

Councillor's Report

August 21, 2017

Julia Butler

In his flyer to constituents this month, Richard Cannings, MP for South Okanagan-West Kootenay, discussed the Liberal Government's private infrastructure scheme. Coincidentally, council's previous motion, asking the FCM to petition the federal government to put legislation in place to prevent privatization of our water infrastructure, is coming up for review. I received an email from the FCM, asking for a third installment of background information and supporting documentation to help this motion move forward at the federal level.

Cannafest certainly was a huge boon to our economy this summer and gave us all a taste of what living in Grand Forks would be like if our population doubled! With the real estate market heating up as well, it got me to wondering how the citizens of Grand Forks feel about increasing our population. Although we have held pretty steady at around 4000 people for many years, it looks like the Okanagan wave could be headed our way. As Osoyoos discovered this year, once their population exceeded 5000 people, the cost of financing the police force becomes a huge burden on tax payers. As our previous CAO used to say, "Once you reach 5000, you have to hurry up and get to 10 000" to ease the financial burden on the tax payer. So, what is our ideal population? It is important to be proactive, as we are now reviewing our Official Community Plan and zoning bylaws. While striving for economic development, do we become a town of 10 000? Is it possible to retain our small town charm under 5000 and still attract business? I'd love to hear community feedback on this topic.

Community feedback has definitely been forthcoming over the topic of Whisper's of Hope! I have always encouraged open dialogue on hot community issues and councillor Tripp and I promoted a town hall meeting/stakeholder meeting on this issue before council's decision of August 1. The volunteers at Whisper's and BETHS are the city's greatest allies and front line workers in combating homelessness and mental health related crimes in our city. Prior to our ministerial meetings at the UBCM, I would like to see a select committee/stakeholder's meeting, to itemize: concerns, actions taken to date and requests from the Provincial government. As a collective voice of councillor's, RDKB reps, RCMP, IHA, doctors, mental health workers, non-profit volunteers, fire department, city staff, Habitat for Humanity, Woman's Transition House etc. we have a wealth of experience on the subject that could be formulated into a concise "ask" from the Provincial minister responsible for Mental Health and Addictions. When understanding why:

- the RCMP have their hands tied in dealing with the mentally ill in our community
- the courts aren't prosecuting the people we feel are threatening our community
- the fire department is struggling to manage camp fires lit by the homeless
- the doctors aren't committing those detained by the RCMP to treatment

- Whisper's isn't restricting access to certain clientele

then we can quit laying blame and start thinking outside the box!

I am truly frustrated with the snail's pace government operates at to affect change but as the Community Charter states, it is council's responsibility to, "foster the economic, social and environmental well-being of its community". I would encourage council to take a leading role to organize open dialogue prior to this year's UBCM, by immediately forming a select committee as outlined in the Community Charter section 142. The purpose of a select committee is to deal with a specific short term goal and must consist of a least one member of council. This issue will undoubtedly require the Mayor to strike a standing committee/task force as per section 141 of the Community Charter to deal with the issue on an ongoing basis, but for now it is important that we do our homework before going to the Minister. Stakeholders unable to attend meetings before the September 25 (beginning of the UBCM convention) can email their organizations' list of concerns, actions to date and "wish list" for the minister. After compiling the information, it can then be presented to council at the September 18 meeting for council's final approval before the convention and meeting with the minister. Therefore, I would like to propose the following motion:

WHEREAS the City of Grand Forks is dealing with complex issues involving homelessness, drug addiction and mental health,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: that council strike a select committee on August 21, 2017 and ending October 16, 2017 to provide council with cohesive feedback from all stakeholders in the Boundary regarding the aforementioned issue, as well as steps already taken by the community to deal with said issue and a specific unified request by the stakeholders to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Butler