

Long Range Planning

Times are changing for Municipalities. We no longer just provide Municipal Services as most of us have come to know them. I am referring to roads, water supply, sewage disposal, fire protection, libraries and recreation/community centre facilities.

We now have a Community Charter which allows Municipalities to consider providing new services, enacting new laws and engaging in other new matters for community benefit. This comes at a time when Senior governments are downloading responsibilities onto Local Government and their grants are diminishing. How are we, in local government, dealing with the new reality?

This raises important questions in my mind.

1. If a Town generates revenue through investment in a new service is it a business venture for the benefit of the taxpayer (a profit/loss situation) or does it require a new level of taxation (subsidization)?
2. If a Town plans on new and enhanced services can it rely on traditional sources of revenue to support these, such as, government grants or elevated levels of local taxation - Not always.
3. How does the Town cope with changes to economic conditions that are beyond the control of the municipality? National or Provincial economic stress may result in local business failures and reduced tax revenues.
4. Environmental issues that arise through naturally occurring events may present major and unanticipated stress on municipal budgets and human resources? Does the local government carry some or all responsibility for solving the problem?

This list of questions, which is not exhaustive, but is merely offered to underline that planning is needed beyond the typical 3 to 5 year time horizon for common infrastructure programs and projects currently used by Councils today.

There is a strong suggestion that Gibsons is subject to changes that we have not embraced in a well prepared long range plan. We have moved into owning a District Energy Utility. We have infrastructure plans (23 year road rehabilitation plan) that depend upon senior government funding that is not guaranteed and currently becoming less available. We own valuable assets with no idea on how to gain ongoing value from these assets. We keep hiring staff based on historical skills without any emphasis on new skills needed or new training of existing staff. In my view we need a **Long Range Plan** that is based upon a **Strategic Plan** encompassing Smart Plan principles: Economic, Social, and Environmental. The key component of the **Long Range Plan** is the **financial analysis** associated with the long term objectives included in the **Strategic Plan**. By taking this approach we are ensuring, as best we can, that what we do today will work for future generations.

This is the challenge for the New Council that I think will be vital to making our community sustainable.