

Mayor's Minute - March 26, 2020

We can all agree that these are unusual and unsettling times.

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19.

More recently, we (humanity) have heard a number of other terms related to COVID-19 including, and perhaps most importantly, self-isolation and social distancing.

The B.C. Centre for Disease Control website (BCCDC.ca) carries up-to-date information on the coronavirus. According to the BCCDC, self-isolation is defined as “staying home and not going to work or school and monitoring for symptoms for 14 days”.

Limiting close contact with others is the best way to slow the spread of the virus. Again from BCCDC.ca: “There are many way to practice social distancing:

- Limit activities outside your home.
- Use virtual options to connect with others.
- If you are out in public, try to keep two metres between yourself and others.
- Keep your hands at your side when possible.
- Stay at home when you are sick.
- Cough into your elbow or sleeve.
- Avoid social activities in large gatherings.”

During the flooding and wildland fires in 2017 and 2018, local and provincial governments gained some valuable learnings in terms of emergency management. Two of the many lessons that are now considered best practice are: collaboration with other local governments, regional health authority and the Province; and consistency in communications and messaging.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a unique situation and one that is changing very rapidly, but this is how the team approach to address the public health emergency looks for the District of Summerland.

Senior management (which includes emergency and public safety staff) meet daily, as do (by virtual means) the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) and emergency management staff of the District, City of Penticton and Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen. This latter group also has a daily conference call with Emergency Management B.C. (EMBC) to hear the Province’s latest recommendations or directives. The situation is rapidly changing

All of the decisions made by emergency management staff are made after careful consideration of the latest information coming from provincial and federal public/medical health officers. This includes closure plans such as municipal facilities that provide essential services (fire hall, water and sewage treatment plants, city hall, for example) or recreational facilities.

Working in collaboration with partners provides the opportunity to not only make informed decisions, but also allows coordinated responses and consistent communications. In other words, although local government partners issue their own media releases, the responses to COVID-19 and messaging aligns between them.

Returning now to social distancing. It is up to every single one of us to change our daily routines and behaviours. We are not living in routine times and normal behaviours are not acceptable. We know what we must do.

Social distancing also applies to businesses and has been particularly hard on small and medium-sized businesses and those that are relatively new. Restaurants, wineries, coffee shops, pubs, gyms, retail stores, those that offer personal hands-on services such as nail and hair salons, have either closed indefinitely or dramatically changed how they do business with their customers.

Business owners may be feeling a double hit from COVID-19: The worry over business and household financial issues plus the distress of having to close lay-off their employees.

Where possible, and if you are able, please support our local businesses. If take-out or delivery is available from your restaurant—use it. Some businesses offer gift cards that you can purchase now for use at a later time.

Having had five forums/symposiums/conventions and countless events either cancelled or postponed, I am suddenly finding a lot of unexpected free time. I am taking our dog for long walks in Conkle Mountain Park; preparing the ornamental and food gardens for another season; relearning how to knit; spending more time playing the piano; baking bread again and generally slowing down and appreciating being a Canadian. Best of all, I am hearing from my sons (in Victoria and near Toronto) more often than usual.

I realize that although life feels surreal, I have it easy; that—for any number of reasons—COVID-19 is very difficult for some in our community. The most vulnerable populations suffer the most in times of sudden change, whether it be extreme weather events, civil unrest, economic collapse or, like now, a global pandemic. For some, COVID-19 is more than unusual and unsettling: It is a living nightmare.

For these folks in particular, I hope there is comfort in the fact that we are all in this together.

Know that a single story of greed or selfishness is overwhelmed by hundreds of examples of compassion and kindness.

It may be that we will all have a defined split in our lived experience: Pre-Pandemic and Post-Pandemic. May the Post-Pandemic period, whatever that looks like, be a time of continued compassion, caring and connecting.

Stay safe. Stay healthy.

“Let’s all lean into our humanity.” —Charles Marohn, Founder and President of Strong Towns