

Mayor's Message – November 2017

Increasingly, clean water and our ability to access it, has become top of mind for many Sunshine Coasters. A growing population, declining precipitation and other environmental changes have all transformed a once plentiful natural resource into a commodity that must be carefully managed and cared for if we are to continue enjoying the many life-giving benefits it bestows.

In Gibsons, we have been blessed with favorable access to the Gibsons Aquifer, a pure groundwater resource which currently provides potable water to almost 75% of the Town. It's a pristine, award-winning and irreplaceable natural asset and we take our stewardship of it very seriously.

In 2012, for example, the Town completed the installation of a universal water metering system at a cost of \$1.5 million. This initiative delivered many important benefits, helping us to identify and repair hidden leaks and, perhaps most importantly, to raise our collective awareness of water use. At the same time, our finance department implemented a new "user-pay" system, along with appropriate water rates, in order to cover the operation, maintenance and future replacement costs of Gibson's water infrastructure.

Together, these initiatives have led to a dramatic decline in our community's water use. In fact, between 2008 and 2016, our Town's per capita water usage dropped by more than half, from approximately 800 litres per day to approximately 350 litres per day.

Another large investment the Town's taxpayers have made in recent years is the commissioning of a grant-assisted four-year mapping study of the Gibsons Aquifer. Completed in 2013, at a total cost of \$500,000, this comprehensive, science-based water-strategy document has become a key resource for any person contemplating projects that might impact the aquifer, from the Town's planners to the province's environmental officers.

Gibson's Official Community Plan envisions us adding approximately 5,500 residents to the Town over the next 20 years, with about 3,000 of those serviced by the Aquifer. As our population grows, the Study prescribes gathering detailed information about the long-term effects of variables such as user demand, climate change, and sea level rise on the aquifer's total capacity. Accordingly, the Town implemented an annual groundwater monitoring program in 2009, so that we are consistently able to make sound, fact-based decisions about our future buildout.

Clearly, the Gibsons Aquifer is an essential natural infrastructure asset that the Town has rigorously invested in, cared for and planned around. Consequently, it is with some concern that we learned that the SCRD is actively investigating supplementing its Chapman Creek water supply with water from the Gibsons Aquifer, rather than focusing its resources on other, less developed groundwater sources.

We understand that the SCRD is under tremendous pressure to find and develop new sources of water for its growing population. Additionally, we place tremendous value on our good

working relationship with the SCR D and strongly believe that maintaining open, respectful rapport is essential to the long-term success of us both.

Nevertheless, our position on this issue is clear. We do not support any investigative drilling into the Gibsons Aquifer by the SCR D until a joint Groundwater Management Plan has been adopted, a joint Groundwater Management Zone has been established and additional long-term monitoring of the Gibsons Aquifer is completed. To do otherwise would be to take a huge step backwards in water stewardship.