

March 22, 2020

COVID-19:

A Message From The SLRD BOARD CHAIR

It's been a challenging and evolving week in our country, throughout the province and here at home in the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District as we find ourselves in the midst of what may well become the greatest fight of our time.

When we say that the health and well-being of our employees and the residents in our communities is a priority, we mean that. It is a grim balancing act at all levels of government, to act with all possible speed to increase public safety against the disease while not wanting to act in ways that increase the terrible economic uncertainty and mental suffering that so many individuals and families are already experiencing due to an increasing number of businesses closing.

The SLRD is taking measures to ensure the safety of our employees and community members, and these measures are being upgraded almost daily as the Prime Minister and Provincial Medical Health Officer continue to strengthen their recommendations and orders.

Last week, we closed our administration office in Pemberton and have cancelled public engagement meetings and events. In a matter of days our employees were moved offsite with the tools they need to work remotely; a strategy that immediately helped to decrease the risk of person to person transmission of COVID-19 by reducing the number of people present in the office, while ensuring that essential services and the work of our Emergency Operations Centre continues. This is not without its challenges, and there may be delays in response for day-to-day business, but we are here.

Last Wednesday, while practicing social distancing measures and all recommended hygiene practices, we held our Board meeting to pass our budget, so that we can continue to do business. We activated a virtual Emergency Operations Centre in order to be able to ensure that the flow of information and necessary field operations continues during this time and on Friday, the SLRD declared a State of Local Emergency, which gives us the powers to take some additional measures. Our EOC management team meets daily and our management team is coordinating with colleagues from around the region and the province to ensure we continue to work together in this fight.

We have had calls from the community to take measures to limit travel and access within the regional district such as to provincial parks and highways. While the SLRD does not have jurisdiction over these areas, we are working on this as a priority, advocating to the province for stronger action on this issue.

The Prime Minister of Canada has asked Canadians to stay at home during this pandemic. This is particularly challenging, I know. The urge to get outside and to connect with nature is strong, especially in these stressful times. And while it is still OK to get outside with your immediate family members for walks and bike rides within your own community, it is absolutely essential that we limit movement, avoid all unnecessary travel, not gather in groups, and maintain the recommended 6 feet of social distance.

If we are to have any impact whatsoever on transmission of this disease, we must take our individual responsibilities seriously. Humour is a healthy response to terrible times, but there is nothing funny about flouting recommendations that reduce the risk of grave illness for our family, friends and communities. Social distancing does not mean meeting a group of friends for coffee. It does not mean playdates for your child. It does not mean gathering with a few friends at the skateboard park. It does not mean flocking to the trails and parks and it does not mean leaving your local community.

Travelling into the rural areas of the regional district and gathering in large groups is not OK. It's insensitive. It's self-destructive. It's disrespectful to other people. It has to stop. The critical time is now. Each of us must take appropriate action. Each of us can be a part of "flattening the curve" of COVID-19. Each of us can be a part of keeping each other safe and ensuring that our healthcare services can manage the demands that are already being placed upon them.

This is an unprecedented situation and we will be living it for some time. As social distancing becomes our new normal, at least for the foreseeable future, heightened feelings of anxiety and isolation are a normal and common response. While we are not able to physically gather with our friends, family and neighbours, it is important to continue to check in on one another. Connect virtually, send a text. The old-fashioned phone call is making a comeback. We are stronger together, working together, and keeping the communication lines open.

Stay healthy. Be safe. Be kind to one another.



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