

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST THROUGH DIALOGUE** **by Mayor Bill Beamish**

“Mayor Beamish, I don’t trust you.”

This statement made by a participant at our recent Gibsons Community Dialogue (July 30th) highlights a concern that is likely shared by others in our community and was reflected to some extent in the issues raised by 19 people who participated in the dialogue.

Issues like: the need for a diversity of opinion and more opportunities to express concerns to Council; the right to speak at Council meetings; a perceived lack of trust between Council and staff with the community; too much top-down decision making; a need for compassion, fairness and openness in decision making; and, greater access to public records without the requirement for FOI requests.

The dialogue was held to identify ways to encourage and facilitate better communications between Council and the community and is intended to be the first of many ongoing opportunities building on a program that was implemented in Gibsons in 2005.

Discussion highlighted the need for this kind of informal but structured approach to communications that provides opportunity for participants to ask questions and share ideas in a respectful, safe and non-judgemental environment in accordance with a few agreed to rules of engagement. These are: listen and be listened to; speak and be spoken to in a respectful manner; develop or deepen your understanding of issues; learn about the perspectives of others and reflect on your own views; be prepared to accept and consider feedback.

Several issues were raised and ideas generated that the members of Council who were present will reflect on and consider with respect to how we conduct business and how we relate to the community in general. One of the consistent themes heard was the need to ensure that the public have more opportunities to make presentations to Council and to ask questions about issues and projects as they are reported on by staff or by councillors before decisions are made. It was also suggested that Council needs to take time to reflect on the past and to apply lessons learned to future actions by Council. A process audit like that conducted by the Auditor General for Local Government was suggested.

Finally, it was agreed that trust is not freely given, it must be earned and nurtured. I understand that and I look forward to working with Council and with our community to continue the process of relationship-building that we have started with this first dialogue.

Our next community dialogue will be held in September.

