

West Shore recreation centre facing budget crunch

Competition from another recreation centre and the loss of Colwood's Rock the Shores music festival have left West Shore Parks and Recreation facing a revenue shortfall, a problem exacerbated by a municipal funding dispute.

Ed Watson, chairman of the West Shore Parks and Recreation Society, which runs the operation, said it should be able to absorb the shortfall without running a deficit — this year.

“It's not a crisis now, but two or three years down the road, it could end up being one,” he said.

Several factors are involved in the revenue decline at the rec centre complex, located on the Island Highway in Colwood.

One is a dip in pool revenue, expected to fall \$40,000 this year, which Watson largely attributes to people trying out the new YMCA-YWCA in Langford's Westhills area.

The cancellation of this year's Rock the Shores music festival represented another \$30,000 hit, Watson said. Festival organizer Nick Blasko has said the festival will return in 2018, but no concrete details have been announced.

The society is also negotiating employee salaries with the Greater Victoria Labour Relations Association. The association is asking for a one per cent increase in salaries, which would cost the society about \$75,000, Watson said.

On top of all that, the society is caught in the middle of a funding dispute between the West Shore municipalities that contribute to the rec centre's

\$11.5-million budget.

The municipalities — Langford, Colwood, View Royal, Metchosin and Highlands, plus the Juan de Fuca electoral area — cover 45 per cent of the annual budget through municipal requisitions. The rest is funded through user fees and other revenues.

The budget requires the unanimous approval of all five municipalities. So when Langford, opposed to a hike of 3.77 per cent to its contribution and rejected the 2017 budget, the society had to operate under the 2016 budget. That has left it with a \$77,000 shortfall.

Langford Mayor Stew Young said his municipality has invested tens of millions of dollars in building its own recreational facilities after West Shore politicians could not agree on what new facilities to build and where.

“We’re not going to increase our budget every year [for West Shore Parks and Rec] when we’re also spending money in Langford on our recreation facilities and nobody else is helping us for those,” Young said.

About half of the rec centre’s users come from Langford, and the municipality pays about half of the municipal requisition, Watson said. According to the society’s annual report, Langford’s share of the municipal requisition was about \$2.5 million in 2016.

However, Young pointed out that the other municipalities do not pay Langford when its citizens use the YMCA-YWCA.

Colwood Mayor Carol Hamilton said the growing population of the West Shore allows room for several rec centres, but area mayors need to work together to make them all sustainable.

The first step, Hamilton said, is to get rid of the veto system in favour of majority rules so that one municipality can’t derail the society’s entire budget.

“How do you ever move forward when ... you must have unanimous approval?” she asked.

If West Shore municipalities can't solve the funding squabbles within the next few years, “the upkeep of public facilities and potentially recreational services on the West Shore are going to suffer,” Watson said.

“This is by far the most diverse recreational facility on the Island and it would be a pity to see it degraded because of arguments among the members.”

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