



City of Rossland

Debunking the Myth: Columbia Avenue and Washington Street Project

It is well known that the Ministry Of Transportation has been planning to pave Columbia Avenue. In cooperation with MOT and in order to take advantage of the opportunity to have the paving paid for provincially, the City has carried out an assessment on the valves, pipes, water and sewer connections existing below Columbia Ave. (if MOT is paying, why don't we fix our old pipes?). Using this initial assessment, a rough cost of the project was developed. The City also thought that if MOT is going to pave, this would be a good opportunity to look at any changes to Columbia Avenue. So, in 2010 the City undertook three design charettes (public input sessions) on how Columbia might look in the next 5 to 15 years. The ideas gathered at the charettes were used to do a very basic conceptual drawing of the streets.

As the City got deeper into our investigation of the 50-60 year old infrastructure, we also took a detailed look into Washington St. and its' infrastructure (the water/sewer pipes, etc. under the pavement). The City chose to include Washington St. as part of the plan to improve Rossland's infrastructure, as it is a main road in the community, in hopes of reducing the costs to taxpayers by piggybacking it with MOT and our Columbia Ave. project.

The next step is where we are at today. Council approved an Alternate Approval Process (AAP) to provide the City with the legal authority from the taxpayers of Rossland for the City to obtain funding **not to exceed** 6 million dollars. Without this approval, the City cannot start the detailed engineering and design work required to determine the **actual** costs for this project.

This detailed engineering and design will tell us what needs to be done: the sizes of pipes; what valves and connections need to be replaced; how to control surface water (snow and rainwater); pedestrian traffic flow (no need to run across four lanes!); the underground pipe replacements required for sewer and water; as well as the water/sewer connections leading up to properties.

The design and engineering work cost is estimated at \$500,000 for a project of this scale. Regardless of whether the Columbia/Washington project goes ahead.... the engineering still needs to be done!

Once we complete this detail work, Council can then assess whether we can proceed to complete the critical underground work on Columbia Ave and Washington St. or scale the project back to be only a bit, half, three quarters, who knows? Council could decide to complete some portions in the near future. Council also has the option at this time to go to a referendum which would delay the engineering and risk losing the cost benefits of partnering with MOT for the Columbia/Washington project.

Important things to note:

- Paving and one half of the cost of curbs for Columbia Ave. will be paid for by the Ministry of Transportation.
- Approximately 75% of the drainage costs for Columbia Ave. will be paid for by MOT.
- MOT is also footing the bill for design and engineering for Columbia Ave. for storm system, roads (paving), curbs and sidewalks.
- If money is still available other surface work such as streetscapes, kiosks, parking modifications etc can be considered. This type of surface work can be also done at a later time when budget is provided.
- It is imperative to have a long term vision of how the streets might look if we had the funds required or if some level of government gave us a grant towards the surface work.
- The City is applying for 3 grants thus far which could potentially offset up to one-half of the project cost as stated in the AAP. If the grants are successful the taxpayer costs will be greatly reduced.

If the grants are not successful, Council will again assess whether it is prudent to increase taxes between \$132 annually to as high as \$188 annually per homeowner for twenty years. The City understands that this might still be too high a tax burden for our taxpayers but also recognizes that Columbia Ave and Washington St., our two major arteries, are the most significant and the highest priorities for major infrastructure improvements. We have to do them sometime and we want to make sure that we replace the 50-60 year old pipes to avoid digging up brand new pavement in the very near future.

With the successful completion of the Arena project, the City has demonstrated that not all borrowing permission sought from the taxpayers is utilized as requested. We had asked for up-front borrowing permission of \$1.2 million for the Arena project. Our final borrowing will be \$250,000 to be paid \$50,000/year over the next 5 years. The project expenses came in at just over \$1 million, with up to \$750,000 coming from reserves and grants, proving that the City is fiscally responsible and respectful of its' residents by taking advantage of such grants.

City council, administration and staff are working hard to ensure that longevity, livability and fiscal forethought is in place to keep Rossland sustainable.

Additional information about the Columbia/Washington project is available at City Hall and on the City's website.