



Ponoka Town Council Approves 2019 Capital and Operating Budgets

Budget Balances Need to Keep Tax Increase Low While Investing in Infrastructure and Growth

(May 17, 2019 – Ponoka, Alberta) – Following a lengthy and thoughtful budget deliberation process, Ponoka Town Council has approved the 2019 Capital and Operating Budgets. The total amount of the 2019 Budget is \$25,524,319, which includes an Operating Budget of \$18,605,124 and a Capital Budget of \$6,919,195. The 2019 Budget contains a municipal property tax increase of \$17 per \$100,000 of residential property assessment, and \$22 per \$100,000 of commercial property assessment, which is equivalent to a 2.2 per cent residential property tax increase.

“This is a responsible budget that balances the need to continue carefully managing our spending and keep taxes as low as possible, while continuing to focus on growth, invest in key infrastructure, and maintain existing service levels for the many essential services our citizens rely on every day,” says Ponoka Mayor Rick Bonnett. He notes that Council successfully held the residential property tax increase to approximately the rate of inflation. “It’s a budget that recognizes our economy is still struggling. However, once the economy finally turns the corner, this budget also positions the Town for growth,” he says.

A new Community Wellness Centre, which would be developed in phases beginning with a new fieldhouse, continues to be a key priority for future growth in Ponoka, says Mayor Bonnett. “New recreation facilities such as fieldhouses deliver proven economic benefits to communities such as attracting new residents and businesses, and in turn, help to increase property values and tax revenue. They’re vital economic drivers,” says Mayor Bonnett. The 2019 Budget allocates \$100,000 to a new fieldhouse, funds which would be used for any studies, design or strategy work needed to continue moving forward with the project.

Infrastructure Renewal

The 2019 Budget offers a solid infrastructure renewal program that focuses on priority projects most in need of repair or replacement, says Town of Ponoka Chief Administrative Officer Albert Frootman. “The Town is committed to maintaining and replacing key infrastructure each year as determined by our Asset Management Plan,” says Frootman. He notes the vast majority of capital and infrastructure projects are once again funded through provincial and federal grant funding. Infrastructure projects planned for 2019 include:

- **Replacement of the underground infrastructure on 52 Avenue** between 50 and 51 Street which will include new water, sewer and storm lines as well as new service connections to each property. The project also includes new sidewalks, curb, gutter and a new paved roadway in 2020 once the road base has had adequate time to settle, in keeping with best engineering practices for roadway construction.
- **Roadway rehabilitation and repairs on 64 Street** at the south end of the Froman Business Park between 42 and 44 Avenue.
- **Road maintenance on 54 Street** north of the high school between 62 and 63 Avenue.
- **Concrete replacement and paving repairs on numerous streets** throughout Ponoka as part of the Town’s annual Concrete Replacement and Paving Program.



Replenishing Reserves

The 2019 Budget is intentional about replenishing reserves to ensure the Town continues to have financial strength to keep its assets and infrastructure in good condition through future capital replacements, says Frootman. The budget transfers \$42,100 to the Contingency Reserve, replenishing half of the 2017 reserve transfer that was used to offset 2017 property taxes. The budget also transfers \$229,000 to a Water Utility Reserve for future capital requirements. Council voted at its May 14 meeting to also transfer \$437,000 in surplus funds from the 2017 Operating Budget to the General Benefit Reserve.

Other important budgeting decisions in the 2019 Budget include:

- **Increased Service Level for Waste Management** – The 2019 Budget increases the level of service provided through the Town’s Waste Management Program with the addition of a new curbside compost program for kitchen food waste which launched in January 2019 at no extra cost to residents.
- **Trail Improvements** – The budget allocates \$150,000 in Federal Gas Tax grant funding to Trail Improvements. Through its Transportation Master Plan, the Town is looking at completing trail connections where missing links currently exist in the Town’s trail system.
- **Economic Development** – The budget allocates funding to create an Economic Development Strategy to identify initiatives that will fuel growth and development in Ponoka.
- **Downtown Development** – The budget allocates funding to continue working with community partners to develop a one-acre park on the old hospital site at the north end of 50 Street, and a conceptual plan for a civic plaza on the old Town Hall site.
- **Staffing Levels** – The budget holds the line on staffing as the Town continues to focus on utilizing existing resources as effectively and efficiently as possible.

2019 Budget Aligns with Public Consultation Results

The 2019 Budget aligns with the results of the Town’s annual public consultation process which once again included a public open house and annual Citizen Budget Survey. The top three priorities that the 122 individuals who completed the survey wanted Town Council to consider in the 2019 Budget were the maintenance and construction of new infrastructure; economic development and business growth; and finding spending efficiencies to keep taxes low. “Council took the survey results into consideration and addressed all of those priorities in the 2019 Budget,” says Mayor Bonnett. The 2019 Budget will be posted on the Town website at www.ponoka.ca.

“As Town Administration begins implementing the 2019 Budget, we will continue focusing on our rigorous commitment to careful and deliberate spending, and strong financial stewardship,” says Frootman.

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