

## **Bylaw enforcement serves the community well**

By Doug Holmes

Like in most municipalities, bylaw enforcement in Summerland is primarily "complaint-driven". That means rather than go out and look for possible infractions, bylaw officers typically take action when a complaint is filed by a member of the public.

Complaint-driven bylaw enforcement allows municipalities to be more efficient and target areas where residents feel their quality of life is most affected.

Residents can submit complaints online, by email, or in person to the Bylaw Services department at Municipal Hall. Once a complaint is received, a bylaw officer will investigate and attempt to resolve the issue through education and voluntary compliance before issuing a ticket if necessary.

Complaints are kept confidential, however the complainant may need to give evidence as a witness if the matter proceeds to court and their name would then be disclosed.

Sometimes bylaw infractions are investigated without a public complaint if District staff discover a violation during their duties or if the RCMP or a provincial government organization request something be investigated. In other instances, bylaws are subject to ongoing inspections for compliance, particularly building infractions.

Summertime generally brings a need for more enforcement given that people (residents and visitors) are out in large numbers enjoying public spaces like parks and beaches. To handle the increased workload, the District hires a seasonal bylaw officer (April to October) to complement Summerland's sole year-round full-time officer.

In addition to matters like noise complaints and public disturbances, bylaw officers this summer have been enforcing two-hour and three-hour parking restrictions in the downtown core following complaints from a number of business owners about the limited availability of parking due to all the construction. To encourage parking turnover, those found in violation are being issued warnings prior to receiving a parking ticket. While some people would rather see no parking limits, we are trying to balance reasonable enforcement with different parking options to maintain downtown vibrancy during this major construction work that will benefit the whole community.

The warmer weather also brings an increase to the local unhoused population, which creates unique enforcement challenges.

While Summerland often has transient agricultural workers and local residents sleeping in their cars, we are also now seeing the type of homelessness common to urban centres where people with no connection to the community arrive and pitch tents in various places. When an encampment is established, a District bylaw officer, sometimes accompanied by an RCMP officer, is sent to enforce municipal bylaws and provincial and federal law. The unsheltered individuals are connected to social support services as many have mental health and addiction issues, and the encampment is then dismantled.

In the months of May and June this year, District staff cleaned up nine encampments and two illegal dump sites, the largest requiring 12 person-hours and the removal of two dump truck loads of garbage.

Dealing with the unhoused has become a significant drain on District resources, and it requires bylaw enforcement officers to use good judgement and conflict-resolution skills. By combining these and other skills with comprehensive training, Summerland's bylaw officers are serving the community well.

For further information on Summerland Bylaw Services and to report a bylaw violation, see: [summerland.ca/city-services/bylaw-services](https://summerland.ca/city-services/bylaw-services)

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland*