



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

3400 – 30th STREET VERNON, BRITISH COLUMBIA V1T 5E6
TELEPHONE (250) 545-1361 FAX (250)545-4048

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

December 23, 2021

A year in review from Mayor Victor Cumming

This past year has been filled with changes, challenges, and triumphs that have significantly impacted all our lives.

2021 included several major events that widely impacted our community as a whole and tested our resolve, strength and resiliency as individuals, families, neighbours, business owners, and organizations of all sizes.

Although we have navigated the same major events, we recognize each person has experienced their own individual challenges and impacts from this year, and is moving into 2022 with a different set of personal circumstances and perspectives. We have each lost and gained in various ways, and have had our lives shaped in new ways by the things that have happened in the last 12 months.

2021 included a lot of difficult challenges, but as Mayor of Vernon, I believe it's important to also acknowledge and celebrate where we took steps forward to foster the continued growth and development of a vibrant and diverse community that is focused on being one of the best places in Canada to live, work, explore and play, all year round.

With this, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the last several months and the major milestones that took place.

COVID-19

Without a doubt, the biggest stories we've seen covered in the news media this year have been related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Local businesses and service organizations continued to pivot rapidly to ever changing health measures, province-wide restrictions, and new efforts to slow and contain the spread of the virus, while also working dutifully to maintain their services and operate successfully. Even now, the environment in which we're operating continues to change and we're having to remain nimble in our approach to daily activities and future plans.

Thank you to each and every one of you who has worked so hard to protect each other and our community, support local businesses, and serve the citizens and visitors of Vernon.

Thank you to our emergency responders and health care staff who have been working tirelessly for nearly two years in response to the virus, in addition to all the other health care needs and emergencies you have faced during that time. Your efforts have been seen and are deeply appreciated.



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White Rock Lake wildfire

The White Rock Lake wildfire was devastating for many people and local communities. Resources across the Interior were stretched as emergency responders, the Province, local governments, First Nations, businesses, and volunteers banded together to support evacuees from neighbouring communities, and take steps to protect people, homes and infrastructure as best as possible.

The threat of the White Rock Lake wildfire on Vernon's boundary was very real and our emergency responders and City staff were on high alert for the entire duration of the active fire event. This fire season was tense for all of us in the community, but residents can rest assured that we were ready if further actions were needed.

In addition to our emergency response preparations, City staff were in contact multiple times a day with the BC Wildfire Service and worked with surrounding municipalities and First Nations as it operated an Emergency Support Services (ESS) reception centre for 40 continuous days.

Nearly 170 volunteers worked in the reception centre, clocking more than 6,000 hours of service and registering more than 3,000 individual evacuees from numerous jurisdictions. Nearly 10,000 local hotel/motel rooms were allocated to evacuees and nearly 8,800 other service vouchers were issued for groceries, clothing, incidentals, gas and billeting. This was no small feat.

Vernon served as home base for more than 500 BCWS firefighters and support personnel at the Kin Race Track, Kal Tire Place and Vernon Regional Airport, as they worked tirelessly to fight the fire and keep all of us safe. The establishment of the fire camp took only a few days once we received the request, and Vernon residents showed an outpouring of support for the work being done by everyone involved.

I am so proud of the work and dedication that was provided by our citizens and staff when our neighbours needed help. This was community in action.

New City developments

- 2021 is on track to be a banner year for new construction and investment in Vernon, with 421 Building Permits issued (valued at nearly \$168 million), and 359 new units of residential housing being added to the local market.
- New subsidized housing projects are well underway that have been generously supported by BC Housing, including projects at: Albert House (CMHA); Okanagan Landing Road (Okanagan Village Housing Society); My Place II (Turning Points Collaborative Society); and McCulloch II (Vernon Pensioner's Accommodation Society).



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- A systematic review of the City's development approval process took place, with actions identified to implement changes and improve processes going forward, with many already being undertaken.

Parks

- New park land was purchased and dedicated for Girourd Park and Civic Memorial Park.
- A new sub-regional trail connection has been made possible for the Grey Canal Trail between Bella Vista/Okanagan Hills and Turtle Mountain West.
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities and local Associate Dealer Jack D'Amico donated a Jumpstart Inclusive Playground for Marshall Field Park, which enhanced the playground development plans already in place by the City.
- Council allocated \$10 million for the planning and development of the Kin Race Track park land with funds from the Fortis BC Legacy Fund. Stakeholder engagement and planning are now underway.

Infrastructure

- In the spring, the 29th/30th Street double roundabout opened, finishing a massive 10-year infrastructure project to develop a third north-south transportation corridor for Vernon. This corridor easily supports vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and those on scooters, who may travel between the shopping and hotel district in the north, southward to downtown, and Okanagan or Kalamalka Lakes. This project also included the replacement of vital underground infrastructure to serve residents and businesses for many years to come.
- More than \$18 million in infrastructure projects took place, including the revitalization of 31st Street and 37th Avenue, planning for improvements to lake access points, drainage improvements, utility replacement, and the initial construction of a multi-use path on Silver Star Rd between Pleasant Valley Road and Blackcomb Way.
- In coordination with the Downtown Vernon Association, the City trialed a closure of the 2900-block of 30th Avenue to vehicle traffic for summertime entertainment and a pedestrian plaza.

Sustainability

- Council approved Vernon's first Climate Action Plan in April, which is now moving to implementation across the community.



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- Vernon welcomed Neuron to the community, with its first electric kick scooter share service. This is part of a multi-year pilot program with the Province of B.C. Data from the first season indicates a very successful launch of this zero-emission program.
- Numerous upgrades were made to City facilities/vehicles to lower the City's GHG emissions.
- The City announced it will be introducing curbside collection of household organics and yard waste in mid-2022.

So much has happened in a very short amount of time. We have much to be proud of in Vernon, and even more to look forward to in the coming year. Although we have faced many challenges, we have also become stronger, more resilient, and better prepared to successfully face adversity in the future.

This is, without a doubt, the best place to live, work, explore and play – not just because of the natural environment we have surrounding us, but because of the people who choose to call this place 'home.'

On behalf of myself, my family, City Council and all the staff at the City of Vernon, I wish you the very best for this holiday season, and health and happiness for 2022.

Victor Cumming
Mayor, City of Vernon