

Councillor's Report for October 16, 2017

Beverley Tripp

At the writing of this report, we have been back from the UBCM for just over a week. This year's convention, held in Vancouver during the week of September 25-29th, certainly did not disappoint! There was a mountain of information presented to delegates from every corner of the province who attended to learn, network and create policy for the betterment of our communities. My report will deal solely with important issues from the convention.

Funding Opportunities for Local Governments

Study sessions took place on Monday, Sept. 25th. I attended the session on Funding for Local Governments sponsored by the UBCM. Some funding opportunities under the Local Government Program Services were discussed, including age-friendly grants to assist local governments to best support aging populations and enable them to "age in place." Another grant of interest was the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund that provides funds to enhance the resiliency of communities in responding to emergencies. This information has been passed along to our staff for further action.

Ministers' Meetings to Discuss Homelessness/Mental Health and Addictions & Housing Affordability

One of the notable differences about this year's convention was the availability of the new NDP cabinet for meetings with delegates throughout the week. During the week, we had two productive meetings with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selina Robinson, and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Judy Darcy. During both meetings, we brought up our city's current situation with the homeless camps and those with mental health issues. Both Ministers were very receptive, and I was impressed to hear that they are working collaboratively across ministries to address homelessness, mental health, and affordable housing across the province. This is a top priority for their new government. Both Minister Robinson and Darcy emphasized the importance of *working partnerships within communities*, and we will be following up on some possibilities that were discussed at those meetings.

In her address to the convention on Wednesday, Minister Robinson remarked that the Government of B.C. is working on a Comprehensive Housing Plan to address the housing affordability crisis in BC, and has taken action with funding for affordable housing units. We hope to be recipients of some of that funding! As well, the Leader of the Official Opposition, Rich Coleman, spoke to delegates on urging local government leaders to protect those who are most vulnerable within their communities. Mr. Coleman encouraged leaders to stand up to "nimbyism," and to ensure that supportive housing and addictions treatment facilities are built. He also noted that the province currently spends \$2.8 billion annually to support those with mental health and addictions issues.

Small Talk Forum for Communities Under 5,000

While the name of this forum is "Small Talk," issues discussed by the over 400 delegates in attendance certainly are not! The forum hosted a range of presenters speaking on financial housekeeping, bylaw enforcement, communicating in an age of social media, and wildfire preparedness. One of the ten discussion topics featured Microcell Transmitter Placement. I gave a brief, five minute overview of the issue and how it is impacting our communities, while referring delegates to a supplied hand-out for further information. The main points I focussed on were: a loophole in Innovation Canada and the FCM's Antenna Siting Policy that excludes microcells; densely placed microcell transmitters emit powerful RF radiation that hasn't yet been proven safe; Safety Code 6's radiation exposure guidelines are inadequate to protect the public; people want a say where microcells are placed in their neighborhoods.

Resolution B100 - Microcell Transmitter Placement Consultation

Prior to the convention, I spent many, many hours working to promote awareness of this topic/resolution with other concerned people from around the province. In my last report, I said that this issue is gaining a lot of public concern as microcells proliferate in neighbourhoods and public spaces, and that wisdom dictates that we remove the ambiguity of the language in the FCM's Antenna System Siting Policy that exempts microcells from municipal and public consultation, and ensure a level of safety with consultation (within 100 meters of homes, school and hospitals) that is necessary, and fair. That was the gist of my resolution, and many other local governments obviously felt the same way, because the **resolution passed at the UBCM**. I will now be following up to find out what next steps should be taken as this makes its way into federal policy.

Responsible Conduct Policy Paper

Delegates also endorsed a UBCM policy paper that outlines an approach to strengthening the framework for responsible conduct by local government elected officials in B.C. Included in the numerous recommendations revolving around development of guidance materials was a recommendation for designing “a model for providing resources that would support fact-finding and assessing challenging relationships/circumstances faced by a council/board due to less-than-responsible conduct and could provide guidance on approaches to help the council/board move forward (considerations include expertise needed, cost, and triggers for involvement).” UBCM’s Executive will follow up with Minister Selina Robinson on the policy paper.

Consultation on Cannabis Legalization

One of the major news-making events at the conference was Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth’s announcement that the Government will be engaging in a public consultation process on cannabis legalization. UBCM has also been invited to establish a standing committee with the Province to support the development of the regulatory framework for cannabis legalization in British Columbia, prior to its legalization next year. Minister Farnworth emphasized the need for engagement with the public and stakeholders in advance of legislation being introduced. He emphasized that a “one size fits all” approach will not work.

Update on the Canada-US Softwood Lumber Dispute

Presenters from the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, and the BC Lumber Trade Council/Council of Forest Industries gave an overview of the softwood lumber situation with the US. This is an industry that is so vital to our community, and not only ours, but 140 communities around the province. In this protracted dispute, the US has the right to control access to their market; currently 50% of Canada’s softwood is exported to them. In November 2016, the US Lumber Lobby filed a petition against Canada for injury to the US lumber industry. But US markets are continuing to grow as there is a pent-up demand for housing along with all the natural disasters that will require repair/remodeling demands for wood. By every measure, the US is doing great in this industry and we are expecting the ruling on injury (which will take place by November 17th) to be in our favour. The NAFTA trade agreement also comes in handy to get a “fair hearing.” They offer a fair dispute resolution because it’s a bi-national panel. Negotiators are aware that a new agreement with the US must work for BC, and negotiating this deal is a priority for both the BC and Canadian government. The bottom line is: Markets are good and are expected to stay that way for the foreseeable future.

There is a monthly information session for Mayors in forestry-dependent communities and regular updates are online at: www.gov.bc.ca/softwoodlumber/bclumbertrade.com

The New Normal - New Directions in Flood Mitigation

Experts from Planning Mitigation and Partnerships, Emergency Management BC, and the Fraser Basin Council chaired this workshop. Unprecedented flooding is causing havoc throughout BC and beyond, and new approaches to proactively enhance flood resistance must be found. Flooding is becoming the most important issue in disaster mitigation. It costs by far the most of any other disaster, comprising 80% of the total Disaster Financial Assistance budget. The focus must move to prevention/mitigation and regional collaboration, with costs shared with provinces. It was noted that poor engineering contributes to the problem and stream bed clearing, and adequate infrastructure like diking are part of the solution. Communities also need to put in place bylaws dealing with vulnerable land.

Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation

The topic of wildfire prevention was discussed with delegates by Madeline Maley, Executive Director of the B.C. Wildfire Service (BCWS), and her colleagues. With more than 1,200 fires, 1.2 million hectares of land burned, 4,000 evacuees and costs nearing \$500 million, this summer was the worst wildfire season in B.C.’s history. Part of a new FireSmart mitigation/prevention program will involve BCWS determining the best way to engage with the public and work with other jurisdictions across Canada to develop innovative solutions to the wildfire problem. BCWS Director of Wildfire Management, Ian Meier, outlined a set of tools that can help reduce catastrophic loss due to wildfire; that information should soon be forthcoming on a website that is currently being developed.

Respectfully submitted,

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