

## REPORT TO COUNCIL

FROM: Councillor Christine Thompson

DATE: September 4, 2018

SUBJECT: Report to Council

I attended the Flood Recovery Meeting on September 5<sup>th</sup> where the very difficult decisions that Council made September 4<sup>th</sup> regarding endorsements of options that we believed were in the best interests of not only those affected by the flood, but our City as a whole, were discussed. We knew from the outset that not all people impacted would be happy with the choices that we made; however, it was felt that people needed to know the direction Council wanted to go to make their own decisions regarding their futures.

I attended the annual UBCM conference the week of September 10<sup>th</sup>, along with Councillors Hammett and Butler and our CAO Diane Heinrich. Because Mayor Konrad was not able to attend, he asked me to represent our City as Acting Mayor. It was a very full week of meetings with several Ministers, our Premier, the RCMP, BC Housing, Emergency Management BC, and the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

### **Mayor's Caucus**

The presentations centered around the opioid crisis in BC, poverty and homelessness. Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Judy Darcy, advised that this issue is having a devastating impact in all of BC. There are no quick fixes and no one pathway to hope. The government has committed \$322 million over 3 years to address this issue including harm reduction and treatment. An Emergency Over Dose Response Centre has been created. Innovation grants are available, and each Health Authority has an Outreach Team.

Dr. Mark Tindell talked about harm reduction and stated that innovation starts at the community level. He went on to advise that in 2017 there were 1500 over dose deaths in BC and that 2018 could meet or surpass 2017. No region has been spared, and that 80% of deaths are male. 81% of those who died had fentanyl in them. He suggested that there needs to be a safer supply with no additives; there needs to be decriminalization; and, that there should be identity verifying vending machines for dispensing methadone and other harm reducing medications.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selena Robinson, talked about housing strategies. The Cities of Coquitlam and Kelowna have housing strategies, and Kelowna's is specifically an affordable housing strategy. Municipalities can zone land specifically for rental housing. She talked about community housing initiatives, including BC Housing's Housing Hub, a new program offered by her Ministry. She expressed her sincere thanks to Mayors for all that they do in times of turmoil. She also advised that the limits on spending in local elections will be closely monitored.

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The final presenter was Donald MacPhearson, Executive Director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition. He advised that municipalities need to act locally and think nationally; and that there needs to be new approaches to intervene, including openly acknowledging the issue, facilitate harm reduction, advocate for the decriminalization for personal use, public health distribution systems, end prohibition and care for those that need it.

### **Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing**

We met with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selena Robinson, to discuss the role of BC Housing in supporting the development of rapid-response programs that empower local home-owners to add new rental housing to existing housing stock through new detached accessory dwellings and upgrading under-utilized or partly developed secondary suites. We also advised that there are mixed use buildings in the downtown core that are currently uninhabitable due to the renovations required. Owners are actively seeking financing to complete these upgrades to current building standards. We asked for provincial funding to assist with rental management and matching landlords and potential tenants. We also brought to the Minister's attention Council's concern that BC Housing did not consult with Council prior to making the purchase of land on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Central Avenue and subsequently making their intentions public. We encouraged the Minister to reconsider the direction BC Housing is intending to go with supportive housing, and instead provide multi-family housing units to address our immediate needs for displaced homeowners and tenants resulting from the May floods.

Minister Robinson's response is that her Ministry is working with communities across the province to provide supportive housing. She advised that there is a misconception of what supportive housing is province wide. She further advised that this housing will be for those currently in Grand Forks who are homeless, and that no one from other communities will be brought in and housed in that facility.

### **Attorney General**

We requested Attorney General David Eby, for support to increase access to the courts by providing a bi-monthly circuit court judge; increase the number of crown counsel lawyers in BC and change the burden of proof criteria for Crown Counsel from a substantial likelihood of conviction to a reasonable likelihood of conviction. We advised that it is our understanding that police in BC are not permitted to lay charges. Once offenders have been apprehended and the RCMP has recommended charges, crown seldom lays charges and these offenders are released only to reoffend. Reference was made regarding 2 prolific offenders, one with an arrest warrant for failure to appear and whose charges are no longer in the system, and one where the victim was requested to drop the charges. The lack of RCMP resources in our community is, in Council's opinion, exasperating the level of criminal activity and increases the frustration of our community members, particularly the business community.

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The Attorney General advised that he will ask his Deputy Minister to look into the issue of the 2 repeat offenders and to make inquiries to the Chief Judge regarding service levels in Grand Forks.

### **Premier Horgan**

Rural Grand Forks Director Roly Russell, RDKB Administrator Mark Andison and Flood Recovery Team Manager Graham Watt accompanied us to this meeting.

We advised Premier John Horgan that the solution to the catastrophic flooding experienced in our City requires both leadership and financial commitment on the part of the Provincial Government as our City does not have the financial resources to ensure reasonable protective measures are in place for the future of our City. We advised him of the very difficult decisions Council endorsed after consideration of engineering reports, consultations with each impacted neighbourhood and the results of a survey that gave each affected property owner the choice of options Council was considering. We further advised the Premier that we knew we could not make everyone happy but resolved to do what we believed was in the best interests of the City as a whole.

Premier Horgan asked if the buy out would be based on assessed values, and we responded we were advocating for pre-flood market value plus the cost of repairs spent to bring these homes to a standard that would keep residents safe, secure and dry over the upcoming winter. He inquired how the City intended to pay for this, and we advised that this is where the Province comes in.

### **Minister of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development**

Rural Grand Forks Director Roly Russell, RDKB Administrator Mark Andison and Flood Recovery Team Manager Graham Watt accompanied us to this meeting.

We advised Minister Doug Donaldson of the same issues that were discussed with Premier Horgan and the decisions of Council outlined above.

Director Russell brought forward the economic picture and the need to talk about supports on the table for small business and agriculture. He advised that small businesses are falling through the cracks. FRT Manager Graham Watt advised of a case study being undertaken that looks at land swaps and green spaces, and that this is being captured in the plan.

Minister Donaldson thanked Council for our long-term vision for solutions and supports for the community at risk. He commented on the incredible amount of coordination done to come to the resolutions that we did. He also said the “eyes” will be on what the City and the Province do together.

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### **Other Meetings**

#### **Insurance Bureau of Canada**

Councillor Hammett and I, along with CAO Diane Heinrich met with representatives of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. We advised them of the frustrations of those insured, and particularly owners of business and their tenants, who do not agree with the recommendation(s) of their insurance company's adjuster. We have invited them to come to Grand Forks to present to our residents the options available to them when there is a disagreement. They will be coordinating this presentation with FRT Manager Graham Watt. Mr. Watt will also invite the Insurance Association of BC to attend this presentation.

#### **Emergency Management BC**

At the invitation of Director Russell, we attended their meeting in support of them.

#### **RCMP**

We advised that Council is concerned with the number of members in our Detachment that are available to deal with the increase in criminal activity in our City. We advised that we were aware that E Division had requested funding for up to 150 additional members and inquired what Council can do to support this request. We were advised that Council could send a letter in support of this request to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety.

#### **BC Housing**

We met with Armin Amrolia, Associate Vice President, Development Strategies, to express our deep concern that Council had not been consulted regarding the supportive housing to be built on land purchased by BC Housing on the south side of Central Avenue and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. We advised that while BC Housing's representative had consulted with the City's Planning Department regarding zoning and permitted uses, Council was not made aware of this purchase and intended development until the day before the notification was delivered to the business community who are extremely upset with this development proposal. We have invited Ms. Amrolia to come to Grand Forks September 24<sup>th</sup> to meet with the business community and to make a presentation to Council regarding this and other housing issues in our community, and she has advised that she will be here for the day.

I came away from our meetings with a positive feeling. It is my belief that the Premier and his Ministers will support Council's asks as much as they can. I am encouraged by the responses from the Insurance Bureau of Canada and BC Housing. I also want to thank our MLA Linda Larson and her Executive Assistant Colleen Misner for attending most of our meetings where they did not conflict with other municipality's in her riding.

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Unfortunately, the number of meetings we had, precluded me from attending the workshops I wanted to; however, the business of the City took precedence.

Lastly, I am please to advise that the City of Grand Forks received an Honourable Mention for our Sustainable Service Delivery Tool in Excellence in Asset Management category at the 2018 Community Excellence Awards.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Christine Thompson