

## Constructive meetings held with government ministers

by Doug Holmes

Last fall's provincial election resulted in a Cabinet shuffle with the appointment of many first-time ministers as well as returning ministers taking on new roles. For local government, it's important to maintain constructive inter-governmental relationships and bring new ministers up to speed on topics of local concern.

I therefore took advantage of the opportunity of all ministers being in Victoria while the legislature was in session and travelled to the provincial capital on May 14 and 15 to meet with five key ministers, all new to their portfolios:

- *Josie Osborne, Minister of Health.* With provincial funding not forthcoming for a proposed team-based primary care centre in Summerland, we discussed alternate solutions for addressing the local doctor shortage and how the evolving primary care network could work for Summerland. My impression is that, as a former mayor, Minister Osborne appreciates the difficulty of building a complete community if people have to travel out of town to see a family physician.
- *Mike Farnsworth, Minister of Transportation and Transit.* We discussed the poor condition of the 2-km stretch of Summerland-Princeton Rd within Summerland's municipal boundary and the possibility of government support for upgrades given its provincial Highway 40 designation. We also briefly discussed options for a secondary route between Summerland and Peachland given the regular disruptions on Highway 97.
- *Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture.* We discussed the challenges of maintaining roads and other infrastructure in agricultural areas given the distances between parcels and small tax base. The Minister acknowledged the difficulty of adequately servicing agricultural land and agreed to participate in a meeting of farming communities being organized by the District of Summerland at the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention in September.
- *Jagrup Brar, Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals.* We discussed the need for the Province to work with municipalities when aggregate activities do not conform to local zoning, in light of the recent government approval of a gravel pit in an environmentally sensitive area at the end of Garnet Valley. Minister Brar was receptive to the concerns raised but said he couldn't speak specifically about the Garnet Valley pit because the decision is before the courts. Penticton-Summerland MLA Amelia Boulton attended this meeting with me and we continue to work together on a political solution separate from the third-party legal action.
- *Brittney Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities.* We had a wide-ranging discussion on all the topics raised with the other ministers and also talked about the need for continued investment in municipal infrastructure. We also discussed her portfolio, which is a new role situated in the Premier's office, and how the government defines what is a rural community.

The five meetings ranged in length from 30 minutes to over an hour, which provided time for proper discussion. The meetings were also less formal than the 'speed dating' format of the UBCM convention, where local governments queue to speak with ministers in 15-minute rotations.

Each meeting served to move the needle on key issues and there will be much follow up in the weeks and months ahead.

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland.*