



Town Council Approves 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets

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

(May 3, 2021 – Ponoka, Alberta) – Ponoka Town Council approved the 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets at its regular meeting last week. The total amount of the 2021 Budget is \$26,598,270, which includes an Operating Budget of \$19,408,070 and a Capital Budget of \$7,190,200.

“This is a fiscally responsible budget that recognizes our economy is still struggling. It balances the Town’s and Council’s commitment to continue carefully managing spending and keeping taxes as low as possible with the need for a very minimal tax increase to cover the cost of inflation this year while continuing to focus on growth, investing in key infrastructure, and maintaining the many essential services our citizens rely on,” said Ponoka Mayor Rick Bonnett. “It aligns very well with Council’s strategic priorities for economic growth and enhanced quality of life for our citizens, and it positions our community to grow and thrive into the future,” he added.

Council to Consider Third Reading of Tax Rate Bylaw on May 11

After incorporating current property value assessments for residential and commercial properties in Ponoka, the proposed municipal portion of property taxes for 2021 equates to an increase of about \$11 per \$100,000 of assessment for residential properties, and \$15 per \$100,000 of assessment for commercial properties. That is equivalent to a 1.2 per cent increase in municipal property tax revenue for 2021, although not all residents would see an increase on their property tax bill. Depending on individual property value assessments, some residents may see a slight decrease, a slight increase or almost no change at all. Overall, residential property assessment increased by \$2.5 million while non-residential assessment decreased by \$2.8 million for an overall decrease of \$0.3 million in 2021 taxable assessment.

Town Council approved two readings of the Tax Rate Bylaw last week to set municipal property tax rates for 2021 based on the proposed rates listed above. Council will consider the third and final reading of the Bylaw at its May 11 regular meeting at 7 p.m.

Future Grant Funding Uncertain

With provincial grant funding being cut by 25 per cent over the next three years and the current Municipal Sustainability Initiative grant program ending in three years with no clear replacement in sight, the future of provincial grant funding to municipalities is uncertain,” said Town of Ponoka Chief Administrative Officer Sandra Lund, adding, “That is why any anticipated surplus left over from the 2020 Town Budget is expected to be transferred to reserves to help cover future infrastructure replacement and maintenance costs so that we can continue to maintain our infrastructure and facilities despite having reduced grant funding to rely on.”

Infrastructure Renewal

The 2021 Budget once again includes a solid infrastructure renewal program. “The Town is committed to maintaining and replacing key infrastructure each year as determined by our Asset Management Plan,” said Lund, noting the majority of capital and infrastructure projects are funded through provincial and federal grant funding. Capital and infrastructure projects planned for 2021 include:

- **Redevelopment of 51 Avenue** between 50 and 51 Street, including redevelopment of underground and surface infrastructure and streetscape design;



- **Paving and concrete replacement and repairs on numerous streets** throughout Ponoka as part of the Town's annual Roadway Infrastructure Improvement Program;
- **Roadway and drainage rehabilitation and improvements on 64 Street** at the south end of the Froman Business Park between 42 and 44 Avenue, completing a three-year project that includes underground and surface improvements;
- **Maintenance Improvements to the Arena and Aquaplex** which include a new ice plant at the Arena Complex; a new HVAC unit and resurfacing of the pool deck and wading pool at the Aquaplex; and façade improvements to the Arena and Aquaplex which include exterior cladding, painting, landscaping, and pedestrian walkways;
- **Trail improvements and wayfinding signage** that will include a new paved walking trail along 50 St. and Highway 53 which directly connects the pedestrian bridge located across from the Battle River Medical Clinic to the Ponoka Arena Complex;
- **Park design improvements** at Lions Centennial Park and design improvements for an expanded skate board park and pump track. Construction would occur in the future as determined through the establishment of capital priorities;
- **Completion of a comprehensive site master plan for a Community Wellness Centre** on the existing Arena land. A Community Wellness Centre continues to be a key Town Council priority for future community growth. The master plan will determine the overall phasing of the project; building locations; utility servicing and site improvements such as parking, vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation; storm water management and landscaping;
- **Waterworks and electrical maintenance improvements**, including equipment rehabilitation at Town pump stations and reservoirs, ongoing sanitary sewer system maintenance, and planning and analysis for future improvements to the Town's Sewage Treatment Plant.

The 2021 Budget includes \$376,500 in funding from the Municipal Operating Support Transfer (MOST), a provincial grant that reimbursed municipalities for lost revenue and increased costs related to COVID-19 until March 31, 2021. The Budget also includes a \$92,090 transfer from the General Benefit Reserve to offset continuing COVID-related costs.

2021 Budget Aligns with Public Consultation Results

The 2021 Budget aligns with the results of the Town's annual public consultation process which once again included an annual Citizen Budget Survey. The top priorities that the 42 individuals who completed the survey wanted Town Council to consider in the 2021 Budget were: new or improved recreation or sports facilities such as improvements to the Town's skate park; improving and maintaining Town infrastructure; economic development and growth; and fiscal responsibility. "Council took the survey results into consideration and addressed all of those priorities in the 2021 Budget through the many capital projects planned for 2021," said Mayor Bonnett.

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