

Council meets with government ministers

by Doug Holmes

The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) annual convention was held Sept 18 - 22 in Vancouver and as always it was an important forum for dialogue between the local and provincial levels of government. It involved inter-governmental workshops, resolution debates, and opportunities to meet one-on-one with provincial ministers and their staff.

Team Summerland this year consisted of myself as mayor, Deputy Mayor Erin Trainer, Councillor Richard Barkwill, Councillor Janet Peake, and Chief Administrative Officer Graham Statt. MLA Dan Ashton supported us all the way, including at meetings with the following ministers:

- *Anne Kang, Minister of Municipal Affairs.* Fresh off her visit to Summerland to kick-off the next phase of the Giant's Head Mountain trail redevelopment, the minister agreed to provide us a further \$10,000 to complete trail redevelopment plans for Conkle and Cartwright Mountains. We also updated her on the Nov 4 referendum for a new recreation centre and she agreed to follow up with her federal counterpart to support our application for a \$25m federal grant.
- *Adrian Dix, Minister of Health.* This meeting was to request government support for a Summerland primary health centre being proposed by a unique community partnership. We were joined at the meeting by Dr. Murali Venkataraman representing Summerland's family physicians, Aaron McRann representing the Community Foundation of South Okanagan-Similkameen, and RDOS Director Riley Gettens representing rural areas outside Summerland.
- *Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.* This summer's rock and land slides on Highway 97 were discussed and we stressed the need to make the highway safer and more functional not only through Summerland but the entire Okanagan corridor. We also discussed the poor condition of Prairie Valley/Summerland-Princeton Rd and asked for government support for upgrades given its provincial Highway 40 designation.
- *Pam Alexis, Minister of Agriculture.* We provided an update on the Okanagan Food and Innovation Hub to be located in Summerland, and thanked the minister for the government's \$800,000 contribution to the project secured at last year's UBCM. We told the minister that finding a suitable location for the Food Hub had become a challenge but we remained confident. The minister in turn re-confirmed the government's support.
- *Josie Osborne, Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation.* We discussed connecting our electrical system to the BC Hydro grid north of Summerland to provide back-up power for the community. Together with the new Solar and Storage Facility, access to BC Hydro would create redundancy and ensure on-going power to critical infrastructure in the event of an interruption of our primary supply from Fortis.
- *Fin Donnelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Watershed Restoration.* We provided an update on our sourcewater protection efforts and enquired about the government's capacity to participate, as per provincial legislation. We were told other municipalities had the same concerns and that they would need to be addressed, along with Indigenous participation.

We also met with Opposition Leader Kevin Falcon, other MLAs, and senior officials with BC Housing and BC Assessment. And we met and spoke informally with Premier David Eby and several other ministers.

Many of our discussions centred on intractable problems but each time we articulated Summerland's needs and emphasized the upside opportunity of working together to resolve issues. None of the meetings were the last step in the process and we have much to follow up on in the weeks and months ahead.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland.