

## **Wetaskiwin City Council listens to residents, now faced with important decisions regarding proposed budgets**

For immediate release

February 7, 2013

WETASKIWIN, AB - Open and transparent. Understanding and sympathetic with regard to the concerns of residents.

Wetaskiwin City Council listened to what citizens had to say, and is now faced with some difficult decisions to make.

The 2013 and 2014 proposed budgets were front and centre during a public budget open house Monday, Feb. 4 at City Hall.

With nearly 100 residents packed into council chambers, Mayor Bill Elliot explained the intricate details of the proposed two-year budget.

“This is one of the toughest budgets of my career. This proposed budget illustrates how serious we are about achieving financial sustainability,” began Mayor Elliot in his address to residents, explaining how the proposed budgets came to fruition. “Through public meetings, open houses, surveys, Coffee with the Mayor, social media, and personal interaction we have heard your ideas. You want Wetaskiwin to move ahead and not be stagnant.”

Elliot then began the process of explaining the proposed budget details - a 9.4 per cent proposed tax increase for 2013 with another 7.2 per cent increase proposed for 2014 - and listening to the concerns of residents.

Questions from the floor showed the concern residents have for the tax increase, the state of the Public Library, which is slated for expansion, and the lack of developable industrial land.

Elliot explained that a portion of the tax increase could not be avoided.

“We started off the process knowing that there would be an increase of 3.1% in 2013 and another 1.4% in 2014 due to the opening of our new Aquatics facility. This was a decision we made late in 2011, which I supported then and still do today. Once open, the facility will be a great addition to our community. Another increased cost is related to the new financial system installed last year. While the system will bring in long-term savings, the initial five-year lease results in additional costs starting in 2013 of about \$60,000. This is a system which was approved by council in 2012, which impacts our 2013 budget,” stated Elliot to the crowd. “We also started off our budgeting process with some additional costs that are not within our control. The new provincial RCMP Contract has resulted in additional costs of \$205,000 in 2013 and another \$114,000 in 2014. Without reducing the number of officers, we have no ability to reduce these numbers. We received notice from the Local Authority’s Pension Plan that both the employee and employer contributions to their pension funds would increase. The cost to the City will be about \$40,000 in 2013 and about \$60,000 in 2014. And, Wetaskiwin Transit costs to the City have increased by \$35,000 in 2013 and another \$40,000 in 2014.”

Here are a few of the highlights of the proposed budget:

No increase in salary for members of Council; a 1 per cent Cost of Living adjustment for staff (Provincial statistics show that the average wage in Alberta increased by 3 per cent in 2012); funding for an Election in 2013 and a Census in 2014; an increase in funding for the Wetaskiwin Library of \$33,000 in 2013 and another \$77,000 in 2014; one additional maintenance person in the Community Service facilities area to assist with the arenas, drill hall, curling rink and aquatics facility; funding for operation of the new Aquatics center; a continuation of our Municipal Intern program with a second intern for 2013; and, funding for three emergency service radios in 2014, which will allow our emergency responders to communicate with the RCMP and other provincial services.

From a project standpoint, the proposed budgets call for increased funding for sidewalk replacement and roadway crack sealing in an effort to protect the roadway asset and to improve pedestrian safety, and a tree and landscaping replacement program for park and boulevard areas beginning in 2013.

The budgets call for approximately \$24,800,000 of capital projects over 2013 and 2014. Of this total only \$1,825,000 is funded by tax revenue. \$16,100,000 is funded by grants, and \$5,650,000 from reserves.

Here are some of the major capital projects to be completed:

Roadway construction on 55A St. from Centennial Dr. to Hawthorne Cres.; roadway paving on 50<sup>th</sup> St. from 40<sup>th</sup> Ave. to 47<sup>th</sup> Ave.; trail upgrading and paving at By-The-Lake Park; driving lane reconstruction on 40<sup>th</sup> Ave. from 49<sup>th</sup> St. to 56<sup>th</sup> St.; a landfill road upgrade, and the second phase of the Main Street Revitalization Project from 50<sup>th</sup> Ave. to 53<sup>rd</sup> Ave.

These projects are funded entirely by grants with the following exceptions:

The Landfill Road upgrade (required by our Landfill Development Agreement) is funded by the Landfill Reserve (Landfill tipping fees); the trail upgrading around By-The-Lake Park is funded 25 per cent by city tax revenue, and 75 per cent by grants. (the grants require a matching component. So if we don't spend our \$125,000, we will not be eligible for the full grant.); Main Street Phase 2. (Of the \$9,000,000 project cost, \$375,000 is funded from Utility Rates - because of the water and sewer component - and the remainder will be funded through grants.)

“This budget is necessary, and fiscally responsible. It provides the first steps towards increasing available funds for capital project work so that we are not 100 per cent reliant on grant funding,” summarized Mayor Elliot. “This budget maintains our existing levels of service in most areas, with modest improvements to the Library and recreation areas as well as road and sidewalk infrastructure preventative maintenance.

The 2013 and 2014 proposed budgets will be addressed at the next Wetaskiwin City Council meeting, slated for 4 p.m. Monday, Feb. 11 at council chambers. At that time, council could decide to pass the budget as is, approve amendments to the budgets, or go back to city departments and residents for further budget deliberations.

For further information, please contact Communications Coordinator Dale Cory at 780-361-4461, or email: [dcory@wetaskiwin.ca](mailto:dcory@wetaskiwin.ca).