

Council Reaffirms Commitment to Solar + Battery Project By Mayor Boot

Summerland is one of only five municipalities in the entire province that owns their electric utility. Penticton, Nelson, New Westminster and Grand Forks also benefit from public-owned electric utilities.

The District buys electricity from Fortis then, using public infrastructure, distributes the power to Summerland ratepayers.

Early in the first year of this term, Council adopted their Strategic Priorities for 2019-2022. The six key themes of this plan are downtown vibrancy, infrastructure investment, good governance, active lifestyles, alternative energy and community resiliency. Most of Council's priorities fall within more than one of these themes.

The integrated solar + battery storage project falls primarily under both alternative energy and infrastructure investment. It is an alternative energy project in that it will produce electricity, that is, the District will not be purchasing it from Fortis. The project is also an investment in the electric utility infrastructure and will not only increase the District-owned assets, but provide revenue.

Examples of other strategic projects and initiatives falling under the alternative energy theme include the ongoing implementation of the Community Climate Action Plan, the Corporate Climate Action Plan (first draft presented February 22, 2021) and the Community Energy Strategy. Council has also approved an updated distributed generation (net metering) program that allows Summerland electric utility resident customers to generate their own electricity through a renewable energy source. Participants are able to completely offset their annual electric consumption; the District purchases, at the wholesale rate, any excess energy which is put back onto the grid.

A second example of infrastructure investment related to the electric utility is the voltage conversion project—an initiative to address future and growing electric load requirements and improve the reliability of Summerland's public-owned electrical distribution system (this project is subject to the District's successful receipt of grant funding).

The first draft of the Community Energy Strategy—a comprehensive report including recommendations on how to get the most out of the District's electric utility—will be before Council by early spring.

The integrated solar + battery storage has been a matter of some discussion over the past year and there has been considerable civic engagement on both sides of the matter, both for and against, on topics from the cost to the need to the location to the risks and benefits.

However, at the February 22, 2021 meeting, Councillor Carlson brought forward a Notice of Motion asking “that Council reaffirms the commitment to complete the integrated solar + battery storage project in its chosen location”. After a lively discussion, the vote of Council remained the

same: a majority 4-3 decision. This vote provides assurance to District staff to continue with the process that is now in the site preparation, design and procurement stage.

Congratulations to Kristi Leardo on her new-ish (July 2020) venture: Bees Knees Yarn Shop on Main Street. Ms. Leardo was featured in a national newspaper article about entrepreneurs who have opened during the pandemic. Well done Kristi!

Summerland was recently named one of “12 great places in B.C. for working remotely” in a magazine focused on stories about smaller communities, homes and living.