

Residential density needed for vibrant downtown

by Doug Holmes

Summerland has a charming downtown with its boutique stores, cultural and recreational spaces, events and markets all creating a sense of place and pride. Still, there is potential for our downtown to become more vibrant and be a catalyst for economic development.

The Downtown Neighbourhood Action Plan, completed in 2022 following widespread public input and guidance from a task force of local residents, provides a long-term vision for revitalizing the town centre. Several projects will soon get underway, including Wharton Street upgrades, an entrance plaza to Memorial Park, and year-round public washrooms.

The Action Plan recognizes that a lively downtown requires a mix of retail, office, residential, arts, culture and recreation, and that Summerland needs more people living downtown to increase vibrancy and create a more resilient and sustainable community.

While not everybody wants to live in an apartment in a compact downtown neighbourhood, we all benefit from those who do. Downtown residents are most likely to shop locally and participate in community events, thus supporting the local economy and contributing to the prosperity of the community. And by increasing density, Summerland can continue to welcome new residents while minimizing urban sprawl.

Following two open houses and a public hearing, Council recently amended its Official Community Plan (OCP) to align with the Downtown Neighbourhood Action Plan and encourage residential densification in the downtown. The changes will guide development and infrastructure decisions over the next 20+ years, including maximum building heights, parking requirements, and public space enhancements.

There are now nine land use designations for different areas of downtown, including:

- *Low Density Residential (LDR)*: Maximum of four three-storey units per lot, as required by the provincial government through the Bill 44 housing legislation, in neighbourhoods on the edges of downtown.
- *Medium Density Residential (MDR)*: Allows for townhouses and smaller apartments up to four storeys, in areas between high and low density housing.
- *High Density Residential (HDR)*: Apartment buildings between three and six storeys with ground floor accessory uses such as offices or professional services.
- *Downtown High Density Residential (DHDR)*: Apartments and accessory uses built to a minimum of four storeys, specific to an area east of downtown between Rosedale Ave and Hwy 97.
- *Downtown Core (DC)*: Ground-level retail with mixed-use above, up to four storeys with the third and fourth storeys recessed back. Specific to Main St. and the downtown portion of Victoria Rd., the intent is to maintain Summerland's small town feel and preserve its commercial hub.
- *Downtown Core Intensification (DCI)*: Ground-level retail and mixed-use up to six storeys, for most properties off Main and Victoria.
- *Gateway Commercial (GC)*: Tourist-based commercial buildings including hotels and apartments up to six storeys, located around the Rosedale Ave and Prairie Valley Rd access points into Summerland.
- *Parks, Recreation, Open Space (PRO)*: Parkland and recreation spaces and facilities.
- *Administrative (ADM)*: Civic and institutional buildings including government offices, schools, libraries, museums, art galleries, cultural centres, leisure facilities.

Some infrastructure upgrades will be needed to accommodate downtown growth, and requirements are being calculated based on modelling for additional dwellings and population. The data will be used to identify future water, sewer, and stormwater needs using existing utility master plans and recommendations from the Downtown Neighbourhood Action Plan.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland