



March 22, 2021

Ref: 265703

Shawn Dahlen
Chief Administrative Officer
Peace River Regional District
PO Box 810
Dawson Creek BC V1G 4H8

Dear Shawn Dahlen:

The provincial government understands the fiscal impacts that COVID-19 has placed on local service providers. To help address these challenges, the Province of British Columbia announced nearly \$2 billion in joint Federal/Provincial spending, including: \$540 million for local governments, \$418 million for community infrastructure, and \$1 billion for transit, TransLink, and ferries.

The \$540 million for local governments was further divided into three funding streams. Two of the streams (Development Services for \$15 million and Strengthening Communities for \$100 million) are application-based funding. For more information on these two funding streams, please visit the following program webpages:

- **Development Services** – <https://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/lgps/local-government-development-approvals.html>
- **Strengthening Communities** – <https://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/lgps/strengthening-communities-services.html>

The third stream provides direct grants to local governments. This funding stream is called the "COVID-19 Safe Restart Grant for Local Governments" and provides \$425 million for local operations impacted by COVID-19. This funding supports local governments as they deal with increased operating costs and lower revenue due to COVID-19.

Of this \$425 million, \$415 million was paid out in November 2020 to local governments and the Province is now in a position to allocate the remaining \$10 million to continue to support local service providers. Of the \$415 million allocated to local governments in November, \$21 million was allocated to regional districts. This amount was relatively small (compared with the allocation to municipalities) because municipalities faced revenue risks and expenses, and the Province and municipalities ensured that regional requisitions would be fully remitted in 2020.

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While the regional tax base was kept whole in 2020, the Province acknowledges that regional districts have developed other COVID-related financial shortfalls and pressures. For this reason, the Province has decided to allocate the \$10 million holdback to the 27 regional districts.

Under section 36 of the *Local Government Grants Regulation*, the amount of the grant to each regional district is set by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The determination of this amount was based on an allocation formula that applies equally to all regional districts. The allocation is as follows: 20 percent of the holdback will be allocated on total regional population, and the remaining 80 percent was allocated on rural population (i.e. population in electoral areas). This was done in recognition of the additional costs associated with servicing remote rural areas.

For the Peace River Regional District, the Province provided **\$700,000** in November 2020. The Province is providing an additional **\$384,000** in March 2021, which represents a **55 percent** increase over the initial installment. The total of both installments is **\$1,084,000**.

Like the November payment, this funding will also ensure regional districts can continue to deliver the services people depend on in their communities. COVID related eligible costs will include:

- addressing revenues shortfalls;
- facility reopening and operating costs;
- emergency planning and response costs;
- bylaw enforcement and protective services like fire protection and police;
- computer and other electronic technology costs (to improve interconnectivity and virtual communications);
- services for vulnerable persons (e.g. persons living with disabilities, mental illness or addictions, persons experiencing homelessness or other vulnerabilities); and
- other related costs.

To ensure optimal transparency on the use of funds, there are two reporting requirements for regional districts. First, as part of the 2021 audited financial statements, the regional district must provide a report on how the funds were allocated to various regional and local services.

The second reporting requirement is an annual report on how the grant funds were spent in that year. This will be a schedule to your audited financial statements, under section 377 of the *Local Government Act*. The schedule will include the amount of funding received, the use of those funds, and the year-end balance of unused funds. This report may be consolidated for the entire regional district, rather than reporting on a service-by-service level. Your regional district must continue to annually report on the use of grant money until the funds are fully drawn down.

For the purpose of reporting, the two payments (November 2020 and March 2021) may be treated as one pooled grant. Thus, a regional district is **not** required to report on the two payments separately.

If you have a questions or comments regarding this letter, please feel free to contact Jennifer Richardson, Grants Analyst, Local Government Infrastructure and Finance Branch, by email at: Jennifer.Richardson@gov.bc.ca, or by telephone at: 778 698-3243.

Shawn Dahlen
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The provincial government welcomes this opportunity to support COVID-19 restart and recovery throughout British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Okenge Yuma Morisho
Deputy Minister

pc: Teri Vetter, Chief Financial Officer, Peace River Regional District
Jennifer Richardson, Grants Analyst, Local Government Infrastructure and Finance Branch