

Council lays foundation in first 100 days

By Mayor Holmes

February 16, 2023

The first 100 days in public office is a critical time for laying the groundwork for the remaining 1,300 days of the term.

Summerland Council has now reached that milestone. In the 100 days since our inaugural meeting on Nov. 7, 2022, we have met as a group for more than 100 hours. We started with orientation and governance workshops to clarify responsibilities, and then established the strategic priorities that will guide the municipality for the next four years. We then deliberated on the 2023 utility and general budgets.

We are making headway across the board. In the priority area of affordability, for example, we held the property tax increase to 3.76% increase -- well below the rate of inflation. To help offset the discontinuation of the utility discount, we matched the Province's electrical rebate so residents will receive a \$200 reduction on an upcoming utility bill. We also waived development fees for a new affordable housing project, and decided to trial free public transit.

In all our discussions, Council works closely with municipal staff. This builds the foundation for a productive professional relationship and a culture of information sharing.

Mindful that little can be accomplished if we don't co-operate, I've spent my first days as mayor reaching out to as many people as possible. I've met with non-profit groups, visited schools and churches, and spoken with individual residents on a range of topics.

I've met with the Chamber of Commerce president and Chamber governance committee, attended two Business-after-Business events and, of course, the Festival of Lights.

I've sat down with the chief of the Penticton Indian Band, leader of the South Okanagan Metis, mayor of Penticton, mayor of Peachland, and several RDOS directors.

The deputy mayor and I toured the provincial minister of Municipal Affairs around Summerland, and I went to Kelowna to meet with the federal minister responsible for PacifiCan, the economic development agency for BC.

I meet often with both our MLA and MP.

I've consumed far too much coffee in the past 100 days, but it's important to maintain bridges since most of Council's priorities will only be achieved through the realization of shared objectives.

Investing in relationships early also prepares us for unforeseen events later on, like a natural disaster. You don't want to be trading business cards during a crisis.

As spokesperson for Council, I've made myself readily available to local media. Since Council's inauguration, I have been interviewed on various issues by the Penticton Herald, Summerland Review, Castanet, InfoNews, Global TV, and CBC Daybreak.

A new 'Council Highlights' package is also being published after every Council meeting, and we've started a 'Mayor's Podcast' where I sit down with a different person each month to discuss a topic of importance to Summerland residents.

These new communication channels are in addition to the District's existing social media posts, web site updates, Youtube channel, newsletter, and newspaper columns.

Everyone has their preferred method of receiving information so we want to keep all lines of communication open. Improving transparency and accessibility to local government is in everyone's interest.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland

-30-