

# Mayor's Report

February, 2016



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Early in my life I was taught to make the best out of a bad situation and that is exactly what the Town is attempting to do with our current water quality situation. Boil water advisories are extremely frustrating for our entire community, council included. Since studies were conducted in 2006, council has been made aware of the need for a secondary water treatment system and the provincial mandate to have the Town meet new drinking water standards for surface water followed. In 2009 we began taking incremental steps to achieve the goal of the mandate without excessive tax increases.

Conservation of water has long been a priority of your municipal government and the Province. In 2008 the Town became a signatory of the BC Climate Action Charter and hence that committed it to creating policies and strategies for taking action on climate change that would help enable the Town to acquire external funding for new projects. Despite this commitment there was opposition to the metering programme which resulted in a special meeting on July 14, 2009. After listening to the pros and cons on the subject, Council narrowly passed a resolution to implement the water metering programme with the receipt of the initial grant of \$400,000. This occurred only after a resolution was put forward to return the water metering grant which, fortunately for our taxpayers, was defeated. I mention this now because the consequences of returning approved funding could have been devastating for us. Further provincial and federal funding could have been negatively impacted had the Town returned the approved funding and ignored our commitment to conservation. Fortunately for us, we were then also able to go on to secure the second phase of the water metering grant. The metering programme could not have been implemented soon enough what with the very dry summers we have had lately.

We recently completed the first phase of the sewage treatment upgrades with grant funding of a \$1,000,000 from the General Strategic Priorities Fund and an additional gas tax grant of \$350,000 from the Regionally Significant Priorities Fund. Total cost for phase one of this project came in under budget at just under \$1.52 million. These significant grant contributions probably would not have been available had we not adopted the metering programme. We recently applied for funding to complete phase two of our sewer upgrades, and with this application being our secondary priority, the application was not successful.

Council realized that we had two very costly future infrastructure requirements that we could no longer ignore. One was for expanding capacity and the upgrading our sewer treatment plant and the other was for the mandated water system upgrade. These are two very costly projects that we know our taxpayers cannot afford to pay on their own. Assistance from other funding sources is critical. However, we have begun a proactive plan to pay our share of the costs. In 2010 we began by implementing a \$50 parcel tax to go towards our sewer upgrades. This parcel tax was increased to \$100 in 2012 when we also introduced a \$100 water parcel tax. Monies collected through these parcel taxes are dedicated solely to these related functions.

Our number one priority grant application is for water treatment and it brings me back to our water related issues. We know our citizens are not very happy when they see boil water advisories and that is understandable. We also know that the more than \$6 million price for a direct filtration water system is more than our water users can bear to pay alone through taxation or user fees. We are working hard to acquire additional funding that will enable our cost share to be much more manageable.

Our management staff has dedicated themselves wholeheartedly into all of the grant applications we have thus far submitted. You may think the application process is simple but it takes many hours spread over days to prepare these applications, with the management team dedicating hours beyond the regular work day to complete those applications by the deadline dates for submission of those. Our management staff under council direction continues to work with consultants to have good shelve- ready projects to submit for the grant assistance we know we require. We are thankful for the letters of support we have received from our neighbouring municipalities and our Lake Cowichan First Nation, who have always stepped up to the plate in every instance, including the Centennial Park Upgrades funding application that we were successful with under the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Programme. The \$500,000 from this particular grant, in addition to moneys from the general funds, should see the start of major upgrades for Centennial Park this year. This is a two-year project. I can't thank our staff enough for the commitment they continue to provide in assuring us that our Town's needs are achieved through minimal costs to our citizens as a whole.

Having good clean water is imperative for the health and safety of our citizens and that is why we respect the safer standards set forth from Island Health. As much as we regret the all too frequent boil water advisories we also understand the economic ramifications a new water system presents and we are working diligently to achieve the new system at a cost that is palatable to us all. I am optimistic this can be achieved if we remain optimistic and continue to stick to the process we have established. This should allow for the worst (constant boil water advisories) to become the best (with a new state of the art water filtration system) if we don't deviate from the course we have chosen. I thank the residents for bearing with the inconvenience of boil water advisories which I hope would become a thing of the past in the near future.

It is good news for our community that the Regional District has been successful in its application for funding to close off a portion of a previous ash landfill at the Meades Creek Site and to undertake the required upgrades to the facility for an amount of \$2.56 million. The cleanup of the Meades Creek site is long overdue.

It is indeed very exciting that the Forrest and Friday Novice Lakers got the opportunity to participate in the Timbits Hockey Intermission Feature during the Canucks / Maple Leaf game February 13. Tim Horton's generously paid for all tickets and the transportation for the group that included the entire Novice Lakers Team, parents, local referee Nic Brown, as well as Lake Cowichan's number one Lakers' Fan and best timekeeper, Tim Gowenlock. Team manager Jenny Fawcett deserves a huge shout out for securing this once in a life time opportunity for these young hockey players. Congratulations team.

**Ross Forrest, Mayor**