

Sincere thanks to the *Sooke News Mirror* for these opportunities to keep readers updated. This time around, I'd like to address a few issues that are at the forefront of our community as June gets underway.

First, good news about SEAPARC. Its summer camps are opening this month and staff are developing COVID-19 safety protocols for the relaunch of fitness classes and use of the pool. The facility was closed immediately upon the province's declaration of emergency. That created the opportunity for transform the arena to into a temporary shelter for the unhoused. This use will end on June 21 to permit SEAPARC's re-opening to the public. I am proud that we in Sooke have lived up to our status as a compassionate community by supporting our vulnerable population. Of course, closing the SEAPARC shelter will create challenges for those continuing to need support. The District will continue to work with service providers to find solutions.

The District reopened playgrounds at the beginning of this month. We know that active play is very important for children, so we decided to give families the freedom to visit playgrounds at their own discretion. As Dr. Henry has reminded us so often, it is vital to keep everyone healthy with repeat hand washing ~ a life skill that will serve all of us well over the rest of our lifetimes.

Canada Post last week delivered evidence to 6,682 Sooke property and business owners that one thing remains certain in this year of unexpected surprises: Taxes. They're the lifeblood -- necessary evil, some might say -- by which municipalities fund policing, emergency services, road networks, sewers, street lights, planning documents, parks, playgrounds, District salaries and much else.

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, Sooke council quickly sought to provide what fiscal relief it could by rolling back a projected tax increase to zero percent in 2020 (down from an approved 4.01 percent). The zero percent applies to residential properties whose BC Assessment value this year increased by the Sooke average of 3.4 percent. If your property value jumped by more than that, you'll see an increase in municipal taxes. If less, then they will decrease accordingly. Tax increases in Sooke have historically been framed using this median average, and this year is no different. For those properties in the Sewer Service Area, the parcel tax that funds the sewer had a scheduled increase for 2020. The sewer parcel tax expires in 2026 at which time the District will move to a full cost recovery model.

It's important to remember that the District receives 51% of the bottom line total on your tax statement. We also collect payments for other service providers -- the Capital Regional District, Sooke School District #62, BC Transit, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, the Municipal Finance Authority and BC Assessment itself -- and promptly redirect revenue to each in turn.

With Canada officially in a recession, local governments are naturally concerned about revenue flow this year. It was encouraging that more than 500 residents dropped by the Municipal Hall in the first week of its reopening to to pay property taxes ahead of the July 2 deadline. The COVID-19 safety measures developed by our Corporate Services and Human Resource divisions worked effectively and proved why they've been adopted for use across the province by the BC Municipal Safety Association.

Closing with best wishes from all of us at the District. Stay well and keep healthy, Sooke!

Mayor Maja Tait

"The expansion of the West Coast Family Medical Clinic and transition to a Primary Care Network service delivery model is the culmination of many years of work and commitment by numerous stakeholders dedicated to improving health care outcomes for local residents.

I am very proud to have been a part of this effort as the chairperson of the Sooke Region Primary Health Care Services Working Group since 2014, and would like to recognize our members and partners, including Sooke's local physician group, Island Health, the South Island Division of Family Practice, community organizations such as the Sooke Region Community Health Initiative and Sooke Family Resource Society, and residents who attended numerous public engagement events.

We are grateful to the Province of BC and Ministry of Health for their response to our advocacy efforts and for investing in the health and wellbeing of our community. We look forward to continuing our work together."