

north shore news

Districts on municipal auditor's agenda

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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TWO North Shore municipalities are among the first that will come under the scrutiny of British Columbia's newly appointed auditor general for local government.

AGLG Basia Ruta will look into the District of West Vancouver's value for money in operational procurement and how the District of North Vancouver fares with capital procurement projects and asset management programs - a fancy way of saying planning for future infrastructure needs and how to pay for them.

But, while the term "audit" may bring to mind angst and insinuations that there is something untoward in the keeping of one's finances, that's not what the AGLG is looking for.

"I understand why people feel that way but there's a couple things we need to point out. These are performance audits, not financial audits," said Mark Tatchell, deputy auditor general. "(They) are intended to help local governments improve their operations. These are not intended to find faults or identify problems that local governments have."

Once the audits are complete in 2014, subject councils will be able to review and comment on the findings before the AGLG releases a public report. Those reports will be for the benefit of municipal councils, regional district boards and their taxpayers around the province, Tatchell said.

Many local government members bristled when Premier Christy Clark announced the creation of the AGLG in 2011, dismissing it as political posturing from the province - especially when municipal governments tended to have better financial track records than the province itself.

But the District of North Vancouver Coun. Mike Little's fears have been allayed and his council is greeting the audit with open arms, especially when long-term capital planning is the district's forte.

"It's something that, in the past, has been too easy for administrations to defer maintenance on infrastructure in order to be able to balance budgets. Since 2004, we've been putting policies in place to stop that from happening. We don't want to see our rec centres fall into disrepair again," Little said.

District staff completed a "super comprehensive" inventory of every asset in the district, from bricks and mortar to the subsurface of roads in 2009. The inventory lists not only the assets, but their expected lifespan and estimated cost to replace.

"I think we have a very good picture of what it costs to manage our assets that are going forward into the future," Little said. "And we're squirrelling away money the correct way. We're making sure we have plans in place so that when we make the decision on the replacement of an asset or facility, we have the money in hand to replace it."

Rather than being singled out for being a trouble maker, Little said he suspects the district is on the list to serve as a model the rest of province.

Similarly, West Vancouver Mayor Michael Smith has softened this approach to the AGLG.

"We're looking forward to it. We're certainly pleased with the way things have been going in the district with no tax increase for the last two years. We welcome them to come in. I think they'll be pleased with what they see," Smith said. "Our only concern is we don't want it to cost us money, in terms of engaging a lot of extra staff time."

For 2013, AGLG has budget \$2.6 million plus \$300,000 in start-up capital costs. Other issues to be tackled by the office this year are managing policing agreements and police budget oversight, the provision of clean drinking water by local governments and managing the risk of limited human resources within small local governments.

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