

## Council Message

Since our last newsletter, COVID 19 has certainly changed the world and life as we knew it. At least on farms, ranches and acreages, we can go outside and have our freedom – our hearts go out to those living in apartments or condos staring at four walls. Now that restrictions are being lifted bit by bit, people can start to live a bit more normal (however one defines “normal “now).

Since the end of March 2020, Council has held all of their meetings via ZOOM from their homes. It certainly has been different, however we have adapted and it is living proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks!!! That being said, we will be going back to Council Chambers on June 10<sup>th</sup> observing all the public health rules- those Councilors who wish to meet via ZOOM can still do so. We want everyone to stay safe and healthy.

With respect to Tax Notices and the MD mill rates, there will be **no increase in Farmland and Residential rates**, however, the Linear and Non-Residential rates will increase by 1.1% to keep the 2020 taxes at the same level as 2019 arising from losses due to depreciation on Linear and Non-Residential. Linear and DIP (Designated Industrial Property) assessment has decreased by \$30 million for 2020. If you have any questions, please contact the MD office.

**Granum residents will see a Special Tax** on their notices, however, this is no different than they would have seen when they were a Town. It will raise the \$235,000 needed for infrastructure projects (i.e. repair of fire hydrants, weed & vegetation management, road repairs, etc.) within the Hamlet of Granum. This does not include the major infrastructure projects that need to be undertaken in Granum – funding for these will be covered through the Municipal Sustainability Initiative Program, the Federal Gas Tax and the Alberta Community Resiliency Program.

In addition to the Provincial School Foundation Fund requisition, everyone will see a **new line for the Provincial Policing Tax**. Since the Government of Alberta made the decision to begin charging all Municipalities for policing costs which will increase from 10% of the costs to 30% over the next 5 years, the costs to the MD of Willow Creek will be \$139,653 in 2020 increasing to \$419,260 in 2024. The MD is merely the fund collector for the Province – it is not our tax. Unfortunately, we do not foresee any increased service for the additional cost.

**2020 Budget-** Council did not take an increase in their remuneration and decreased the amount for their Discretionary Funds (from \$35,000 to \$10,500 divided equally among 7 Councilors). We know it does not seem like a lot in the big scheme, however, Council wanted to set an example and is very much aware that tough times exist and will continue to exist everywhere while trying to maintain the essential services and continue to maintain funding for Libraries, FCSS, Transportation Societies, Fire Halls, Community Halls, emergency services, recreation, cemeteries, etc.

Council spent a very productive day on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> in Council chambers and came up with a Strategic Plan that will help guide Administration and Council in the next 5 years. Guiding principles and foundations for future success are: Community, Accountability, Economic Growth & Diversity, Municipal Infrastructure and Collaboration. Under each of these, strategic priorities were then identified.

Council has completed an ICF (Intermunicipal Collaborative Framework) agreement with each of the four towns within the MD. Now the work begins with a Committee composed of elected officials from

each of the partners – Nanton, Stavely, Claresholm, Fort Macleod and the MD to look at various of topics of collaboration. Initially it will be regional recreation.

We continue to strongly advocate for and defend agriculture in ongoing discussions on the IDPs (Intermunicipal Development Plans) with Claresholm and Fort Macleod. The April 1, 2020 deadline has been extended by the Government of Alberta to April 1, 2021.

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, Council passed a resolution to authorize, from their discretionary accounts, an immediate donation of \$2800 to HALO Air Ambulance and to examine creating a line item for annual contributions to HALO in future budget years. As many of you have probably seen and heard, HALO Air Ambulance in the SE part of our great Province is experiencing great financial difficulties due to the inability to fundraise during the pandemic to the point that it may cease to operate as of July 1<sup>st</sup> if adequate funding is not found. Although not often, residents of the MD of Willow Creek have used HALO when STARS was not available. The MD has budgeted \$10,000 to STARS annually for several years.

As you can see, even with COVID, your MD Council is still at work and more importantly, we are so grateful to our Administration and all the staff that keep the MD operating every day. Thank you to all of them.

Belated Happy Mother's Day to all Moms.

Happy Farmer's Day on June 12<sup>th</sup> – to many of us every day is Farmer's Day!!!

Happy Father's Day for June 21<sup>st</sup> to all the Dads.

Do not let the COVID get you down – Seeing the green grass after the good rain along with the emerging crops and then watching the calves play out with the cows, how can you not smile and then be optimistic about our rural way of life.

We live in a great part of the world- the MD of Willow Creek.

The Council of the Municipal District of Willow Creek