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COVID-19 Message #3

THANK YOU HEALTHCARE WORKERS, DOCTORS AND FIRST RESPONDERS

As we enter our third week of self-isolation and social distancing it appears that we are becoming used to the many new practices and ways of living that have been implemented in our community. Lining up to get into stores, maintaining a two-meter distance from fellow shoppers and between friends who we meet on the street, taking long walks in the fresh air, having extended phone calls and zoom chats with friends and family, and finally completing those long postponed household chores. Perhaps when this is over, we will all have some new habits that we will continue to practice in our daily lives.

In my previous messages, I highlighted some of the things that we, as a community, were planning to do or that we have put into place. Today, I want to provide an update on these and other items that you may be interested in.

1. **First Responder Testing:** thanks to the strong and persistent lobbying from local governments, the Ministry of Health has agreed that our police and firefighters should be eligible to be tested for the COVID-19 virus. This will ensure that these workers have the same protections as our healthcare workers while doing their jobs to protect us.
2. **Business Watch Program:** our Corporate Officer has developed a detailed written plan and procedure for the implementation of a Business Watch Program that, once approved, will serve as a model for other communities.

The purpose of this program is to provide additional resources to keep an eye on our local businesses, many of which are currently closed and unprotected. The recent example of theft of fencing in Sechelt shows how vulnerable our communities are to property crimes like these while our police members are stretched to the limit working on COVID-19 related issues in the community. At this time, we are awaiting comment on the Business Watch Program from our legal advisors; once that is received, we will begin to implement this new volunteer initiative.

3. **Community Task Force:** the Sunshine Coast Community Task Force, an initiative that is being spearheaded by the District of Sechelt, is also nearly ready to launch. Councillors Croal and De Andrade have volunteered to represent the Town of Gibsons on this new program, which help coordinate and support the various social services that are available in our communities. Details will be announced shortly.

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"Nature is our most valuable asset"

4. **Washrooms and Hand Washing:** provisions have been made in all communities for open washrooms and handwashing stations. In Gibsons, the public washrooms at Winegarden Park, Armour's Beach and Dougall Park remain open during the day and are being cleaned every two hours by a cleaning service we have contracted to maintain them. Showers are also being arranged for people who are still living on our streets during this crisis.
5. **Emergency Operations Centre (EOC):** the Sunshine Coast EOC is continuing to operate, with meetings held three times a week to coordinate information and to implement programs. The EOC Policy Committee also meets on a regular basis to provide direction and assistance to the EOC.
6. **Regional Communications:** our Local Governments remain in close contact on a daily basis. Our Chief Administrative Officers hold daily morning conference calls and the Mayors, Sechelt Nation Chief and SCRD Chair meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday or as needed via Zoom. We continue to share and discuss ideas and plans like the Community Task Force and Business Watch.
7. **Local Initiatives:** we are extremely appreciative of the many local initiatives that have been started by community members, such as the Food Bank Fundraising Drive and coordination of local services. We honour those people who have stepped up to help neighbours and family who may not be able to get around due to mobility issues or the requirement to self-isolate.
8. **Remembering the Homeless:** it is critical that we continue to provide services to the homeless and less fortunate residents of our community throughout this crisis. The Salvation Army and St. Barts Church food banks continue to provide food to those in need in Gibsons and the homeless shelter in Sechelt is continuing to offer overnight shelter. Please remember to extend a helping hand, and financial support if possible, to the most vulnerable in our community.
9. **Public Meetings:** I have received a number of questions about why the Town is not hosting online or Facebook-live meetings. At present, we do not have the technological capability to provide these services. However, our staff is working to implement the required digital infrastructure and as soon as it is ready, we will let our citizens know how they can use these new tools to interact with us online.

In the meantime, Council is continuing to meet as usual, in order to advance the work of the Town. As always, our meeting schedule, agendas and minutes may be found at:

<https://gibsons.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingSchedule.aspx>

Visitors to the Coast:

One issue that continues to be of concern is the number of reports or complaints received about people who are arriving on the Sunshine Coast from other communities or regions of the province. In my previous message, and also in an e-mail to the Minister of Health, I made it very clear that,

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except for healthcare workers, police and first responders who are travelling here to provide support or relief to our local population, we discourage others from coming. This applies even in the case of people who own property on the Sunshine Coast and want to escape the pressures of their primary communities.

We do not have the resources to support them if they become COVID-19 positive and the best place for them to receive care, is at home, in their own communities. Even BC Ferries is trying to discourage unnecessary travel, as passengers may pose a risk to their own ferry workers.

At present, local governments do not have the authority to ban regional travel of this nature. However, like us, many communities have made it clear that visitors are not welcome at this very precarious time. We are still hopeful that the Medical Health Officer will issue an enforceable order to this effect.

Our Work Continues:

Our staff remain committed to delivering the highest level of service possible and even though Town Hall is not open to the public, requests and applications are being processed and we are preparing for our next council and committee meetings on April 7th.

In the meantime, our website is being maintained with new information and updates being added daily. Please visit gibsons.ca/covid-19 anytime for the most current information on how COVID-19 is affecting specific Town of Gibsons services.

I also invite you to contact me directly if you have any questions or concerns about our community or services that are being provided. I may be reached by email at mayorandcouncil@gibsons.ca or by phone at 604-989-2364.

A Final Comment:

I continue to be amazed and humbled by the many acts of personal kindness and support that our citizens are showing for our community. I thank you all for whatever you are doing to help others during this time of crisis.

When life returns to normal, I look forward to thanking you in person...perhaps we will have a party.

On Behalf of Town Council,

Bill Beamish, Mayor

