

Mayor's Report – December 17, 2024

This is the time of year for budget deliberations and besides our own Council's budget meetings on December 10 and 11, Councillor Barkwill and I attended the second round of budget debates at the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) on December 12. These will continue into the new year. Councillor Barkwill and I also attended the regular RDOS board meeting on December 5.

After the Regional District meeting on 5th, all members of Council met with the School District 67 board where we discussed the impact of the closure of Giant's Head School and the conversion of Summerland Middle School into the Summerland Elementary School. Discussion included revisions to our Transportation Master Plan to ensure safe routes to school as well as future plans for the Giant's Head School building.

On December 4, I was joined by Deputy Mayor Trainer and Councillors Peake, Betts and Patan at the now former site of the United Church for a celebration of the start of construction of a 60-unit affordable housing project and new space for the Food Bank and Resource Centre. The project is a partnership between the Turning Points Collaborative Society, Summerland Food Bank, and United Church. It is exciting to see the project move ahead given the need for affordable housing in Summerland, and, as a reminder, Council is supporting the project by waiving development and building fees and approving height and parking variances.

Earlier that same day, on December 4, District staff and I attended a Zoom meeting hosted by the Ministry of Transportation to discuss the work at the landslide on Highway 97 north of Summerland. The site will be shut down over the winter and a contract will be tendered for the long-term stabilization of the area.

Once work resumes, there will be intermittent closures of the southbound lanes between the site and Bentley Road, but we were told that these closures will only be during limited periods and not all the time as was done previously. After expressing our concerns about traffic, we were told the Ministry will arrange for extra speed reader boards and increase the speed limit through the construction zone with the intent of reducing driver frustration and speeding through Summerland once drivers get past the slide. The Ministry will also request additional RCMP enforcement on the highway through Summerland.

On December 3, I attended the monthly meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board where we heard about the discovery of yet another invasive mussel that's new to North America: the so-called Golden Mussel. This species is originally from China and has been found in California. Like the quagga and zebra mussels, it presents a threat to infrastructure and habitats and we need to do everything we can to keep it out of the Okanagan.

On November 29, Deputy Mayor Trainer and I met with our new MLA Amelia Boulton. We discussed Council's strategic priorities and some of the issues we're facing, particularly in respect to infrastructure. We also invited her to attend today's meeting so she could introduce herself to Council.

November 29 was also Light Up and once again it was an honour to 'flick the switch' to turn on the lights and as always I appreciated having Council join me for the Countdown along with MLA Boulton together with our outgoing MLA, Dan Ashton, and our Member of Parliament, Dan Albas.

Congratulations to Destination Summerland/ Chamber of Commerce for another successful Festival of Lights. The weather cooperated and downtown was buzzing with live music, fireworks, all the vendors, and our local businesses.

Thank you to District staff who worked with the Chamber in planning, setting up, operating, and cleaning up afterwards. With such collaboration it's easy to see why Light Up is one of the premier attractions of the Okanagan.

The night before Light Up, on November 28, I was joined by Deputy Mayor Trainer and Councillors Peake, Barkwill and Betts at the Light Up the Arts reception hosted by the Arts Council at the George Ryga Arts and Cultural Centre. If anyone is looking for any last-minute gifts, Light Up the Arts continues until Christmas Eve.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and happy new year. Looking back on 2024, we've had yet another very busy year and we continue to make solid progress on our strategic priorities. I look forward to keeping the momentum going as we begin the second half our term.

- Mayor Doug Holmes