

The YouTube video provided corresponds to the official recording of the **Strathcona Regional District (SRD) Regional Board Meeting held on March 27, 2024** 1. This session featured high-level presentations on regional literacy and early childhood development, a divided debate on island housing regulations, and a significant escalation in the fight for rural electrification 1-3.

The following are the key highlights and outcomes from the meeting:

1. Regional Literacy and Library Operations (VIRL)

Ben Heyman, Executive Director of the **Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL)**, provided a comprehensive update on the library's strategic plan and 2024 budget 1.

- **Usage and Reach:** Within the SRD, **31% of the population** are active library users, with local branches drawing approximately **14,000 visitors per month** 1.
- **The Literacy Crisis:** Heyman raised a major alarm regarding declining literacy rates, noting that **4 in 10 adults** in the region struggle with basic literacy in their daily work lives 1.
- **Security Costs:** The library's budget was right-sized to **\$38 million** (a 15% increase), driven partly by the new necessity of spending **\$1 million annually** on security services across the system 1.

2. Early Childhood Support: Campbell River Early Years Council

Anne Boyd and Brenda Wagman presented the Council's 2024–2026 strategic plan, emphasizing that every **\$1 invested** in early childhood education returns approximately **\$6 in long-term economic benefits** 4.

- **Systemic Barriers:** The delegation identified long waitlists for developmental assessments (speech, hearing, and literacy) as a primary bottleneck for young families 4.
- **Pandemic Fallout:** They noted that children currently in **grades 3 and 4** are struggling significantly with reading because they missed foundational learning windows during COVID-19 disruptions 4.

3. Area C Short-Term Rental (STR) Opt-In Debate

The Board engaged in a polarized debate regarding whether **Electoral Area C (Quadra Island)** should opt into the provincial *Short-Term Rental Accommodations Act* principal residence requirement 2.

- **The Decision:** Led by Director Robyn Mawhinney, the Board voted to **opt into the provincial mandate** to address an acute local housing crisis 2.
- **The Opposition:** You (**Director John Rice**) and Director Seratik opposed the move, arguing that the provincial law is a **"blunt instrument"** that overrides local autonomy and could cause severe financial hits, such as a **5% GST payback bill** on assessed property values for some owners 2.

4. Cedar Creek & Upper Campbell Lake Electrification

A major highlight of the meeting was your leadership in bringing forward a motion demanding accountability from **BC Hydro** regarding the **Cedar Creek and Upper Campbell Lake** areas 3, 5.

- **The Grievance:** You highlighted that BC Hydro's recent **\$5.6 million quote** for

community power appears to ignore four significantly cheaper project alternatives that were technically explored in 2011 3, 6.

- **Safety and Livability:** The Board agreed that the lack of grid power is a critical safety issue impacting clean water access, refrigeration, and future cellular connectivity 3.
- **Outcome:** The Board passed your motion directing staff to provide residents with a formal status update and to investigate a **formal complaint to the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC)** to audit BC Hydro's pricing and technical requirements 3, 5, 6.

In summary, the March 27, 2024 meeting documents your role as a **principled advocate** for rural infrastructure and safety while you navigated complex provincial housing mandates alongside your regional colleagues 3, 7.