

Comment: A positive wish for the new year in our region

Re: “Ignoring issues doesn’t fix regional challenges,” comment, Dec. 17.

In recent weeks, there have been commentaries questioning the role of the Capital Regional District in bringing forward solutions to regional problems. The thrust of these arguments seems to be that the CRD should operate outside the confines of the legislation that created regional district boards across the province.

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Regional districts were formed for a definite purpose, and were never meant to be a fourth level of government, especially not a fourth level of government that would have the authority to overrule its member agencies, as has been suggested by a recent writer.

The following quote from Union of B.C. Municipalities sums up the role of a regional district: “Regional districts establish and provide their local, sub-regional and regional services in direct response to the expressed needs, desires, and instructions of the municipalities and electoral areas that comprise the region. The regional district board of directors, on which all electoral areas and member municipalities are represented, serves as the political forum in which these needs, desires and instructions are expressed.”

The powers and authorities of regional districts across B.C. are set by provincial legislation, and any changes to those authorities must come from the higher level of government. The truth is that the CRD does an amazing amount of good work throughout our region.

Our regional parks system is the envy of jurisdictions across North America.

Our water system is arguably the best in Canada. Our recycling program and our landfill have both won awards. The CRD provides more than 200 services and also provides the local government for all the electoral areas and Gulf Islands.

Does the CRD have challenges? Yes, of course it does, just like any organization. Could there be improvements at the CRD? Again yes, just like any organization, improvements can be made. But, fundamentally the CRD is a strong corporation with a highly professional staff and a high standard of service delivery. As former MLA Gary Holman recently said: “By continually discrediting the governance entity that was created to enable collaboration around such challenges, we make the job harder.”

These words are so true. In the past three years, we have seen agreement on sewage treatment. We have seen agreement on a unified regional 911 service and we are headed in that same direction with fire dispatch. We have seen agreement to invest \$30 million in a program with a matching \$30 million from the province to assist with housing the homeless in our region.

We have also seen the creation of the South Island Prosperity Project, an organization created to fuel economic growth in the region. There are many more examples of integration and co-operation among all the partners.

For groups that are putting effort into continually criticizing the organization, why not assist us with positive solutions as we wrestle with the issues and challenges facing the residents of our region?

Steve Price is chairman of the CRD board and mayor of Sidney. David Screech is vice-chairman of the board and mayor of View Royal.

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