



Mayor's Report – July 18, 2023

The signs of summer are all around us.

We kicked off the month with Canada Day, of course, and I was joined by Deputy Mayor Trainer, Councillor Peake, and half of Summerland (so it seemed) at the Legion picnic in Memorial Park. I was invited to say a few words along with MP Albas and MLA Ashton, and I'm happy to report that all three of us kept our speeches short -- because we knew we were the only things standing between half of Summerland and the Canada Day cake and ice cream.

I have to say MLA Ashton and I made a pretty good team serving the pieces of cake. Although a note for next year: we will need a bigger cake. Thank you to the Legion for once again putting on a great Canada Day celebration!

Another sign of summer is all the street banners up on the lamp standards alongside the beautiful hanging flower baskets.

Every year, the Arts Council commissions five new banners with financial support from the District of Summerland. Last Thursday, July 13th, Councillor Peake and I attended a reception hosted by the Arts Council at Thornhaven Estates Winery to acknowledge this year's banner artists.

Members of the Summerland Arts Club were tasked with selecting the five designs from a total of 17 submissions.

It's a good thing they were judging the designs and not me, however I wasn't the only one to remark that the quality of the artwork seems to be getting better every year. In fact, we were told that, as juried competition, the Banner Project is gaining a widespread reputation as a prestigious art commission. More and more artists throughout the Okanagan covet the recognition of having designed a Summerland banner.

Another, less pleasant, sign of summer is wildfires and drought. Last Friday, Bowinn Ma, the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, and several Ministry officials held an online briefing for mayors and regional district chairs on the wildfire and drought situation in the province.

As of Friday, there have been 1,035 wildfires in B.C. since April 1st with 1.2 million hectares burnt. (And there's been more since.) That's unprecedented. To put it in perspective, the 10-year average by this time of year is 575 fires and 76,00 hectares burnt. While the fires have been concentrated in the North, this is the time of year they tend to move south.

The wildfire situation is complicated by drought conditions. It has been abnormally dry for the past year, which is creating a dangerous trajectory as we get deeper into the summer.

While the heat dome of two years ago affected mainly the southern part of B.C., drought conditions this year are throughout the province. Most of the province is at Level 4 or Level 5, which is considered severe drought. Flow rates in one-quarter of all streams in the province are at a record low.

The Okanagan is so far bucking the trend somewhat as we're at Level 3, which is of concern but not yet severe. For Summerland, the water levels in our reservoirs are good for this time of year, however we are monitoring them regularly.

Speaking of emergency management, Councillor Van Alphen and I attended the RDOS board meeting on July 6th, where a delegation from the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness presented a draft of the new emergency management legislation that's to be tabled in the fall.

Under the new legislation, local governments will have to choose whether to establish their own emergency management organization or join a multi-jurisdictional organization that can include different local authorities, First Nations, and the Province.

Another change is that State of Local Emergency declarations will last 14 days instead of the current seven, and local authorities will be able to declare a 90-day Recovery Period, and use recovery powers if required, following a State of Local Emergency.

The legislation will align with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) so local authorities will have to consult and cooperate with Indigenous governing bodies when developing risk assessments and emergency management plans.

Ministry officials said the new legislation will not come into force all at once. Some aspects will be implemented immediately while others will be brought into force by regulation and phased in over time.

Mosquitos are another less-than-positive sign of summer, although they haven't been too bad this year, perhaps because of the heat, and also because of the RDOS mosquito control program.

At the July 6th RDOS meeting, the Board passed an amendment to its mosquito control bylaw to add Electoral Area "E" (Naramata), the Village of Keremeos, and the Town of Princeton to the program. Electoral approval in these areas was obtained through the alternative approval process (AAP). This means mosquito control is now a full regional service with everyone in the RDOS contributing. Which is a good thing because it wasn't easy telling mosquitos they couldn't cross a municipal boundary.

Also at the RDOS, the Board discussed its officer positions and the delegation of duties. Like a municipality, the Regional District is required by provincial statute to appoint a financial officer and a corporate officer. The District of Summerland, like most local governments, designates our Director of Finance as the financial officer and our Director of Corporate Services as the corporate officer. At the RDOS, however, the CAO holds both officer positions. Some of us on the Board have been questioning the reason for that, and a recent draft auditor's report also noted that the concentration of authority in one individual might not provide adequate internal controls. The Board requested to meet with the auditors to discuss that and other governance concerns.

Finally, back on June 29th, Susan Brown, the President and CEO of Interior Health, and Doug Cochrane, Chair of the Interior Health Board of Directors, were in Summerland and they met with Deputy Mayor Trainer and myself. We discussed the on-going efforts to establish a primary care clinic in Summerland as well as Interior Health's staffing challenges and how they continue to impact lab hours at the Summerland Health Centre. We also discussed Interior Health's role in addressing homelessness and how it is increasingly becoming an issue in small communities like Summerland that have limited wrap-around services.

Doug Holmes

Mayor of Summerland