



Mayor's Report – January 23, 2023

Council's strategic priorities were finalized at a committee-of-the-whole meeting on January 12th and brought forward for formal approval today. With our priorities in hand, Council was able to get straight into budget deliberations last Tuesday and Wednesday (Jan 17 & 18).

Given the inflationary pressures that are making everyone's life difficult this year, Council had to make some tough decisions. We made some cuts and deferrals and, in the end, we were able to produce a draft budget that keeps property tax increases to less than 4% for this year.

We'll now be seeking public input and comment on the draft budget before bringing it to a future Council meeting for further discussion and adoption. The draft will soon be posted to the District website, and it will be presented at a public open house on Thursday, February 2nd. (5-8pm at the Arena Banquet Hall).

As has been reported, the Deputy Mayor and I hosted the new Municipal Affairs Minister, Anne Kang, on a visit to Summerland last Monday (Jan 16). We spoke to the Minister about our strategic priorities, including aging infrastructure, affordable housing, primary health care, and our plans to go to referendum to build a new recreation centre.

Seeing is believing, as they say, so we took the Minister on a tour of downtown, including a stop at the existing swimming pool. After trying out Justin Kripps' bobsled, the Minister entered the Aquatics Centre and saw first-hand a community hub that was buzzing with activity. She also saw black globs of muck leaking from the ceiling, uprooted floor tiles, leaking pipes, corroded control panels, and an aged-out HVAC system.

As we seek government grant funding, it's important that we demonstrate the need in the community for a new rec centre. I think we did that.

It's not everyday a government minister drops into Summerland for visit, and I thanked the Minister for reaching out. The Minister spoke about her desire to establish relationships and partner with municipalities, and I think she was sincere.

Building an adaptable and affordable community encompasses both increasing housing supply and protecting the environment. The two need to go together. An example of that is the Lakehouse development in Trout Creek, where the developer is undertaking work to protect and restore the riparian area alongside Gartrell Trail. On January 13th, the Deputy Mayor and I joined the CAO and other senior District staff on a visual inspection of the trail. We were accompanied by the developer and the Qualified Environmental Professional, who showed us where invasive trees like Russian olive, Siberian elm, and black locust had been removed. He also showed us where thinning had occurred to help the growth of existing Cottonwoods, and where new native vegetation and trees will be planted.

Another one of Council's strategic priorities is to further First Nations reconciliation and to continue building our relationship with the Penticton Indian Band. On January 12th, the same day we finalized our strategic priorities, I met with Chief Greg Gabriel.

The meeting came in the wake of the news that welcome signs on PIB land had been defaced with hateful language. I told Chief Gabriel that such racist acts were in contrary to our community values and we stood in solidarity to condemn them.

It was mainly a “get-to-know-each-other” meeting with no set agenda; however we did agree to scheduling a joint meeting of our two Councils for sometime in the near future.

When we speak of reconciliation, we also need to think of the Métis. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) speaks about the historic lack of relationship and recognition of the Métis and how that still permeates today. Over the Christmas break, I met with Jamie Keith, leader of the South Okanagan Métis, who also happens to be a resident of Summerland. Ms. Keith told me there are about 70 people of historic Métis Nation ancestry living here in Summerland. We agreed we’d work on an opportunity for Council to meet with the Summerland Metis so we can start to establish that relationship.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also talks about the need for continuous learning about indigenous peoples, and, with that in mind, last Thursday evening I attended a Zoom panel discussion organized by the University of the Fraser Valley where First Nations and municipal leaders shared their experiences of Indigenous and local government relationships. It’s always useful to hear the learnings of those who go before you, and there were a couple key take-aways from the former mayor of Kamloops, who spoke about the City’s cultural and heritage agreement with its First Nations neighbours, and from the District of Mission where the Council adopted 9 Principles of Reconciliation as they move toward becoming what they call a ‘City of Reconciliation’.

Moving on to the RDOS – at last Thursday’s Board meeting, it was agreed to apply to the UBCM Community Emergency Preparedness Fund for a \$117,000 grant to support technology connectivity, increased regional training, and volunteer recruitment and retention for the Emergency Support Services in the region. The RDOS has been successful at obtaining funding from this program every year since 2017 and, like in previous years, the 2023 application includes participation from the District of Summerland, Town of Oliver, Village of Keremeos, and Town of Princeton.

Emergency Support Services in our communities play a critical role in helping people impacted by floods, fires and other emergencies. Coordinating the training of the different Emergency Support groups helps to ensure services are consistent throughout the region and it also helps build a spirit of collaboration that’s needed for emergency response.

Also at last week’s RDOS board meeting, Interior Health presented its 2023 capital funding request to the Regional Hospital District. The request was for \$3.5 million for a range of projects, including \$1.3 million for primary care projects in Keremeos and Princeton. The Board agreed to provide financing through a combination of long-term borrowing and reserve contributions and there will be no increase in the tax requisition from last year. Overall, the average residential levy for the Regional Hospital District this year will be about \$116.

Doug Holmes
Mayor of Summerland