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To: GVRDall <gvrall@metrovanancouver.org>

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Subject: COVID-19 Weekly Update – May 22nd

Dear Staff,

This week was the official launch of Phase 2, for our province and our region. I think it's clear that our collective efforts on physical distancing and limiting social contacts has helped flatten the curve and stem the tide of what this could have been for our province. We now need to turn our attention to considering how we can learn and innovate during this time. As we've been seeing and supporting both private businesses and our member jurisdictions adapt to this new way of being, I've been thinking a lot about innovation and creativity as we rebuild and strive for 'bettering the return to normal'.

As you all know, this is far from the first global pandemic. The Black Death, which had a devastating effect on Europe's population, ended up changing the economic and social structure of Europe, and it led to the creation of a middle class. It sparked interest in literacy, art, and experimentation. The Boston Smallpox Epidemic resulted in an important first step towards the introduction of vaccines. In 1665, the Great Plague of London hit. Sir Isaac Newton, (before he became a Sir) was a student at Cambridge University. Much like present day, Cambridge sent its students home, to try and reduce the rate of transmission. During that time, Newton thrived. The year he spent away from university was later referred to as his "annus mirabilis", or "the year of wonders". He first worked on mathematical problems; these papers became early Calculus. Next, he developed new theories on prisms and optics. And, right outside his window, was an apple tree. He unlocked a fundamental law of physics and his theory of gravity was born.

A few decades later, when the plague swept through Europe in the early 17th century, much of England shut down, also to try and reduce the rate of infection. When theatres shuttered, for almost a year, it could have been the end of Shakespeare. Theatre requires an audience; it requires physical presence. Instead, Shakespeare [turned to poetry](#) and [writing](#). He composed King Lear, Macbeth, and Anthony and Cleopatra before the year was over. During the Spanish Flu, in 1918, Edvard Munch, famous painter ('[The Scream](#)' is one of his most widely known pieces of art), not only contracted the virus, he recovered and made some of his greatest works during that time. The Spanish Flu sparked a new approach to people's health, focusing on what contributes to illness, such as diet and living conditions.

Breakthroughs occurred in the next few decades that were all traced back to the Spanish Flu pandemic - national disease reporting systems, national health surveys, flu vaccines. And, in present day, we're innovating in response to COVID-19. In Italy, ventilator tubes that originally cost [up to \\$10k each are now being produced for under \\$1 by using a 3D printer](#). Automakers and other manufacturers are reworking operations to produce critical ventilators at a fraction of their usual cost. Distilleries that usually make whisky have made hand sanitizer. When we were struggling to acquire hand sanitizer for our staff and our field, we ended up getting many barrels from a brewery that had switched operations to support the need.

There is clearly a history of innovations arising out of epidemics. And again, all experiences are valid; these are trying times and there are going to be days when we all need to pause, go slow, and recalibrate. It's important, however, to try and also think to the future; look beyond now and see what's

next. The technology and creative thinking that comes out of COVID-19 will ensure we're better equipped to handle the next threat to humankind, and hopefully also, support our environment in new, sustaining ways.

Where some see insurmountable challenges, I'm encouraging you to see opportunity, and an invitation to innovate, increase efficiency, continuously improve. Contact your supervisors if you have ideas. You might be the next innovator of our time. I also don't want anyone to assume that innovation is led by the private sector. Far from it. It was the public sector that sent humanity to the moon. The public sector that has led research across all disciplines. Our organization is leading the world on [heat recovery](#) and working to use microalgae in wastewater to rid it of macronutrients [and create biofuel](#). Our Parks team [is testing for EDNA in habitats](#) to determine if endangered species are present, and how to adapt operations to support these species. UV filters on water filtration. Our IT team had us working remotely, almost overnight; examples of innovation span across our departments.

There are so many things that are now 'standard' that once seemed impossible, like magic. A telephone allowing people that are distant, to communicate. An airplane, taking people into the sky, transcending the previous laws of weight and gravity. Global internet. Sending humankind to the moon. The projects and work that you all do here at MV, each and every day. The next generation will look back and say it wasn't magic, it was science. It's engineering. It's the human spirit. This extraordinary time calls for us to build on our rich history. I'm excited to see what you all do next. What we all will do next, as an organization.

Economic Re-Building

It's clear that our respective local jurisdictions, as well as Metro Vancouver as an organization, will be instrumental to rebuilding the economy in the months and few years ahead. We are also hearing from the provincial government that due to the immediate effects on so many workers in BC, [their initial focus will be on worker aid](#), to drive economic recovery in the immediate and short-term, and not infrastructure spending as the immediate priority, but they will still provide support to secure federal funds for capital projects. This doesn't change our course, it just changes the immediacy, and reflects that we need to innovate to respond to immediate matters.

Supporting Staff:

This has been a difficult time for many. I'd like to remind staff that our [Employee and Family Assistance \(EFAP\) program](#) is available to you and your dependents at any time, and is a confidential service. Our EFAP has adjusted their model to offer telephone and virtual counselling.

Our HR team continues to roll out training and support offerings on resiliency, remote working and more. There's a June 3rd 'Working Remotely' training session available –check out the [buzz box](#) to sign up.

Staff Communication:

It's not lost on me that you've had to put up with a book's worth of emails from me so far. And now also two interviews (Part 1 and [Part 2](#)). And that I'm breaking every rule about using brevity in emails. So this is what's really important – **I want to hear from you**. A reminder that I have two questions for you:

1. ***What would be the one life lesson/ life skill you'd say you learned during COVID-19?***
2. ***What has inspired you most during this time?***

Your answers will be collated for me and for an Intranet News story. I have asked Internal Communications for an update; 24 of you have responded so far. (Gold stars for those of you that have replied to date - I have read all your responses - thank you!) I did the math, and that's 1.4% of our current staff. Ahem. (Yes, I might not know bandwidth, but engineers and math, however, is a great combination.) Can we shoot for a measly 15-20%?? **I really want to hear from you**, and I'm providing an extension. Please send them through to [Internal Communications](#) **by the end of the day Wednesday, May 27th**.

Together we make our region strong.

Be well, choose kindness.

Jerry

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