

Over the Back Fence  
For Friday November 21, 2008  
Approx 640 words

Grand opening  
By Alva Wood

They had a grand opening ceremony for the new Main Street the other day.

After all these years, and a big fat cheque from the provincial government, our village has a freshly blacktopped one-block road through the downtown core.

The new road comes equipped with every modern convenience already built in, the kinds of things that other places have to tear their main roads apart to retrofit. Pull out bays for buses, if case we ever get a public transit service. Curbs with wheelchair ramps at regular intervals. Gutters to collect rainwater that used to soak into the ground naturally. The latest design in storm sewer gratings, so that no absent-minded cyclists can possibly get a front wheel jammed in a slot and do a header over the handlebars. Spindly little trees wrapped in stucco wire for protection against marauding deer, planted in the sidewalks with sunburst pattern metal grids around them.

There's even a traffic light halfway down the block. Our very first traffic light. There's no crossroad there, so it doesn't actually control anything. But Freddie Fallis got it at a huge discount.

"How about some traffic lights?" asked the company that supplied the sunburst gratings for the baby trees. "We got a couple leftover from a contract in Abbotsford."

"How much?" asked Freddie.

"Make us an offer," they replied.

"I got a box of apples I haven't been able to give away yet," said Freddie.

"Done," they said.

"Where're you gonna put it?" administrator Henry Hill wondered, when Freddie bragged about the great bargain he had negotiated. "You've already got a roundabout at one end of the block, and a four-way stop at the other end."

"How about we hang it over the pedestrian crosswalk?" Freddie suggested.

So they did.

To declare the road open for business, they organized a ribbon-cutting, tree-planting, and street-lighting photo op for the press and the public.

Mayor Jake Bowers, the councillors, and the executive staff gathered at the designated location. Then they waited for the people to arrive.

They could see a line of pickup trucks entering the far end of Main Street, but none of them came through to the site for the ceremony.

"How long is the computer for your traffic light programmed to stay on red?" Henry whispers to Freddie.

"We didn't get any computer with it," Freddie whispers back. "We just plugged the light in, that's all."

"Maybe you could switch it to green," Henry suggests.

The spectators finally arrived and parked in all the No Parking zones posted along the new curbs.

A front-end loader rumbled up with a perfectly healthy tree that had been dug up from somewhere else so that it could be stuck back into the ground in a new place where it could soon die of neglect.

The councillors took turns throwing shovelfuls of imported topsoil around the base of the tree and stomping it down.

Electronic flashes lit the night as cameras recorded the scene for posterity.

Then it was time for the main event. As the bright stars glittered like diamonds in the black sky overhead, chief engineer Freddie Fallis stood beside a big knife switch mounted on a wall for symbolic effect.

Wielding a pair of his wife's hedge clippers, mayor Jake Bowers strode up to a strand of yellow highways tape strung across the new blacktop between two of the new lamp posts.

"I hereby declare Main Street open!" he announced, chopping through the tape.

The spectators clapped.

Freddie pulled down the knife switch.

All the streetlights up and down the block flared into light, flooding the whole area like it was day.

Their glare instantly blotted out the stars overhead.  
Freddie clapped his hands with delight.  
“Wow!” he burred to no one in particular. “Look at that!”  
“Yeah!” agreed Henry. “Finally, we’re starting to look like a real city!”