

## Councillor's Report

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On Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, I was happy to represent the city, as acting mayor, at the Gazette's 2018 shopping spree draw. Janice Podovinokoff was the lucky winner after what has become a Grand Forks game show event! A reverse draw of elimination, with consolation prizes from each participating business, left Janice as the last woman standing. I sat next to her before the draw and she told me of her practical plans for the \$2018 if she won. It was heartwarming to see her when she did!

This year's LGLA Conference – "Leading to the Finish", hosted in Richmond, was an information overload for the elected officials who attended this three day session. I find that I learn just as much from networking with the other attendees as I do from the workshops themselves. Hearing of other city's trials and successes, their operating procedures, MLA and MP's careers, consultants' experiences and learning how LGLA and UBCM operate are all a plethora of ideas that I find myself wanting to apply in Grand Forks.

Our keynote speaker was Shachi Kurl, executive director for the Angus Reid Institute. Shachi told the story of Canadian government interwoven with many statistics from her non-partisan organization. 47% of Canadians, she said, do not trust the government to act in the best interest of the people and 51% say that news stories can't be trusted. She went on to say that although the federal government might speak on behalf of the Canadian people, quite often what they say does not represent statistically what Canadians think. For example, a quarter of citizens would like to see a Trump style travel ban, a fifth of people surveyed said that housing is a top priority and 22% of Canadians were not born in Canada. 50% would like to slow down the legalization of marijuana. Moving to provincial politics, she said that there were three main reasons the Liberals lost the last election. First, they denied that soaring real estate prices were a problem. Secondly, the young working class were miserable and 80% of them wanted to move for affordability reasons. The third reason was the personal rejection of Christy Clark. The Greens surged because of electoral reform and many people who once voted Liberal, now voted Green. Premier John Horgan is doing better than expected and ranks as Canada's second favorite premier.

Responsible conduct and codes of conduct were discussed to help the province, UBCM and the LGMA collaborate to find a balanced approach in dealing with this issue. A panel of experienced delegates shared their styles of leadership that help foster harmony on the boards that they chair. One mayor began by introducing "our council" that were in attendance. He stated later, that he did this to make them feel valued and included but also to acknowledge that they were "our council" and not "his council". Many in the group felt that codes of conduct needed to have "teeth" to be able to censure those who disobeyed the rules. Discussion ensued around who would be the judge and jury and one panelist shared his uncomfortable experience of being on a council who took on this role. After his experience, he strongly recommended that a third party or an Integrity Commissioner make the decisions in this regard to avoid the optics of it being used as a political tool to silence minority voices. Another veteran said that if Robert's Rules were properly taught and adhered to, the chair of the meeting would set the tone and keep the room in order. Indeed, a thorough reading of parliamentary

procedure reveals that codes of conduct are already addressed and creating more bureaucracy is merely redundant.

Day one ended with an address by the Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing followed by a networking reception where I had the opportunity to discuss BC Housing initiatives with the minister.

Social media survival tactics were discussed on Thursday, as well as the proper use of the internet for the upcoming local elections. While I do not yet have a cell phone, the presenter led everyone through strategies for turning it off and delved into the statistics of overuse. Facebook of course was a hot topic and through break out sessions, the group came to the consensus that when dealing with heated posts, it is important to engage but only with the facts and not emotion. Debates in this realm are seldom won and any more than two comments on a post is detrimental. Anyone wanting to discuss further should be asked out for coffee or given your phone number to continue. Texting is not an effective form of meaningful conversation. After discussing the juggling act of political/ personal/ family life we were told to look at the many pictures displayed on the walls and write down the first word that came to mind when viewing our favorite picture. Without knowing the reason for the activity, it was a way of the subconscious telling us what we needed to help destress. Apparently, I need to take another walk through East Sooke Park sometime soon!

I wasn't overly enthused about the workshop about Women in Local Government but I was pleasantly surprised. I was hoping it wasn't going to be a "poor me we are so marginalized" discussion and I'm happy to say, that with a room full of strong women and a handful of courageous men I learned a lot! The discussion was really about the similarities that women share in government and the strengths that we bring to the table. Having women on board usually means that more family and children's issues will be brought to the table and as well as safe drinking water projects. Gender has not proven to be a detriment at the ballot box although women are less likely to put their names forward. Reasons for this include time management issues with other areas of their life, socializing pressures and the low income level of local government. A panel of women delegates including an MP and the campaign manager for the Mayor of Victoria had us all laughing at ironic situations women in government find themselves in particularly when you have a dual dialogue of zoning bylaws and Lego man videos going on in your head!

The forest fires of 2017 continue to be a hot topic at conventions! Some interesting pointers to pass along include:

- When dealing with traumatized evacuees, keep repeating directions and don't give too many choices
- Internet connected phones can go out, you need to have copper connections as well
- Learn how to manage payroll remotely in case you ever get evacuated. Not getting a paycheck in a time of crisis can be devastating for some families
- How should your city manage its infrastructure while in evacuation so that it is functional upon return.
- How do we prepare to receive evacuees?
- What are the steps to recovery for the environment, people, infrastructure and the economy?

Despite the loss from last year, it is encouraging to hear of the acts of kindness, generosity and courage, the strength of the human spirit and the long hours of dedication by everyone involved. The Mayor of

Prince George was also happy to announce that while they hosted the thousands of evacuees, they had eight babies born in Prince George and two weddings!

Friday morning BC Assessment gave us a summary of their 40 years in operation. They were formed to standardize the industry because at the time, there were many companies doing assessments and the government wanted continuity. Since that time of course, the value of the assets that they survey has risen exponentially and their mapping systems have become high tech. Anyone looking for more information on how they operate, can check out their utube videos online.

“You’re Canadian! How hard can it be to say sorry?”, was the cleaver title of MIA’s presentation on defamation charges against elected officials. The Apology Act of 2006 that their talk was based on states: “In this **Act**: ‘**apology**’ means an expression of sympathy or regret, a statement that one is sorry or any other words or actions indicating contrition or commiseration, whether or not the words or actions admit or imply an admission of fault in connection with the matter to which the words or actions relate”. Defamation cases can be long and drawn out, costing both parties time, money and damaging their reputation in the media, without significant monetary compensation. In most cases, MIA recommends an apology without an explanation, as explanations usually just fan the flames of emotion and can lead to more damages being awarded. MIA will defend councillors if the comment was made in a professional capacity and not in a personal capacity. They will not get involved in internal squabbles between councillors or councillors and staff.

With all the workshops on cannabis legalization over the past couple years, I was reluctant to attend another one but considering the amount of \$\$\$ at stake, I figured I’d better make sure we have all our ducks in a row. The provincial government has started to make decisions on the new framework here in BC, that will complement the model being rolled out federally. The age limit has been set at 19 years, the same as alcohol. The federal and provincial limit for personal cultivation of plants has been set to four and personal possession limited to 30g. When it comes down to commercial cultivation, processing and retail, municipalities are being given a lot of leeway on how to organize this. With solid rational, retail outlets can be limited by zoning, prohibited completely or limited to a certain number of business licences. Provincial licences will be required for retail as well. Processing facilities are recommended only in agricultural or light industry zones as there have been concerns with explosions due to the chemicals used in refinement. Cultivation in ALR lands cannot be prohibited unless the land is zoned, which in some areas of the regional district, it is not. With two different kinds of licences, bylaws will have to be specific to regulate micro or regular production. Landlords and strata boards will also have the ability, to place restrictions on their tenants. The representative from Young Andersen giving the presentation, recommended that cities have their bylaws in place prior to the legalization date. Once legalization occurs and production, processing and retail businesses set up, it will be very difficult to control where this occurs, if it is not specifically zoned in advance. One easy way they suggested, was to have public input in the process, by writing into the zoning bylaw that “retail” does not include cannabis sales. Anyone wanting to open a retail outlet would then have to apply for a zoning variation, thus triggering a public hearing before moving ahead.

I’m not sure what conversations our staff has had with our lawyers at Young Anderson on this issue but considering what I heard at their presentation, **I would like to suggest that council pass a motion directing staff to work with our legal team to amend our zoning bylaw and business licence bylaw to regulate the cultivation, processing and retail distribution of cannabis, prior to July 1, 2018.**

With the general local election coming up quickly in October of this year, Elections BC was on hand to give us an update on new regulations as well as a refresher on campaign financing. In a town of our size councillors will be required to spend under \$5000 on their campaign and mayoral candidates will be limited to \$10 000. Corporate and union donations are now prohibited. We have now entered what they call the “silly season” folks! Let’s hope that everyone can keep it civil and based on facts!

As you can see there is a lot of information packed into a short couple of days but what I find most rewarding is the information gleaned in talking with my colleagues. Not only are relationships strengthened with the ministry and other local politicians but people are more than willing to share the great things they are doing in their communities. I was most interested in a few projects being done with the forest industry in Merritt, Ft St James and another still under wraps in a coastal community. Forest companies are bringing whole trees into the mill for processing, thus eliminating the huge amount of waste normally piled and burned in the forest. Limbs and tops are then chipped to be burned for energy production. One city is even planning a trifold model with a mill, pellet plant and biomass fired energy generating facility. With our tax base heavily dependant on our two major industries, I think it would be beneficial to research the viability of such a project in our area. The energy production is considered “green”, with low emissions. A good quick reference for the project can be found at <https://www.canadianbiomassmagazine.ca/biofuel/building-bioenergy-5597>.