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To: Finance, Facilities and Technology Committee

Prepared By: Jason Reid

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Subject: White Road Property

Date: October 5, 2021

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### **Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this briefing note is to recommend approval to submit a second funding application to develop an early learning and childcare program on the White Road property.

In October 2020, the Board approved submission of a funding application to the BC Childcare New Spaces Fund to develop a Nature Based Early Learning Centre on the White Road property. This application (submitted on October 30, 2020) proposed a nature-based early learning program for ages 3-5 to facilitate the creation of a robust program that would integrate with district programs to create a more seamless transition from early learning into K-12.

This decision followed several years of community consultation and feasibility work regarding the creation of an early learning program on the site.

To reduce the risk the project would not be successfully rezoned following a funding announcement, in December 2020 the district held a community open house to review the plan, consulted with Central Saanich staff on the project proposal, and initiated a rezoning application with Central Saanich. There were 19 attendees at the open house and most of the feedback can be summarized into the following two themes.

- Those who support the project and feel it honours the intentions of the donor (many of these people have identified as descendants of the donor);
- Those who are concerned with the impact of the centre on the neighbourhood, with the primary concern being traffic impact. Note that the district will need to conduct a traffic study as part of the rezoning process.

Considering feedback from the community and staff at Central Saanich, the final site plan (included in the rezoning application) reflected moving the facility entrance from White Road to Veyaness Road. This was done to reduce the traffic impact on White Road (a residential road with little traffic flow). The rezoning application also included proposed municipal upgrades including concrete sidewalks connecting White Road to East Saanich Road, and a community trail connecting White Road with Seabrook Road. More information on the proposed application, including the detailed site plans can be found on the [White Road Consultation site](#).

In March 2021, the district was notified that the funding application was not successful. In April 2021, I had a debrief meeting with staff at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (“MCFD”) who provided the following feedback:

- It was a strong application, but there was more competition than in previous rounds of funding.
- The primary areas it was noted where the application could be improved included operator experience (they assume 0 for ranking purposes when an experienced operator has not yet selected), and with the level of detail in describing the various aspects of the program including details of the support programs for vulnerable families (which is challenging to do prior to selecting an operator).
- With the continued focus on creating spaces, MCFD staff reported they expected there to be future rounds of funding and advised to expect more information in coming months.

With this first application, the plan had been to select a qualified operator following confirmation of funding. Considering this feedback from MCFD, in May 2021 the Board approved partnering with Beacon Community Services (“Beacon”) on the project and the next funding application, and in June 2021 the Board of Beacon confirmed their support to partner with the school district on the White Road project. The school district and Beacon already have several program partnerships including the Peninsula Early Years Centre, and the Teen Education and Motherhood Infant care programs located at Saanichton ILC. The White Road project is an opportunity to expand upon and leverage the success of these existing childcare and family support programs.

Staff from Beacon and the district met over the summer and starting developing a plan for the next round of funding.

### **White Road Funding Application 2021**

On September 13, 2021, the MCFD announced that the [BC New Spaces Fund](#) was open for applications, with a November 16, 2021 deadline to apply.

The program funding limits remained unchanged with maximum funding per site of \$3 million, and prioritization of projects with a cost per childcare space of \$40,000 or less.

The most significant change was increased prioritization of projects creating infant toddler child care spaces. Consistent with the previous round, the program prioritizes the creation of spaces serving priority populations including: low-income families, children with support needs, Indigenous children and families, families new to Canada, and young parents. Beacon has a proven track record of developing early learning and childcare programs that support vulnerable families.

Staff from Beacon and the district have developed the following Program Concept Summary reflecting the stated priority of programs that create infant toddler care and that support vulnerable families. This summary (below) is the proposed foundation of the second funding application.

### Program Concept Summary (Second Funding Application)

The vision is a nature based early learning and childcare program that creates 82 childcare spaces and provides additional support programs for families. The childcare spaces created include infant toddler care (12 spaces), full time group care (ages 3-5, 24 spaces), part-time group care (ages 3-5, 24 spaces), and after school child care (24 spaces). Additional support programs will include programming for early years and young parents, counselling services and other family support programs. This program design addresses the stated priorities of the Childcare BC New Spaces Fund including:

- Creation of infant/toddler childcare spaces.
- Creation of spaces serving priority populations including:
  - low income families;
  - children with support needs;
  - Indigenous children and families;
  - families new to Canada; and,
  - young parents.
- Creation of spaces co-located with other community or family services.
- Creation of fully inclusive and accessible child care spaces that allow children of all abilities to participate meaningfully (i.e., accessible physical design and application of program inclusion policy).

The vision for the early learning programming is to integrate with school district programs where beneficial to create opportunities for learning and sharing and to facilitate a more seamless transition from early learning into K-12. Through a nature-based program rooted in W̱SÁNEĆ ways of knowing and being, children will establish a sense of community, place and belonging leading to smooth transitions into future education. It is essential for children that live, learn and play on the land of the W̱SÁNEĆ people to gain knowledge of their ways of knowing and being and to be exposed to the SENĆOŦEN language. Woven through the fabric of the program would be the First Peoples' Principles of Learning, by engaging with local W̱SÁNEĆ elders and educators to ignite an understanding of Indigenous perspectives within the program.

### Building Design and Project Cost

The overall site plan and building footprint will not change from the [design proposed for rezoning](#). To meet licensing requirements for infant/toddler care certain changes to the internal layout of the building are necessary including separating part of studio 1 into a nap room, and additional sinks and toilets.

The first application proposed creating 72 childcare spaces, with a proposed project cost of \$2,880,000 (equal to the \$40,000 maximum per childcare space). As the second application is proposing the creation of 82 childcare spaces, project costs can equal \$3,000,000, which is the maximum funding per site.

The district is working with consultants to update the internal building design and to update the project cost estimate reflecting design changes and construction cost escalation. The updated cost estimates should be complete in a few weeks. With a funding cap of \$3 million per site, fully funding the cost remains a risk. In the application last fall, the design was modified to modular construction to reduce cost within the available funding envelope.

As this stage, I am recommending the Board approve proceeding with an application on the condition the revised cost estimates can be contained within the \$3 million funding envelope. If cost estimates are higher, I will seek new direction from the Board prior to the application deadline. Even with a sound cost estimate within \$3 million, there will be a number of potential risks including that construction cost inflation and/or municipal upgrades will exceed the cost estimates in the plan. If for example, the municipality required the district to fund a signalized intersection the project would likely not be financially feasible.

While the district has already incurred some rezoning costs, the intention is for many of the rezoning costs such as a traffic study and riparian study to be funded. There is a risk that if rezoning is ultimately unsuccessful these costs incurred will not be funded.

Balanced with this financial risk are the risks associated with not developing the property for an educational purpose consistent with the donor's wishes. The risks of owning a vacant forested site increases each year as surrounding neighborhoods densify. Selling the property may be an option, but only if the district is able to demonstrate that alternative educational use is not possible. This may be difficult to demonstrate if the district was not willing to consider alternative funding sources to bridge a reasonable funding gap. The financial commitment to complete the project, contingent on successful rezoning, occurs when entering the funding agreement following confirmation of funding (to occur March 2022).

### **Staff Recommendation**

That the Board approve submission of a funding application to the BC Childcare New Spaces Fund to develop a childcare and early learning program in partnership with Beacon Community Services, conditional on the project cost estimate being \$3,000,000 or less.

With Respect,



Jason Reid  
Secretary Treasurer

JR/klg