

The year has certainly started off with a number of significant events for our municipal community.

As many know, the Town of Granum voted 74% in favor of dissolution in November. On January 29th the MD was informed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs that the Order in Council officially dissolving the Town had been issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta effective February 1st. Fortunately much work had been accomplished by our administration in preparing for this event prior to the announcement.

An open house in the Hamlet of Granum on February 26 saw 75 residents of the Hamlet have the opportunity to meet MD Council members and staff, and to view information related to municipal services as well as other matters related to the Hamlet. It was a great event which fostered a better understanding by all. Although the Hamlet's infrastructure issues are challenging, they will be addressed in a timely manner realizing that the time to accomplish all matters on the lengthy (and costly!) list will take many years.

It was officially revealed in December 2019 that beginning April 1, 2020, all municipalities within the Province of Alberta will be paying policing costs. Previously, the Province paid the cost for municipalities under 5000 population (MD Willow Creek). This starts at 10% of costs in budget year 2020 (\$139,000 for the M.D.) and escalates to 30% of costs in budget year 2024 (\$419,000 for the M.D.).

This is a significant new **provincial tax** which will appear on the municipal property tax notice alongside the School Foundation Fund tax. It is unfortunate that municipal taxpayers will be paying for a service for which we have no ability to provide operational input: its simply "Here's the bill - Pay it!" As a council, we will continue to be vocal with our opposition to this new downloaded cost on municipal citizens for a service which should be covered by the plentiful revenues already generated by the province.

We have come to understand that additional services that have been provided by the province are being reduced – in particular, we are deeply concerned with the reduction of staff at Alberta Agriculture who have provided services directly to the agricultural community for many years. The loss of valuable knowledge and expertise of not only the local experts, but also those of the network of specialists (all of whom have been but a phone call away) will be felt by our producers who, although understanding of the changes that inevitably occur during tough financial times, are also facing economic challenges and rely on expert advice. Along with the loss of staff, there is a concern that volumes & terabytes of information which have been gathered over decades may no longer be available for analysis and use.

On a local level, the work on the Intermunicipal Development Plans with the Town of Stavely, Town of Claresholm and the Town of Fort Macleod continue to progress with details to be worked out. We are hopeful that collaborative solutions to matters that have arisen will be resolved in a timely way.

It appears as if we will be successfully concluding the Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework agreements prior to the April 1, 2020 deadline. Agreements are in place with the 6 rural municipalities which border the M.D. and final details on the Willow Creek Regional Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework Agreement are being completed. Work will continue to develop an agreement on recreation funding with our urban neighbors upon conclusion of the ICF agreement.

Another agreement that is nearing completion is the Intermunicipal Emergency Services Agreement which is a contractual agreement between the M.D. and the Towns of Nanton, Stavely, Claresholm and

Fort Macleod. The single most significant principle of this agreement is that it will ensure that no matter where you live within the M.D. of Willow Creek, you will be able to receive an identical level of service.

The arrival of the new calves (for some of us and for others, lambs, kids or foals) has signaled the start of a new production cycle and as the daylight hours begin to get longer, our thoughts are once again turning to farming, field work and ranching. We wish you the best of luck in 2020 and hope for warmer weather, timely rains and good prices.

Sincerely,

The Council of the Municipal District of Willow Creek