

December 2017

A Year in Review

As we approach the final year of our term, Council and senior staff have embarked on an update to our Council Strategic Plan to re-focus our collective efforts on making the Town of Comox the best place to live, work, play and invest. When we look back at the previous three years, a lot has been done but more work on various initiatives will be required.

As your Council, we were able to move forward and complete the construction of the Twin Sail buildings in Marina Park as well as the construction of a splash park (which won the Reader's Choice award for "City Project Worth the Wait") in collaboration with other partners (Rotary, BIA, Young Professionals of CV and the Mayor's Cup) and funding agencies (Island Coastal Economic Trust and Western Economic Diversification). An official opening/ribbon cutting ceremony was held on August 7, 2017 (in conjunction with the Town's Nautical Days festival) where we welcomed various dignitaries and guests, along with festival goers who participated in the event. We also completed the second phase of Robb Avenue Rebuild from Church to Pritchard, which completes upgrading of a significant piece of Town infrastructure.

In 2017, the Town of Comox, home of 19 Wing was officially designated as the location for the highly advanced training and simulation centre - Fixed Wing Search and Rescue (FWSAR) Aircraft Replacement Project. A project valued at \$4.7 billion will bring new long term technical employment to the Comox Valley with the creation of 70+ jobs not to mention the economic benefits. We anticipate ground-breaking of this project shortly.

As part of the ongoing implementation of our Official Community Plan Goals and Objectives, we renewed our Downtown Vitalization Incentives Program for another year. While Council approved the Berwick expansion project in 2016 at approximately \$6M, works continue and are expected to be completed early 2018. Major construction renovations continue at Comox Mall and we remain hopeful that the 14 unit Element project and the 21 unit Lorne project get started under new ownerships in 2018. These developments should provide more residents and customers for existing and new downtown businesses and generate significant DCC revenues that will allow the Town to move forward with capital improvement projects identified in our five-year financial plan.

Once again, we experienced a very successful summer of events and festivals including the BC Shellfish and Seafood Expo, the Filberg Festival and Comox Nautical Days Festival (which continues to be recognized by various categories of the Reader's Choice awards for activities scheduled throughout the 3 day event). We appreciate the hard work the organizers and volunteers have put into running these successful events over the last number of years.

Our community centre continues to show incredible growth in user numbers as the program offerings continue to expand and vary. Also complementing the use of our centre was the completion of the change room renovations with patrons now being able to enjoy a 'hot shower' following their activity of choice. This past year we found ourselves saying goodbye to our Recreation Director Mandy Johns, who retired in September and welcomed Ted Hagmeier who was promoted to Mandy's former position and who has been with the Town for a number of years serving in the capacity of Recreation Supervisor.

We also found ourselves having to say farewell to Mr. Don Jacquest, the Town's Director of Finance. Don served the Town in this capacity for many, many years and his commitment and dedication and 'hands-on' approach not to mention leaving the Town in an extremely strong financial position will be missed. Don was also instrumental in allowing the Town to be in a position to retire its capital debt in 2018. Following Don's retirement, the Town filled this vacancy with Mr. Clive Freundlich who has been busy familiarizing himself with the Town's financial systems along with establishing a formal asset management program.

Our Comox Fire Rescue crews continue to be busy in training and operational activities as follows:

- responding to a number of significant fires throughout the year including two interface fires that could have easily gotten out of control if not for the quick and professional response of our firefighters (and assistance from neighbouring communities)
- our five full-time staff have combined, over 140 years of dedicated service.
- at the request of the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) in July – our department deployed our Structure Protection Unit trailer and crew to the Bella Coola/Anahim Lake area where crews assisted for 50 consecutive days (resulting in over 3,000 hours of injury free service under some very challenging conditions)

We appreciate very much the leadership of Chief Schreiner who, in addition to his regular duties as Fire Chief also responded to a request from the OFC to assist (for 35 days) as a Structure Protection Specialist where he provided a hands-on management role at six different fires this past season.

Chief Schreiner and his Officers are to be commended as they continue to keep up with the challenges of maintaining a fully trained crew of volunteer fire fighters and first responders to serve our residents and those living in the Comox Fire Protection District.

Our Parks and Public Works staff have had another very busy year, made even more challenging with winter storm events, and keeping our greenspaces and our roads well maintained and safe for use by our residents. With over 50% tree canopy cover and over 80 kms of roads, these assets will continue to be managed in a cost effective and efficient way.

We continue our work associated with the Shakesides property with Council making an application to the courts earlier this year requesting a modification to the terms of the Mack Laing Trust with the proposal of demolishing the existing home and replacing it with a viewing platform yet continuing to meet the spirit and intent of the trust bequest. We're hopeful that this 36 year old issue may be resolved by mid 2018.

We are also excited to report that in partnership with Courtenay Rotary Club and the CV Pickleball Association, we hope to move forward with outdoor pickleball courts in the Town of Comox. We hope to see completion of these courts by mid 2018 to meet the recreational needs of our active residents.

At a regional level, significant progress has been made by our staff and Council on pressing issues including:

1. Water filtration and treatment – cost estimate of \$110.6M with anticipated construction completion by the year 2021. A necessary project mandated by regulations and once completed will significantly reduce if not eliminate the issuance of boil water notices.
2. Solid waste management and composting facility in Campbell River
3. K'ómoks First Nations treaty settlement and economic development
4. St. Joseph's Hospital Task Force on future role in seniors care centre of excellence – with the opening of the new North Island Hospital Comox Valley on October 1, 2017, St. Joseph's Hospital began its transition into a new role; a role focusing on residential care services.
5. Recycle BC program implementation in the Town - - formerly Multi-Material BC, a non-profit organization responsible for residential packaging and printed paper recycling programs in many areas across BC, either directly or by working with local governments, First Nations, private companies and not-for profit organizations. For an overview of accepted materials visit our website at www.comox.ca and click on "Recycling" under the Services tab on the home page menu.

Regarding Comox No. 2 pump station – the Comox Valley Sewage Commission has agreed to put the proposed Comox No. 2 Pump station project on hold while alternative options are investigated. Key factors contributing to this decision was the increase in estimated costs, possible environmental risks, existing infrastructure reported to be in better condition than anticipated and consideration of other options which suggest there may be lower-cost options available.

Our Planning and Building departments have had a very busy 2017 with \$15 million in value of construction building permits being recorded. This activity is expected to continue for the near future, and we expect to open up new areas for construction and development in both NE and NW Comox including our most recent boundary extension area on Hector/Aspen Road. We received a very positive report on the planning process timelines which indicated that targets set in our Council Strategic Plan were being met and in some cases exceeded. This bodes well for the increased level of private sector investment interest in the Town and in particular, the downtown core.

Public engagement and exceptional customer service continues to be a high priority of Council and senior staff. Our open house this past spring on capital Public Works and Parks projects was once again successful and very well attended. Given the positive attendance and feedback it is our intention to continue with this format on an annual basis. Our Town newsletters have been augmented by increased use of social media like Facebook and Twitter to get out the message and for receiving feedback. We also issued eight press releases in 2017 some of which were:

- Town of Comox and Recycle BC partner on expanded blue box program
- repeal of Knight Road Sanitary Sewer Main Extension Capital Fee Bylaw, 2010 - a result of the regional sewer fee apportionment settlement negotiated between the Comox Valley Regional District, City of Courtenay and the Town of Comox
- settlement of a new 5-year collective agreement between the Town of Comox and CUPE Local 556; and
- conferring the Freedom of the Town to Mr. John Marinus (former Councillor)

It is with a heavy heart that 2017 finds us acknowledging the passing of two prominent citizens and on whom Council conferred the Freedom of the Town. Former Mayor Dr. George Piercy passed away in April and former Councillor Mrs. Alice Bullen passed away in May. Both individuals contributed significantly to the Town of Comox, the people they met, and who prided themselves on the importance of family and the many great friends made during their lifetimes. They will be missed.

All in all, 2017 was a great year but we're not resting on our laurels as more work needs to be done on all fronts in the beautiful Town of Comox for the benefit of our citizens.