

Council meets with government ministers at UBCM

by Doug Holmes

The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) annual convention is an important forum for dialogue between local and provincial governments through inter-governmental workshops, resolution debates, and one-on-one meetings with provincial ministers and ministry staff.

This year's forum was held Sept 22 – 26 in Victoria and was attended by council members Erin Trainer, Richard Barkwill, Janet Peake, Adrienne Betts, and myself. We had formal meetings with the following ministers:

- *Anne Kang, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture & Sport*, to speak about our request to apply a 3% Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) to short-term accommodation, which requires Cabinet approval. Summerland is one of the only municipalities in the Okanagan to not collect this hotel tax, which would be directed to Destination Summerland for destination marketing and tourism promotion.
- *Brenda Bailey, Minister of Finance*, to discuss the District's ability to adequately support widely dispersed infrastructure with a relatively small tax base. In particular, we discussed provincial support for rural infrastructure to ensure the integrity and sustainability of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).
- *Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land & Resource Stewardship (WLRS)*, to discuss a Sourcewater Protection Plan for the Trout Creek watershed that the District of Summerland is developing with the Penticton Indian Band. The work will require consistent provincial involvement and support.
- *Jagrup Brar, Minister of Mining & Critical Materials*, to discuss ongoing concerns with the Garnet Valley gravel pit approved last year. We questioned how the government will deal with negative environmental impacts as identified by the WLRS Ministry, including a mule deer winter range established through government regulation. (This was also discussed with Minister Neill.)
- *Diana Gibson, Minister of Citizen Services*, to ask why so few provincial services were available in Summerland and talk about the possibility of a pop-up Service BC Centre in Summerland one day a week.
- *Amna Shah, Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Addictions*, to discuss youth mental health in light of recent local tragedies. While the matter is largely beyond the scope of the municipality, we wanted to make the government aware of a potential suicide cluster and gain a better understanding of how it could be addressed.

Penticton-Summerland MLA Amelia Boulton attended and supported us at all our minister meetings.

Council requested but was not granted meetings with the Premier, Minister of Housing & Municipal Affairs, Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation & Transit, and Minister of Health. However, we did meet with senior staff from those ministries as well as from BC Assessment and BC Hydro.

For the second straight year, the District of Summerland also organized a meeting of delegates from farming communities which was attended by more than 50 mayors and councillors from 20 municipalities as well as Agriculture Minister Lana Popham. Discussion covered a range of topics including the Premier's Task Force on Agriculture and Food and a review of the threshold for achieving farm status.

Face-to-face meetings at the UBCM convention help to move the needle on issues. Decisions and responses are typically not provided on the spot but government staff are sent away to review a request and report back. Follow-up meetings are often required.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland.