

Mayor's Report – July 29, 2025

On July 23, I attended a zoom meeting for BC mayors with staff from the provincial Ministry of Emergency Management, Ministry of Forests, and Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship for an update on the drought and wildfire situation throughout the province. Currently more than half of the rivers in BC have below normal streamflows, creating drought conditions in many areas.

As of the 23rd, there were 71 active wildfires in the province, of which 51 were started that week. Those 51 fires, however, had only burnt 26 hectares of forest and there were no fires out of control anywhere in the province. But as a note of caution, the officials said warm drying winds are on the way so it's important we remain vigilant.

Over the weekend of July 18-20, I attended all three days of the Pow Wow Between the Lakes, which, like two years ago, was held at the South Okanagan Events Centre in Penticton. The District of Summerland was once again one of the event sponsors and I had the honour of participating in the Friday and Saturday evening grand entries. Councillor Barkwill joined me on opening night.

One of Council's published strategic priorities is to support truth and reconciliation through meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities and our sponsorship of the Pow Wow is part of our on-going effort to build a strong and respectful relationship with our Sylix neighbours.

It was encouraging to see a number of Summerland residents in attendance at the Pow Wow, and everyone I spoke with felt inspired by the powerful display of Indigenous culture. Nothing brings people together more than music, dance and culture.

I see that somebody calling themselves Summerland First has issued a statement on social media questioning Council's sponsorship of the Pow Wow, without actually naming it as the Pow Wow. Rather, they call it a "private, ticketed event"!

The Four Seasons Cultural Society, which organizes the Pow Wow Between the Lakes, has gone to great lengths to build bridges and make it easy and comfortable for non- Indigenous people to access and participate in the Pow Wow. This is one of the reasons for holding it off reserve in a large venue like the Events Centre. Like any event at the SOEC, such as a Vees hockey game, anyone can go and watch. A day pass cost \$10.

Summerland First took issue that we would sponsor an event held outside the community. But rather than continuously expect Indigenous participation at our events, reconciliation emphasises the need to reciprocate engagement and show genuine interest in Indigenous culture by getting involved in Indigenous-led gatherings, ceremonies and celebrations.

In its statement, Summerland First says "cultural support and reconciliation are incredibly important values for the community". Yet they then proceed to resist reconciliation with cynicism and spread misinformation about the Pow Wow. In doing so, they undermine the effort many of us in Summerland are making on a personal, professional, and community level to walk together with our Indigenous neighbours on a path of truth and reconciliation.

In my opinion, Summerland First owes the Four Seasons Cultural Society and the Penticton Indian Band an apology.

On July 17, Councillor Barkwill and I attended the regular board meeting of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) where a delegation from the City of Penticton presented its new Sports and Recreation Needs Assessment. Whenever the City of Penticton comes to the board to talk about recreation, the suggestion that the RDOS make a contribution to Penticton facilities inevitably comes up. It was agreed the first step should be a Needs Assessment of the whole region, taking into account all amenities in the Regional District, not just those in Penticton.

On the same day, at the Okanagan-Similkameen Hospital District board, which is the same as the RDOS board, we received a presentation from the South Okanagan Similkameen Healthcare Society, which operates four primary care clinics – three in Penticton and the Kelly Ave clinic here in Summerland. They spoke about their new walk-in clinic in Penticton, which so far has 35 doctors signed up. They said the walk-in clinic is needed given the short supply of family doctors and nurse practitioners in the region. Not only are many people unattached to a doctor, even those who are struggle with same-day access, which means the Hospital ER is seeing a significant increase in primary care cases. This diverts resources from true emergencies and puts additional stress on an already overburdened hospital system.

I also attended a special board meeting of the RDOS held on the morning of July 9. It was called to meet with Minister Brittany Anderson, who was doing a tour of the region. Discussion centred on infrastructure challenges, in particular the water systems in Sage Mesa and Heritage Hills.

Later that afternoon Minister Anderson visited Summerland, and CAO Statt and I played host and showed her around town. We were able to see and discuss several community projects, including:

- the 60-unit affordable housing project and new home for the Food Bank going up across the street
- the new daycare centre that's being built by SD67 at Summerland Elementary School
- and the Wharton Street revitalization and infrastructure renewal project.

We also took the Minister to the Aquatic & Fitness Centre, where Lori Mullin, our Director of Community Services, gave her a tour and discussed the challenges of keeping the 50-year-old facility up and running.

At each stop we stressed the need for government investment in municipal infrastructure, and at each stop the Minister listened and asked good questions.

For our final stop, we drove out to the Trout Creek Trestle, not so much to show her the remarkable view but to talk about the trestle's importance to the local economy given it's the terminus of the Kettle Valley steam railway, which of course is one of the Okanagan's most popular tourist attractions. We also spoke about the fatalities from people falling from the trestle, in particular youth suicides. And we talked about other social issues facing Summerland, including encampments of unhoused individuals like the community has never seen before.

Minister Anderson is the government liaison to UBCM so I noted we have requested a meeting at UBCM with Premier Eby to speak about our ability as a small community to deal with such big issues. Again, she listened carefully.

Finally, to end on a bright note, sandwiched between the two meetings with Minister Anderson, I went to the Legion for lunch, along with Councillors Peake and Barkwill and about 100 other people, to celebrate the 100th birthday of Able Bodied Seaman Richard Norris.

Mr Norris is a veteran of the Juno Beach landing in 1944 and is a member of the legion of honour in France. He is one of only two remaining World War 2 vets living in Summerland and he has called the community home for the past 60 years. At the lunch I wished Mr Norris happy birthday and presented him a gift on behalf of Council.

- Mayor Doug Holmes