

REPORT TO McBRIDE VILLAGE COUNCIL

TO: Mayor Lorraine Martin & Council Members July 15, 2017

CC: Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development and
McBride Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Isabell Hadford, Municipal Advisor, Province of BC

SUBJECT: STATE OF THE VILLAGE OF McBRIDE AND PATH FORWARD

As part of my contract with the Province of BC, I was directed to provide a report on the scope and state of McBride Village practices and procedures, and to recommend to Council a written strategy for a path forward. This contract requirement is being presented to Council at the July 25, 2017 Regular Council meeting.

1. BRIEF HISTORY

When I first arrived in McBride in December 2016, three Council members had resigned leaving Mayor Martin and Councillor Thompson to provide leadership in a limited capacity as directed by a Ministerial Order signed by the Honourable Peter Fassbender, Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development. Reporting directly to the Inspector of Municipalities, my role as Municipal Advisor was to work with Council, municipal staff, and the community to stabilize short-term municipal operations and help support long-term confidence in the municipality.

In the early months I got involved in the community and invited people to meet with me to hear their concerns. I met with over 30 people and the recurring themes included:

- controversy with the McBride Community Forest Corporation
- lack of local government training for CAO and Village staff
- lack of open/transparent communication between Council and the public
- poor work environment within the Village Office
- no Public Works Foreman in place
- no Community Economic Development Coordinator in place
- a perception that the Mayor and CAO run the Village and Council members seen as an inconvenience
- a rift between people within the community

By-Election - The immediate priority was to undertake a by-election to elect three new councillors. Staff at the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George managed the by-election, and I was Deputy Chief Election Officer in McBride. Councillors Edwards, Green and Hruby were elected during the March 4, 2017 by-election, and took their oath of office on March 21st. The Municipal Solicitor provided an orientation and overview of roles and responsibilities of elected officials. In an effort to get all Council members on the same page, I prepared a Council Handbook for Council members to use as a reference going forward and the Chief Administrative Officer I undertook a separate orientation session with the new Council.

CAO Resignation - On March 30, 2017 the Chief Administrative Officer tendered her resignation with the Village, effective May 30, 2017. The CAO attended one regular Council meeting during the months of April and May. The Finance Officer took on the role of Acting CAO and I continued in my role as Municipal Advisor and became Minute Taker for the majority of the meetings held during that very busy time. In order to prepare the Village's 2017-2022 Five Year Financial Plan and to develop the Village's 2016 Annual Report in order to ensure they were prepared in accordance with regulations outlined in the *Community Charter*, extra meetings were held.

BKB Cedar Mill Fire - On April 5, 2017 the BKB Cedar Mill caught fire and burned down, leaving 38 mill workers without a job. Fire fighters from several Fire Departments fought the fire and after a few days, brought it under control. They remained on the scene for over two weeks to ensure the fire was out.

Under the direction of Hon. Shirley Bond, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, a Transition Team was put in place consisting of two members of the JRSK Ministry staff and McBride's Regional Economic Development Manager to provide services to help the impacted workforce, to support the McBride local government, and to provide economic diversification going forward.

The Transition Team held weekly conference calls with representatives from the Ministry of Social Development & Social Innovation, the Council and staff of the Village of McBride, The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Area H representative, the Valemount Learning Centre, the Robson Valley Support Services, WorkSafe BC, the owner BKB Cedar Mill, the College of New Caledonia, and the Chair of the McBride Community Forest Corporation. On April 22, 2017 a public Town Hall meeting was held to update citizens on the status of the fire and the displaced mill workers.

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Transition Team has now shifted its focus to conference calls every three week to review McBride Community Economic Development initiatives going forward.

2. MAYOR AND NEW COUNCIL

The Mayor and new Council members hit the ground running following their March 21st swearing-in ceremony, starting with the Municipal Solicitor's Council orientation session, and followed by an orientation with the CAO and Municipal Advisor.

On April 5th Council became involved with activities following the BKB Cedar Mill fire and ensuing meetings with the MLA and numerous meetings and consultation with the Government appointed Transition Team. It was also a time of extra Council meetings to develop and put in place the amended Fees & Charges Bylaw, 2017 Five-Year Financial Plan and Tax Rates Bylaws. Following this, extra meetings were held to develop a 2016 Annual Report and make decisions regarding the recruitment of a new CAO.

Over the past three months Council met with the McBride Community Forest Corporation Board, the Robson Valley Chamber of Commerce, a representative from the CASE Feasibility Study (pocket housing project), the Village's engineering firm, the Village's auditor, the Robson Valley Mountain Bike Association, and McBride's Regional Economic Development Manager (JTST Ministry) to discuss future initiatives. They also met with representatives from the Ancient Cedar Forest, the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, and Fraser-Fort George Regional District representatives to hear about their plans for the McBride area.

Council also attended weekly Transition Team meetings, meetings with the Chamber of Commerce, recruitment meetings for a new CAO, and other impromptu meetings. At the end of June Council advised they were looking forward to a break.

Council decisions made since March 21st include:

- Adoption of McBride Officers and Employees Bylaw 766, 2016
- Adoption of the McBride Five-Year Financial Plan for the years 2016-2020
- Adoption of the McBride 2017 Fees & Charges Bylaw No. 768, 2017
- Increase annual budget to allow all Council members to attend NCLGA conference and UBCM Conference if they so wish
- Approval of an Encroachment Agreement (Licence to Occupy) for 211 Main Street
- Commitment to promoting open and transparent governances and discussing Council business at the Council table rather than outside of Council meeting
- Acceptance of resignation of CAO and thank for all her hard work over the past two years
- Upgrades to fencing at Bill Clark Ball Field
- Acceptance of 2016 Audited Financial Statements
- Adoption of the McBride 2017 Five Year Financial Plan Bylaw 769, 2017 and the McBride 2017 Tax Rate Bylaw 770, 2017 (May 9th Council meeting)
- Rescind the appointment of Mayor and appointed Councillor Edwards to Board of Directors of McBride Community Forest Corporation (May 23rd Council meeting)
- Permission for Robson Valley Arts & Culture Council to re-paint the Village's fire hydrants
- Approval of Development Variance Permit 2017-01 for the RDFFG for Museum/Library site to place a C-can on site (May 23rd Council meeting)

- Approval of 2016 Schedule of Employee and Council Remuneration report and 2016 Schedule of Payments to Suppliers report
- Staff to advertise for and post Community Economic Development Coordinator position
- An opportunity for members of the public to review the Village of McBride 2016 Annual Report and the report be approved (June 27th Regular meeting)
- BC/Canada 150 grant in the amount of \$24,000 be used to replace downstairs windows in CN Train Station
- Adoption of amendments to the Water and Sewer bylaws (June 27th Council meeting)
- Approval to enter into an employment agreement with Cheryl Martens for the position of CAO (July 11th Council meeting)
- Amend the Financial Policy FN-01 to redefine the procedure for paying invoices
- Approve the CAO's attendance at 2017 UBCM Convention

Village of McBride 2017 projects include:

- Improved accessibility to Village Office and Council Chambers (grant received)
- Sidewalk installation on part of the south side of 3rd Avenue to Columbia Street
- Dominion Creek water system – replace holding pond with underground tanks (BC/Federal Gas Tax grant received)
- Replace windows in historic CN Train Station building (grant received)
- Sewer/storm sewer replacement and street rehabilitation on part of Main Street, 4th and 5th Avenues (grant applied for)
- Fire hydrant replacement (2) – part of Public Works work plan
- CN underpass repair – to be completed by CN

Council made time to have some fun by building and entering a float in the Village of McBride Pioneer Days parade. They won second prize for their effort and donated the prize money to the McBride Secondary School "Live Different Fund".

Following the March 2017 appointment of the new Council members, communication with the public by Council, staff and the Transition Team resulted in public comments being more positive as the Council and staff worked through the issues and residents became more confident in the management of the Village going forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Mayor, Council and the CAO are to work together as a team to ensure the success of the Village of McBride going forward. s.13,s.16
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3. STAFFING:

a) CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER:

On March 30, 2017 Kelley Williams tendered her resignation from the position of CAO with the Village of McBride, effective May 30, 2017. Advertising for a new CAO was undertaken, and after an extensive search Council welcomed new CAO Cheryl Martens to the Village on July 4, 2017. CAO Martens has ^{s.22}

^{s.22} and will be looking to Council for support in her new role in McBride.

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b) FINANCE OFFICER

Finance Officer Claudia Frost has been with the Village since November 2016 and recently successfully completed her six-month probationary period. Although she is new to the position, Claudia has learned a lot about Municipal financial obligations by:

- learning to navigate the Village's financial software system, assisting with the preparation of an amended "Fees & Charges Bylaw",
- leading Council and staff in the preparation of the 2017-2021 Five Year Financial Plan, and Tax Rates Bylaws
- overseeing the preparation of the 2016 Annual Report,
- preparing and training staff in the collection of annual utility fees and 2017 property taxes and all of the reporting required to be submitted to the Province

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c) PUBLIC WORKS

It's good to see that the Village's Lead Hand was recently hired to fill the Public Works Foreman position, as he has been doing the job for some time. After reviewing the applications received, he was the logical choice for the position.

Although the Village's Public Works workers are criticized by select members of the public, they do a good job and often go beyond what's required of them to ensure the work is done well.

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d) CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES:

Both of the Village's Customer Service Representatives are knowledgeable about their Village role and ICBC services provided within the organization and do a good job of helping customers. They work well together and often have suggestions for ways to improve the office environment.

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e) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Advertising to hire a new Community Economic Development Coordinator closed on July 14, 2017. The CEDC will take the lead in creating and implementing relevant economic marketing strategies, policies, actions, and projects to increase employment and business opportunities for McBride and area. The new CEDC should be in place by August 11th so that he/she can participate in the scheduled Strategic Planning exercise.

Projects recently recommended include:

- Implementing free WiFi program for the McBride downtown core
- Upgrading the interior and exterior of the historic CN Train Station
- Upgrading the ball diamond
- Taking the lead on implementing the Municipal and Regional District Tax Program (MRDT) to assist designated recipients to fund tourism marketing
- Supporting expansion of the McBride Peak Mountain Bike Trail Network
- Market McBride as the gateway to the Ancient Cedar Forest
- Applying for grant funding to support economic development initiatives

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council and staff continue to monitor and support realistic opportunities for economic development and job creation initiatives in McBride and area, based on consultation with community, government and regional stakeholders.

4. VILLAGE BYLAWS

The Village of McBride was incorporated in April 1932 and currently has over 700 bylaws on their Bylaw List. The Bylaw List is incomplete and contains a number of inaccuracies, making it difficult to determine which bylaws are current and active and which ones have been rescinded or are no longer valid. The wording in a number of the bylaws is ambiguous making the bylaws difficult to interpret or understand. Council identified the “Fees & Charges Bylaw” and “Sign Bylaw” as examples of bylaws needing amendments.

The Official Community Plan Bylaw and the current Zoning Bylaw are out of date and need to be updated to reflect compliance with current Provincial legislation.

Following the March 2017 by-election the current Council adopted a number of bylaws, noted under the “Mayor and Council” section of this report.

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5. VILLAGE POLICIES

A policy is a formal set of guiding principles and procedures by which a municipality will operate, as established and enforced by Council.

The Village of McBride Policy Manual contains only 28 policies, and curiously Council adopted 18 of them in February 2014. Of the 28 policies contained in the Manual, only 7 appear on the Village’s website. The “Equipment Hiring” policy is listed on the Village’s website, but does not appear in the Policy Manual. There is also a written “Complaint Policy”, but it does not appear in the Policy Manual or on the Village’s website, and there is no date indicating when it was written and adopted by Council.

Some of policies contain language that is ambiguous. For example, one would expect that the "Mobile Technology Use Policy" would provide direction for the use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc., but this policy only refers to employees' use of cell phones. The wording of the title should be changed to reflect this.

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6. WEBSITE IMPROVEMENTS:

The Village's website needs to be updated to make it easy for users to find what they're looking for. For example, whether it's a regular meeting or a special meeting, minutes for ALL Council meetings need to be listed in date/time order under one heading. This also applies to Council agendas.

Residents should be able to complete application forms online, and submit them directly to the Village via email.

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7. ADMINISTRATIVE IMPROVEMENTS:

The Village should implement a simple monthly “Bring Forward” filing system to track applications and contracts that are set to expire.

It has been suggested that the Village should make improvements to the Council Chambers to allow electronic recording of meetings and to allow the public gallery to view presentations from delegations on overhead screens. As well, improvements need to be made in the Council Chambers to allow Council members, staff and delegations to participate in meetings via Skype, telephone conferencing or other electronic means.

The Village’s computer system is aging and funding needs to be made available to upgrade the system.

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7. STRATEGIC PLANNING:

A consultant has been contracted to work with Council and staff to develop an up to date Strategic Plan to help guide the Village in budgeting and financial planning for the next 5 to 10 years. The session is scheduled for August 11th (evening) and August 12th (all day).

8. CONCLUSION:

Since the election of the new Council, there is an improved willingness by Council to be more open and transparent, resulting in less negative feedback from members of the public. I believe the Village of McBride Council and Administration have the resources in place to succeed going forward and that working together as a team they will achieve their goals and objectives.

It has been a pleasure getting to know all of you over the past seven months and advising and encouraging you along the way.

I wish you much success in your future endeavours.

(Original signed by author)

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PS: I'm only a phone call away if you have any questions.