

Year End Review

By Mayor Boot - January 7, 2021

“What we are doing is working, but we cannot let up now.” ~ Dr. Bonnie Henry, December 23, 2020

Words of caution from a woman whose name is well recognized by British Columbians as we end this very unusual and disquieting year.

If ever there was a year when plans changed, this was it. Life went on as usual...until it didn't.

To varying degrees, since roughly mid-March, we have faced limited in-person contact with our families (especially older members), our friends, and our communities. Households and businesses, again with varying degrees, have faced decreases in income or revenue. I would be surprised to hear that people and business owners accounted for a pandemic in their household budget or business plans.

At the District, we certainly did not factor in a pandemic as we worked through hours and hours of discussions and decisions leading up to the budget open house on February 12. Who would have expected that, a month later we would be in a province-wide state of emergency and the ensuing lockdown? Or, that the following month Council would cut almost \$1.5 M in operational expenses from the 2020 budget to provide some financial support to Summerland residents.

Fortunately, and surprisingly, in early November the District of Summerland received a COVID-19 Safe Restart Grant of \$2,724,000 to help offset “increased operating costs and lower revenue” due to the coronavirus. Recognizing that the impact of COVID-19 on District revenue will be felt beyond 2021, Council will make every effort to be strategic and fiscally prudent as we move into capital and operational budget discussions beginning next week.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the District of Summerland completed many projects in 2020 and many other initiatives are underway. Highlights include:

- Solar array + battery storage. A parcel of District-owned land on the toe of Cartwright Mountain was selected as the location for this project.
- An increase in housing stock. Most notably, completion of Hillcrest Terrace, an 88-unit market rental building in the downtown core; 24 luxury condos and commercial space topped with additional condos on Lakeshore Drive; 20 townhomes under construction along Trout Creek on the east side of Highway 97; approximately 146 lots in the Hunters Hill housing development. [The Hunters Hill Team and the District of Summerland were co-awarded a Silver Okanagan Housing Award of Excellence by the Canadian Home Builders Association for “leadership in fostering cooperation between public and private sectors in addressing housing issues”.]
- Affordable Housing Forum. This two-day event had to be cancelled due to COVID, but affordable housing projects are expected to be underway in 2021, including a 62-unit development on the former RCMP site.

- Giant's Head Trails Redevelopment. The first two of four phases were completed in 2020 and a grant application has been submitted for the final two phases. This is a joint initiative between the District and the Summerland Rotary Club.
- Racism. Council passed a resolution to have staff work with local non-profit organizations to develop a series of Conversations Against Racism. This work is underway; Summerland's new chief administrative officer will continue to collaborate with interested agencies and individuals.
- Organics Processing Facility. In late 2019, the District was awarded a \$1.581 M grant for this facility which will be located at the Summerland Landfill. The design work is underway; expected completion is early 2022.
- Road Infrastructure. Segments of Quinpool Road (and replacement of a watermain), Doherty Avenue/Bathville Road and North Victoria were reconstructed and repaved.
- Locations for off-leash dog park, and tennis and pickleball courts. Identified as a need in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2019), locations for new and refurbished courts have been selected; the off-leash dog park location is expected to be determined in early Spring 2021.
- Electric fleet. In keeping with sustainable practices, Council has asked that electric vehicles be considered when District fleet vehicles are replaced. This fall, the District procured an electric Zamboni to replace the aged-out, propane equipment.
- EV charging stations. Installation of 22 grant-funded EV charging stations (an additional 16 Level 2 and six Level 3 stations) began in 2020 and will be completed in the spring of 2021. The District also had a solar array installed on municipal hall in 2020.
- Proposed Summerland Recreation and Health Centre. Based on the first round of engagement, project consultants have identified both the core space and potential secondary spaces. The Needs Assessment Report is expected to be finalized in late January; an online survey is open for your input until January 3. Click the link on the Community Updates section of the District's home page. (summerland.ca)
- South Okanagan Agricultural Food Hub. The business plan is complete, but the project has been put on hold pending the *potential* next intake of grant funding.
- Council hired Graham Statt to replace Anthony Haddad as chief administrative officer after he resigned to take on a new role with the City of Penticton. Mr. Statt brings many years of leadership and management experience and Council and staff are looking forward to having him join the team on January 4, 2021.

Much has been written about the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the systematic and systemic social injustice and inequities that have been brought to light over the last many months. Fortunately, we have seen how communities can work together when we feel threatened or imperiled and how taxpayer dollars can be redirected to address a crisis.

Senior levels of government appear to be listening to the calls to set aside the tried-but-no-longer-working methods of rebuilding. I hope that intentional efforts, sincere commitments—and the requisite funding—will be directed to creating a sustainable, resilient, and equitable home for all British Columbians. Our children and future generations are depending on us.

As we enter a New Year, we have much to be grateful for. On behalf of Council and District of Summerland management and staff, warm wishes for a Happy New Year. May it be joyful and bright...and hopeful.