

## Mayor's Minute - April 16, 2020

Communication—“a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour”—is an integral part of the business of local government (merriam-webster.com).

These unsettling and uncertain times call for an elevated level of clear, consistent and factual communication.

The District of Summerland communication strategy during this public health emergency consists of two separate, but connected, segments: 1) collaboration with other local governments and the Province, and 2) Summerland-centric.

Crossing both segments is the range of media used to deliver and receive communication. This includes legacy media (television, newspaper and radio) and online media platforms, for example online news, websites and social media.

From the announcement of the first cases of the coronavirus in British Columbia by provincial authorities (and American Sign Language interpreter Nigel Howard), District staff have regularly liaised with their colleagues at the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) and with Emergency Management B.C. (EMBC) to discuss matters related to the pandemic.

Region-wide communication creates efficiencies and capacity. This collaborative approach is best practice for a number of reasons including providing:

- harmonized actions across the regional district (for example, closing recreational facilities and assets or allowing passive use of parks and beaches to continue);
- a single, direct channel for information to flow between local and provincial government senior management;
- coordinated planning and preparing for seasonal or emergent events (for example freshet and wildland fires);
- a secure environment to raise challenges and discuss the merits or faults of solutions;
- a forum to recognize successes and discuss the worthiness or weaknesses of new ideas.

Collaboration is also occurring regularly between the chair, the six municipal mayors and the seven chief administrative officers in the RDOS. Additionally, we have weekly calls with the provincial ministries, usually Minister Robinson, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Parliamentary Secretary Jen Rice, EMBC and their respective senior staff. Again, this regular and consistent communication provides a way to exchange factual, real-time information and ask questions specific to concerns local government leaders see in their respective communities.

To date, I have heard nothing but professionalism and respect between levels of government, whether participants are elected officials or senior management. Partisanship has stepped aside for, in my opinion, the betterment of all British Columbians.

The second segment of our communication strategy is centred on the residents of Summerland. This communication includes updates on the District of Summerland website (Summerland.ca), media releases, media interviews, this Mayor's Minute column and social media posts (primarily Facebook).

Generally, it's still business as usual, that is, our strategy has not changed under the provincial state of emergency. However, there is one addition to note. I am writing a daily Mayor's Message post for the District's Facebook page ([facebook.com/SummerlandBC](https://facebook.com/SummerlandBC)). Sometimes the message is an example of what I'm doing to combat stress, others are shout outs to local businesses and how they are adapting, still others are thanks to residents who are doing their part to flatten the curve or celebrating our frontline and essential workers. Occasionally it is a reminder, with links to appropriate agencies, to practise physical (social) distancing or other provincial directives when out and about.

As we have from the outset, the District will continue to follow the lead and adhere to the orders of the B.C. health experts, namely Minister of Health Adrian Dix and Public Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. Especially in the early days, information about the spread of the coronavirus and how the Province was addressing it changed rapidly. Thankfully, a constant in the provincial briefings has been the calm yet empathic delivery of difficult very sad and difficult news.

The overwhelming majority of British Columbians have never been through a public health emergency: This is new ground for us all. We are all this together and I'd like to close with the assurance that we can all share the same goal—get through the first round of this pandemic and focus on getting back to “normal”, whatever that might look and whenever that might be.

Be safe and continued health.