

November 20, 2024

**REPORT TO:** MEMBER OF COUNCIL AND PARKSVILLE RESIDENTS

**FROM:** MAYOR DOUG O'BRIEN

**SUBJECT:** MID TERM REPORT

**PURPOSE:** *An overview of Council achievements to date*

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report will provide an overview of the achievements of Council since taking office in November 2022. As we approach the halfway point in our term, I am incredibly proud of the collaborative efforts of this Council and the successful outcomes we have been able to accomplish. As elected officials we all dedicate many hours and make personal sacrifices to serve our community. In this report, I am pleased to highlight a sample of the great work we have done together and share my vision for the next two years.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. THAT the report from Mayor O'Brien dated November 20, 2024, entitled "Mid Term Report" be received.

**BACKGROUND:**

On November 7, 2022, we took the oath of office and pledged to serve this community. As I reflect on the privilege that holding elected office brings, I am very proud of the work we have done to improve the quality of life for Parksville residents, business owners and visitors. I am honoured to serve as Mayor to this Council and very grateful for the respectful way this Council debates important issues and collaboratively solves complex challenges, such as balancing the tax burden with maintaining critical infrastructure and ensuring we build a solid foundation for Parksville's future.

**STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUS AREAS:**

Shortly after taking office, we spent several days caucusing to develop our Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> Key to this plan is our commitment to carry out our roles in a respectful and considerate manner, make thoughtful decisions and proactively engage with the community and be clear and transparent in our communications.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.parksville.ca/cms/wpattachments/wpID686atID11417.pdf>

The Strategic Plan guides our priorities and investment decisions and acts as a road map to inform the corporate work plan, define levels of service and outline priorities for program delivery. The full Plan can be found on our website and includes the following Focus Areas:

1. Advocacy
2. Official Community Plan (OCP) Review and Update
3. Vibrant and Livable Downtown
4. Community Engagement
5. Water Use Planning and Management
6. Investment in Recreation Amenities

*Advocacy:*

During this term, we have attended the Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities (AVICC) each year and we have submitted motions for debate with our Island colleagues. AVICC's purpose is to secure united action among member municipalities and advance key priorities to the provincial level through the Union of BC Municipalities. As a result of this advocacy, motions have been advanced to the UBCM convention by the City of Parksville. Attachment 1 contains a summary table of the motions submitted to the annual Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal communities (AVICC) and UBCM conventions by the current Council. Council also requests meetings with provincial ministers at the annual UBCM convention to discuss salient issues; Attachment 2 contains a list of meetings requested during the current term.

Council has also engaged in advocacy through correspondence with the Province; including letters to the Premier, Minister of Housing, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Response, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy on topics such as proposed housing models, short term rental accommodations, social issues, rehabilitation facilities, and recycling programs, among others.

I am particularly proud of our successful advocacy to the Province regarding the reconsideration of short-term rental regulations as applicable to Parksville's Resort Drive area. The initial provincial mandate contradicted the City's vision for this area as exclusively short-term tourism accommodation; Council advocated to the Ministry of Housing and successfully secured a reconsideration and ultimately, a regulatory exemption, to ensure Resort Drive can continue to provide world-class visitor accommodations without threatening the local housing supply.

Furthermore, the City has also advocated through its presence on the RDN Board. As an example, the RDN Board, including myself and Councillor Wood, has advocated for much-needed health care facilities that serve our community, such as a new cancer clinic and cardio cath lab at the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.

Council has fostered respectful relationships with our colleagues in Qualicum Beach, Nanaimo, Lantzville and at the RDN.

Council has undertaken collaboration with social service providers to ensure that extreme emergency guidelines are achieved regarding unhoused citizens, while also balancing the needs of all community members to ensure all residents and businesses feel safe and secure. Maintaining this balance has been challenging, however Council continues to navigate these issues with transparency and a commitment to working with social service providers with a proven track record of success.

Council has built and maintained strong relationships with MVIHES and Arrowsmith Naturalists; these partnerships have been rewarding and produced amazing achievements, including the removal of invasive species and the planting of many trees in our parks and natural spaces.

After many years of discussion and advocacy, I engaged with the provincial Ministry of Transportation of Infrastructure on the reconstruction of a portion of highway between Resort Drive and the orange bridge, resulting in safer traffic flow and a safer active transportation route in that area.

Furthermore, I often provide letters of support to local community organizations, programs or events. Some examples include a letter requesting federal support for inter-city transportation on Vancouver Island, support for \$10 a day childcare application at multiple facilities in Parksville, support for the UNESCO designation of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region, support for affordable housing projects, and for grant applications by organizations like Elder College, the OCAC, the PDBA and the Parksville Museum. Most recently, I provided a letter to Gord Johns, MP for Courtenay Alberni, in support of a federal grant funding application for the proposed Ravensong Aquatic Centre expansion.

*Official Community Plan (OCP) Review and Update:*

The Provincial government enacted many legislative changes affecting land use planning in all cities. Our staff are required to update Plan Parksville with specific housing targets by the end of 2025. During this time, we will also be starting the engagement with the community about the broader elements of the OCP and moving to a more comprehensive review in 2026.

*Vibrant and Livable Downtown:*

Working closely with the Parksville Downtown Business Association (PDBA) we have successfully activated Memorial Plaza with dozens of community events throughout the summer months. We co-hosted four Dance with Me events attracting hundreds of people of all ages, adding vibrancy and fun to this newly created space.

As a Council we are fully engaged with the PDBA and meet formally at least once per year to discuss common goals and identify projects and services that businesses need to thrive.

I meet regularly with the President of the PDBA, and we both agreed year-round lighting was necessary to bring life to some areas of the downtown core. I am very happy with the overhead lights at Memorial Plaza, which will bring some festive music to the space over the holiday season and the permanent lights along Alberni Highway brighten the darker evenings throughout the year.

*Water Use Planning and Management:* I am probably most proud of our investment in critical drinking water services. I recently signed the phase one contract with Kerr Wood Leidal to initiate the most comprehensive review of the City's drinking water assets to date. This important work will provide factual information on the state of our current drinking water assets and offer guidance to Council on future storage and water provision needs for a growing community, with resiliency and climate change implications in mind.

Water is one of our most precious resources and one of the most important services we provide to residents. Sound management of this critical resource must be informed by science, best practices and factual data about the availability of water in the aquifers and rivers. As part of the drinking water service

we provide, we also support ecosystem health in the Englishman River and estuary as a result of our management of the Arrowsmith Dam. By releasing water during summer months we are able to significantly enhance critical habitat for fish and riparian species.

*Community Engagement:*

As Mayor, my week is filled with one-to-one meetings and conversations with residents, prospective residents, business owners, not for profit service providers, senior government officials, elected officials from our neighbouring cities and at times, the media. I am kept very busy listening to the suggestions, concerns and accolades from community members and commit to this ongoing communication for the rest of my term in office.

One of the greatest benefits of being Mayor is being invited to attend special community events and see the smiles and happiness on people's faces as they enjoy our beautiful public spaces. Whether it is welcoming people to the Park on Canada Day, opening a new affordable housing project, acknowledging completion of a new track facility, celebrating achievements of local athletes, raising awareness and honouring the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women at the installation of the Red Dress project at PCTC, or offering solemn recognition at Remembrance Day ceremonies, I am so honoured to represent Council at these occasions.

Additionally, the City offers many formal opportunities to engage with the community and I am always very happy to attend these events and hear directly from our citizens on the various topics we are working on. During this term, we have hosted open houses and engagement events on the Parksville Wetlands, Urban Forestry, Transportation, the City budget process, Accessibility and capital renewal projects.

*Investment in Recreation Amenities:*

I am very proud to lead the investment in recreation assets in our city. The Community Park is a true gem. A new Gathering Space has been completed, the boardwalk is being renewed, sports courts and the skate park were repaired and re-painted, new accessible washrooms have been built and many new pedestrian connections link all of these great amenities to enhance safety and connectivity in the park. The natural setting is second to none and it gives me great satisfaction to see the improvements that have been made during my terms. As an added bonus, much of this investment has been supplemented by significant grant funding.

I was the liaison to the Beach Fest Society during the early approval, design and development of the Outdoor Theatre and it is especially exciting for me to have been at several fantastic music events at this wonderful stage this past summer. A strong partnership with my colleagues at Beach Fest has made this project a tremendous success, with relatively low operating costs for Parksville taxpayers. A definite "Win-Win" in my opinion.

The rubberized playground surface and fabulous play equipment offer an accessible and inclusive space for our young families and attracts thousands of visitors all year round. I get emails daily during our summer months complimenting the City on this special playground feature.

The City explored the feasibility of a new aquatic recreation facility in Parksville, however after thorough and considered investigation, it was determined that the estimates for a new pool exceeded the capacity

of our tax-paying community. However, I am fully committed to advocate for the much-needed expansion of Ravensong Aquatic Centre.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

#### *Mobi Mat Installation*

One of the most exciting accomplishments of my term so far has to be the addition of a beach Mobi-Mat to our Community Park. This project was not without its challenges. The foreshore is a critically sensitive ecosystem and provincial and federal permits are required for everything that happens in this space. I worked many hours with the Access Oceanside Association Chair to solve a multitude of problems and develop creative solutions to allow us to take advantage of a unique grant opportunity to get this mat at no cost to taxpayers. It was such a joyful day to see several of my fellow citizens access the sand and ocean for the first time in many years. Throughout the summer, this new accessibility mat was used by people of all abilities to access the beach and even four legged residents enjoyed the smoother surface over the rocky foreshore. This innovative accessibility device will make us even more attractive to tourists and has already caught the attention of the inspirational Rick Hansen Foundation.

#### *Oceanside Track*

As a strong advocate of sports and recreation, and a former Special Olympics coach, I was thrilled to be at the groundbreaking ceremony and construction of the Oceanside Track. I have personally been involved in this project for many years and seeing this new recreation asset become a reality is truly wonderful. The City took the lead by committing substantial funding through our gas tax grants and encouraging neighbouring local governments to match our support.

#### *Environmental partnerships:*

I am very happy to announce major progress on another important project that required a solid partnership with the City and Nature Trust BC (NTBC). The Parksville Pathway project has been a vision for almost 20 years, but during my term, this new pedestrian connection has been initiated, complex land tenures issues are resolved and we are working closely with NTBC to develop an environmentally sound pathway that will be world class and offer many opportunities to view the estuary and unique marine and riparian ecosystem, while promoting active transportation. I ultimately envision continuous active transportation connections with Top Bridge and the rail trail that reaches all the way to Coombs.

#### *Affordable Housing Partnerships:*

During my previous term and continuing in my role as Mayor, I have personally built a strong relationship with several non-profit leaders in the community around the issues of affordable housing. The City has agreed in principle to donate land to the Lions Housing Society for a housing project designed to support local workers in the service industry. I was honoured to attend the opening ceremony for Ballenas Housing which provides 87 units of affordable housing for local residents, several of whom provide important emergency services to our community. My mission is to ensure we have a balanced and mixed range of housing options for people of all ages, diverse economic backgrounds and abilities to be able to live here.

**VISION FOR THE FUTURE:**

In the second half of this term, I expect to see the Parksville Pathway from Mills Street to Nerbus Lane be completed, with connections to the Community Park and other trails, bicycle lanes and pathways.

I am looking forward to attending many special events in our community spaces, supported by the newly created Special Event Coordinator.

The results of the Transportation Master Plan will be released to Council shortly and I will be exploring options for pilot projects and ideas to slow traffic down through the core and make the downtown streets feel safer, more inviting and more vibrant. My vision is to create Parksville's downtown as the destination, rather than a "drive-through." I have already implemented some changes, allowing lights to remain up year-round in some key areas and working with the PDBA to light up the Plaza. I will be advocating for this to be expanded throughout the Business Improvement Area in the next few years.

I have been engaging with many pickleball enthusiasts and with the elected club presidents. I will continue working with this group of motivated people to find acceptable solutions to support this growing sport in our community and across the region. With a goal to improve multi-purpose options in public spaces, I am leading a project to design a renewed Lacrosse Box facility that will also host pickleball, basketball, and floor hockey. I have met with the baseball community and had conversations with tennis players, and I am anticipating some great information to come out of a field user and facility analysis, which will help Council prioritize future investment and manage competing demands for the same spaces as our community grows.

Perhaps most important to me, I anticipate Council approval of a comprehensive long term Drinking Water Master Plan, that dispels myths and misunderstandings about our water system and provides a sustainable, responsible plan to supply a growing population with clean and reliable drinking water, focusing on capturing the abundant rains in the winter months and storing this resource for responsible drinking water production and consumption in the drier months. I expect all of this to be achieved while doing our part to enhance environmental conditions for fish and aquatic life through successful management of the Arrowsmith Dam and possibly other storage infrastructure.

I am the ambassador for the City of Parksville and always welcome the new arrival of residents and businesses that have the confidence to relocate to the City of Parksville. I look forward to your families' and businesses' contributions to our diverse and accepting community fabric that makes Parksville a desirable and productive location, while maintaining the welcoming, friendly, "small town" sense of community.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of staff at both the City of Parksville and Regional District of Nanaimo; their knowledge and experience is invaluable as we seek policy solutions to complex issues.

To our partners in collaboration at the provincial government level, I am encouraged by the dialogue that will further our relationship by working together, creating solutions for the pressing crises and competing priorities: housing; doctors; water; environment; recreation; homelessness; safe, secure, thriving communities. Together, we have achieved monumental visionary solutions. We are on the right track creating success stories but we can always do better.

Respectfully submitted,

*Original signed by D. O'Brien*

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Mayor Doug O' Brien