

Strait Talk October, 2009

Local elected officials from across the province spent last week in Vancouver at the annual convention of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM.) UBCM is local government's lobby group, charged with advocating for municipalities' and Regional Districts' interests to higher levels of government. This is the annual opportunity for mayors and councillors, board chairs and directors to meet each other in a working as well as a social environment through workshops and networking events; to lobby for benefits to our respective communities through meetings with cabinet ministers and their staff; and to give the UBCM executive their policy direction through resolutions on a huge range of topics from environmental protection to public safety.

The SCRD Board scheduled meetings with the Minister of Forests on First Nations relationships and watershed protection; staff from the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport on possible new regulations around drinking water protection; representatives from the Ministry of Transportation on the Langdale dock issue and transit expansion; the executive of the Private Managed Forest Land Council on issues around forestry activity at the edges of residential neighbourhoods; the Minister of Community & Rural Development on regional planning issues; and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts on trails strategies.

Running throughout our meetings was the message that the province is out of money. Many of the grants and programs we have been used to will not be available in the coming couple of years at least. Local governments will therefore need to find creative and collaborative solutions to the problems we face so that we can address the growing demand for services in our communities without increasing the financial burden on the individual taxpayer.

Another primary theme was Transition. We are moving from an oil dependent culture to using alternative forms of energy. We are changing our consumption patterns and our concepts of waste. Our economies are shifting focus from traditional resource extraction to knowledge based and tourism industries. Our settlement patterns are adjusting to population growth and the need to be more efficient in our use of resources. Transition will continue to be a feature of our society as the technologies that dominate our lives continuously evolve.

Some other recurring themes of this year's conference included food security and the need to protect and enhance our potential to raise our own food, climate action projects such as the development of community energy systems like waste heat recovery, and the need for partnerships and collaboration in all the work we do. It was a strenuous and exciting week! We have made some important connections and were offered a wealth of information and stimulating ideas, all useful as we move through the coming months.

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The opinions in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the rest of the SCRD Board.