



April 4, 2020

Dear CAOs,

Several important topics have been raised this week by Mayors and CAO's: financial sustainability concerns for local governments, how to manage public hearings during the COVID-19 emergency, and how we can keep the supply chain open and moving for essential goods and services. I am pleased to share an update with you on these matters.

Financial Sustainability:

I understand that the COVID-19 emergency has created considerable financial uncertainty for local governments in British Columbia. I want to assure you that we have heard your concerns around property tax deadlines and collections, es, other taxing authorities, grant programs, budgeting, requisitions, cashflow, and financial reporting. We have been working closely with our colleagues in the Ministry of Finance, along with key partners like the UBCM and MFA to understand the nature of the challenges you're facing and to help develop a path forward for local governments. We will have more to communicate with you on this in the coming weeks.

In the interim, please find attached, two circulars that will be important for your Chief Financial Officers: one for regional districts and another for municipalities. These are initial circulars providing some early direction for local governments. There may be additional circulars over the coming days and weeks as a clear provincial response emerges to meet this evolving situation. We continue to welcome your input into how your local government is dealing with the current situation, and what provincial tools would best help you meet this challenge.

Public Hearings:

Many local governments have raised concerns about their ability to hold public hearings, which are required under the Local Government Act for some land use bylaws like an Official Community Plan. We want to support local governments in keeping the business of government going and supporting development projects to continue as much as possible while ensuring the public health orders are followed. Ministry staff are developing guidance for local governments to help them navigate this issue during the pandemic and will provide updates to local governments soon.

In the meantime, we encourage local governments to consider whether it may be appropriate to waive public hearings where they are not legally required, such as zoning bylaws that are consistent with their official community plan. We encourage you to be creative in moving local government business forward and also want to encourage local governments to find ways to keep people informed of any changes to their regular processes through websites and social media.

Supply Chain:

I want to thank you for your role in helping the Province coordinate an inventory of critical supplies held by local governments as well as businesses and other organizations in your community. Through your efforts, we have been able to quickly build a materials inventory of critical supplies, including personal protective equipment that will keep our health care professionals safe, as well as other essential medical and cleaning supplies.

The B.C. government has been receiving a myriad of offers of support from suppliers since the onset of this pandemic. Our challenge until now has been that there has not been a single effective way for suppliers to understand the most pressing product needs and specifications, become newly certified, and for Health Authorities to efficiently evaluate the overwhelming number of proposals being received.

I am pleased to confirm that BC now has a dedicated online platform, the [COVID-19 Supply Hub](#), that will provide a single point of entry to triage and prioritize the thousands of offers and donations for essential supplies from business and other organizations.

The initial focus of the COVID-19 Supply Hub will be sourcing supplies for the health-care system and front-line workers, although the Hub will be used by the provincial government to accept offers for other essentials supplies as well. Going forward, we would encourage you to direct offers of assistance, as well as donations of critical supplies, to the COVID-19 Supplier Hub at: www.gov.bc.ca/supplyhub

Stopping the spread of COVID-19 remains everyone's top priority. We can all do our part by following the direction and orders from our provincial health officer. Thank you for the important role you are playing in helping our health care professionals' source the critical supplies they need.

I know these are uncertain times, but if we work together, I have no doubt we will all come through this situation stronger.

Thank you for all your work and your ongoing partnership during this challenging time,

Kaye Krishna, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Office: 250.387.9108 | Fax: 250.387.7973

Attachments:

1. Circular: Municipal Budgeting, Taxation, and Financial Reporting During COVID-19
2. Circular: Regional District Budgeting, Requisition, and Financial Reporting During COVID-19