

Here's what I found: "The underlying theme for the year 2020 will be self-betterment. The question is how does one define self-betterment? If you're smart, you will de-clutter and tidy up your world this year in order to promote a calm, peaceful environment for yourself. This year will bring scientific discoveries, medical breakthroughs and more technological inventions."

I can't argue with the theme of self-betterment and the promise of a medical breakthrough for COVID! For all of us, I suspect this year has been one that has tested our abilities to be the best we can be and to draw on our resources – personal, professional, family, community – to help us balance supporting our employees and colleagues and the challenges of the reality of living with the repercussions of a pandemic while also looking for opportunities to spark change and growth.

Staying mentally healthy, as difficult as that may be or has been for some, is how we will prevail and be successful, no matter what still lies ahead. We hope this issue of *Exchange* provides some ideas if you and your staff are struggling to maintain a healthy workplace and mindset. For me, learning and trying new things, even when they are super hard or uncomfortable, helps to activate a sense of progress and forward momentum. That has been essential to help offset the sense of loss of all the things we're not able to do or look forward to and to introduce new thinking and ways of looking at problems to avoid the sense that there is nothing positive or that change is impossible.

Tidying up my home office, as per the astrologers' prediction, has also become a weekly necessity, along with heading into the office a couple of times a week to avoid feeling trapped at home!

Finding joy in the mundane – being grateful to be a Canadian with good political leadership, a sound governance structure and excellent health care and to be living in beautiful B.C. – have all helped me keep a positive perspective. If you are having difficulty finding things to look forward to and adapting to this strange "new normal" we are living in, please seek professional support. Everyone should have an Employee and Family Assistance Program through their workplace. If you don't, please call the LGMA, and we will help connect you to supports.

As we turn the page on this year, you can look forward to great learning and training opportunities from the LGMA for local government professionals across B.C. in 2021. We have a lot of your favourite programs planned to run next year – offered virtually in most cases but with some limited in-person options – along with a wide variety of technical and leadership/management training options. The team at the LGMA has been working so hard to get these programs ready for you, along with our superb volunteer advisors and faculty, and we're excited to get them under way!

I want to thank the LGMA staff (Ana Fuller, Candace Witkowskyj, Adrian Paradis, Shannon Gustafsson and Randee Platz) and our advisors (Allison Habkirk, Peter Smith and Sonia Santarossa) for their incredible support, hard work and dedication to serving LGMA members and the local government profession this past year. It has been a tough year but one they can take pride in for all that they have contributed.

And thank you to all of our local government professionals across the province for the great work you have continued to do in your communities in the face of many unknowns.

Wishing all of you a very peaceful, safe and healthy holiday season and looking forward to 2021. We remain here for you and will continue to provide the services you need to learn, lead and grow together.

Nancy Taylor
Executive Director



By Pam Costanzo
Young Anderson Barristers & Solicitors

CASE of INTEREST

Respectful Workplace Policies Apply to All

With the changes to the workplace and our personal lives that have resulted from COVID-19 and the continuing uncertainty, the mental wellness of employees is at risk. There is also added stress in the workplace. It is more important than ever that all employees, even when they are acting as union officials, behave in a respectful manner.

In *Squamish (District) v. CUPE Local 2269*, [2020] B.C.C.A.A.A. No. 21 (Brown), the union filed two grievances concerning a respectful workplace investigation filed by a human resources (HR) advisor against a union president. The arbitrator considered whether a union official is immune from discipline for engaging in what were found to be personal and abusive statements.

The evidence was that the union president had confronted an HR advisor in her office, in front of others, and angrily accused her of disrespectful behaviour in grievance meetings. The meeting escalated to the point that another employee came over to say he was uncomfortable. There was also evidence that the president had sent the HR advisor multiple emails, copying others, accusing the HR advisor of poor behaviour. No grievance had been filed by the union, and the president had not filed a complaint against the HR advisor.

When the District appointed an investigator regarding the behaviour of the union president, the union cited the doctrine of union official immunity, and objected, arguing that the respectful workplace policy did not apply to union officials engaged in advocacy.

Ultimately the investigator found that the union president had breached the policy. She received a three-day disciplinary suspension. The union filed grievances concerning the investigation process and the discipline imposed.

Arbitrator Mark Brown dismissed both grievances, upholding the discipline. He found there were delays in the investigation, but they were not solely the fault of the District, and there was no evidence of prejudice to the union president. He found the president breached the District's respectful workplace policy when she sent the emails and confronted the HR advisor. Then he considered whether union officials were protected from the consequences of such a breach. He found that union officials enjoy protection from discipline when they "advocate in an assertive manner," but that they "cross a line when that debate goes 'beyond the boundaries of lawful union activity.'"

Advocacy by union officials cannot cross the line into bullying and harassment, according to a recent decision.

He found that the president was not advocating for her members when she made abusive comments directed personally at the HR advisor. He noted that employers have an obligation, under statute and the collective agreement, to provide a workplace free from bullying and that union official immunity did not allow union officials to potentially violate policies and legislation.

The union appealed this decision to the Labour Board (2020 BCLRB 95). The Board upheld the award. The union argued that management had an obligation to address the conduct with the president before filing a policy complaint and imposing discipline. The argument was that filing a complaint, rather than raising the issue at a labour management meeting, risked disempowering union officials. The union also argued that the arbitrator had misapplied the doctrine of union official immunity.

The Board found that the arbitrator turned his mind to the particular facts of this case when he found that the union president's conduct was not directed at advocating for members, but rather personally directed at the HR advisor. The Board found the arbitrator did not state union officials were never protected from respectful workplace complaints, but rather that the conduct in this case was not protected. The Board stated that the arbitrator was free to determine whether the District should have addressed the conduct short of imposing discipline.

This case is important for local governments because it confirms that union officials are not permitted to engage in conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment. While some latitude will be given to employees when they are acting as a union official, local government employers will have the ability to discipline employees when their conduct crosses the line into bullying and harassment. This is an important protection for exempt supervisors and managers who deal regularly with the union.

By Karin Mark

An illustration featuring a grey city skyline in the background. In the foreground, two hands in white shirts and black sleeves reach upwards from a dark grey, textured surface that resembles a virus or a globe. A third hand, also in a white shirt and black sleeve, is shown in the upper left corner, reaching downwards towards the other two hands.

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Managing the Shifting Landscape

More than ever, the pandemic has put the spotlight on mental health in the workplace.

As B.C. local governments continue to reel from the ever-changing effects of COVID-19, they are finding they need to ramp up their mental health supports as employees at all levels struggle with mounting stress, anxiety and other issues as the pandemic wears on.

“The pandemic has absolutely been a game changer for mental health awareness,” says Colleen Tillapaugh, Human Resources Manager for the City of Campbell River and an instructor in the MATI Managing People program. “Employers have to be mindful that many people, if not most, are experiencing some impact on their mental health now.”

It’s a brewing problem that can’t be ignored, particularly for organizations that are already stretched thin.

“Mental wellness has always been important for business productivity,” notes Paula Allen, Senior Vice-President of Research, Analytics and Innovation for Morneau Shepell, a human resources and technology company. “People get used to a certain level of opportunity and compromise. Since the pandemic that’s changed, and there’s been a massive decline in mental health across the board for working Canadians.”



Paula Allen

According to Morneau Shepell’s Mental Health Index – a monthly report that studies the mental health of employed Canadians – workplace mental health began to decline again in the fall, matching early pandemic levels after some gains over the spring and summer.

“Employers have to be mindful that many people, if not most, are experiencing some impact on their mental health now.”



Colleen Tillapaugh

About half of the respondents in October’s index survey reported needing some form of mental health support.

It’s not that mental health issues in the workplace are new. Rather, it’s that the pandemic has essentially thrown grease on the fire and is putting added pressure on already strained resources.

In recent years, more and more employers have been waking up to the need to take mental wellness seriously – something that has translated, in part, to increased mental health claims to benefits providers like Pacific Blue Cross, which supports 1.3 million British Columbians.

“Ten to 12 years ago, the discussion became more public,” says Mike Reid, Senior Manager, Client Relations/Health and Wellness Solutions for Pacific Blue Cross.

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“People have become more willing to talk about it now, but unfortunately, this important conversation has created unintended consequences in that it’s created a greater need for mental health resources,” Reid notes.

Even pre-pandemic, the available resources could not keep up with the growing demand. “COVID is exacerbating the need. We’re all working hard to deploy new and innovative solutions for a whole new cohort of mental health issues,” Reid says.

Mike Roberts, Executive Director of the British Columbia Municipal Safety Association (BCMSA), notes that prior to the pandemic, mental health issues were known to affect one in five people in local government.

“During the pandemic, what I’m hearing is one in every two working people are affected by mental health issues,” he says.



Mike Reid

In response to this concern, BCMSA partnered with workplace mental health expert Diana Vissers to develop a mental health discussion series along with the COVID-19 Psychological Support Toolkit for Workers and Employees, a series of free downloadable guides and videos. (See page 14 for more information.)

“From the polls we did during our discussion series, we found that 78 per cent of people were experiencing an advanced level of stress during the pandemic,” Roberts says. “It is affecting almost every single person in some way.”

If there is a silver lining to be found, it’s that the pandemic could lead to permanent improvements in how people talk about mental health and how workplaces deal with it.

“This is a watershed moment,” Roberts believes. “I think when people look back, they’ll say this period of time really changed the way we think about mental health.”

One of the big lessons being learned is that what happens at home doesn’t stay at home.

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“All the stuff that is not work-related has suddenly become work-related now.”



Mike Roberts

“Life is about more than just work, particularly during the pandemic,” Roberts notes. “You’re taking care of your children. Worrying about their school. Wondering about your elderly parents. Losing friends. All that stuff that is not work-related has suddenly become work-related now.”

Tillapaugh agrees. “The pandemic has brought a keen awareness of the concept of the whole person. There isn’t a switch that turns on or off when people enter the workplace, or a distinct separation between your home life and work life,” she says. “We’ve all heard of work-life balance or blend, but the pandemic has really brought it to the forefront.”

Also importantly, “we are talking more about what we need during the pandemic, and for some people it has really identified what they need to do their best,” Tillapaugh says.

The supports being put in place now are probably not going to go away, Allen predicts.

“When you have a trend that’s valuable for the majority, when it makes life better even in a small way, it sticks,” Allen notes. “Sometimes you have to unearth an unforeseen pain to get an unforeseen benefit.”

EFFECT ON EMPLOYEES

Morneau Shepell’s Mental Health Index identifies financial uncertainty as the strongest driver of mental health. The October report showed that while financial concerns dropped between April and August, they have crept up again in the fall as people have depleted their savings.

“Just the general economic uncertainty has impacted everyone, and it has impacted you worse on a personal level if you don’t have any savings,” Allen notes.

The index highlights social isolation as the second biggest determinant of mental wellbeing, as so many are now working from home and missing out on their social connections and support networks.

The BCMSA’s toolkit includes similar research that shows the impact of social isolation, social distancing, lack of connection, social support and physical contact has compounded what was already viewed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a loneliness crisis before the pandemic hit.

In the workplace, that isolation is resulting in missed opportunities to share ideas that can influence and improve people’s work and productivity. But there’s also an important social component to going to work that’s now missing, notes Vicki Gannon, Director of Corporate Services and Human Resources for the Township of Esquimalt and member of the LGMA’s Human Resources Advisory Committee.

“You come to the workplace not only to do your job, but for social connectivity,” Gannon says. “As an employer, we need to understand that and do what we can to keep it going.”



Vicki Gannon

Reid notes that online connection has not proven to be an adequate replacement for in-person interaction. “At the beginning of the pandemic, it was great – we had all pre-arranged Zoom calls and staff were socializing online – but the feeling is that trend has started to grow tired. You’re not seeing your friends from work, your colleagues and bosses,” he says.

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“For a lot of people, the isolation is causing the most stress,” Reid adds.

Working at home also interrupts the work-life balance – particularly for those who lack dedicated workspaces.

“A lot of people are just crawling out of their beds and walking to the dining room table,” Reid notes.

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“Your computer is always there. People are working longer and unable to avoid the stressors of work because it’s always right in front of them.”

Added to that, in many cases work expectations have remained the same while people’s lives have changed in a multitude of ways. “These stressors are a real thing and the longer the pandemic goes on, the more this type of stress is going to exist and become more problematic,” Reid notes.

This much is known: human beings don’t like change or uncertainty.

“Even positive change we find stressful,” Allen notes. “That whole adaptation of how we return to the office – it’s not just flipping on a switch. You still may be homeschooling your child. Your life is different. Your perspective is different.”

In fact, people are so averse to uncertainty that those who were laid off or lost their jobs tend to fare better mentally than those who have their hours or salary reduced, according to Morneau Shepell’s research. This should be of interest to local governments and employers so they are aware that even with the best intentions, some strategies for saving money have unexpected consequences and those affected need additional support.

Added up, the impact of all of these pressures can be severe. “We’ve seen a 30 per cent increase in suicidal ideation,” Allen relates. “We’ve seen domestic violence accelerate. We’ve seen people not being mindful of their own physical or mental health. We’ve also seen high risk of burnout.”

WHO identified burnout in 2019 for the first time as an “occupational phenomenon” affecting mental health in the workplace. This is exacerbated now, as demonstrated in Morneau Shepell’s Mental Health Index. Forty-one per cent of respondents indicated they were putting in more effort at work, and this increase aligned directly with the lowest mental health scores.

At the same time, work productivity has begun to slide again, almost returning to early pandemic levels after slight increases over the spring and summer. In the October Mental Health Index, 33 per cent of respondents said they had more difficulty concentrating, 39 per cent are more mentally or physically exhausted by the end of the workday, and 36 per cent found it more difficult to feel motivated to do work than before the pandemic.

Not all people are affected to the same degree, however.

“It has been interesting to see how people have responded,” Tillapaugh notes. “You see some people being quite impacted and finding it hard to move forward. And the opposite is also true – I’ve seen people stepping up in new ways and taking a strong leadership role and setting good examples. At the end of the day we’re all humans, and we’re all dealing with it as best we can.”

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“You never, ever forget how people related to you during a crisis.”

According to the BCMSA toolkit, certain segments of the population carry higher psychological risks at this time, including women, primary caregivers, young workers, those having existing mental or physical health challenges, immigrants, low-income families, and those with unsafe work, living arrangements or relationships.

The BCMSA toolkit also identifies alcohol and substance use as a growing risk that employers need to be aware of. A toolkit guide and companion video are dedicated to these topics.

RISKS FOR EMPLOYERS

How employers address mental wellness during the pandemic will have long-term effects on both costs and culture, Allen believes.

“The things we do now show themselves in cost later on. Your risk is absenteeism, higher disability costs, loss of productivity and other impacts,” she notes. “Organizations need to build a very mindful approach to mental health into their business. If you ignore it, it becomes a bigger problem. Things fester if people are not well. It’s a choice between planning for future disability costs or being preventative now.”

Morneau Shepell’s index shows that employees who perceive their employers as supporting their mental health have markedly better scores than those who feel they aren’t supported.

“You never, ever forget how people related to you during a crisis,” Allen says.

Even in the most supportive workplaces, the pandemic may be exposing weaknesses that proactive organizations should identify and address.

“There’s no doubt it’s having an effect on morale,” Tillapaugh says. “Where cracks may have existed before they become even greater in many cases.”

That is Reid’s experience as well at Pacific Blue Cross. “It doesn’t take much to change a culture to the negative. You really run the risk of alienating your employees,” he says.

“It’s also not responsible. Everything we do relies on employees – ultimately everything’s at stake,” he adds. “We’re a service-based company, if we don’t take care of our own people, they can’t take care of their clients.”

The same is true of local governments, which are serving their communities in more ways now than ever before. In terms of health and safety, Morneau Shepell’s research shows that two-thirds of Canadians believe their local governments are doing a good job of handling the health and safety risks of the pandemic. In addition, front-line workers are often being called upon to provide emotional support to community members while dealing with their own anxiety and stress.

“In July when we reopened, we had some very stressed residents,” Gannon recalls. “We see and hear what’s going on in the community. As a local government, we’re the first tier of government to the people. People look to us as a resource, and we need to support our people to make sure we’re able to be there for our community.”

ADVICE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The BCMSA toolkit provides leaders with five tips to share with their team:

- Demonstrate that “we are all in this together.” For example, ask how your employee is doing with COVID-19 or be flexible with an employee who has complicated family needs.
- Model clear work-life boundaries. For example, don’t send or read emails after hours.

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- Maintain confidentiality/respect privacy. For example, tell employees about how you will keep their information confidential.
- Provide access to care and resources. For example, find out and share the phone number for counseling available through work.
- Do self-care especially when work demands are increased. For example, set one hour a day without phone or technology access for connecting with your family and friends.

Other suggestions from the experts:

■ **Communication is key.** At stressful times such as these, more information is always better than not enough. As well, simply talking and listening to shared experiences can go a long way to making employees feel heard.

“This is an equal opportunity situation – everyone has had some challenges,” Allen notes. “Just sharing that helps to normalize it. Employers really need to show a lot of empathy right now.”

Allen said some employers are dedicating specific times to discuss concerns, anxiety and mental health as an issue that people are experiencing. Staff surveys can also help employers “take the temperature” at the workplace and guide their response.

What you say matters as well. Gannon stressed the importance of leading by example.

“Trust, teamwork, transparency and respect – we need to let staff know these are very important to us as a leadership team,” she says, but adds: “Staff also need to understand that we may make mistakes, but we can move on. None of us has gone through a pandemic before.”

Acknowledge layoffs openly, Gannon recommends, and help staff understand why they were necessary. As well, recognize that staff are taking on different roles and tasks right now, such as cleaning.

“You have to keep people motivated in different ways. Give them kudos for what they are doing,” Gannon says.

Tillapaugh agrees: “Local governments perform meaningful work and it makes a difference. It’s important to emphasize that collective vision and mission right now – that what we’re doing makes a difference.”

■ **Be flexible.** Now is the time for flexibility with employees, particularly those with children or who are struggling with remote work situations.

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STEWART McDANNOLD STUART
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A nine-to-five schedule may not work for all, but split shifts might. The key is to find ways to support employees so that they can continue to contribute.

■ **Be vigilant.** As the months of remote work continue, employers need to come up with ways to keep their at-home workers engaged and healthy.

“We need to look for new triggers to see if people are struggling, if they don’t come forward and ask for help. What’s their level of engagement? Is the work starting to slip?” Reid says. “So much of supporting our employees comes from seeing them – seeing how they behave, changes in body language and appearance. It’s easy when we see them in person

.....
“We need to look for new triggers to see if people are struggling.”
.....

and on a regular basis. Now we just don’t have that ability.

“At Pacific Blue Cross, we’ve increased the frequency of when we see our teams. There’s more discussion around, ‘How’s life? How are things going at home?’”

Leaders must also take care of themselves, mentally and physically, to be at their best.

“It’s the oxygen mask theory,” Tillapaugh adds. “You have to take care of yourself before you can help take care of someone else.”

■ **Be creative in promoting well-being.** At Campbell River, for example, lunchtime mindfulness meditation sessions have become popular with staff. Employees there were also surveyed on what they do to improve their wellbeing, and the results were then shared with all staff.

Esquimalt has organized weekly wellness webinars by professionals, such as a registered nurse, with positive results. Effort is also made to maintain the personal connection between staff, Gannon says. “You can still keep those connections. It’s a bit harder during the pandemic, but you can still do it.”

■ **Identify and promote resources.** Publicize existing employee and family assistance programs to staff – including mental health, financial and legal counselling services – and consider extending them to contract workers. Many of these services are available online or by phone, with growth this year in internet-based cognitive therapy and other digital resources.

“These are strong, valid effective methods that you can use any time or anywhere,” Allen says. “I do believe long term we’ll see people continue to be using them.”

Digital training is also available to educate managers in communication and supporting mental wellness.

■ **Revisit remote work practices.** It’s now clear that remote work will be with us for some months to come.

Make sure home offices that were set up on the fly in the early days of the pandemic are ergonomic and suitable for long-term use.

“We’re going to see an influx of low back issues, neck strains, repetitive strains and other problems if people continue to work with inadequate equipment and remote work situations,” Reid notes. “We need to focus on how we’re going to support people over the long term.”

Continued on page 14



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■ **Keep the big picture in mind.** In the end, it's a simple trade-off: support employees now so that they can effectively continue to support the organization.

“The whole goal is to have people healthy and in the right frame of mind to be productive and engaged at work. By not addressing it, we're certainly not helping people be at their best,” Tillapaugh says. “How we respond to people's needs now will have a long-term impact on the relationship. People will remember.”

Allen encourages employers to consider mental health supports as an investment.

“The main takeaway is we all have to be more active about taking care of our mental health. We can't be passive and take things one day at a time without thinking of it,” she says. “If only for the bottom line, it's an investment in resilience.”



tips & tactics

Resources for Supporting Employee Mental Health During COVID-19

COVID-19 Psychological Support Toolkit for Workers and Employees

The BC Municipal Safety Association partnered with workplace mental health expert Diana Vissers to develop this free, made-in-B.C. multimedia toolkit to help local governments navigate the heightened mental health issues COVID-19 is bringing to their workplaces.

Available at www.bcmsa.ca, it includes a series of downloadable guides and videos featuring background information and research, assessment tools, coping strategies and other resources.

The toolkit provides practical information and resources on:

- Identifying psychological impacts and needs due to COVID-19;
- Skills for communicating effectively with people experiencing psychological distress;
- Exploring substance use and impacts during COVID-19; and
- Support for managers and leaders in how to respond to their team's psychological needs during COVID-19, both for on-site and remote workers.

The fifth video in the series features a panel discussion by leaders from a variety of industries on COVID-19 and its effects on mental wellness in the workplace.

Additional Mental Health Supports

- BC Municipal Safety Association's Pandemic Exposure Control/COVID-19 page at www.bcmsa.ca with best practices information and links for local governments, including guidelines for essential safety protocols and physical distancing in vehicles.
- British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner COVID-19 information: www.bchumanrights.ca/key-issues/covid-19
- Morneau Shepell resources:
 - Coping with COVID-19: www.morneaushepell.com/ca-en/tips-coping-covid-19
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- WellCan app with articles and tools for mental, physical social and financial wellbeing: free download from Apple Store or Google Play.
- Pacific Blue Cross COVID-19 resource centre: www.pac.bluecross.ca/covid19
- Wellness Together free 24/7 mental health and substance use supports: <https://ca.portal.gs>
- Province of B.C. virtual mental health supports: see link at www.gov.bc.ca/covid19
- BounceBack, a free skill-building program for managing mental health issues: www.bouncebackbc.ca

BUSINESS CONTINUITY & COVID-19

BALANCING EMPLOYEE AND ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

By Karin Mark

Local governments don't have the option of cancelling essential services such as fire protection, garbage collection, water and sewage. But what happens when something beyond their control threatens the stable workforce they rely on to provide these services?

As the short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic are felt by organizations and individuals, local governments and other employers are reporting high levels of staff anxiety and fear about returning to the workplace – and even, in some extreme cases, refusal to do so. This poses risks for local governments and their ability to maintain business continuity and provide essential services during the crisis.

Given what's at stake, it's critical that B.C.'s local governments understand not only their legal obligations as employers, such as duty to accommodate requirements, but also the potential ramifications of how their policies, workplace safety plans, actions and communication affect employees – and ultimately the community – in this crisis situation.

Creating Workplaces that Are Safe – and Feel Safe

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how perceptions of safety risks can be just as challenging to deal with as actual safety risks.

While B.C.'s Occupational Health and Safety Regulation gives employees the right and responsibility to refuse unsafe work, that determination isn't made subjectively. It is not a matter of "Do you feel safe?" but rather a matter of "Is the workplace safe?" This safety assessment requires a formal process that always begins internally, with a report to the supervisor that must be acted on by the employer – sometimes with the involvement of the joint health and safety committee, explains Lisa Houle, WorkSafeBC's Manager of Occupational Health and Safety Consultation and Education Services for Municipalities, Arts, Tourism and Hospitality.

Employers are required to inform their employees of their right and obligation to refuse unsafe work and to have an internal process in place to address and resolve formal complaints.

As a last resort, unresolved matters are reported to WorkSafeBC for intervention. But simply having open conversations about workplace safety – and what is being done to address concerns – can sometimes stop issues from escalating to that level, Houle says.

This is especially important amid the stress and anxiety related to health and safety during the pandemic. Employee fears and concerns need to be addressed, whether they are about perceived risks or real ones.

"In this time of added tension, it may help to remind people of their rights and responsibilities," she says. "You want to create an environment where people can come forward to work things out."



Lisa Houle

Organizations are also encouraged to apply this same spirit of openness, inclusiveness and transparency to preparing and updating their required COVID-19 safety plans.


On the whole, Houle says, B.C.'s local governments have been working hard on their plans. "It's being taken seriously by local government employers," she says, noting that more than 222 COVID-19 inspections for the public sector had taken place by early November.

Maintaining a comprehensive, up-to-date plan and providing training can go a long way to reducing anxiety among staff. Employers are also required to post their plans online and on-site, an important step for promoting transparency, Houle says. "You want to show both the public and your workers that you're taking workplace safety seriously."

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To create effective plans as well as buy-in among staff, Houle strongly recommends involving employees in developing and updating safety plans. “Think about who’s putting the plans together. Include the people who are actually doing the work. It shouldn’t be someone sitting in an office making a plan for everyone else,” she says.

Here is a round-up of best practices from Houle for making sure safety plans are both effective and promote buy-in:

- Post the plan prominently and make sure employees know about it.
- Continue to update your plan as health protocols, people and other situations change – for example, as different sites reopen, as staff return or are hired, or as seasonal jobs like snow removal begin.
- Make sure workers are involved in plan updates.
- Take a coordinated approach to the various safety plans in place throughout the organization for different sites, departments and duties.
- Be on the lookout for new risks and unintended consequences. For example, is that large order of hand sanitizer creating a fire hazard? Are different or fewer people doing work, potentially leading to injuries?

- Create regular opportunities for employees to talk about workplace safety and identify emerging issues, such as a designated time at staff meetings.
- Review plans, protocols and procedures regularly, and particularly when they change.
- Be aware that local government plans must cover not only their own activities but those carried out by contractors or other employers working on their sites.

Overall, Houle recommends more frequent and in-depth communication – including sharing the reasoning behind decisions.

“It’s important to get on top of things before the rumour mill takes over. There are a lot of opportunities for misinformation when it comes to COVID-19,” she says.

“People may get upset because they can’t see why rules may be applied differently, such as why some sites are open and others are not,” she adds. “People have a lot of questions. It’s worth taking the time to talk to workers about the effort and thought that goes into a decision. Share with employees not just the what but the why.”

Duty to Accommodate and COVID-19

When it comes to duty to accommodate, there’s the law, and then there’s recommended human resources practices to support employees in a prolonged crisis. Human rights laws in B.C. and Canada require employers to accommodate employees with a disability – including mental health issues – to the point of undue hardship, such as excessive cost or safety impacts on others in the workplace.

However, the duty to accommodate only applies when an employee has a disability and does not generally apply to fears and concerns about COVID-19 as long as employers are meeting their WorkSafeBC requirements, notes Carolyn MacEachern, a partner at Young Anderson Barristers & Solicitors. Further, employers that provide a safe workplace are not obligated to provide employees the option of working from home or other accommodation who are fearful about COVID-19 unless they have a disability that requires one.



Carolyn MacEachern

It boils down to this: because local governments are required to provide services at this time, they need their employees to show up for work. However, it should also be noted that B.C.’s *Employment Standards Act* requires employers to provide unpaid job-protected leave when employees can’t work due to medical conditions, quarantine, child care or other COVID-related circumstances.

That said, even though local governments are technically not required by law to address employees’ general anxieties about COVID, MacEachern suggests a more understanding approach is warranted given the upheaval in people’s home and work lives.

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“From a human resources perspective, employees are understandably anxious and feeling overwhelmed about COVID and the economic uncertainty it has created,” says MacEachern, who has practised labour, employment and human rights law for more than 20 years.

“Local governments must meet their COVID WorkSafeBC obligations, but beyond that, they may also want to consider temporary changes to the workplace that support their employees’ mental wellbeing while still allowing the organization to continue to operate and provide services,” she says. “Local governments have been working hard to achieve this balance since the pandemic started.”

MacEachern notes that local governments that are considering accommodating a staff member’s needs should do so on a case-by-case basis to assess each unique situation, such as the individual’s limitations, the nature of their work, whether duties can be performed remotely or in another way, or whether alternative hours or duties may suffice.

“Do not make decisions based on assumptions; base them on the facts of the individual situation,” she advises, adding that if an accommodation is offered, “it should be reasonable but does not need to be perfect.”

“Be proactive if an employee appears to be struggling.”

As well, if their hours or duties change, employees are only entitled to be paid for the hours and wage level of the work performed, MacEachern adds.

To head off potential issues, she recommends local governments encourage a culture where employees can freely talk about their fears about COVID-19, are aware of the services available to them (such as the Employee and Family Assistance Program), and are immediately updated about new protocols or changes to their workplace.

“Be proactive if an employee appears to be struggling,” MacEachern recommends. “And don’t forget to ensure those working from home are engaged and connected.”

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tmcneil-hay@fultonco.com



Devin Buchanan

dbuchanan@fultonco.com



Kaitlyn Cumming

kcumming@fultonco.com



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Colleen Tillapaugh, Human Resources Manager for the City of Campbell River for the past 12 years, notes the challenge faced by local governments is that they want to support struggling employees but also need their full staff complement to function properly.

Instead of entering into a formal accommodation arrangement, Tillapaugh recommends employers first consider other ways they could utilize the employee to his or her strengths. Having employees conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis on themselves may help identify how they can continue to provide value, she says.

One potential approach for managing those resistant to returning to work is to treat them like a disability management case, with extra check-ins from supervisors and discussions to identify key concerns. “Maybe exploring the issue will help you address it in a creative way,” she says.

At the same time, it’s important that employees understand that any measures are temporary.




“We need to be clear that during the pandemic we are being more flexible and understanding because of the unusual circumstances,” she says.

“In general, we need to be a bit more flexible. It’s not a free-for-all – there are still rules – but it’s important to understand that people’s needs will be different.”

Employers should also consider how others in the organization may perceive the steps taken to support individual employees. “There’s often a fair amount of judgment that comes with accommodation. The reasons aren’t always widely known – and they shouldn’t be – and we as humans tend to fill in the gaps and make assumptions,” she says.

But overall, Tillapaugh advises managers to put themselves in their employees’ shoes during these uncertain times. “In general, we need to be a bit more flexible. It’s not a free-for-all – there are still rules – but it’s important to understand that people’s needs will be different.”

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“If you have an employee who’s refusing to be reasonable, you can’t just ignore it.”

Tillapaugh adds: “Some managers may be tempted to take a hard line, particularly with people who have a history of taking advantage. Now is the time to be extending your hand, not flexing your muscles.”

Vicki Gannon, Director of Corporate Services and Human Resources for the Township of Esquimalt, agrees that the approaches that worked pre-pandemic may not be appropriate now.

While the rules around duty to accommodate haven’t changed, “there is an expectation for employers to be reasonable during these trying times. We have to be reasonable and flexible and transparent.”

For example, employers may need to allow for more sick time or be more flexible. This includes accommodating parents with daycare issues, such as if children need to stay home from school because of a runny nose.

That being said, there needs to be a recognition across the organization that people’s jobs are essential to the local government’s services. “If you have an employee who’s refusing to be reasonable, you can’t just ignore it – that’s one of the worst things you can do. You have to deal with the behaviours,” Gannon says.

For those anxious about coming in to work, a frank conversation can often get to the root of the problem and sometimes uncover unfounded fears. “Education and communication are key, always.”

It’s this focus on communication that led Esquimalt to develop specific COVID-19 policies to guide managers and staff, including one for people working from home and another for employees, contractors and others who access Township workplaces.

This latter COVID-19 attendance policy, an addendum to Esquimalt’s attendance management policy, provides in-depth information on topics such as:

- COVID-19 information about symptoms and how it is spread;
- Workplace safety procedures, including staying at home if sick, practising physical distancing and mask-wearing, cleaning of work areas and hand hygiene;
- Safety expectations outside the workplace, such as following the direction of the Provincial Health Officer;
- Rules governing attendance and absenteeism when people are exposed to COVID-19, have travelled or have symptoms;
- The new unpaid job-protected leave provisions in the Employment Standards Act and Township requirements for demonstrating a need for leave; and
- Discipline for non-compliance.

Gannon says the documents, which have been widely distributed, alleviated much of the previous uncertainty.

“Esquimalt developed the COVID-19 policy because we were getting a lot of questions and wanted to ensure we were all on the same page,” she says. “Now staff knows what to do in all of these situations.”

Gannon also recommends that directors and managers use the 8-1-1 health information line as a resource. “If an employee has COVID-like symptoms, call 8-1-1. If they’re living with someone exposed, call 8-1-1,” she says. “The provincial government has taken the responsibility for health, and we need to rely on that. They are the decision-makers here regarding what steps to take around exposure, or potential exposure, to the COVID virus.”

See Tips & Tactics on page 14 for more advice and resources.



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Pension Plan Changes

Major Update Coming to Municipal Pension Plan

The first major update to B.C.'s Municipal Pension Plan (MPP) in more than five decades is under way, with a number of proposed changes anticipated to take effect Jan. 1, 2022.

One of Canada's largest pension plans, the MPP has about 210,000 active members who work for about 930 public-sector employers across the province, including local governments. The proposed changes will not impact the defined benefit for the 105,000-plus retired MPP members currently collecting pensions; however, it does affect all members in that it will increase the long-term sustainability of the plan, improve cost-of-living adjustments and support a new health benefit trust.

Based on a request by the MPP board, the plan partners have been conducting a comprehensive review of the plan to balance the needs of members and employers, with the key goals being:

- Improving equity and pension amounts for members,
- Aligning benefits with how most members use them,
- Setting up the plan for long-term sustainability, and
- Maintaining the current cost envelope.

During the review, the plan partners sought in-depth legal, actuarial and policy advice, reviewed and analyzed demographic data and retirement trends, and conducted numerous costing exercises.

All unions and employers in MPP were involved in the discussions leading up to the proposed changes. The process also included member and employer engagement from Sept. 14 to Oct. 23, 2020 through call centres, webinars, townhall and Q&A sessions, member and employer newsletters and submitted questions.

The impact of the proposed changes may vary based on group, but in essence, they will improve equity while increasing the lifetime pension amount for the vast majority of members. This will be achieved by introducing a flat accrual rate, moving to a single contribution rate and removing the bridge benefits and early retirement subsidies to which only some members had access.

Improving equity, pension amounts for members and plan sustainability are among the key goals of the MPP update.

Members who intend to maximize current early retirement options may experience negative impacts due to the proposed changes. A temporary annuity option is available and may assist with those plans.

The proposed changes are intended to take effect Jan. 1, 2022, which means they would only affect service after Dec. 31, 2021. Any pension bridge amounts and early retirement calculations earned before that date would not change.

The plan partners believe the proposed changes, in addition to those implemented over the last few years, represent the best set of options to greatly improve equity in the plan, provide benefit improvements for most plan members, and protect the plan's sustainability into the future.

Members are encouraged to learn more at www.mppredesign.ca, a comprehensive source of information that will be live until mid-2021.

Local government employees can find in-depth details in the website's Effects on Members section (General Members page), which includes video links explaining the changes as well as information about pension options, temporarily annuity options for accessing funds before age 65, and a calculator to see how the proposed changes will affect their pension.

Information about the MPP can also be found at www.mpp.pensionsbc.ca.



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We congratulate this year's deserving award winners:

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- David Allen, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Courtenay (recently retired)
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- Brent Molnar, Director of Engineering and Development Services, City of Colwood
- Sharon Byrch, Manager, Information Services, Capital Regional District
- Sophie Loehrich, Records and Privacy Manager, City of Surrey
- Lauren Hewson, Information, Privacy and Administrative Services Manager, City of Coquitlam
- Vicki Gannon, Director of Corporate Services and Human Resources, Township of Esquimalt
- Ellen Jackson, Senior Manager of Human Resources, Comox Valley Regional District
- Susan Ney, Retired Human Resources Director
- Gerry Parker, Senior Manager of Human Resources, Sunshine Coast Regional District



Paul Murray receives the 2020 President's Award from Past President Ron Bowles.

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- Harmony Huffman (University of Victoria)
- Janelle Taylor (Thompson Rivers University)

Meet the LGMA Board

The 2020-2021 Board of Directors was acclaimed at the 2020 Annual General Meeting held virtually on Oct. 16.

A recording and minutes from the AGM can be viewed at www.lgma.ca/annual-general-meetings. Please welcome:



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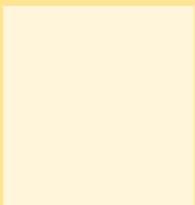
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MEMBERS PAGE

MEMBER MOVEMENT

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Heather Nelson-Smith, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Port Hardy (formerly Director of Corporate Services, District of Port Hardy)

Yun Ke (David) Ni, Finance Director, Township of South Stormont, Ontario (formerly Director of Finance, District of Houston)

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MEMBER MOVEMENT (CONT.)

Bob Norton, Deputy Fire Chief for Community Safety, City of Fort St. John (formerly Fire Chief and Bylaw Officer, District of Hudson's Hope)

Mokles Rahman, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Hudson's Hope (formerly Public Works Director, District of Hudson's Hope)

David Schroeter, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Fort St. James (formerly Economic Development Officer, District of Fort St. James)

Lyle Smith, Director of Finance, District of Peachland (formerly Chief Financial Officer, Peace River Regional District)

Jennifer Thompson, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Tumbler Ridge (formerly Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Lanigan, Saskatchewan)

Lynn Wark, Director of Recreation and Culture, City of Nanaimo (formerly Recreation and Culture Manager, City of Campbell River)

Selina Williams, Director of Corporate Services, District of Oak Bay (formerly Director of Corporate Services, City of Colwood)

Andrew Young, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Invermere (formerly Chief Administrative Officer, District of Taylor)

Jim Zaffino, Finance Manager, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (formerly Chief Administrative Officer, City of West Kelowna)

RETIREMENTS

David Allen, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Courtenay

Heather Avison, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Terrace

Irma Breitreutz, Deputy Municipal Clerk, District of Coldstream

Chris Cvik, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Hudson's Hope

Cindy Denomme, Executive Assistant, District of Oak Bay

Dave Dyer, General Manager, Infrastructure Service and Public Works, City of Prince George

Lynda Flynn, Chief Administrative Officer, Squamish Lillooet Regional District

Suzanne Garand, Director of Corporate Administration Services, City of Fernie

Alberto de Feo, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Lake Country

Dianne Hunter, City Manager, City of Fort St. John

Mitch Moroziuk, Director of Development and Engineering, City of Penticton

2021 LGMA PROGRAMS & EVENTS

January 14
FOI and Privacy Fundamentals – Webinar

January 26 - March 9
Corporate Officers Fundamentals – Online Course

February 4, 11, 18
Advanced Supervisor Essentials – Online Course

Most programs and events will be held online in 2021. Formats include:

- Virtual – An event, workshop or conference held online
- Online course – A multi-day course using an online learning platform with exercises, coaching and assignments
- Webinar – An online seminar offered in a single day

Learn more at www.lgma.ca/programs-training

February 25
Records Management Fundamentals – Webinar

March 10
CAO Forum – Virtual and satellite locations

April 6 - May 14
MATI Managing People in Local Government – Online Course

April 7
Where to Spend Your Media Budget – Webinar

April 13, 20, 27
Bylaw Drafting – Online Course

May TBC
Public Hearings – Webinar

May 17 - June 25
MATI Advanced Communication Skills for Local Government – Online Course

June 9-10
Approving Officers Workshop – Virtual

June 16-17
LGMA Annual Conference – Virtual

June 23
Managing FOI/Disclosure Requests – Webinar

August-December
Foundations of Local Government – Virtual

September 9
FOI Advanced – Webinar

October 4, 5, 12, 19
Effective Report Writing – Online Course

October 21-22, Nov 1-3
MATI School for Statutory Approving Officers – Virtual and in person TBC

October 29
Corporate Officer Forum – Virtual and satellite locations

November 10, 17, 24
Minute Taking – Online Course

2021 PARTNER PROGRAMS & EVENTS

February 3-4
Local Government Leadership Academy – Online course

May 9 - 13
International Institute of Municipal Clerks Annual Conference Grand Rapids, Michigan TBC

May 26 - 28
Government Finance Officers Association of BC Annual Conference Victoria, BC

May 31 - June 2
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators Annual Conference – Virtual

TBC
Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario Annual Conference – Virtual



Nanaimo boasts an incredible island lifestyle, with a stunning setting, enriching amenities, a vibrant economy and welcoming people. And the world-famous Nanaimo Bar, of course.

OUR TOWN: CITY OF NANAIMO

Push aside your Slice, New York; it's called a Nanaimo Bar.

The chocolatey, custard-layered, crumbly treat has made Nanaimo internationally famous, and although you may find it out there under another name (New York Slice, London Fog Bar), make no mistake, it's ours. And it's the best sweet treat out there! (Yeah, we're proud of it. A little ego never hurt anyone, right?)

Nanaimo though, is so much more than a dessert city, and while there are more than three dozen different versions of the delight that can be found on the Nanaimo Bar Trail, the true equation that makes up our City is simply this: stunning setting + enriching amenities + vibrant economy + welcoming people = an incredible island lifestyle.

Built on the traditional lands of the Snuneymuxw people, our community has nearly 100,000 people and is still growing. People live, work, play and thrive here.

Throughout the city, traditional Coast Salish art and ever-changing modern art welcome one and all while highlighting the positive energy that makes up our community.

For visitors, one glimpse from the deck of an approaching BC Ferries vessel and Nanaimo stands out as a community built on a hill, with plenty of ups and downs on winding roadways. Our sunrises are blindingly brilliant. The sun appears from just behind the distant coastal mountains across the Salish Sea, while our gentle sunsets settle higher up behind Mount Benson. We are indeed a harbour city nestled between the water and the hills.

We have so much harbour that we've adopted "the Harbour City" as our slogan, but thanks to our central location on Vancouver Island, we're also the go-to transportation and distribution hub north of the Malahat Mountain. In 2019, we saw more than 4.6 million tons of cargo come through Nanaimo's port facilities.

For off-island travel, we have two BC Ferries terminals that connect us to the mainland, an all-weather airport that offers direct flights to Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto, helicopter service and various seaplane connections linking Nanaimo to downtown Vancouver and Richmond.

Despite the waterway between us, we're just a 20-minute flight to Vancouver, which makes us a great bedroom community. In fact, many Vancouverites are now selling their condos and buying a full-size home in Nanaimo with money to spare. For Vancouverites that can work at least part-time remotely, it's an excellent work-life choice. And the flight from Nanaimo to downtown Vancouver is proving to be a much faster commute than driving through Vancouver's rush hour to its outlying districts. For retirees, we have great medical services and amenities that make it a first-choice retirement move.

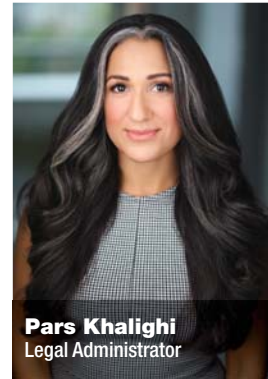
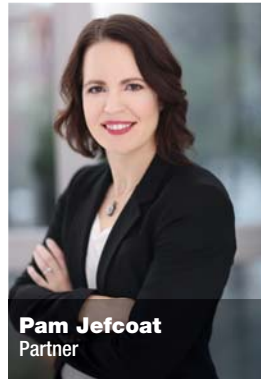
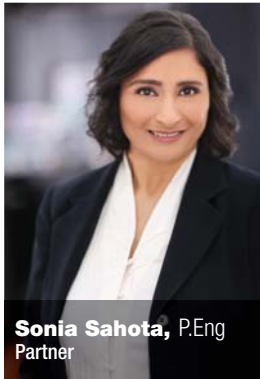
Technology continues to be a silent catalyst for Nanaimo's growth. We have a complete range of telecommunications services, a talented workforce and a first-rate university. It's all helping to support and develop our business sector. This confidence in our economy is also reflected in the record-breaking number of recent development projects, with \$445.3 million in approved building permits in 2019.

With a pandemic in play, outdoor activity has been more appealing than ever, and Nanaimo has plenty to do outside. We have over 880 hectares of parks and 170 kilometres of trails to hike through. We also have a new inclusive and accessible playground at Maffeo-Sutton Park, our destination waterfront location. The more adventurous often climb to the top of Mt. Benson, ride through our endless kilometres of mountain bike trails, or kayak around Saysutchun (Newcastle) Island. We even have a disc golf course.

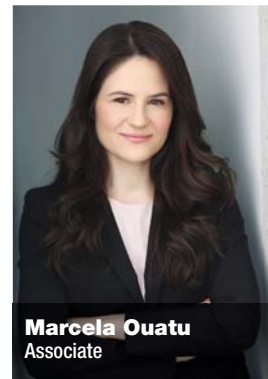
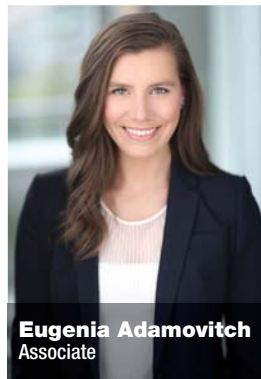
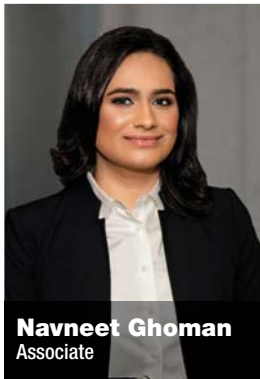
Our facilities add to our active, island lifestyle as well. We have an internationally known BMX bike park, a pump track, a brand new mountain bike skills park and skate parks. We also have a new artificial turf field, a new covered lacrosse box, four ice arenas, an outdoor and two indoor pools, a public gymnasium and fitness facilities.

There's a lot more to Nanaimo than can be shared in a one-page article. Just remember, we have an incredible lifestyle and a lot more to offer - and to brag about - than just a Nanaimo bar... but mmm, that Nanaimo bar is really, really good too. So good it's worth borrowing, right New York?

— Derek Johnstone, *City of Nanaimo Communications and Digital Content Specialist*



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