
Introduction

The Steveston Community Society is the governing body of the Steveston Community Centre in partnership with the City of Richmond. As you will read in the article below, the community centre cannot operate without a non-profit society and volunteer board of directors in place, and a defined partnership with the City of Richmond in the form of an annual operating agreement. This is the model at all community centres in Richmond and has been a very successful partnership for many years.

Here's how it works:

The City of Richmond is responsible for the physical building and property surrounding it, and the Society is responsible for its contents, including the day-to-day programs, equipment, and supplies it takes to operate those programs from the fitness equipment to the last staple in the office. The City provides staff to manage the building and property (Area Coordinator), support staff who manage daily operations (Facility Clerk), and programs developed in cooperation with City staff, society staff (Coordinators) and board volunteers (Program Committee) are managed by City staff (Community Facilities Coordinator). The City also provides the front desk attendants, Recreation Leader, and custodial staff (Building Service Workers). All the other staff are employees of the Steveston Community Society.

Society Coordinators (Seniors, Youth, Racquets, Preschool, Fitness, Volunteers & Events, Summer) are hired by and report to the Community Facilities Coordinator, with the exception of the Executive Director, who is hired by and reports directly to the Board of Directors. The Program Committee is responsible for Human Resources.

Society Coordinators are responsible for the hiring and supervision of any staff who fall under their area of responsibility. The Fitness Coordinator is responsible for any fitness staff, the Preschool Coordinator is responsible for preschool teachers and support staff, etc. Society Coordinators are also responsible, through the Program Committee, for the development and implementation of all programs under their jurisdiction. Society Coordinators report to the Board on a monthly basis through the Program Committee.

About the Steveston Community Society

The following article was written by Jack Gilmore, (a long-time volunteer in many capacities), and presented to the city council of the day in response to a proposed change to the model for delivering community recreation and cultural services in Richmond. It is a good snapshot of the Steveston Community Society's foundation and growth.

THE STEVESTON COMMUNITY SOCIETY- A RICHMOND MODEL

By Jack Gilmore ~ circa 2003

Richmond is a diverse community that has changed significantly over the past few decades. Despite all of the change that we have witnessed, a strong community spirit has been encouraged by citizens who have been willing to give of their time, ideas, sweat, equity and money to build strong, vibrant and active community associations. In many ways, these community associations have been the defining elements of Richmond.

The Steveston Community Society is the grandfather of community associations in Richmond. The Society has a proud history of many achievements and those achievements continue today, benefiting the people of Steveston and Richmond.

As our City government embarks on a restructuring of the current system for delivering parks, recreation and cultural programs, it is perhaps timely to look back at how and why community associations were established. It's important to understand the role community associations have played in Richmond, not just in operating the eight community centres in neighbourhoods throughout the City, but also their role in fighting for civic rights and encouraging civic responsibility and involvement.

The Steveston Community Society's heritage is firmly rooted in grass-roots community involvement, dating back 24 years even before the Society was officially incorporated.

In May 1922, five Steveston residents appeared before Richmond's town council to petition the municipality to provide a playground by buying the original piece of park property near No. One Road and Moncton, where the current children's playground and tennis courts are now located. Proceeds from tickets sold for a "Queen Contest", organized by community volunteers, went to supplement the \$700 the municipality committed to acquire the land.

The first facility at Steveston Park was a lacrosse box, built in the early 1930's using materials donated from the Imperial Cannery and with labour supplied by community volunteers. This make-shift structure was so sturdy it lasted more than 30 years.

In May 1944, a small group of Steveston residents got together to talk about the state of recreational facilities in their community. This vocal group went on to press the municipality to buy nine lots on Broadway Street to establish a new children's playground. With an enthusiasm that has not diminished over the years, the founding members of the Steveston Community Society personally pitched in, grading and seeding the park and building swings for the kids.

Their fundraising efforts started with the first sports day on Dominion Day in 1944, an event that was a great success not only in fundraising, but also in drawing the community together. That event went on to evolve into the popular and renowned annual Steveston Salmon Festival.

A commentary in the Richmond Review following the 1945 July 1st Sports Day spoke of the efforts of the volunteers:

"Steveston is improving everyday. The interest of citizens will help it and its young people to better things."

When Steveston Community Society was officially incorporated in 1946, one of the objectives was to partner with the municipality to construct a community centre. But the Society was committed to doing much more than simply building and operating a community centre, as is evident in one of its objectives spelled out in the Society's original constitution:

"To provide opportunities in such building (community centre) and elsewhere in Steveston for wholesome recreation and other leisure-time activities and to create a community spirit in and about Steveston in a democratic manner"

Since its inception, the Steveston Community Society had expanded its role of leadership beyond the park and community centre on Moncton Street, the Society has been a voice for the people of Steveston. We have demonstrated how community societies throughout Richmond can represent the people of their neighborhood in issues like heritage preservation, community development and civic involvement.

We've shown how volunteer achievement leads to civic pride, time and again. Little community pride is generated simply by calling on people to be advisors. When volunteers can devise plans, make decisions, get involved hands-on in community projects and programs, they take ownership of their community and act responsibly.

The Steveston Community Society has taken a leadership role in many community projects beyond our park boundaries, like the establishment of the Fisherman's Memorial at Garry Point – the landmark 'needle'.

We've forged partnerships with many other community-based groups, like the Steveston Lions Club, the Steveston Japanese Language School, the Steveston Judo Club, the Steveston Kendo Club, the many groups that participate in the Salmon Festival and many others.

The most important partnership is the one that originally was forged with the municipality, that allowed land to be acquired for our park and that allowed for the development of the many facilities that are part of the Steveston community.

In 1956, the Steveston Community Society turned over title to their park and \$440,000 in trust funds to the municipality to allow for the Steveston Community Centre to be built. That money, together with \$15,000 generously donated by the Japanese Canadian Citizenship Association, formed the basis upon which the Community Centre was funded. It opened in November 1957, signifying the realization of the long-standing dream of a group of committed citizens in the Steveston community.

This partnership between the community and the municipality continued over the years in Steveston and it has always formed the basis upon which the Steveston Community Centre and its many facilities and programs were developed.

In 1971, when municipal council approved only partial funding for the construction of the Steveston Martial Arts Centre, the first dojo building outside Japan, three of my fellow Community Society Directors and myself showed our commitment by co-signing a \$15,000 bank loan to get the project underway.

The Steveston Community Society became the model for the community associations in Richmond. Other community societies were founded using the Steveston model as a foundation. The strong partnerships that exist today between the City and various community societies and other organizations in Richmond draw much of their strength from the experiences of the Steveston Community Society.

The Steveston Community Society and other organizations in Richmond can continue to provide strong leadership and pride of accomplishment in their local areas. It is imperative that these groups continue to have a say in how their communities are run as they have always had a strong feeling for the needs of these communities.

Before we change the model for delivering community recreation and cultural services in Richmond, it would be prudent to look at the successes that have flowed out the Steveston model. If the proposed changes to the delivery system are adopted by City council, I believe it will be the demise of the community societies. Richmond will lose the many dedicated volunteers who take pride in giving their time and effort to improve their community. The “Spirit of Steveston” will die and it will be a sad day for Richmond.

Jack Gilmore first became involved with the Steveston Community Society in 1967, serving as the Society’s President between 1968 and 1970 and as a Director until 1991. He chaired the annual Steveston Salmon Festival for many years and also served as a Trustee on the Board of the Steveston Community Society.

About the Richmond Agricultural and Industrial Society

The Richmond Agricultural and Industrial Society was originally formed in 1891 by a group of Steveston farmers and merchants, many of whom were also Richmond’s founders. Some years later “The AG” lost its status as a Society, but was re-established in 1965 and continues today as one of the oldest societies in BC. The AG Board is the same Board of Directors as the Steveston Community Society. The Steveston Salmon Festival, Steveston Farmers & Artisans Market, and the planned Educational Garden project are all managed under the umbrella of the Richmond Agricultural and Industrial Society, in keeping with its objectives as outlined in its 1965 Constitution, which are:

- a. to assist and develop and foster Community spirit;
- b. to promote the artistic, educational, social, professional, agricultural, industrial and sporting endeavours of the Community;
- c. to assist any organization, group, corporation, society, or individual whose aim is to promote the artistic, educational, social, professional, agricultural, industrial and sporting endeavours of the people within the Municipality of Richmond.
- d. to operate a Social Club