

Councillor's Report for August 21st, 2017  
Beverley Tripp

Whispers of Hope/BETHS Closure Announcement

I wanted to comment on the conversations I have been having with many residents, and the dozens of letters that have been written to the City by concerned citizens in support of Whispers/BETHS staying open. I empathize with the feelings of dismay and concern expressed by the writers. Many valid points and ideas have been conveyed in those letters, which I very much appreciate. My suggestion to council to have a town-hall meeting has been verified many times over in those letters and in personal conversations with people, and I would really like to see this take place so that we have a plan to take to the Minister Responsible for Mental Health and Addictions, and the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing, at the UBCM next month.

I have always been in favour of the work of Whispers of Hope and BETHS. The very first winter we lived in Grand Forks, having just retired from prison chaplaincy, I volunteered at BETHS. Working in the prisons for seven years, I counseled many prisoners who suffered from the same social and drug-related issues. Since then I have had numerous dealings with Whispers: I donate and shop there, exchange ideas with Whispers volunteers, and have eaten the delicious and nutritious meals provided by the soup kitchen. In various incarnations, Whispers has been providing an essential service for this community for decades, and BETHS has now added to that service. I firmly believe that we need to give those in need in our community a "hand up."

No easy solution existed for the complex and dangerous situation that developed around the Whispers/BETHS property this summer, and Council's decision to give notice to close these establishments was not an easy one to make. As a Council, we felt that some form of intervention had to take place for the safety of the city but this can only be a short-term solution to an evolving issue that is not going away anytime soon. At last year's UBCM, I attended a workshop on Tent Cities & Homelessness, and learned that City Councillors need to be informed and aware of what has been done successfully (and not so successfully) in other centers. The bottom take-away on the homelessness issue was, "Take action – early!" - get supports in place, ***work with outside agencies, societies, volunteers, and government to implement a workable plan.*** That is why Councillor Butler and I have advocated for a townhall meeting, or the immediate formation of a working group/committee to collectively look into the issue and formulate a way forward that best serves this community. My earnest hope is that our town will unite around the creation of a new and better plan for meeting the needs of the vulnerable and homeless living among us. Last year, I had the opportunity to be invited on a tour of the old Hardy View facility when Whispers was exploring the possibility of providing additional transition housing for their homeless clients. That prospect did not gain traction, but there are other options and possibilities that could be explored. Couldn't we all roll up our collective sleeves and come up with solutions that better the city for everyone?

Regardless of where we are at with organizing a group to engage this issue, Council will be planning to meet with the provincial ministries involved at the UBCM to put our City's situation before them.

Cannafest RV/Tenting in Donaldson Park

I would like to find out from staff how much the City received in camping/RV collections for the use of Dick Bartlett Park all the way to Silver Kettle, and the Arena parking area. I understand from literature circulated around town that fees of \$70 and \$40 respectively were charged for RVs and tents. A conservative estimate would put the proceeds from campers at around \$35,000. City works crews were busy doing "in kind" services to support the event, and I believe we could "sharpen the pencil" a little for next year in this area.

#### Resolution on Microcell Transmitter Placement Consultation at the UBCM Conference

I am thrilled that this resolution has gained a lot of grassroots attention! I have been working with individuals and groups throughout the province to inform British Columbians about issues surrounding microcell placement and the new 5G technology, and the microwave frequencies that these “tiny cell” transmitters will use. Province-wide, municipal councillors are being contacted by supporters of our resolution, with a request to support this motion at the UBCM. A form letter “To the Editor” is also circulating for those who want to bring attention to this important issue to their local papers.

#### Removal of City Trees

A couple of concerned residents contacted me about the removal of the trees outside of the Library. We were advised by City staff that they were asked to remove the trees by the Library due to their messiness and large water use. Looking further into the situation, it seems there is no official bylaw in place regarding tree planting/removal/replacement in the city, however, I believe this is currently being worked on and will come before Council for approval sometime in the near future. If you have concerns or ideas you'd like to share, I suggest getting in touch with the City through email, or by writing a letter.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverley Tripp