

Upgrades revive Summerland waterfront while retaining traditional character

by Doug Holmes

In the dog days of summer, Summerland residents and visitors head to the waterfront to enjoy outdoor activities and the cooling breeze from Okanagan Lake. In recent years, however, recreational amenities at the waterfront were showing signs of age and were not fully accommodating the community's increasingly diverse needs.

Spurred by the need to address shoreline erosion and repair flood damage, and guided by a Waterfront Concept Plan endorsed by Summerland Council in 2022, incremental investments – large and small – have been made over the last four years to improve safety and accessibility and provide more features to draw people to the waterfront.

The culminative result has been a remarkable revival of the Summerland lakeshore into a hub of activity while retaining its cherished traditional values.

The iconic Summerland Pier has long been the centrepiece of the waterfront but its pilings were rotting and decaying. It was torn down in 2024 and replaced with a more durable steel substructure while the old platform design was retained to maintain the nostalgia of the original landmark. Summerland Rotary fundraised for additional features including seating, lighting, waterslide, and a deep water staircase.

Another piece of aging infrastructure, the Peach Orchard Beach Park playground, was removed earlier this year and replaced with a new design reflecting its beach surroundings. It offers improved accessibility and play features for both younger and older children, including a zipline – a throwback to the one beloved by a previous generation of playground users.

While the beaches have long had seasonal public washrooms, there is now also a year-round washroom at Peach Orchard Beach. Through a partnership with the Summerland Arts Council, the washroom building includes an expanded mural design painted by Okanagan artist Larry Hunter, maintaining and extending the building's original artwork of the late Angela Hook. There is also now an automated external defibrillator (AED) on the exterior of the washroom building – a donation from Al Klar who previously donated an AED station at Memorial Park.

The volleyball court at Peach Orchard Beach Park is being upgraded to regulation size with finer grained sand more appropriate for volleyball. And while dogs were previously allowed off-leash out of season at Peach Orchard Beach Park, it was recognized there was a need for a fenced year-round dog park and one was opened in 2024 at the north end of the park after one-year trial with temporary fencing. The dog park helps to make Summerland a more dog-friendly community while preserving the rest of the park for other activities.

The dog beach continues to be well used and a double-gate entry system has been installed to provide a more secure transition between the pathway and off-leash area. There are also new mobility mats at the dog beach, as well as at Rotary Beach and Powell Beach, to provide better lake access for people with mobility challenges. Rotary Beach also has a mobility chair that people can register to use free of charge.

Lifejacket loaner stations are available at Rotary Beach and Powell Beach. Offered on an honour system, the stations provide additional safety for beach users. And to help keep the beaches clean, goose-deterrent lights have been installed at Rotary Beach and Powell Beach.

While big ticket items like the pier and playground have obviously received the most attention, small details like goose lights, lifejackets, mobi-mats, landscaping, signage, expanded parking, etc, all add up to make the waterfront safe, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland