

Councillor's Report

September 24, 2018

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This month, I was very grateful to have been able to attend the 2018 UBCM convention in Whistler. Conventions are the most effective job training program for councils to receive updated information on a host of local government issues, meet with ministers and staff from government bodies, network with their peers in other communities to learn from their experiences and hone their presenting skills in a large meeting setting while debating motions that are important to their communities. The Local Government Leadership Academy recognises the workshops from the UBCM and AKBLG as merits toward their certificates in local government leadership. I was honored to receive my level one certificate this year from Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Minister Robinson made herself very available to the local governments that she oversees both during official sessions and at the receptions in the evenings. As a council, with our MLA, staff and Regional Director, we met with her privately to discuss our concerns surrounding the new supportive housing development just announced for Grand Forks. The Minister has a huge heart for disadvantaged people in her province and although council was upset with the way this program was rolled out and the location chosen, she was committed to making this project a success for the community as a whole. Indeed, a further meeting with BC Housing confirmed their willingness to listen to feedback from the community and be flexible moving forward. Although BC Housing and the Ministry are firm on their decision to place this facility at this location, it is my hope that the ideas council discussed with BC Housing can be implemented. Some of these include:

Council will be on the selection committee when choosing a non-profit to run the complex

The number of units will be reduced to 38

Not all residents will have mental health or addictions issues

There will be background checks with the RCMP to eliminate repeat offenders

The non-profit selected can choose a drug free policy for the facility

Commercial space on the ground floor including health related agencies.

Heritage components built into the façade of the building.

The day following our meeting with the Minister we were pleasantly surprised to hear of a second BC Housing project for families and seniors affected by the flooding in our community. I learned at a workshop earlier in the week that BC Housing has five revenue streams and that we are eligible to have a project in each stream. These include:

Supportive Housing

Low income Families and Seniors

Women's Transition Housing

Indigenous Community

Housing Hub - works with non-profits and private developers, faith groups, property owners, federal and local governments, and Indigenous partners to locate, use, or repurpose, land in communities where affordability is an issue. The goal is to build houses for people of middle income, to rent or buy.

The workshop was hosted by a panel of experts from BC Housing, The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, BC Non-Profit Housing Assoc. and two doctors on public policy. Because of the housing crisis in the lower mainland, the speculation tax was a hot topic. So too was the issue of homelessness, with the province promising to soon release their BC wide homeless count this fall. A "Housing Action Response Team" has been set up to do outreach in homeless camps. Seven billion dollars over four years has been committed by the province, to fund their thirty-point plan on housing to deal with these issues. Local governments will now be required to file a housing needs assessment every five years. New rental zoning has been introduced for the multi family residential zone, a rental housing task force has been formed and a new online portal for tenancy disputes has been set up. Statistics on the rental housing index were discussed that showed the increasing percentage of income people are spending on rent.

The two doctors on policy addressed the myth that increasing density increases affordability. The move away from single family detached neighbourhoods to higher density apartment complexes in their opinion (and many graphs of statistics!) did not make the rental or real estate market more affordable. A fact that they said developers hate to hear, as this type of rezoning often concentrates the land ownership into the hands of developers and not families.

I did attend four other workshops during the week in between minister meetings and plenary sessions. One was specific to the new Housing Hub initiative, another focussed on the RCMP and police services in BC, the third was on the opioid crisis and the fourth on the new legislation for cannabis. The opioid discussion troubled me the most. With the huge number of ODs in Vancouver alone, local government resources are being strained responding to them all and costs are skyrocketing. 200 ODs per year used to be a pretty constant average but 2017 saw 1450! This increase was due mainly to pentanol.

I was reminded how many opioid addicts were created by the effective advertising of the pharmaceutical companies to doctors. Many patients, in an effort to manage pain, were prescribed highly addictive substances with little warning. An estimated 55 000 people have been diagnosed in BC with opioid addiction. How many go undiagnosed?! Sadly 80% of deaths are males who die alone. The construction industry sees a higher percentage of addicts perhaps because of the highly physical nature of the work. Once addicted to opioids, doctors see permanent brain changes and quitting, usually only leads to relapse. Because of this, lifelong suboxone treatment is recommended but only 10% manage to stay on it over two years. I found it ironic that the same companies that got people hooked on the opioids are now selling the lifelong cure. \$\$

The RCMP may soon become unionized! This from the Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of Police Services, Public Safety and Solicitor General. Together with Eric Stubbs from RCMP E Division, they gave a summary of the structure of policing in Canada under the RCMP Act and the BC Police Act. The RCMP forms municipal unit agreements with municipalities and once a community breaches 5000 people, they become responsible for their own police force or share a detachment with their neighbours. The costs

include accommodation, supplies, support staff and lock ups. In Grand Forks because we are under 5000 we pay 33% of just the basic costs, through the police tax. There was a comment that patchwork funding agreements exist in BC, which made me realize the complexity of the funding structure. Provincial and federal policing services have different responsibilities. Federal policing is responsible for national security, serious and organized crime, financial crime, cybercrime on the Wild Wild Web!, protective policing and border crime. Provincial police are responsible for response calls, investigative services, traffic, security policing for events and emergencies. RCMP responded to 1.4 million calls last year in BC. With a recent court decision to reduce wait times for court, timelines for police to get their disclosure packages to crown council have been shortened. With pot legalization this fall, work loads are expected to actually increase, not decrease.

In September 2017 the province engaged the public in discussions about legalization. October 2017, the province formed a joint working group with the UBCM and in May 2018, provincial legislation was passed. Council put most of our zoning and other regulations in place this summer in advance of legalization October 17th. Again, this marijuana workshop delineated the federal and provincial responsibilities. Federal: medical marijuana, criminal activities, product standards, labelling, packaging, promotion, advertising, commercial production, impaired driving (THC levels – 2-5 ng/ml blood as determined by an oral fluid screening device). Provincial: distribution and retail, Cannabis Control and Licencing Act, Cannabis Distribution Act, amendments to the Motorized Vehicle Act (no TCH for graduated licencing). So far, 31 licenced producers have been approved for the liquor distribution branch's online sales and stand alone stores, with over 100 strains. Over 100 licence applications have been received and regular inspections are performed after the licence is granted. Tax sharing is still being worked out between the province and municipalities, with \$400 million the estimated intake in the first year alone. Taxes are set at \$1/gram or 10% of the final retail price (whichever is higher), plus 7% provincial tax.

This year's small talk forum had some great ideas that I'd love to see Grand Forks try out. The District of Clearwater talked about the success they have had with two biomass energy systems. Using wood waste, this project has reduced carbon emissions and provided substantial cost savings. The neighbourhood golf cart pilot project was started by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure in Chase. Modified golf carts are now a permanent fixture on summer streets. Childcare needs in small communities was also highlighted with the \$10/day child care option presented. An idea that kept popping up over the week was the concept of having a community forest. The two communities I spoke with about it, said how profitable it had been for them and that it provided more grant opportunities for them. Our regional director for area D said that this is something that the regional district has been looking into. I would like to get more information on this option for Grand Forks.

Finally, I'd just like to say how happy I was with our meeting with Premier Horgan. The Premier took extra time with Grand Forks to listen to our most urgent flood related concerns. Acting Mayor Thompson read the motions that council had passed for each area and the Premier asked us questions pertinent to each one of the areas. We highlighted the urgent need for winter housing and assistance for our business community to get back on their feet. In his closing address to the convention on Friday Premier Horgan mentioned Grand Forks specifically and encouraged us that all of BC was supporting us in our recovery.

Respectfully Submitted, Julia Butler