

## **New Municipal Hall hours designed to improve service, retain staff**

By Doug Holmes

To provide good service, we need good staff. It's with both service and staff in mind that the District of Summerland is trialing new opening hours for Municipal Hall.

While counter services are now closed on Mondays, they're available for extended hours (8:15am - 5pm) from Tuesday to Friday.

When surveyed, many people accessing over-the-counter services said they would like to be able to come into Municipal Hall either earlier or later in the day. With this feedback, we collaborated with the union to see how we could extend opening hours without creating new staff positions or incurring additional operating costs.

The solution was to put some Municipal Hall staff on a 'compressed' workweek where they work the same number of hours but over four days rather than five. They have a shorter workweek, but a longer workday.

Like other industries, local government is impacted by the worldwide labour shortage. When some positions can't be filled, other employees must fill the gaps and they become overworked and stressed. As a result, they're not able to provide the quality of service they've spent years curating.

Aggressive hiring and dropping new employees into high pressure environments with little or no experience or training doesn't help to increase productivity or improve service delivery. Rather, we need to focus on retaining existing staff.

While the District of Summerland provides fair wages, we're not able to match the higher salaries and benefits paid by the likes of Penticton and Kelowna.

So that we don't become a farm team for larger municipalities, we are looking at other ways to compete for employees, for example by hiring local where possible and providing a positive work environment.

To be an employer of choice, the District strives to offer flexibility, educational and accreditation opportunities, and an inclusive organizational culture rooted in our corporate values. The compressed workweek is one further element to giving employees a better work-life balance.

Monday was chosen as the day of the week to close Municipal Hall because it was the day that would cause the least inconvenience for residents and businesses.

Many people already don't come downtown on Mondays because other establishments are also closed, including the library, thrift store, bakery and several businesses. (Fridays, on the other hand, are a day when many people get paid and they want to be able to come in to pay their bills.)

Also, most statutory holidays fall on a Monday when Municipal Hall is closed anyway. Taking statutory holidays into account, Municipal Hall will be open the exact same number of hours per year as before the compressed workweek.

Not all Municipal Hall staff are participating in the compressed workweek. Corporate Services staff and building inspectors continue to operate five days a week, and bylaw officers are currently on their summer schedule of seven days a week.

To hear more about the connection between staff retention and providing good service, tune in to this month's Mayor's Podcast: [www.summerland.ca/your-city-hall/mayor-council/mayor-s-podcast](http://www.summerland.ca/your-city-hall/mayor-council/mayor-s-podcast)

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