



Mayor Marc Lefebvre
City of Parksville
100 Jensen Avenue East
PO Box 1390
Parksville, BC V9P 2H3

March 24, 2015

Dear Mayor Lefebvre:

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) regarding the article “Council shoots down \$600,000 archives” published in the *Oceanside Star* on February 26, 2015. The article quoted you and other councillors speaking about factors relating to records management and archives that reveal an incomplete and dangerous understanding about archives and records management and of council’s role in ensuring that Parksville has a functional records management program bearing evidence of an accountable and transparent municipal government.

Established in 1975, the Association of Canadian Archivists is a national not-for-profit organization representing over 600 archivists in Canada. With headquarters in Ottawa, the ACA’s mandate is to provide the archival profession leadership and to facilitate an understanding and appreciation of Canada’s archival heritage. As such, we are concerned about several statements made by councillors in their discussions surrounding the City’s archives, particularly surrounding electronic records. When Councillor Leanne Salter mentions that in her job with the provincial government, archiving is done with disks and computer programs due to the high cost of paper storage, she is incorrect or—more likely—she is speaking only from her limited perspective. The Province of British Columbia, like almost all large government organizations, operates under a hybrid system of managing paper as well as electronic information. Moreover, there are real costs in both electronic storage and not having a proper paper records management program. The lack of a program results in reduced productivity, poorly utilized office space, and the creation of increased liability surrounding documents that either cannot be found or should be destroyed. An efficient records management program reduces the bulk of paper and electronic records so that only 3-5% of the original volume of records *identified by the program as archival* is preserved.

Large-volume digitization of paper records, and the subsequent long-term storage of the resulting digital files is expensive and complex. Born-digital files are similarly complex and should be preserved in their original format; however, electronic records additionally require migration to new software as old versions become obsolete. For example, how many WordStar or WordPerfect files or electronic records on Zip drives are readable today with no intervention along the way? Paper files created in that same period would still be readable despite benign or even wilful neglect. Thus, an official digital storage facility should be in place to ensure that the electronic files cannot be altered and remain legally authentic evidence of past actions.

The issues surrounding digitization of paper records and the preservation electronic records are complex and require a strategic, long-term plan about their accessibility well into the future. There are examples



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of municipal archival programs in BC—including those in Mission and Coquitlam—that could serve as models for future development of the municipal archives in Parksville.

Mayor Lefebvre, as you state in the article, it does all come down to what risk council is willing to take with the archives. From a distance, it appears that the Parksville City Council would be making a perilous decision *not* to support the building of an archives and the implementation of a robust electronic records management system. The ACA is concerned that City Council has not fully assessed the risk and instead is proceeding on a path not supported by evidence-based decision-making. Unfortunately, history has shown that systemic problems with recordkeeping go unnoticed until there is a need to access records for legal, media, or evidentiary reasons. By this time, the records no longer exist or legal discovery is obviously incomplete, as was seen in the recent Gas Plant scandal that contributed to bringing down the Provincial Government of Ontario. There is significant risk to the city if it is unable to document its governance decisions due to improper and incomplete recordkeeping, and the people of Parksville will rightly feel they are not getting the government and governance they pay for and deserve.

Best regards,

original signed by Kathryn Harvey

Kathryn Harvey
President