



Mayor's Report – November 28, 2023

Congratulations to the Chamber of Commerce for another successful Festival of Lights. Downtown was absolutely buzzing on Friday night with live music, fireworks, food, Selfies with Santa, craft sales, and much more. And also Light Up the Vines, which continues this weekend. It's easy to see why Light Up is one of the premier attractions of the Okanagan.

The Festival is the result of many hours' work by Chamber and District staff in planning, setting up, operating, and cleaning up. They do a great job, and they show how the Chamber and District are able to work together for the betterment of the community. Thank you to District and Chamber staff and everyone who contributed to make the event a success, including all the sponsors, performers, vendors, downtown businesses, community groups like the Museum and Arts Council.

As mayor, I once again had the honour of 'flicking the switch' to turn on the Christmas lights at 7 o'clock on the dot, and I appreciated having all of Council join me on stage for the Countdown.

As mayor, I also had the honour – a different kind of honour – on November 11th to lay the wreath on behalf of the District and the people of Summerland at the Cenotaph in Memorial Park. Many thanks the Royal Canadian Legion Summerland Branch for continuing to organize such a moving and solemn Remembrance Day ceremony. It's heartening to see the community come out in large numbers, as we always do, to hear the rolls of honour of fallen Summerland soldiers and to pay our respects.

When thinking of the sacrifices made by previous generations, it's difficult to understand all the war and terror that continues unabated. The Middle East currently dominates the headlines, but there are at least 32 ongoing conflicts around the world today. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of them, of course, and a number of displaced Ukrainian families have taken refuge here in Summerland, including Sergei Shubin, who was head of communications for the municipality of Kirillovka, which is a town in southeast Ukraine currently under Russian occupation.

Mr Shubin arranged a Zoom meeting with the mayor and First Deputy of Kirillovka, which I attended on November 15 along with Councillors Barkwill, Peake, and Betts. More than 60% of the people in their community have been displaced, including the mayor and deputy who spoke to us from a nearby city that's under Ukrainian control. I will write about our meeting in my next newspaper column but safe to say the conversation was engaging and at times emotional. When we asked how could we help, the mayor said he just wants us all to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, for as long as it takes.

On November 14, I was joined by Councillors Barkwill, Betts, Peake, and Deputy Mayor Trainer, at the grand opening of the Okanagan's first utility-scale solar and battery storage facility, which we are calling the Summerland Energy Centre. Also present were representatives from the City of Penticton, including Mayor

Bloomfield, and from the City of Nelson. Those two municipalities also operate an electrical utility and they were very interested in learning about our project.

While the facility is still in the final stages of commissioning and testing, the solar panels have been connected to the grid since late October. And as of yesterday, they have so far generated more than 38,000 kWh of energy, which is the equivalent to the energy used by 42 homes in one month.

On Nov 16, Councillor Van Alphen and I attended the Regional District board meeting where we heard an inspiring presentation from Advocate Accessibility Partners. They are a volunteer group that's petitioning the Provincial government to use professional American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, and closed captioning or subtitles, during important government announcements, especially in emergencies.

The two presenters, one of whom is a Summerland resident, spoke to the Board entirely in sign language through an English language interpreter. Everyone had questions, and they answered them all with grace and humour.

The Regional District's Emergency Operations Centre is now exploring options to incorporate sign language in its live video updates on wildfires and floods, and closed captioning has been made available for the online broadcasting of Regional District board meetings.

Motivated by the group's presentation, effective of today, we are also making closed captioning available during live broadcasts of Summerland Council meetings. While captions have always been available on the re-broadcasts posted on YouTube, they will now also be available when watching live on Zoom.

Not only does this signify our commitment to be inclusive and accessible to all our residents, it also helps build awareness for hearing people as well as those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Finally, on behalf of Council and the District of Summerland, I would like to pass on our sincere condolences to our Sylix neighbours on the passing of elder Grace Greyeyes. Many of us in Summerland knew Grace, and she was often here to provide blessings at various events, most recently at the Celebrate Summerland event earlier this year, as well as at the Pow Wow Between the Lakes. She had an amazing ability to humour and charm while at the same time make us feel really uncomfortable about our colonial ways. She was a gem and she will be missed.

- Mayor Doug Holmes