

Background Notes from the Mayor's Desk - December 29, 2015

Happy New Year everyone. What were some of our community accomplishments in 2015 and what can we expect for 2016?

In 2015, as in every year, taxes were a concern for businesses and residents. After a projected 3.9% increase in taxes in the initial 2015 budget, Council was able to reduce the tax rate increase to 3.1% due to a budget surplus in 2014. There was a 2-year budget adopted for the first time in 2015 proposing a tax increase in 2016 of 1.9%. With the current economic climate, Council needs to reconsider ways to reduce 2016's projected tax increase. Beginning in 2017, we will be moving to a 3-year budget cycle.

10th Street was paved this Fall. 10th Street is the west boundary line between the Town and Mountain View County (MVC). There has been much discussion about cost sharing between both municipalities on this project, and this Spring MVC will be presenting a cheque for a portion of the project's surface costs. The Town originally had a 4-year plan to complete the project, but ended up doing the entire \$1.5 million project this year.

Council has spent considerable time working to talk with, and improve the relationship we have with MVC. They are our neighbours and we all need to spend a lot more time listening, and working toward solving common community concerns. To that end, we are negotiating new agreements to replace those that expire at the end of 2016. Both of our municipalities are committed to success in these negotiations that will guide multiple future Councils. We are also looking forward to putting the final agreements together that will see a contribution from MVC for the East Side Water and Waste Water oversize costs, prior to Summer of 2016.

Alberta Transportation (AT) completed the post flood "rip rap" Highway 27 bridge protection project this past Summer, and we are grateful. AT officials will be presenting some innovative options to improve safety concerns along Highway 27 through Sundre at a public meeting on February 4th at 6pm at the Sundre Legion. It's very important that everyone attend this presentation to ensure we see change to the roadway in the future.

Through 2015, Waste Commission Issues got sorted out; the old "County Shop" was demolished by MVC; the new Recycling Centre was moved and opened off the Bergen Road; "Welcomes You" was added to the "Sundre" entrance signs; a striking new Visitor Information Sign was installed at the VIC; and 2 more pocket playgrounds were rebuilt with incredible support from volunteers which kept them way under budget. There was also a great show of public support for the Aquaplex in June. Council was pleased to contribute an additional \$76,000 over and above the allocated budget, to assist the Aquaplex Board with a Facility Audit, Financial Review and funding to address a deficit. The Board, through incredible volunteer dedication, continues to run a wonderfully efficient community facility. And this summer, volunteers of the Sundre Bike and Ski Club also constructed a new trail on Snake Hill. These are only a few of the projects completed in 2015.

In 2016, we can expect the new Seniors Housing and Care Facility to open in June. There is a need for a community discussion about "repurposing" Foothills Lodge once residents move in to their new building. "Broadband" will be a very important topic of discussion this year. You will hear much about our Waste Water Capacity and water quality issues and I advise everyone to begin serious water conservation plans in preparation for our peak wastewater capacity months of May and June. Curbside recycling bins are coming to residences - for free :) We must continue to push the Province to address flood mitigation and river issues. Council and staff need to continue to improve the "service" part of public service.

Our new Provincial and Federal Governments will be expecting all municipalities to be more environmentally aware and sustainable, to reduce our carbon footprint and to take steps to use more renewable energy, rather than depend on "coal fired" electricity. We have some challenges, like every year, and we will meet and exceed them. That is who we are. Again, Happy New Year everyone :)

Mayor Terry Leslie