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Referendum On Cultural Facility Borrowing Set For This Fall

The Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO) has approved an October referendum on borrowing \$25 million so the Multi-Purpose Cultural Facility for Greater Vernon can move forward.

“Growing Greater Vernon’s cultural capacity allows us to be a community of choice for families, and the impact on jobs, tourism and spending in a vibrant downtown would be significant,” says Bob Fleming. “The timing of construction has been carefully considered for taxpayers so that it dovetails with the completion of other major projects.”

As part of the approved funding strategy, the \$25 million loan is timed to coincide with the \$23.8 million borrowed for the construction for Kal Tire Place and the Vernon and District Performing Arts Centre coming off the books. The referendum, being held along with the October municipal election, gives voters a chance to have a say in borrowing a portion of the funds to build the cultural facility.

The need for a multi-purpose cultural facility was identified as part of the Greater Vernon Cultural Plan, completed in 2016 following a comprehensive process that involved research, document reviews, stakeholder meetings and public consultation. The facility will provide improved space for the art gallery and museum, as well as flexible spaces that will be available to other community organizations struggling to find venues to host their programs and activities.

The heart of downtown Vernon has been chosen as the preferred site for the proposed Multi-Purpose Cultural Facility. After reviewing and analysing numerous publicly owned sites in and around Vernon’s City Centre, Vernon Council supported a part of the Vernon Block, located in the 2900 block between 31st Avenue and 32nd Avenue, as the preferred site. The city has offered one third of the property for the project at fair market value. The Vernon Block, which is currently used for parking, has been slated for future development for over a decade.

Over the last number of months, the Regional District of North Okanagan has been working with community stakeholders to explore the proposed facility to provide adaptable and flexible cultural programming and performance space, as well as improved space for the Greater Vernon Museum and Archives and the Vernon Public Art Gallery. A key component of the project was site selection.

“A project of this size and scope can be a catalyst to encourage higher density mixed-use development, which is what we want to see for downtown,” says City of Vernon Mayor, Akbal

Mund. "The economic impact of such a development will be significant to existing businesses, surrounding shopping and restaurants, and will encourage more redevelopment in the area".

The Vernon Block is also close to transportation options including the newly constructed 29/30 Street active transportation corridor, the Transit Exchange and municipal and private parking facilities.

The proposed Multi-Purpose Cultural Facility has an estimated project budget of \$40 million based on estimates that presume construction in 2020. The project will be subject to a successful referendum to approve borrowing of up to \$25 million, with the remaining \$15 million of project funding to be obtained through federal and provincial grants, partnership contributions, fundraising and donations.

Quotes:

Amanda Shatzko, President of the Arts Council of the North Okanagan

"There is great value in supporting our creative industries and our youth. According to economists, creativity will be the third most valuable skill for jobs by 2020... a new cultural facility will add to nurturing innovative thinking, especially in a time of advancing technologies."

For more information on this project, visit the Regional District website at www.rdno.ca, or call 250-550-3700.