



Mayor's Report *February, 2017*



We have just become aware of the recent population growth numbers for Lake Cowichan and hence the potential for economic growth opportunities in and around our community. The recent census report for 2016 indicates that Lake Cowichan has experienced a positive population growth of 8.5% since 2011 bringing our population total to 3,226 in 2016. This is a higher increase than the provincial average of 5.6% and the CVRD average of 4% as a whole. Indeed this is most encouraging and indicators are our population is continuing to grow. We have had an increase in housing starts this year, also. We are beginning to establish numbers similar to what were present in the boom days of our town when forest-related jobs were prevalent, though our demographics have now certainly changed.

Council has worked on a revitalization plan to restore the pride that was felt by so many in our community, in days' past. With us undertaking project after project, big or small, we are now seeing indicators that our revitalization efforts are producing results. We know and understand that some of you who live daily through the changes don't recognize these changes and the gradual growth we are experiencing, but many, many of our new citizens tell us that seeing the new, vibrant and inviting look of our town has been instrumental in their decision to locate here. Undeniably we are witnessing not only increases in population growth, but increases in construction projects that help immensely in stimulating our local economy. Like life itself, if you are not growing, you are stagnating, and while we were in a downward slide for some time, we have reversed that process and growth and positive improvements to our community are the result. We recognize a great potential for our community and we will continue to make the necessary adjustments and try to be as prepared as possible to reach the maximum potential that we are all capable of.

The timing of the census release could not have come at a better time because it gives me an opportunity to present positive and real statistics. Unfortunately for any community, there are always the few who see improvements as not occurring quickly enough or who see that the employees not quick enough to respond, as with the recent heavy snowfalls. We welcome constructive criticism but the public needs to be aware that given our limited resources, council through its staff and employees always strive to serve the greater public good. Our town doesn't reach the level of success we are experiencing without good employees and the flexibility and adaptability they are capable of. We operate our departments in the most effective and efficient way possible to meet our requirements for providing a safe and healthy environment and providing essential services, while keeping our costs as manageable as we possibly can. The flexibility of our employees is to ensure their ability to do many varying and complex tasks that prove of great value to us. Our expectation is for everyone in our organization to see improvements in their abilities each day. If we can continue to develop a culture where we all take our jobs seriously and represent the town to the best of our abilities and not take our jobs for granted, our success and personal pride will increase accordingly. It is very common to see citizen expectations rise with municipal growth and I strongly believe our staff and employees do a tremendous job in meeting those expectations. Although we do have the number of employees and equipment available for our work requirements, there are certainly circumstances that challenge us occasionally.

This winter has been particularly challenging and our public works crew has done a great job of maintaining our roads and infrastructure. While we have received some complaints about snow removal, I cannot agree that those complaints are wholly warranted. I want to thank our Public Works crew for the great service they have thus far provided and continue to provide. Many of our citizens may not realize that the weather conditions this winter presented greater challenges to the extent that we have not experienced before. It seems that because of colder than usual weather, heavy snow storms have coincided with many water main breaks. Even though our crew tirelessly worked repairing the breaks, they also answered the additional call-outs, whether early in the morning, or late at night or the week-ends to help clear our roads and sidewalks the best they could within the time constraints available. Obviously some people don't watch the news at night during snow storms or they would have realized that we have it pretty good here, compared to many cities and municipalities throughout the Island, province and country. Our snow removal policy prioritizes our main roads which are of primary concern and they did an admirable job of fulfilling the requirements of our policy. When our employees sacrifice their valuable family time and precious sleep, I want to emphatically state that it is very much appreciated. New challenges are occurring each day and all of our employees do their utmost best to rectify the problems and learn from those experiences.

The Town is pleased to announce we are welcoming one new employee, Jill Walters. Jill fills in as at a casual clerical position.

It is unfortunate that we have been experiencing boil water advisories due to high turbidity levels. Work is well underway that will eventually see these advisories cease. Our new water treatment plant design is 75% complete. Tenders will be issued soon to pre-purchase the equipment components required for the plant directly from the successful supplier.

Council has approved the necessary contract to undertake a Water Distribution System Model for the Greendale Road water-main replacement project. This project is scheduled for completion this year. We are continually attempting to upgrade our aging infrastructure.

Council approved the making of two separate grant applications under the Strategic Wildfire Initiative one for \$10,000 for FireSmart Planning and another for \$22,500 for a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and CWPP Update Program. We are very pleased that the \$10,000 grant for FireSmart Planning has been approved. This provides us a great opportunity to address community safety issues related to wildfires. Thank you to the BC Government and UBCM for your quick approval of this grant.

Tenders for our Town hall renovation project closed recently and the tenders came in too expensive for council to consider. Council realizes discipline is required to make the appropriate adjustments to changes that will ensure the project is eventually re-tendered and accepted within our approved budget estimates.

It is great news that the Province is providing an additional \$10 million in funding to ICET (the Island Coastal Economic Trust) so it can continue to invest in economic development projects on Vancouver Island.

The Cowichan Lake Economic Readiness Focus Group met with Urbanics Consultants to identify the strongest values and needs of our area that should be considered for attracting more economic growth. There was valuable input from the group that should help the consultants come up with very important recommendations for setting the direction our community chooses on attracting potential opportunities.

The CVRD now provides *PlaceSpeak*, a location-based civic engagement platform. This forum provides the public the opportunity to Claim your place; Speak your mind; or Influence the outcome. If you want to have a say in areas of the region that concern you, for example the watershed or the Lake Cowichan weir, please sign up at placespeak.com and have your say or follow the relevant discussions on important topics.

Congratulations to the Cowichan Lake District Figure Skating Club on your 47th Skating Show. This club has been a valued contributor for youth recreation in our community since the opening of our arena. Many of our skaters have excelled over the years thanks to the assistance of good skating professionals and the dedication of the clubs volunteers. Awesome achievement!

I wake up every morning excited about what it is each of us can do to contribute to our community in our very own special way. I am particularly proud of the resilience of this beautiful Town that just did not give up because of those who cared.



Ross Forrest, Mayor