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October 21, 2025

Mayor Rob Douglas and Council
Municipality of North Cowichan
7030 Trans-Canada Highway
Duncan, BC V9L 6A1
Via email: mayor@northcowichan.ca

Dear Mayor Douglas and Council,

Re: Chemainus Branch Operating Hours

Thank you for your inquiry received October 15, 2025, regarding the Chemainus branch of Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL). I am pleased to provide further context on the recent schedule adjustments that took effect in Chemainus on September 21, 2025.

In 2023, VIRL’s new administration team, under Library Board direction, conducted a regional review of operating hours from a regional perspective. The result: recurring inequities, particularly in branch scheduling and staff allocation. Further imbalances surfaced, at the community level, with recently built branches operating at levels exceeding those of communities twice their size. To remedy these disparities and inefficiencies, VIRL created new standardized schedules and aligned operating hours with considerations such as branch size, population, community setting (urban or rural; small, medium or large) and service priorities expressed by community members.

As a regional library system, VIRL is committed to delivering consistent, high-quality service across all 39 branches, including the virtual branch. Our catchment areas are based on regional and district boundaries established by the BC Electoral Boundaries Commission; VIRL does not create, advocate for, or influence these boundaries. Residents from nearby communities - including Saltair, Crofton, Westholme, Thetis and Penelakut Islands, and surrounding Indigenous reserves - may use the Chemainus branch as well as others nearby, reflecting the flexibility and reach of a regional system.

Please see the catchment area’s below:

Community	Electoral Area	VIRL Branch Catchment Area
Saltair	CV Area G	Ladysmith
Crofton	North Cowichan	Cowichan
Thetis Island	CV Area G	Ladysmith
Penelakut	CV Area G	Ladysmith
Westholm	North Cowichan	Ladysmith
	CV Area B	1/2 to Cowichan, 1/2 to South Cowichan
	CV Area D	Cowichan
	CV Area E	Cowichan

Chemainus population data has also been verified against the 2021 Census. While the updated figures show a modest increase, this does not affect branch categorizations or operating hour allocations.


In a future without resource constraints, our vision for library service includes every location to be open every day of the week. For now, we must ensure our services are delivered effectively and within budget. A sustainable staffing model in place, in all 39 locations, is a pragmatic step forward. We hope our valued patrons and supporters of the library system will continue to enjoy the branch located in Chemainus and may also enjoy exploring the branches in neighbouring locations. The Ladysmith and South Cowichan (Mill Bay) branches are both open on Mondays.

We agree that the Chemainus branch is a success - beautifully designed, thoughtfully planned, and well aligned with community needs. We also understand local concerns and deeply value the role the library plays in Chemainus. Adjusting operating hours was a difficult but necessary decision to align Chemainus with branches of comparable size, ensuring sustainable and equitable service across the region.

A VIRL library card provides an open door to learning for individuals who have a branch in their immediate community, as well as those who are served by a branch for their catchment area. While seven-day service remains an aspirational goal, aligning Chemainus' hours with similarly sized branches ensures sustainable operations across communities in the Cowichan Valley Regional District and across our service area. VIRL is committed to equitable service delivery and continues to invest strategically in branch renewal and service enhancements across our system.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Erin Hemmens
Chair, VIRL Board of Trustees

cc: Tek Manhas, Trustee, VIRL Board of Trustees
Ted Swabey, CAO, Municipality of North Cowichan
Eileen Gillette, Executive Director, VIRL

October 15, 2025

Erin Hemmens, Chair
Vancouver Island Regional Library
Box 3333
6250 Hammond Bay Road
Nanaimo BC V9R 5N3

Via email: info@virl.bc.ca

Dear Chair Hemmens and Board members

Re: Chemainus Branch Operating Hours

At its meeting on September 17, 2025, Council for the Municipality of North Cowichan passed a resolution authorizing the Mayor to write to the Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) Board to express concern regarding the recent changes to the operating hours of the Chemainus Branch.

Council acknowledges the intent of the Standardized Schedules and Operating Review (SS&OR) project to address system-wide financial and operational challenges. However, we are concerned that the reduction in operating days at the Chemainus Branch—specifically the closure on Mondays and Sundays—will negatively impact residents who rely on the library for access to resources, programming, and community connection.

Chemainus is a vibrant and growing community, and while we understand the branch currently serves a population below the typical threshold for small branches, its role as a community hub is significant. The reduction from 55 to 42 hours per week represents a substantial change, and Council is concerned that this may disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, families, and students.

While we understand that VIRL's SS&OR project was informed by public engagement conducted in 2022, Council is concerned that this consultation may not reflect current community needs or the full scope of the Chemainus branch's service area. The population data used to justify the reduction in hours appears to account only for the core of Chemainus, excluding nearby communities such as Saltair, Crofton, Westholme, Thetis and Penelakut Islands, as well as surrounding Indigenous reserves. These areas have instead been included in the Cowichan and Ladysmith catchment areas, despite their close proximity to and reliance on the Chemainus branch. Council believes the needs of these communities must be meaningfully considered in any future service decisions.

We respectfully request that the VIRL Board reconsider the revised schedule and explore options to maintain or restore service levels that reflect the unique needs of Chemainus residents. We also

welcome further dialogue with VIRL leadership to better understand the data and rationale behind these decisions and to advocate for equitable service delivery.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response and to continued collaboration in support of our community's access to library services.

Sincerely



Rob Douglas
Mayor

mayor@northcowichan.ca

cc: Tek Manhas, Trustee, VIRL Board of Trustees
North Cowichan Council
Ted Swabey, Chief Administrative Officer, North Cowichan