

Dear Mayor and Council,

In my previous letter, I suggested that the federal government's authoritarian response to the District of North Saanich's land-use decisions may have been motivated, at least in part, by a desire to obscure the true extent of PFAS contamination from airport runoff.

Since then, a damning report from the University of Toronto's Investigative Journalism Bureau (IJB) has validated those concerns — revealing that the Department of National Defence (DND) detected dangerous levels of “forever chemicals” in North Bay's water as early as 2012, yet withheld that information from local officials and the public for nearly five years.

These revelations makes the need for municipal unity unmistakably clear.

Municipal Unity and Transparency

Municipal unity can close the gaps that senior governments leave open — and those gaps are often where public health, trust, and accountability are lost. The North Bay case shows what happens when federal custodianship meets silence: citizens drink contaminated water, mayors write unanswered letters, and local governments are left to pick up the pieces.

If municipalities choose to commit to a unified approach in order to fill these oversight gaps, it will not only demonstrate the will of the people, but will also help expose these issues, pressuring senior governments to do their part. When local councils act together, it forces senior governments to choose: either help fund the solution, or expose themselves as unwilling to meet the clear public mandate for food, water and air that are clean and safe.

The urgency is no longer abstract to British Columbians. UBC researchers have now detected eight different PFAS compounds in B.C. sea otters, marking the first confirmed contamination in the province's marine mammals. The study found concentrations three times higher in otters near cities and shipping routes such as Victoria and Tofino — clear evidence of a runoff-driven proximity effect. These findings confirm that PFAS are entering the marine food web from our shorelines, airports, and landfills, implicating wastewater systems and storm drains that municipalities must manage every day.

Fiscal Timing: A Federal Responsibility

Canada's federal budget continues to run a staggering deficit, one that future generations will be forced to bear. If Ottawa is prepared to draw from those future funds to sustain partisan priorities or administrative growth, then surely this is the moment to fund PFAS remediation in full. Addressing “forever chemicals” is not a luxury project — it is an existential necessity.

This is not just a northern Ontario problem, nor a contained military-base issue — excessive PFAS contamination has reached our coastlines and wildlife. Waiting for federal regulators to solve it while

municipalities shoulder the consequences is no longer tenable. Every dollar spent now on proactive cleanup, improved stormwater controls, and transparent monitoring is a dollar saved from decades of bottled-water deliveries, lawsuits, ecological collapse, and chronic illness.

Federal inaction leaves local governments to handle the immediate fallout — but if municipalities act together, it exposes the imbalance plainly.

Artificial Turf: A Unified Call for Rejection

As Saanich Council and others weigh artificial turf fields, municipalities must face a clear truth: every synthetic turf system releases microplastics. The UBC “Understanding and Managing Artificial Turf” (2025) report confirms that, even when marketed as PFAS-free, turf fibers, infill, and backing materials shed microplastics and chemical residues through wear, weather, and sunlight.

These pollutants wash into storm drains and waterways, adding to the same runoff pathways already contaminated with PFAS. Turf also increases surface runoff, heat, and soil compaction, further stressing ecosystems and municipal stormwater systems.

UBC researchers warn that while PFAS can sometimes be avoided, microplastic pollution from artificial turf cannot — it is an inherent and permanent feature.

For that reason, municipalities should adopt a unified position:

- Reject new artificial turf installations until full environmental monitoring and accountability systems exist; and
- Phase out existing fields over time in favor of permeable, organic alternatives that ensure the protection of our soil, water, and public health.

Until transparent monitoring is in place, approving artificial turf is not responsible infrastructure — it is deferred liability. True leadership means choosing permeable, organic, and low-impact alternatives, and using this moment to model what environmental accountability looks like in practice.

Next Steps for Councils

1. Pass a resolution calling for full PFAS transparency and municipal testing programs aligned with Health Canada’s 30 ng/L benchmark, not the looser provincial standard.
2. Request federal funding for PFAS mitigation infrastructure now — while Ottawa is still spending freely — rather than after austerity arrives.
3. Form inter-municipal alliances to coordinate testing, data sharing, and advocacy. A unified voice will make it politically impossible for senior governments to ignore this issue.

4. Establish a moratorium on new artificial-turf installations until transparent, province-wide environmental monitoring and leachate testing systems are operational.
5. Develop municipal policies to phase out existing turf fields over time in favour of permeable, organic, and low-impact alternatives, prioritizing natural grass, cork, and sand-based systems that restore infiltration and biodiversity.
6. Encourage regional districts to track and publicly disclose all artificial-turf locations and runoff pathways, so that future PFAS or microplastic remediation can be planned effectively.

Closing Thoughts

This is not fear-mongering — it is an invitation to lead. There are solutions already within reach: white rot fungi and reed-based biofiltration can help remove toxins from soil and water, while a municipally funded mobile incinerator program could safely dispose of PFAS-contaminated materials.

Municipal leaders should be working hand-in-hand with our universities and research institutions, which continue to provide some of the most forward-thinking environmental science in the world. In the absence of real leadership from senior governments, it falls to municipalities — and to municipal unity — to pioneer the solutions that will define Canada's environmental future.

When municipal leaders act together on behalf of their residents, they embody democracy at its most tangible level. The IJB report out of Ontario is not an isolated scandal; it is a warning. If municipalities seize this moment, you can ensure that what happened in North Bay never happens again anywhere in Canada.

Only once we understand the true nature and extent of our problems can we cooperate on solutions. Transport Canada's authoritarian attitude toward one of our municipal councils was preventing that important progress. I trust that councils across this province will look to the recent federal budget and consider why that approach was taken — and why unity is now essential.

I would like to personally thank every municipality that has added these letters to their public agendas — your actions have amplified awareness and strengthened provincial and national calls for reform. The more people become informed, the harder it becomes for senior governments to look away from these critical issues.

With respect and gratitude,
Philip Perras

4510 Bedwell Harbour Road
Pender Island, BC

VON 2M1

philip_perras@hotmail.com