



Plans to replace the Campbell River Library are on hold for at least 12 months.
File photo/Campbell River Mirror

New Campbell River library on hold for at least 12 months

Vancouver Island Regional Library pausing project due to 'skyrocketing' construction and labour costs

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Plans for a new library in downtown Campbell River have been put on hold, following a decision by the Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) Board of Trustees.

On Sept. 25, VIRL trustees voted to continue operating from the current library, located at 1240 Shoppers Row, for at least a year. The main factors influencing this decision were 'skyrocketing' construction and labour costs, according to a VIRL press release.

“This was certainly a difficult decision,” said Gaby Wickstrom, board chair, in the release. “But we could not, being fiscally responsible, move forward with this project under the current construction and labour markets. While the Board is disappointed, we remain committed to and confident in finding a viable solution to build a flagship branch for Campbell River and the North Island.”

For now, the library will remain in its current location for the next year under a month-to-month lease.

Over the next year, all options to revive the new library project in the future will be explored by staff, per the release. VIRL staff will continue to consult with community representatives and weigh options for the future before recommending a path forward to the board.

Per plans developed for the new library, which started in 2019, the existing building was to be demolished, and in its place, a new 20,000 square foot facility was to be constructed.

The total budget for the project was \$14 million, with \$9 million allocated for construction, and the remainder for furnishings, IT infrastructure, consulting, and shelving, among other features. These funds were secured through a Municipal Finance Authority (MFA) loan.

The City of Campbell River committed to providing a no-cost lease to VIRL, demolishing the existing facility, and servicing the site with sewage, water, drainage, and broadband.

But in April 2021, a cost estimate showed that construction costs alone would surpass \$16 million. A second costing was performed in May based on a revised design with scaled-back features, but this also projected construction costs exceeding the budgeted amount by up to \$5 million.

“A new library as a cornerstone of Campbell River’s downtown core and cultural district remains a priority for us,” said Colleen Evans, VIRL trustee and city councillor, in the release.

“The difficult reality is it simply is not the right time to move forward with a project of this size and scope. I will continue to advocate for a new library in Campbell River and trust that the VIRL Board of Trustees will not lose sight of the important role a new library will play in our economic development goals and ongoing community growth.”

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