

Mayor's Report – March 19, 2023

First off, thank you to Deputy Mayor Trainer for taking charge while I was away for a few weeks last month.

Since my return, there has been a lot of activity with the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB). At our regular board meeting on March 6, we heard from Lisa Scott from the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) on their invasive mussel outreach work. The OBWB contracts OASISS to take its 'Don't Move A Mussel' campaign to boaters, yacht clubs, retailers, and others. Last year, they interacted with more than 3,000 people at boat launches, community events and youth camps. They also collected 131 water samples from five lakes in the region, and fortunately all test results came back showing no signs of mussels.

However, with invasive quagga mussels now in the Columbia River basin in Idaho, they are closer than ever to British Columbia. And with added concern that the federal government may reduce or cancel its funding to support the provincial Invasive Mussel Defence Program, the OBWB hosted the first meeting of a new Okanagan-Interior Invasive Mussel Working Group. That was held March 8 in Kelowna, and included about 100 representatives from local governments, the provincial government, First Nations, chambers of commerce, tourism groups, marina operators, watershed groups, and others interested in protecting our lakes. The meeting included a lot of brainstorming, and some good ideas emerged on what more can be done to prevent zebra and quagga mussels from arriving in B.C., how to stop their spread should they arrive, and how to prepare for their potential arrival.

Still on the OBWB, on March 14, I attended the international Environmental Flows conference in Kelowna organized by the OBWB and the Canadian Water Resources Association. This conference was a follow-up to one held in 2018 after the Province passed the Water Sustainability Act, which required that environmental flow needs for fish and a healthy ecosystem be considered in water licensing decisions. The 2018 conference developed recommendations on how to set and improve environmental flows in creeks and rivers while last week's conference was about how environmental flows relate to drought, flood and fisheries management. It brought together more than 200 representatives from national and international organizations involved in water management or research, including First Nations, local government, regulators, academia, and non-profits.

On March 7, Councillor Van Alphen and I attended the Regional District (RDOS) board meeting where we received the results of four After Action Reviews from the 2023 wildfire season. Areas identified for improvement included better defining the roles and responsibilities of the various organizations operating in multi-jurisdictional emergencies, and coordination with Indigenous partners and neighboring jurisdictions such as the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO), particularly with Emergency Support Services. This and other recommendations have been incorporated into the RDOS's 2024 Emergency Management Program work plan.

The District has held a number of public open houses recently. On March 12, I attended one in regards to Food Waste Organics collection, and on March 5 it was one for proposed amendments to the Official Community Plan stemming from the Downtown Neighbourhood Action Plan. These public face-to-face interactions are essential for the democratic process. They are the best way for the community to provide its input on difficult or important council decisions, and they will become even more important as new provincial legislation reduces the opportunity for public hearings and public participation at Council meetings.

Finally, this past Saturday, March 16, Councillor Peake and I attended the Arts Council AGM, where I had the pleasure of announcing that the Summerland Community Arts Council is the 2023 recipient of the Mayor's Award of Excellence.

Since 1968, the Arts Council has served a vital role in Summerland's cultural, social and economic development. By engaging the community in the arts, as participants or audience, the organization consistently responds to local needs and helps to create our town character and vibrancy. It showcases local artists with exhibits and performances, including the popular Music in the Park every Wednesday during the summer. For youth, there is the long-running Summer Arts program, Pro-D Day camps, and Saturday drawing classes. The Awesome Arts program is a new initiative dedicated to providing art opportunities to people with diverse developmental abilities, giving a voice to those community members who often struggle to be heard.

Community partnerships have contributed much to the Arts Council's success, including their partnership with the District of Summerland to produce the colourful street banners that go up around town every summer. And, as a natural progression, they will produce the new Christmas banners to be put up during the festive season.

Another partnership with the District was, of course, the renovation of the old library building to create the George Ryga Arts and Cultural Centre. The Arts Council was, and still is, the driving force behind making the Centre such an important cultural space for the community.

The Arts Council is a special organization with an impressive track record. For the invaluable service it provides to the community, I'm pleased to name the Summerland Community Arts Council as this year's recipient of the Mayor's Award of Excellence.

- Mayor Doug Holmes