

Better Representation? Yes, But How

It is one thing to speak about what should be done, another to suggest how, yet another to actually make it happen.

One director trying to represent over 8000 people presents an obvious challenge. With the best will in the world, circulating effectively among that many people would take the proverbial “month of Sundays”. There are five concrete ways that I believe we could improve the level of contact and engagement to good advantage. We can do these things long before the form of eventual incorporation is decided and implemented.

1. The Advisory Planning Commission, already established, augmented by frequent and transparent communications about agendas and results, both of the short term issues and the long term vision for the community that a living OCP should promote
2. A Watershed Round Table, adapted to Shawnigan from the one that has been operating for ten years next door in the Cowichan, that brings together local people with the many agencies that need to collaborate to make sensible decisions – a process already proposed by me through the CVRD Environment Commission and The Cowichan Water Board where I am a member
3. An informal “Village Council” set up to promote a visionary plan for consolidation and beautification of Shawnigan Village, working with residents and merchants to design improvements and to do the hard work of fund raising to get projects up and running.
4. An annual regional forum, bringing a large number of people from all corners of Area B to look at the area as a whole, to review issues and to propose solutions with specific actions that individuals, businesses, government agencies and the CVRD can contribute.
5. Establish a full time storefront office for Area B, in Shawnigan Village, to make it easier for residents to contact their Area Director, find information and make their issues and concerns known

None of these approaches happen spontaneously without a champion to sponsor and promote them. They take the hard work of teams but they can amplify the number of citizens involved, make decisions more responsive and give people confidence that thoughtful community work is being done in the open.