

Chamber CEO stepping down after revitalizing group

Saying that she managed to get through her to-do list in just under four years, Catherine Holt has decided to resign as the chief executive of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce.

Holt, who stepped into the position in the spring of 2016, announced her decision Wednesday but will remain in the role until June.

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“It has been a difficult decision, a very difficult decision,” said Holt in an interview. “When you’re on a roll and things are going very well and the organization is solid, the chair is great and the membership is solid it’s a good time to leave because you’re handing it off to someone in very good shape.

“But that’s what makes it hard — you’re leaving when things are really good.”

Holt’s and the Chamber’s goal in 2016 was to grow and diversify the membership and ensure the organization was responding to the needs of its constituents.

Her tenure has been nothing short of a success, said consultant Frank Bourree, who was on the recruiting team that hired Holt and was past chair of the chamber’s board during her first year.

“The Chamber is in a much different place than it was when Catherine came in — it’s very healthy,” he said. “The membership is strong, our events are well attended and she’s been scoring points with government. I would think you would want someone who is going to continue that momentum [to


replace her.]”

Current board chair John Wilson said Holt’s vision was to establish the chamber as a more professional and influential organization.

“Our board is always looking to improve the service we offer our 1,400 members, and Catherine delivered by opening doors and creating connections between everyone who contributes to the prosperity of our region,” he said. “Catherine has helped us become a much more diverse organization and that has made our advocacy efforts much more effective.”

Holt, who told the hiring committee she would stay for between three and five years, said there are things she simply could not tackle during her tenure.

“The frustration of the job is there are so many issues that could be accomplished, but seem to be intractable in our region and at the top of that is the ongoing burden that 13 different municipal systems place on business and on our ability to rise to a higher level as a region,” she said.

“One of the biggest consequences is  our lack of transportation planning and that is going to get worse not better if we don’t figure out a regional approach to transportation planning and delivery.”

Though that remains an itch she couldn’t scratch, Holt said it was still time to go.

“My style is to put an enormous amount of energy into what I do and to do my best to make things better and fix any problems I inherit and so with that style three-to-five years is good,” she said. “You can keep that level of intensity up for a few years, but you can’t do it forever.”

Holt said she has plans to do some travelling in the second half of this year before finding a new challenge in 2021.

Before being hired by the chamber, Holt worked as a management consultant with the Sage Group for 18 years. She has also been an assistant deputy minister in B.C. and a producer for CBC.

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