

Budget, Finance and Fun?

Budget, finance, and fun? Fun might be a leap, but as March rolls around it's once again time to decide where the community's hard-earned taxes go in the Town of Gibsons.

While federal and provincial governments focus on sweeping laws and policies, municipal governments must focus our decision-making on issues that have the most day-to-day impact on people's lives.

And our budget process is full of those decisions. I was quite enthusiastic about budget in my first elected year. I couldn't wait to dive in. But I quickly learned that someone had taken half the water out of the pool. All those shiny sexy projects fell out of consideration after the Town's real priorities (like water, sewer, roads, and storm water management) were taken up. Sorry Armours Beach swimming pier upgrades and community beach building. Sorry sea path widening and flood level upgrades. Sorry Brothers Park improvements. Sorry Harbour expansion. You all have to wait.

The process is not necessarily about making Gibsons better by adding the things we want, but by ensuring a high quality of life by maintaining and improving what we have and need. It's truly a balancing act. Raise taxes? Create new user fees? Increase fines? This might be easier on a federal level, where those legislators probably won't run into their kids' soccer coach at IGA, and get an earful. And rightfully so. Gibsons residents paid \$1.95 million in taxes last year, while our local businesses contributed \$875K to the Town. We all work hard and pay enough taxes. Much of the business tax flows through and is paid by small businesses via their lease agreements, and, speaking from experience, the small business community has enough financial challenges.

So, without plunging the Town into a mountain of debt, we have to set priorities that satisfy our community's current and future fiscal needs, while at the same time treating our tax-paying community fairly. Through growth, we will slowly build our ability to get those shiny things, and as we grow, I would like to see more public engagement with respect to where our discretionary budget items might be directed. After all, it's your money.