

Councillor's Report for July 23rd 2018

During the past month, flood recovery is still the dominating focus of Councillor duties, and several important meetings have been held to further communicate information to Council and the public. On June 25th, I attended a meeting with the BC Economic Development Association, who were in town to prepare a report for key stakeholders. The goal of this Provincially-appointed group is to provide the community and surrounding area with relevant information and additional resources to help restore the economy in the short and longer-term, and present initiatives to assist in the community's economic recovery. This report was expected to be presented to Council before our next regular meetings.

Yet another community meeting was held on July 11th at the GFSS high school, where Recovery Manager, Steve Newton, and several local Recovery Team leads in charge of Economic, Human Factors, Environment, Housing, Critical Infrastructure, and Logistics provided further information about recovery efforts and what's to be expected in the days and weeks to come. Most of these leaders are from our own community as it was the Province's decision to have a community-led recovery initiative, rather than bring in people from outside of the area. Jessica Mace, team lead for environmental recovery, spoke about an upcoming hydrological report that would be received by Dobson Engineering Ltd., a contractor hired by the Province to provide critical information about the river and the floodplain. This report, she explained, would provide pivotal information for decision-making regarding future floodplain construction for residential, commerce, industry, and diking options. Bob Huff, team lead for housing recovery, spoke about where people have been living but can't anymore, building inspection, demolition assessment and coordination of materials disposal, rebuilding, and property negotiations. Other areas that were addressed included family recovery, economic recovery, critical infrastructure, and environmental impacts from the flood. A Rockwool representative was there and offered up to 20 bags of insulation for rebuilds until next year.

Attending residents had many questions about home renovations and permits. There was a clear message conveyed that flood-affected residents don't feel that they have been receiving enough communication and are feeling left in the dark about many things. The issue of building permit fees was brought up and Mayor Konrad committed to waiving these fees for affected properties. This good news was met with a round of applause by those present at the meeting. Other questions revolved around longer term solutions – diking issues; river diversion; dredging; was there a chunk of money (\$80 M) offered by the Province toward rebuilding the area? Again, information included in the hydrological report, among others, seems to be the key to moving forward. The Red Cross, who were also present, stated that they are now located at the Grand Forks Legion and are booking appointments for the Provincially funded \$2800 recovery allowance for affected residents.

On Friday, July 13th, I attended a Flood Risk/Mitigation and Land Use Workshop, where the Dobson Report was reviewed by a large and diverse team of professionals from around the Province and beyond. During this think tank, costs, benefits and alternative scenarios were discussed for each geographical area in the RDKB and neighborhoods within the City of Grand Forks, as the river hydrology report was dissected in detail. Some potential scenarios were presented to the elected officials present, and information was gathered concerning what else they would need to be able to make some concrete decisions moving forward. I expressed my desire to have additional technical details provided, as well as the need to receive input from the residents of Grand Forks and Area D who were most affected by the flood, and also the business community. I also spoke to the importance of including the commercial and industrial sectors in this conversation, as they are the life-blood of this community.

At this time, it looks like a “patchwork” approach will best suit the needs of the different areas and neighborhoods, as opposed to one blanket application of recovery options. The key element moving forward will be flexibility and buy-in from those affected by the flood – and, of course, a commitment from the Province to fund the options that are chosen.

Last week, I had the opportunity to sit down for a few minutes with our MLA, Linda Larson while she was in town. She spoke about the Province’s commitment to follow the Dobson Engineering report findings, and she would be looking forward to hearing what Council thought about the recommendations made in that document. Council will be receiving more reports on July 19th and the 23rd, including an Economic Recovery Report prepared by the BC Economic Development Association, and the good news is that there will soon be some concrete options for community consideration through open houses and public hearings.

Canada Day festivities in Gyro Park started after the community parade passed by with enthusiastic participants wishing everyone a happy Canada Day! The park was chock-full of happy participants enjoying live music, great food. Several councilors, including myself, were on hand to pass out gooey Canada Day cupcakes. It was a beautiful day to celebrate Canada’s 151st birthday!

On Saturday, July 14th, I attended the 9th Annual Christina Lake Homecoming at the Lake. It was another beautiful West Kootenay day at the beach, with talented musical performers and dance troupes providing entertainment for beach-goers. A great time was had by all, and we heard that 600 scrumptious hamburgers and hotdogs were served to guests throughout the event, which culminated at dusk with a flotilla “parade of lights.”

Over the past month, I’ve been working diligently on updating my Council Business Spreadsheet that keeps track of initiatives and business approved by Council (bylaws, projects, presentations, budgeting, etc.) I have distributed this to the other members of Council as a record of the work that Council and staff have achieved in the past couple of years since I have been elected to council. This, I feel, can help us better keep track of important works and make sure that things are less likely to fall through the cracks during the flood recovery process. If you are interested in this document, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverley Tripp