

Councillor's Report for June 25th 2018

Neighborhood and Community Meetings

On June 5th, 8th and 9th, I participated in neighborhood meetings which were held in North and South Ruckle areas, and Johnston's Flats. These meetings were held for residents to be updated on the flood, and to ask questions. Several Emergency Operations Center (EOC) managers were on hand to provide information and respond to questions from residents that were specific to their neighborhoods. Chris Marsh, EOC Director, described the role of the EOC in the initial flood event stages. In total, over 100 people were involved in the EOC operations center, which transitioned to a recovery center once the state of emergency and evacuation orders were lifted, Marsh said. Other officials from the Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA), Provincial Health Authority, Red Cross, several City managers, some members of council, the Mayor, RDKB staff and Area D Director Roly Russell were also on hand to answer questions, and more importantly, listen to residents' comments/questions. Residents were, understandably, very upset, and some exchanges were pointed, and at times heated. Some of the expressed concerns were for added neighborhood security overnight, the level of soil contamination due to the sewage, and issues around sampling of soil and air. People wondered if they should be rebuilding, and if the dykes would be built up for next year, and what are the long-term plans for people living on flood plains.

Another community meeting for the public was held on June 13th at the GFSS high school, where the same officials and the newly recruited Recovery Manager, Steve Newton, provided further information about the flood event itself, and outlined recovery efforts moving forward. Newton will be heading up a team of several leads in charge of economic, human factors, environment, housing, critical infrastructure, and logistics areas. It was also announced at the meeting that the Province will be giving \$2,800 for three months to every displaced household affected by the flood, to be administered by the Red Cross.

As time elapses, a clearer picture of the flood is beginning to emerge: Who was most affected (in North Ruckle, it was singles); how many homes were impacted (101 out of 124 homes in South Ruckle); what housing options will best meet the needs of the community post-flood; what will the hydrology report that is currently being done reveal about the river; what areas of the dykes will need immediate attention; what financing options will the City be able to access; how will the downtown core business area be affected? Talks with BC Housing have begun, but no definite path forward has yet been delineated. And housing, along with issues involving floodplain mapping and diking, homes needing demolition, uninhabitable properties – will urgently need council's collective wisdom and attention over the next months. A rezoning change that will ease the restrictions for placement of modulars on North and South Ruckle properties is now being passed, and this is a start.

In the coming weeks, Council will be receiving workshops and gathering information that will help us be better informed to make sound decisions for our community. But the fact that Grand Forks city officials (council and Mayor) had virtually no involvement in the critical, day-to-day operations of the EOC (based on the Policy Group Manual as identified in the Regional Emergency Response Plan), left us uninformed, and feeling very frustrated and helpless in the early days of this catastrophe. We were not able to provide timely, or adequate information to the public, and this resulted in quite a toxic situation, which I believe was unnecessary. The Province's mandate for the EOC is that for the sake of accuracy, information must come from one source, and I get that. But from my perspective, the take-away for future disaster events must include at least weekly scrums that includes all the local elected officials.

Samaritan's Purse

I wonder where we would be without the fantastic, self-sacrificing efforts of Samaritan's Purse and their volunteers who, over the past weeks have been helping flood victims clean out and sanitize their flood-damaged homes? I have had the immense privilege of volunteering with them in the areas of food preparation (BBQ lunch for the Community Clean-Up Day at the City Hall park on Saturday, June 2nd, and meal preps at the RVCC church), and community outreach. Early each morning, these dedicated out-of-town volunteers rise from rudimentary cots to share a simple, communal breakfast together, pray, and then express God's love to our community by venturing into flood-damaged homes to tackle the mammoth job of cleaning up and clearing out the flood debris. They provide hope and relief to every family they come into contact with, and some of the stories I've heard about their compassionate acts of kindness have literally brought tears to my eyes. My sincerest appreciation goes out to this organization who have shared the love of Christ in such a tangible, practical way, and a shout-out and hats off to all our local volunteers who have come alongside to help their neighbors out. Samaritan's Purse volunteers will be leaving our area as of June 31st. If you get the chance, do offer them thanks for their incredible service to our community.

Zoning Bylaw Amendment Open House

I attended the Zoning Bylaw Amendment Open House on June 18th. Staff members were on hand to respond to visitors' questions about the proposed regulations for the location of cannabis retail, production and processing facilities, and changes being considered to allow modular dwellings in North and South Ruckle, and some other minor changes to Zoning Bylaw 2039. A Public Hearing for the same followed in the evening, where Council listened to what members of the community had to say about these proposed zoning changes. Concerns were expressed about the distance of production and sales facilities to youth-related centers; distances to residential neighborhoods, decreased property values, and where cannabis can be publicly consumed.

Salmon BBQ Sunday, June 17th

On Father's Day, Sunday, June 17th I attended the community Salmon BBQ, hosted by the Legion. The fresh-caught salmon was donated by a northern community on behalf of those who were flooded out, and funds for relief efforts were collected by donation. I want to thank the Legion members and all the volunteers who stepped up to take on the project, and for doing such a fabulous job of it. While there, I noticed not only the Samaritan's Purse crew enjoying the delicious salmon dinner, but also many displaced families as well. The entertainment was great, and the wonderful community spirit that was present went a very long way to bring hope to our community. Thanks so much!

Respectfully submitted,

Beverley Tripp