

Mayor's Report

July 27, 2020

On July 17, I attended the Summerland Ambassador Program's coronation. Nine young people—eight young women and one young man—participated in the Program. To retiring Miss Summerland Sage Beddome, and retiring Summerland Princesses Katrina Kirschmann and Verity Taylor: You have served and represented Summerland so well during your reign. We wish you every success in future years. Congratulations to Summerland's new Ambassador Team: Miss Summerland Daphne Susheski, and Princesses Marie Bowyer and Hillary Robertson. Your hardworking coordinators are working with District staff to work on a swearing-in ceremony. And, speaking of them, I was pleased to be able to award—in person this time—the 2019 Mayor's Award of Excellence to Pat Gartrell, Karen Hooper, Leanne Sieben and Caroline Mackay. Thank you, ladies, for the many volunteer hours you put into supporting Summerland youth.

On the morning of July 21, I and a colleague—Logan Lake Mayor Robin Smith—were guest speakers on a Southern Interior Local Government Association discussion about how COVID-19 has impacted our respective local government budgets. We also spoke about the questions Councils and Regional District Boards need to ask and discuss during the next two+ years of budget deliberations, especially related to infrastructure renewal. Just as important will be the community discussions about levels of service: What level of service do you need or want? How much does it cost to reach or maintain that level of service? And, ultimately: How much are you willing to pay?

On the evening of July 13 the Lekhi family was a target of racist vandalism, a shocking and traumatic incident for the family. Although the Lekhis bore the brunt of the attack, the community of Summerland was also negatively impacted by what is being investigated as a hate crime. On July 16 hundreds of people showed their support and love for the Lekhis by attending a drive-by rally organized by Mary Anne Chartrand.

The following evening, just before 10 pm, I received a text from Sgt. Preston of the Summerland detachment asking if I would be willing to talk to the man who was seen displaying a Confederate flag at the parade. He wanted to apologize. During our discussion, the man mentioned he had purchased the flag in a local dollar store.

On Saturday, I went to the dollar store with two friends and a member of the local media. After some time, a dollar store employee admitted that they carried bandanas printed with the Confederate flag. I offered to purchase the bandanas, but the shopkeeper gave them to me. My friends and I destroyed them.

I knowingly put myself in a place of criticism. My actions, done as the Mayor of Summerland, were an overt and public display of anti-racism in reaction to an overt and public display of racism earlier in the week. The Confederate flag is a contributing factor to displays of racism.

I am a leader and leaders are expected to lead.

In Canada, the sale of the Confederate flag and merchandise bearing its image is not illegal—neither is the sale of the Nazi Party flag. The Confederate flag is a universal symbol of hate, just like the Swastika. Both flags have been co-opted by white supremacy groups.

Summerland is not a racist town, but we do have a problem with racism.

Much like the pandemic has provided opportunities to learn from difficult and unexpected circumstances, the events of the last two weeks have also revealed important learning moments.

We, as a community, have an opportunity to talk about racism. Consistent with our February 2020 commitment to start the work of Reconciliation, Council unanimously adopted two resolutions on July 13:

1. THAT in light of the recent vandalism and graffiti in Summerland, Council stands with the Lekhi family and the community against racism.
2. THAT Council direct staff to look into working with the Library Board, Philosophers Cafe or other organizations to start a community conversation on racism.

This is our chance to learn and reflect in a safe and inclusive environment. I am hopeful that—together—we can do the work that needs to be done so that, in time, we can proudly and truthfully proclaim “Summerland is an anti-racist community.”

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Toni Boot