Comox Strathcona Waste Management

Minutes

REGIONAL SOLID WASTE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes from the hybrid meeting held on February 7, 2025, in the CVRD Civic Room and via Zoom commencing at 10:00 am

PRESENT:

W. Cole-Hamilton	Co-Chair, RSWAC
D. Baar	Campbell River
D. Birtch	Campbell River
W. Semmelink	Comox
J. Best	Courtenay/Cortes Island
K. Lovely	Cumberland
K. Stubblefield	CVRD Area C
R. Telegus	Denman Island
M. Jeffs	Sayward
M. Stewart	SRD Area D
C. Thompson, Manager of Solid Waste Services	City of Courtenay
C. Perry, Engineering Manager	Town of Comox
A. Milwid, First Nations Liaison	SRD
M. Tatchell, Chief Administrative Officer	Village of Tahsis
C. Melvin	Island Health
L. Eason, CSWM Community Educator	Consultant
M. Rutten, General Manager of Engineering Services	CVRD
V. Schau, Senior Manager of CSWM Services	CVRD
S. Willie, Manager of Solid Waste Planning & Policy Development	CVRD
K. Broughton, Manager of Financial Planning	CVRD
L. Koorn, Senior Financial Analyst	CVRD
B. Meagher, Branch Assistant	CVRD

ITEMS:

1. **Review of Agenda and Minutes**

   Co-Chair W. Cole-Hamilton acknowledged that the meeting is being hosted on the traditional unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, and the Comox Strathcona Waste Management (CSWM) service area is located in the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Nuu-chah-nulth territories.

The committee reviewed the minutes of the November 28, 2024, Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee (RSWAC) meeting and no errors or omissions were noted. The advisory committee adopted the January 23, 2025, meeting agenda.

2. Financial Update

- **Board feedback**

V. Schau reviewed the 2025-2029 CSWM Financial Plan with the committee. It sets the framework for SWMP recommendations. Implications of current political climate with tariffs being considered. Operating budget projections over next five years show a year-to-year increase. Revenue needs to be applied against operating budget. The proposed budget from November 2024 recommended increased taxation from $5,000,000 to $6,000,000 to build up reserves (making up for the $1,000,000 lost through the COVID recovery plan) and minimize future debt load. Service has gone through capital-intensive period with organics facility, cell 2 construction, Campbell River flare and Campbell River landfill closure resulting in debt. Upcoming capital costs include Cells 1 and 2 partial closures, construction of Cell 3 and closure of remote landfills. Finance recommended building revenue to avoid future debt for ten-year capital plan. Long-term debt servicing is approaching $36,000,000 with the maximum $45,000,000 approved. Board directed CSWM to lower proposed tax requisition increase by $500,000 and expressed preference for user-pay model.

- **Tip fee changes recommended**

Staff analyzed tipping fee increases and strategically targeted high-volume waste stream categories, e.g. construction and demolition (CnD) waste and industrial, commercial, institutional (ICI)/household waste. Municipal curbside collection not included increases to avoid impacting customer base with set contracts in place. CnD will increase from $155/tonne to $205/tonne. Self-haul and ICI waste will increase from $155/tonne to $165/tonne. Other minor adjustments were made with organics and multi-family pilots. Partnership with some big box stores being explored and drywall fees updated. Increase in CnD fees will make up $500,000 originally proposed to come from taxation.

- **2025 uncertainty**

Recommended budget passed last week highlights reduction in 2025 taxation by $500,000, new revenue increase through tipping fees, and surplus to be transferred to capital reserves for future expenditures. CSWM has broken down residential tax impact to show annual cost per household. CSWM is working with Finance to create Operating Reserve Policy, Capital Reserve Policy, Debt Management Strategy, and Funding Model User Fees and Charges Policy.

Advisory comments:

S. Willie – CnD tipping fee increase won't come into effect until October 2025 to provide sufficient notice. Other tipping fee increases proposed for April 2025.

M. Tatchell – Has there been consideration given to increasing drywall and asbestos fees?

S. Willie and V. Schau – Drywall has been increased slightly. There is incentive to keep fees affordable to avoid hazardous materials being disposed of unsafely and illegally. Looked at costs with partners who take this waste. CSWM is mindful of keeping asbestos disposal costs down.

M. Tatchell – Are you mitigating the operating budget to manage the risk of tariffs?

V. Schau – We passed the budget last Thursday with pending tariffs in mind. CSWM is working to identify key items in budget from a capital standpoint. We are looking to defer $360,000 in fleet vehicle replacement, which will be likely the hardest hit. There are more than 300 line items in the 391 budget, with fuel is the biggest factor if oil is targeted.

A. Milwid – Can you clarify the figures on tipping fees?

S. Willie – There's still a $10 minimum charged for small loads. Rates are prorated per tonne.

R. Telegus – I'm curious about the asset planning model.

K. Broughton – The Asset Management Policy is comprehensive and covers the whole landfill site, vehicles, capital costs, and life cycling costs.

V. Schau – We will include the Asset Management Policy passed at the last Board meeting with the minutes.

M. Rutten – CSWM also passed an asset management plan a few years ago. It's an inventory of all assets looking at their condition and expected lifespan to determine how much money needs to be set aside to look after them. We're looking to better enhance our maintenance systems and asset management systems.

3. Outline of 2025 SWMP Steps

- **Agenda highlights for meeting**

S. Willie highlighted that we may not need all meeting times on hold. Time will be spent narrowing down possible strategies to bring back to the public. Aiming to complete consultation by Fall 2025, rather than Spring 2025. People are often

away in the summer. CSWM Board Roundtable on February 27 will be a more informal discussion to explore the value of saving landfill airspace through diversion to defer the cost of completing new cells and closing old ones. If we can expand the cells by a couple of years, we may save significantly on borrowing costs. The RSWAC conversation today about accessibility and service levels will also go to the Board. Strategies will be narrowed down to determine which ones are affordable and need to be prioritized in next ten years.

- **Milestones ahead**

CSWM is conducting a waste collection audit with a consultant looking at different types of waste collection to see what works well and how we can improve. Waste in from Tahsis and Zeballos will be brought in. The audit will look at CVWMC and CRWMC to capture full picture. Results estimated to be ready to present to Board in March 2025. Strategies will be reviewed with consultant and materials presented to RSWAC in April 2025.

There's a Community-to-Community (C2C) meeting on April 2 and 3 with the Zeballos wasteshed communities. On April 22, RSWAC will meet to short-list strategies and then they will be presented to the Board. [see Sarah's slides]

There are no RSWAC meetings in the summer. We'll consult with the public in Fall 2025 and a draft SWMP Renewal will be prepared in 2026.

Advisory comments:
K. Lovely – Will the audit include CnD waste?

S. Willie – CnD waste will be considered. ICI waste doesn't show exactly which waste is MF or subscription or big box stores. We'll work to identify the source. It's challenging to target specific industries.

C. Melvin – I'm curious about medical waste.

S. Willie – It can be challenging to target specific industries accurately.

R. Telegus – We don't have curbside on Denman. Will you look at recycling?

S. Willie – We won't be auditing recycling. Our priority is looking at what gets thrown away that shouldn't be.

4. **Review of Accessibility and Convenience**
   - **Background information**

Our overall objective is to reduce waste. We're making progress but there's room to grow to reach our 350/kg per person goal. Where do convenience and accessibility fall with the seven Rs (refuse, rethink, redesign, reduce, reuse, repair, recycle)? We've had some memos on repair initiatives. It can be challenging to influence redesign.

Barriers to participating in diversion activities include high cost of driving, concern for attracting wildlife with organics, storage issues for MF, personal accessibility (lifting/driving), and lack of nearby facilities. There is facility pressure from rising use. Customer counts are rising and putting pressure on the system to add staffing and equipment.

- **Options presented**

Statements of agreement include wanting equity in service where residents of areas with landfill closures don't have to transport waste further. We have a diverse service area and need to look at what should be funded by CSWM and what should be funded by users. We have populations without organized curbside service. The more convenient you can make drop-off, the more we get participation. There are private subscription service providers. We've provided opportunities to provide input on creating a user-pay rural collection service and it has been declined.

There are curbside services with a mix of different models within the CSWM and SRD. Users in rural areas are less satisfied with recycling drop-off facilities. Denman has consolidated collection and this has benefits. City of Courtenay has made significant changes to their waste collection services and has seen a 40 per cent reduction in garbage and an increase in organics waste diversion. There's a lower tip fee for organics and electric trucks.

Advisory Comments:

B. Thompson – The City of Courtenay trend has continued in 2025. Our main goal is reducing contamination. Residents have adjusted their focus with only one garbage cart.

M. Rutten – The success of Courtenay is to be celebrated. Cumberland and Comox are also in tune with this success. The City of Campbell River is gearing up for a similar transition and may benefit from seeing where there have been successes from these experiences.

S. Willie – If Campbell River can have a similar experience to Courtenay, it would be a benefit to waste reduction. We looked at Hornby Island and Cortes Island operations to see what is working well. There are funding impacts from all service changes.

Curbside services, when contracted out, have a user-pay structure and don't involve CSWM asset costs. Depots and transfer stations are part of the overall service and require a capital investment.

EPR product categories have been examined at a provincial level for accessibility standards. We'll use the proposed standards to inform our strategies. The previous RSWAC group discussion identified how service levels align with expectations and the Index of Remoteness. We looked remote, less remote, and urban categories where some communities overlapped. Some communities with boat-only access have been categorized as very remote. Ferry travel hasn't been considered in the provincial accessibility model; the Discovery and Gulf Islands are not as accessible as communities accessible by road.

J. Best – Recycle BC is experiencing similar challenges in categorizing communities across the province for accessibility. We've provided feedback to the Ministry that analysis needs to be done for specific regions to achieve accuracy.

S. Willie – We're looking at how the Index of Remoteness could be modified to consider the circumstances of individual communities. Our GIS team is doing a drive-time analysis. For today's exercise, we'll look at distances to CSWM facilities on a map which will be refined further given different road conditions. One consideration is a 15-minute drive time. Island communities and more remote communities currently need to travel further for some services. Area A is one of our biggest gaps, as well as Mount Washington. The Outer Discovery Islands populations are boat-accessible with no public ferry.

D. Baar – This could be a good project for a student to analyze how the different accessibility factors are applied to communities.

M. Tatchell – The way CSWM is looking at the individual circumstances of remote communities is helpful. We take all the waste from the resorts and the hatchery, which are outside of the circles on the map.

C. Thompson – The geographic mapping is missing the density of areas. In the Comox area, there are two sites for 70,000 people. The Return-It Depot on Puntledge Rd is very busy. We could look at the two big items people are looking to drop off and offer something for these waste streams, e.g. soft plastics, Styrofoam.

S. Willie – There are many people in the electoral areas relying on the Puntledge bottle depot. Getting the Oyster River Depot going would help. We may need to look at the Comox urban region again with the impact of losing their Return-It facility.

K. Stubblefield – Are you able to say anything about the land purchase in Oyster River and the depot being staffed with expanded services?

V. Schau – It's still on-camera information. We hope to be able to share more information in coming months. The intention is to have a depot more aligned with the Recycle BC approach with a staff to enforce compliance and reduce contamination for EPR programs.

Advisory comments:
M. Stewart – I speak with my family about reducing waste because it saves on taxes.

5. Roundtable:
D. Birtch – Encouraging work.

K. Lovely – I think accessibility and reducing are important. Storing and separating recycling takes time, strength and space. I have seen the electric trucks around and really appreciate the noise reduction.

K. Stubblefield – Reducing is a big factor. How does reducing encompass many of the other objectives?

J. Best – Emergency planning needs to be considered as part of the SWMP.

S. Willie – We have a strong emergency management team at the CVRD. The CVRD is creating a disaster management plan separately from the SWMP. The SWMP will be considered in its development.

C. Melvin – There are barriers with storage of waste in hospitals and health facilities in terms of separating out recycling.

M. Jeffs – The discussion is interesting.

D. Baar – Discussions around end-of-life electronics are helpful. There was a great repair café in Courtenay before our last meeting. I see lots of enthusiasm for repair and demand for access to community repair people and facilities. Think (not necessarily "re"), redesign, repair.

M. Tatchell – Part of the conversation could be looking at different models in terms of cost and efficiency.

M. Rutten – We looked at different service options in the past and concluded one larger engineered landfill was the most favourable option. Now we're looking at how to increase diversion to best use this landfill.

C. Thompson – A large part of our collection is cleaning up waste from the unhoused population amounting to approximately a tonne per week. Will this be charged at the lower rate? We also collect garbage in the community and parks without recycling.

S. Willie – We did analyze the impact. These other applications like parks waste and streetscape will fall under ICI and see an increase in tipping fees.

R. Telegus – I would like to know more about Recycle BC's impact on the operation of depots. Will SWMP give direction to the bottle depots?

S. Willie – There are two different product categories: the bottle depot model and the recycling depot. The bottle depots are recycling depots with contracts with companies who accept the refundable containers. Not every private depot needs to accept all materials depending on profitability. There may be changes coming to encourage collection of more materials.

M. Stewart – No questions other than curiosity about the Area D Recycling Depot. I see the property is for sale.

A. Milwid – We're planning discussions about the Zeballos landfill closure with the communities. People see there's a safety piece, engineering and policy considerations. These landfills are close to people and there's uncertainty around what a transfer station looks like. I'm glad we're going there to have this conversation and learn from the First Nations about how they're managing solid waste.

6. LUNCH BREAK

7. Discussion on Accessibility, Convenience and Service Levels

- **Online and in-person exercise**

  S. Willie introduced the exercise and led the online discussion regarding accessibility, convenience and service levels. V. Schau led the in-person exercise. Materials examined included household garbage, packaging and paper, yard waste, food scraps, clean wood waste, electronics waste, hazardous waste, bulky items, and marine debris. Services included curbside pickup, depot, and collection events. A drive time analysis was made available to the group. Discussed allocation of communities into four different categories: very remote communities, remote communities, less accessible communities, and accessible communities. Groups were asked: Are the categories and standards acceptable?

Can you identify any missing materials/services? Comments recorded within groups.

In-Person Discussion Group Comments:

V. Schau – Previous public assent processes have shown opposition to rural curbside collection. We need to assess whether drivetime expectations are reasonable for different communities. Generally, greater convenience leads to higher waste diversion rates, onsider cost effectiveness and community preferences in determining the right service level, particularly choice and alignment with waste generation.

C. Thompson – Drywall disposal is infrequent, so 30-minute drivetime may be acceptable. Twenty-minute drivetime for propane also probably okay.

R. Telegus – Why is soft plastic collection restricted?

V. Schau – Soft plastics can damage sorting equipment and require specialized handling. They are not accepted in the Recycle BC blue bin program and must be dropped off at depots. Similarly, glass and foam must also be taken to depots due to processing requirements.

V. Schau – Accessibility is trickier to determine for less accessible and Island communities with multiple ferries, e.g. Hornby and Cortes. Do collection events make sense for them? How often should they take place? It is reasonable to wait 6 months to dispose of HHW and appliances?

C. Thompson – What are the consequences of asking people to hold onto garbage? Small propane canisters and lithium ion batteries could end up in the trash and create a large hazard in the waste stream.

A. Milwid – What are people on Reid and Sonoma Islands doing with their garbage? Resorts create lots of ICI waste.

V. Schau – Discovery Islands are considered less accessible. An SRD study found some waste is being burned or kept in garbage piles, while some are being transported off the islands. We can include SRD survey responses with minutes.

M. Tatchell – Who would do the curbside collection in remote communities, e.g. Zeballos, Tahsis? Would it be the municipality or CSWM coming into the municipality? Large items are collected once per year and there are no plans for recycling collection. People take recycling to the depot. The municipality doesn’t have a vehicle with that capacity.

V. Schau – We're considering what we can do beyond curbside collection which is currently undertaken by the municipalities. Will add bulky items collection to the list for consideration.

M. Tatchell – Annual yard waste and appliance collection are helpful. Washers and dryers can go in scrap metal. Mattresses and tires are landfilled. There is nowhere to bring HHW and fire extinguishers.

V. Schau – We recognize the hazards associated with these materials and this could be an avenue to improve disposal options to keep folks from storing these in large quantities and out of communities.

M. Tatchell – It would be helpful to separate out existing versus proposed enhancements to services in the analysis chart.

Online Discussion Group Comments:
[Zoom recording doesn't include breakout room]

8. Options to Improve Diversion from Rural Single-Family Households Within "Accessible" Communities

Options 1 to 4 were presented to the in-person and online discussion groups to explore the pros and cons.

Option 1 – More Depots: Increase the density of publicly funded depots to meet proposed service level standard for CSWM.

Option 2 – More Depots with Future Waste Drop-off Options: Increase the density of publicly funded depots. User pay drop-off for household garbage bags, small quantities only for those who are opposed to subscription collection service.

Option 3 - Regional Roadside Collection Service: CSWM contracts for provision of roadside collection in accessible communities where none is currently provided. This option has faced public opposition in the past. Recycling collection eligible for Recycle BC funding.

Option 4 - Mandatory Source Separation for Residents: All households required to divert organics and recyclables from their waste. Pickup not mandatory. Haulers might have opportunity to expand this service. Clear bags only to increase compliance. Subscription services not eligible for Recycle BC funding like consolidated services.

In-Person Discussion Group Comments:

V. Schau – Oyster River Depot is underserviced. Bins are emptied daily to keep up with volume. CSWM is working with Recycle BC to demonstrate how it qualifies as a satellite depot. There's a high volume of traffic at CRWMC and CVWMC. CRWMC saw approximately 73,000 customers in 2024 and CVWMC saw approximately 123,000 customers, not including recycling depots. CSWM is considering these four options as a way to provide service to reduce pressure on waste management centres. We recognize that past feedback indicated a preference for choice over mandatory curbside collection. This discussion is exploring how service improvements could align with community needs while respecting previous concerns.

M. Tatchell – To clarify Option 3 funding, would it be a parcel tax?

V. Schau – It would similar to how municipalties administer the curbside program, including Royston. The Royston collection is funded through user fees paid quarterly by residents.

M. Tatchell – That option seems to cover all the long-term sustainability issues for funding.

R. Telegus – The cost per bag on Denman doesn't cover full cost of private collection.

Director Cole-Hamilton – What portion of the cost of the service do the users pay?

V. Schau – Under Option 2 (more depots with future waste drop-off options), a 40-yard bin system, similar to Hornby's model, could be used. User fees would cover only household garbage disposal, while Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs would fund the collection of other recyclable materials. CSWM would provide and maintain the depot infrastructure. How should we weigh convenience in our decision-making, considering that increased convenience typically results in higher diversion rates?

Group agreed Option 3 offers the most convenience, recognizing some residents previously expressed that they don't want a government provided service. While past feedback indicated concerns about a government managed service, need to explore ways to address those concerns while improving accessibility and diversion outcomes.

V. Schau – Option 4 might encourage diversion with subscription and self-haul services. Regional services have the benefit of economy of scale but compliance might be a challenge.

Director Cole-Hamilton – If residents don't voluntarily comply with mandatory source separation (Option 3), the policy might not effectively support waste diversion goals.

V. Schau – In the previous AAP, we specified there would be room for localized haulers to be involved in a regional service and there was still strong opposition.

M. Tatchell – Option 4 would probably create more work with resources spent on chasing operators.

Chair Cole-Hamilton – I would think the additional cost at this particular time might be a lightning rod for opposition. We might know more when we see the results of the current APPs out on spending.

V. Schau – Options 1 and 2 increase costs as well as these are physical assets that will need to be funded. What pros and cons do you see with these two options? And who pays, recognizing that the residents had previously turned down the regional service option. Build and staffing more depots will be a considerable expense. Would 391 or residents in the area that are benefiting from this service carry the cost?

C. Thompson – Weekly curbside collection is a great way to increase diversion, but depots may be what people settle for in the end. Over time, we may eventually get to Option 4 after paying per bag with Option 2. It's a phased approach.

A. Milwid – How is the contamination going with the Oyster River Depot?

V. Schau – There's lots of contamination. We've had to close down similar unstaffed depots throughout the CSWM service area due to illegal dumping concerns. We're looking to transition Oyster River to a staffed depot. We pay a high cost to Emterra to clean up illegal dumping at Oyster River.

A. Milwid – Comparing demographic traits, do you see similarities with other depots?

V. Schau – There are some patterns. Contamination tends to be higher in areas where depots are unstaffed, where there is low awareness of proper sorting requirements, and in communities with a high number of transient or seasonal residents. Illegal dumping is also more common in locations that lack convenient waste disposal options, which suggests that accessibility plays a role. We have observed that communities with strong local engagement, like education programs, outreach efforts, or clear enforcement mechanisms, tend to have lower contamination rates.

Online Discussion Group Comments:
[Zoom recording doesn't include breakout room]

8. Review of Strategies - Anything missing?

Follow up on this item next meeting due to time constraints.

9. Meeting Adjournment

Co-Chair Cole-Hamilton adjourned the meeting at 2:05 pm.

GENERAL:

The next Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee is scheduled on March 13, 2025, at 10:30 am. We may not need to have this meeting. We'll tentatively hold the date for now.

Recorded by:	Certified correct:
B. Meagher	***S. Willie***
Bridget Meagher Branch Assistant – Engineering Services	Sarah Willie Manager of Solid Waste Planning and Policy Development