

## **A road is more than a road: a new way to look at infrastructure**

By Doug Holmes

When a road is closed for construction, it isn't always simply to fix the road. It could also be to repair or install curb and gutters, storm drainage, sidewalks, bike lanes, signage, boulevard plants, telephone poles and street lights, the wires above or pipes below.

To avoid inefficiencies like repaving a road only to dig it up later to fix a burst pipe, we need to think of infrastructure in a more unified way. This is the premise of an Integrated Roads and Water Master Plan recently adopted by Council.

Of Summerland's 175 km of roads, about 70 km are in good condition, 60 km are in fair condition, and 45 km are in poor condition and should be repaved. Of our 200 km of water mains, 44 km were installed prior to 1960 and should be replaced.

Summerland is not unique; every municipality in Canada faces an infrastructure deficit as a result of operating for years without budgeting for replacement costs.

In 2015, Summerland Council started replenishing depleted reserves with small tax and rate increases. By the end of 2022 we had accumulated \$21.4 million in the general capital reserve and \$5 million in the water reserve.

We're now in a position to start upgrading infrastructure, but we need to do it in a fiscally responsible manner. That's where the Integrated Road and Water Master Plan comes in.

To prioritize capital investments, we assessed the condition of all local roads and water mains and their likelihood and consequence of failure. High risk projects were then scored against the following criteria:

- the opportunity to reduce risk in advance of a failure
- the opportunity to reduce maintenance or emergency repairs
- the availability of external funding such as government grants or development contributions
- alignment with Council priorities such as implementing the Downtown Neighbourhood Action Plan
- the opportunity to gain efficiencies by phasing or bundling several projects.

Scoring produced a priority list of 19 capital projects amounting to \$241million based on 2022 costs. Three of these projects are included in this year's budget: replacing the water main and repaving the east end of Dale Meadows Road, repaving Jubilee Road West between the middle and high schools, and repaving a portion of Victoria Road South that also needs drainage and sidewalk work.

Further projects will be determined at annual Council budget deliberations.

The full Integrated Roads and Water Plan is being posted on the District of Summerland website in the form of a story board and geodatabase. People can click onto an interactive map and view information about any road's condition, work being planned, and project costs.

The plan will be updated as projects are completed, and eventually irrigation mains and sewer lines will be added.

Our roads and water mains are aging while demand grows for more and better infrastructure to address population growth, climate change, and higher health and safety standards. We need to change the way we plan, design and manage infrastructure, and the new Integrated Road and Water Master Plan gets us headed in the right direction.

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland*