

December 2016

A Year in Review

As we have reached the mid-point in our mandate, 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.

Some highlights from the past year include three major infrastructure projects:

1. Robb Road resurfacing from Anderton Road to Church Street (\$1.345m) funded 1/3rd by federal gas tax monies;
2. Point Holmes Shoreline Restoration Project (\$1.8m) funded 2/3rd by the Provincial Government Emergency Measures Mitigation and Bike BC programs;
3. Marina Revitalization Project (\$1.85m) funded 25% by Island Coastal Economic Trust, 35% by Western Economic Diversification and 40% by Town of Comox.

As part of the ongoing implementation of Official Community Plan Goals and Objectives, we renewed our Downtown Vitalization Incentives Program for another year. We have approved the Berwick expansion project valued at \$5,671,000. As well, Comox mall is undergoing a significant renovation (valued at \$2.9m) and we hope to see both the 14 unit Element project and the 21 unit Lorne project get started under new ownerships early in 2017. These developments should provide more residents and customers for existing and new downtown businesses and generate significant DCC revenues that will allow projects like the Comox – Rodello roundabout to proceed in the next few years.

Upon completion of the first phase of the Marina Vitalization project by March 2017, we're hopeful that the next phase can include a splash park budgeted at \$450,000 with funding from Canada 150 and Comox Rotary working in collaboration with the Comox Business in Action.

We had a very successful summer of events and festivals including the BC Shellfish and Seafood Expo, the Filberg Festival and Nautical Days (which was recognized as the best family friendly festival in the Comox Valley). We appreciate the hard work the organizers and volunteers have put into running these successful events over the last number of years.

Our recreation centre continues to show incredible growth in user numbers as the program offerings continue to expand and vary. It was recognized, once again, as the top fitness facility in the Comox Valley (due in large part to the staff who work there) and the keen participants who enroll in these programs.

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

- safe response to over 500 emergency calls this year.
- our five full-time staff have combined, over 135 years of service.
- to date, over two hundred smoke alarms have been given away.
- almost 30 AEDS have been placed in our community over the past few years.
- over 300 visiting firefighters from over 50 different fire departments have attended training at our fire training centre.
- continue to be a leader in the fire service and freely shares lots of our great ideas and innovations with others.
- our fire service costs our citizens less than .14 cents per person per day while providing above average service levels.
- Comox Fire Rescue have raised thousands of dollars for various charities each year.
- saving well over one million litres of drinking water per year by reuse/recycle of water used in training exercises.

We appreciate very much the leadership of Chief Schreiner and his Officers as they 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 a 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.

As we look to the future (where the Town will be able to retire its capital debt by 2018), we'll reinvest those debt payments into increased investments into our Town's vital infrastructure.

We were able to make some progress on the Shakesides property by having a select committee chaired by Terry Chester present a report to Council this past spring. We're applying to court to seek direction on how Mack Laing Estate funds from 1982 may be applied to meet the spirit and intent of the trust bequest. We're hopeful that this 35 year old issue may be resolved next year. We're appreciative of the efforts of committee members, volunteers and others who have contributed their support to resolve this matter.

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

1. Water filtration and treatment
2. Sewer capacity/enhancement and environmental integrity
3. Solid waste management and composting facility
4. K'ómoks First Nations treaty settlement and economic development
5. St. Joseph's Hospital Task Force on future role in seniors care centre of excellence.

Public engagement continues to be an ongoing effort on the part of Council and senior staff. Our annual open house this past spring on Public Works and Parks projects was very well attended and received a number of compliments for its format. Our newsletters have been augmented by increased use of social media like Facebook and Twitter to get out the message and for receiving feedback. Coffee with Councillors was held on two occasions in 2016 and will carry on into the next year. The Town also embarked on updating its website, resulting in a more user friendly format. Residents are encouraged to visit the Town's website to obtain up to date information at comox.ca.

Our Planning and Building departments have had a very busy 2016 with over \$20 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 the recently approved 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.

In collaboration with the Comox Valley Economic Development Society we have made good overall progress in our Economic Action Plan. By the end of this year, we're hopeful that the federal government will announce its final decision on FWSAR replacement, which will see a new 72,000 square foot training centre built at 19 Wing and 30+ new jobs created to go along with the already substantial payroll generated by CFB Comox.

All in all, 2016 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.