

Thank you for inviting me down to Bozeman to take part in these conversations about building and sustaining the New West. It's a real pleasure for me to be here - and to share a little bit about what we are doing in the Town of Canmore. As well, this is a great opportunity for me to be able to listen to and learn from those assembled today.

## **History / Context**

As noted in the introduction, my wife & I have been living in Canmore, Alberta - a small town in the Canadian Rockies — for more than 40 years.

When we moved to Canmore the population was 1,800 people – most of whom were dependent in one way or another on the coal mine. Today the population is approximately 18,000 – with 20% of those residents being part-time – or non-permanent residents. As well, our numbers can swell by another 5-10,000 visitors - depending on the time of year.

As some background, it was in 1886 that Queen Victoria granted a coal mining charter to the Canmore Mining Company - and the first mines were opened. The coal mining industry remained healthy well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century ... however, by the 1970's the market for hard anthracite coal had diminished. The Canmore Mines ceased operations on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1979 - Black Thursday, as it is now remembered.

At that time Canmore's economic future seemed uncertain - however, the town had already begun to attract an interesting assortment of climbers, artists, adventurers, and entrepreneurs ... and our community culture – or identity – was changing. Given the beautiful location of the townsite within the Bow Valley, and immediately adjacent to Banff National Park – Canada's first national park - the Town Council and business community of the day began to re-envision Canmore as a community with a tourism-based economy.

With the announcement in the early 1980's that Canmore had been selected as the host venue for the Nordic events during the '88 Winter Olympics, there was renewed optimism for our collective future. It has been said that the Olympics introduced Canmore to the world, but that experience also helped define our community character as we transitioned away from coal mining.

When showcasing the Games internationally, the American Broadcasting Corporation breathlessly described Canmore as 'the hidden jewel of the Canadian Rockies' – which of course meant that we were then no longer 'hidden'. People with a broad range of backgrounds were relocating to Canmore to enjoy the small-town mountain lifestyle, and many people from across the region – or across the world – were interested in owning a recreational home in our valley. Land development and construction became the primary industry for some time – although Tourism is now our main economic driver.

However, planning for growth in Canmore is difficult, as the valley is divided by a river, a railway, **and** a major highway. To make things more complicated, our growth boundary is constrained because we are surrounded by protected park areas ... and we are smack dab in the middle of a continental wildlife movement corridor.

A big part of the challenge for us now is to manage the change that is occurring, while holding on to our vision of a community that is in balance ... with a strong economy ... is socially inclusive, with housing that we can afford ... and which has a healthy environment for ourselves AND the wildlife that share the valley.

If growth is well planned - and if citizens are engaged and participate in shaping the community - growth can bring opportunities for community benefit.

I believe that one of the most important jobs is to provide good opportunities for meaningful community conversations. Public input is one of the factors that elected councils must carefully consider when we are making our decisions, as we are elected to represent the greater good. In Canmore we have adopted a formal Spectrum of Public Participation, which is designed to provide the tools to establish an appropriate level of public participation in order to define the public's role in any process. This approach is used internationally, and it is found in many formal communication policies.

## **Housing**

Fueled by rising oil and gas prices, in the late 90's and early part of the 2000's there was significant growth in Calgary and the region. Disposable income in the province was on the rise at that time, and for the first time in Canmore's history, growth in our permanent population was outpaced by growth in the weekend (or non-permanent) population. Market demand for high end homes and condos grew quickly and the affordability of home ownership has since become out of reach for many.

Today our real estate prices are amongst the highest in the country, with the average detached family home priced at close to \$900,000. Many people who live and work in Canmore are unable to obtain decent housing that they can afford, and often feel that their only option is to move down valley - to live in a place that they can afford.

This affects not only the service sector workers who pour our morning coffees, but a broad group of well-educated middle-income earners – our teachers and nurses, firefighters, tradespeople, mid-level managers, and many others.

It was in response to this growing housing crisis that the Town created the Canmore Community Housing Corporation, a wholly owned non-profit with a mandate to develop resale restricted housing with residency and employment criteria requirements. The housing that we are developing – both rental and owner occupied – is not social housing, as it requires a substantial family income in order to qualify. Owner occupied units are resale restricted, with resale values tied to growth in the annual cost of goods.

Through the past 10 or 15 years the Housing Corporation has been very active, developing more than 230 units of community affordable housing ... such as the recently completed units pictured here. As well, we have provided incentives to private sector builders who have added another 70 units of restricted housing ... for a current inventory of close to 300 homes.

We have also been finding success in working with the private sector over the past few years to bring on a significant number of market rental properties. This is expected not only to improve our rental vacancy rates – which have hovered around 0% for the past several years - but also help to reduce market rents – which are amongst the highest in the province.

The recently opened project shown in this image is the first market rental project built in Canmore in more than 45 years, and along with the 2 others will add 400 units of long-term rentals to the Town.

One of the factors that have contributed to the low inventory of long-term rentals has been a growing trend for landlords to choose to put their units into the short-term rentals pool, managed by such online platforms as AirB'nB and VRBO. Under our regulations in Canmore it is not permitted for owners to rent out dwelling units in residential neighborhoods for periods of less than 28 days.

In 2017, after a lengthy period of public communication, Town Council changed the approach to how we manage this growing issue - in order to reduce the significant number of illegal short-term rentals. We provided the resources necessary for Planning to identify all non-complying units, deliver stop orders to the owners of these units, and then levy fines of \$2500 per night that the unit remains in the rental pool.

The most effective component of this initiative was not the enforcement itself but the publicity and

awareness that it created about the regulations. While there are several districts in Canmore that do allow for short-term rentals, the incidence of non-permitted rentals in residential neighbourhoods has been significantly reduced.

### **Human/Wildlife Coexistence**

Aside from the housing issues that I have spoken about, perhaps the biggest challenge facing our community today is that of the steadily increasing conflict between humans and the wildlife that have used our valley for eons. People who come to visit Canmore - or to live here - love to see the wildlife, as that is a big part of what draws people to the mountains. The downside is that we are – literally – loving them to death. When the wildlife become habituated and lose their natural aversion to humans, it is most often the wildlife that pays the price.

In 1993 the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative was created as a joint Canada-US not for profit organization, with the purpose of connecting and protecting habitat from Yellowstone to the Yukon. Y2Y opened an office in Canmore – and it was at that time that our community really began the slow process of understanding what it is that influences safe passage for the larger species – particularly the carnivores – so that they can maneuver around the townsite and make it into the national park and on up to the Yukon.

It was in this decade that the first wildlife corridors were defined on the north bench of the valley, and a big piece of the land slated for development in a new subdivision on the north bench was protected in perpetuity with a conservation easement. As well, wildlife corridor studies were undertaken by a multi-party stakeholder group, and in 1999 they wrote the first set of scientifically informed guidelines for functional corridors. These guidelines continue to directly influence future development on the south bench, most of which is owned by one landowner.

It was also at that time that Town leaders introduced a bear proof garbage collection system, in order to address the increasing bear mortality within the townsite. Prior to that time, we were placing our household trash out at the curb for pick-up in the morning – but of course the easily accessible garbage attracted bears, many of whom became habituated, trapped, and then often put down as ‘problem bears’.

In addition, restrictions were put in place to manage other unnatural food attractants such as bird feeders, berry bushes, and fruit trees – also intended to reduce the number of bears that were drawn into the townsite by these easily accessible food sources to fatten up in preparation for hibernation.

Through these actions, Canmore was beginning to gain a reputation as a leader in environmental stewardship and wildlife protection.

More recently, in 2017 we established a Roundtable on Human/Wildlife Coexistence, along with the Town of Banff, the Government of Alberta, and Parks Canada. The Roundtable appointed a Technical Working Group composed of wildlife management experts from both government and NGO’s. In April 2018 the Working Group brought forward a report on human-wildlife coexistence in the Bow Valley. The report outlines a number of objectives to address how we might better share the landscape with wildlife.

A primary focus of our work in 2019 – as recommended within the report - will be to address the safety concerns identified when elk congregate in local parks and school grounds. We have approved a project to install an 8 foot high fence this year around a park site that is regularly used by elk herds for grazing, but which is immediately adjacent to a school playground.

### **Congestion/Transportation**

I would like to change my focus now to other issues that we are addressing in the Town of Canmore – issues arising as a result of the growing numbers of visitors coming to experience the many amenities

that we as residents are so privileged to enjoy.

As I've noted, ours is a tourism economy ... and one of the fastest growing components of that economy are the visitors who come out for a day or two from the City of Calgary – which is less than an hour's drive east. The city – which had a population of 400,000 when Canmore first began to transition into a visitor destination - now has a population of close to one and a half million people ... again, less than an hour's drive away.

Council recently updated our Transportation Master Plan to shift away from designing roads for cars, and to focus more on safely and efficiently moving **people** ... by bus, on foot, on bicycle ... OR by car. In planning circles this approach is referred to as Complete Streets.

We believe that building roads and trails that provide a range of travel options is the most efficient way to move people – and in order to prepare for the future we recognize that our network must include options that make more efficient use of our limited road space.

We hear some pushback from residents about this approach – and about why some believe the complete streets model will not work in Canmore. Some of the doubt voiced within the community reflects the challenge of getting around in the winter, or the distances and hilly terrain that we have to navigate. However, these conditions have been successfully overcome in other towns and cities around the world, where steps were taken to make streets more complete.

Communities are recognizing the benefits of making streets more walkable, and creating better places for people to live, work and play. When efficient and comfortable infrastructure exists, people will walk and cycle more. Since walking and cycling take up less room than vehicles, more people can be accommodated, freeing up room on the roads for driving. We are not trying to eliminate the use of vehicles - the goal is to provide a more efficient transportation network: one that is sustainable, and works for everyone – regardless of how they choose to get around town.

As another initiative to reduce road congestion and GHG emissions, the Town partnered several years ago with the Town of Banff and the Village of Lake Louise to create the Bow Valley Regional Transit Services Commission. In 2013 the commission initiated the first regular bus service between Canmore and Banff – approximately 20 minutes west of Canmore.

In 2017 we started local transit service within Canmore, and in 2018 we offered fare-free transit during the summer months - which resulted in more than twice as many riders over the previous summer's ridership numbers. Given the success of that 2-month initiative, Council has just approved making the Canmore service fare free for the remainder of this year.

We are now in the final planning stage of introducing paid parking into the downtown core, with the parking revenues expected to fully offset the ridership fares collected on transit. This will then enable our intent to make our local Canmore transit permanently fare free.

### **Climate Action**

In 2010 we adopted an Environmental Sustainability Action Plan, within which we have committed to take action to address energy reduction, climate protection, resource conservation, waste management, water conservation, toxin reduction and community education.

Following on that plan, we have approved a Climate Action Plan, within which we set targets for a 30% reduction in community-based greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and an 80% reduction by 2050. This is ambitious but it signals the bold leadership required. It is also in-line with the targets set by our federal government.

Because Canmore doesn't have large industries, small actions are required on the part of a much greater number of people. Last year, university students conducted a study on solar potential in Canmore and found that if panels were installed on every possible rooftop, the potential electricity generated would be equivalent to taking 8,600 cars off the road.

There is a perception that solar opportunities in Canmore are limited, because of shading from the mountains - however the study found that open roof space with southern exposure has over 4 times more impact on solar potential than does location.

We are demonstrating leadership within our own municipal infrastructure – having established a target to cut our own operational emissions in half by 2030. We have initiated or completed several solar projects - at the Town Hall, at our recreation centers, the waste management facility, and at the Seniors Centre. It is estimated that when these projects are complete, 1,145 solar panels will be in place, reducing our municipal electrical needs by 20-50% and providing a lifetime GHG reduction of 8,834 tonnes.

Another initiative underway is to add residential Organic Waste collection to our Waste Management service delivery. Back yard composting is not permitted in Town, as the compost would become a bear attractant. Beginning in September, we will be placing 5 neighbourhood bins to collect household food waste, and in 2020 we will be adding the organic waste collection from restaurants and other commercial operations. Reducing these organics from the landfill waste stream will prolong the life of the area landfills, while reducing the off-gassing of methane and other gases from the area landfill.

### **Wildfire**

In conclusion, I will speak briefly about our work over the years to reduce the risk of wild fire for our community. In Canmore we now speak about 'when' a wildfire comes down the Bow Valley – not 'IF'. I know that concern about this issue spans our borders – and I understand that the smoke from recent Alberta wildfires has spanned the border as well.

We are addressing the threat of wild fire in several ways, and have been now for 20 years.

The longest running program has been an annual firesmarting program on public lands within the townsites to reduce the fuel that would be available to an oncoming fire. In this program we have been clearing brush and dead wood, and thinning the canopy in some places – particularly in the areas that abut the forest.

In fact, the Town has just been recognized by FireSmart Canada for being an early leader in the country for this work.

More recently we have made changes to the Land Use Bylaw to put much stricter building guidelines on new construction within proximity of the forested areas. These regulations require a higher level of fire resistance for building material – particularly roofing materials. As well, the regulations specify what vegetation and landscaping material can be used within certain distances from new buildings.

As one other initiative to increase our resilience in a wildfire situation, we have acquired a Sprinkler Protection Unit for Fire and Rescue Services to deploy as a first line of defense against wildfire risks. This equipment is a trailer that contains a selection of water sprinkler heads, hoses, pumps and associated tools and equipment - which can create up to a 1000 meter defensive water line, which will help to protect the community until the Province can respond with more significant resources.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for having provided me with this opportunity to share a bit about what is happening in Canmore as we plan for a more sustainable community. I will look forward to answering any questions that I can later on in the program.