



Director's Corner

Wells Gray Country-Electoral Area 'A'

TNRD

TNRD BOD's Meeting Highlights June 25th, 2009

A busy month topped off with a busy TNRD Board meeting. The month of June has been very busy as I have worked with the District of Clearwater on various proposals and funding applications, many of which have had tight deadlines. In the month of June I had 21 days with scheduled meetings, sometimes 2-3 per day, and of course a few unscheduled ones added to the list. Why so many you may wonder. Many of course were routine business but added to that were several relating to economic development issues. Any project in which the area can garner 100% funding from outside sources means area employment and improvements at no additional cost to the local taxpayers. A win/win situation to benefit us all!

I have also been in discussions with a Cariboo business with the intent to have them expand their operations into the North Thompson Valley. Initial discussions have generated information requests. The District of Clearwater is now assisting in compiling an information package. Will anything actually happen with this proposal, I am hopeful but who knows, however I can assure you that if we don't try there is a 100% chance that nothing will happen. There were no travel costs to area taxpayers as I combined the meeting with some personal business I had in the area.

A broadband (high speed internet) project for Vavenby is officially in the works! On Thursday I asked and the TNRD Board consented to support an application to Network BC's 'Connecting Communities Agreement'. The maximum funding available is \$20,000. I also intend to provide an additional \$20,000 from our share of funds from the North Thompson Economic Development Society payout. The intent is to first make this venture viable for the long term and secondly to allow for expansion within the next year to other areas including Birch Island, Blackpool, Greer and parts of Upper Clearwater. It has been repeatedly pointed out that both from a user and business standpoint high speed internet is much sought after. The goal is to achieve speeds of 1.5 megabits per second. We should know within a few weeks if the Network BC grant is approved.

A 'Grant in Aid' of \$5000 was provided by the Electoral Area Directors to the 71st Provincial Winter Fair. Agriculture and showcasing agriculture are important to rural residents. Significant 4H participation is included in the fair.

The District of Clearwater and Wells Gray Country sought a \$10,000 grant from the TNRD to establish a 'Youth Activity Trust'. Unfortunately since the idea was put forward we saw further regional economic pressures. Mills in other areas have announced closures, the School Board has announce the potential closure of 11 schools, Highland Valley Copper mine has reported a significant fracture in the pit which may cause extraction problems and Interior Health has announced that significant cutbacks must be made in order to meet funding allotments. Initially I had significant support from directors, but given all the other issues that arose many directors were reluctantly forced to withdraw support, even though they felt the idea was great. Given all that has happened the request was denied. That said, the idea is not currently a dead issue, we are just lacking one potential funding source. Discussions on this will continue at the next Joint Committee meeting with the District of Clearwater.

The TNRD Board of Directors has also agreed to support 2.4 million dollars in funding applications for fuel management projects in the area. The application is from the District of Clearwater and includes a significant portion of work in the electoral area. I have worked with the District on this project. We determined that a single application to start this type of regional work was the best route to take. Further projects in the electoral area will be considered when future funding opportunities present themselves.

Work on mutual aid agreements with area Fire Departments has been completed. The TNRD Board of Directors has authorized staff to sign an updated agreement between the District of Clearwater and Blackpool fire departments. The old agreement was between the TNRD and the CID. The TNRD Board also authorized signing of a newly established agreement between the District of Clearwater and Vavenby fire departments. Historically no agreement existed prior to this. With some restrictions the fire departments may now leave their specified area to provide assistance as indicated in the agreements.

On Friday I attended a UBCM (Union of BC Municipalities) Electoral Area Directors forum in Richmond. The intent of these annual forums is to deal with specific rural issues. Significant progress has been made in one regard that has had a huge financial impact on rural residents, Septic Sewage Regulation. New pending legislation will see the return of the ability for homeowners to do their own installations. This had ceased when Health Authorities stopped doing inspections. Initially, inspections of homeowner installations will be required to be completed by registered professionals. Various other inspection options may be undertaken by a regional district or municipality. Hopefully this will reduce the costs to those who wish to complete their own work.

The 'Provincial Fire Service Model' was also discussed. There is significant concern that 'one size fits all' will not work in rural areas. Costs in both dollars and volunteer time are simply not manageable for smaller departments. One staff representative made the comment that he wished to see a ban on groups that have little or no training and a pick up truck with a tank and pump for equipment actually fighting fires. What he failed to realize is that many of our now well established departments started out exactly like this, rural people working together to help each other out! Directors sent a very clear message in regards to this.

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Disclaimer: These comments are personal comments of Wells Gray Country Electoral Area 'A' Director Tim Pennell and in no way reflect the comments, opinion or position of the Thompson Nicola Regional District Board of Directors