

District of North Vancouver audit gets glowing review

District 'a leader' in ensuring value for taxpayers' money: auditor general's report

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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"(Report) a validation of what we do," according to District of North Vancouver Coun. Robin Hicks. File photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

The District of North Vancouver is among the best in the province when it comes to how it handles capital assets.

That's the conclusion of the province's auditor general for local government, who released a report on the district's capital procurement and asset management last week.

The audit delved specifically into the Fire Hall No. 3 upgrade and the replacement of artificial turf at William Griffin sports fields as well as the district's practice of keeping an eye on the depreciation of its infrastructure and setting money aside to replace it.

<http://www.aglg.ca/includes/docs/NR-Audit-Topic-3-Report-4-District-of-North-Vancouver.pdf>

"The report found that the district's processes and controls protected the interests of taxpayers and helped it ensure value for money," said Arn van Iersel, acting auditor general for local government. "We see that North Van (district) can be interpreted largely as a leader in this particular area and we're happy to see that."

Despite the largely glowing review, the office did make some recommendations for improvements including better cross-referencing the conflict of interest policy with its policy on the reporting of fraud, and a method for staff to evaluate vendors' performance, although there had not been any specific problems with conflict or poor vendor performance to cite.

District Coun. Robin Hicks, who is a former director of finance for the cities of Chilliwack and Coquitlam, said there was never any doubt that the district's capital procedures were in order. District citizens already have an internal audit committee, and twice annual audits working on their behalf, Hicks said.

"We've never had any serious critiques of our accounting controls and procedures and I think this is a validation of what

we do,” Hicks said

The province created the AGLG in 2012 against the protest of many in municipal politics. The minister of community, sport and cultural development fired then-AGLG Basia Ruta in

March this year after her office had cost the province more than \$5 million and only produced two reports. Since then, van Iersel has taken over the office on an interim basis and several other reports have been issued.

A Union of B.C. Municipalities survey of local governments that have gone through an AGLG audit, criticized the AGLG’s staff as being totally inexperienced with local governments.

“I don’t think, when the organization was set up, they really understood the exact nature of accounting in a large-scale municipality,” Hicks said.

Hicks said the creation of the AGLG appeared to be a “knee-jerk reaction” to criticisms from groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and Canadian Taxpayers’ Association that municipalities are bad managers of money.

“I don’t think that’s the case and I think that’s been proved by the audits that are being carried out,” he said.

Large municipalities, like the district, tend to have high-calibre staff and well-honed processes. It’s the smaller communities that need some outside help, Hicks said.

Audits into the District of Sechelt and the City of Dawson Creek produced scathing reports.

In Sechelt’s case, the auditor criticized the previous council for, among other things, meeting with potential contactors behind closed doors before accepting bids to build a wastewater treatment plant.

Dawson Creek’s quest to turn an old postal office into a centre for performing arts ran way over budget because staff never made a proper business case, van Iersel said.

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