

Innisfail Town Council approves forward-thinking budget for 2020 and beyond

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On Monday, December 9, 2019, Innisfail Town Council approved the Town's 2020 operating and capital budgets. This year's overall budget sees the Town moving forward with an aggressive infrastructure improvement plan while maintaining the level of services residents have come to expect. This has been achieved through tremendous fiscal responsibility on town council's part. Council passed the operating budget of \$21,994,784, capital budget of \$4,559,494, and a contingency of \$88,240 without an increase in the property tax rate. A marginal increase to water and wastewater rates was included to cover delivery costs and build reserves.

Budget Highlights

The current economic conditions in the province prescribe that Albertans will have to do more with less. The Town of Innisfail, in its 2020 operating and capital budgets, has taken this into consideration and has made adjustments which reflect a need for continued growth and improvement while preparing for further financial challenges. All in all, the numbers reflect a positive approach toward maintaining and growing core services while ensuring a safe and vibrant community, as outlined in the *2018-2021 Town of Innisfail Strategic Plan*.

The Town's financial condition remains strong and risk averse and the municipality is in the enviable position of being able to offer consistent and stable taxes, maintain a healthy level of reserves, and carry relatively no financial debt.

In November, council accepted the recommendation of the **Council Remuneration Review Committee** and agreed to a zero increase in both pay and cost of living allowance. This again reflects council's awareness of the current economic realities facing many town residents.

Council has received notice from the provincial government of the adoption of the **Well-Being and Resiliency** framework, which requires the community to redesign its approach to children, youth, and family services. Council has acknowledged the need to enhance youth engagement in the community and will emphasize development of the youth engagement strategic priority as identified in the *2018-2021 Town of Innisfail Strategic Plan*.

Property Taxes

Council held the property tax rate with no increase, meaning citizens for the most part will see little to no change on their property tax bills (although changes in assessment values may account for increases, or even decreases in isolated cases). Once final assessment numbers are known and provincial school requisitions have been received, the tax rate bylaw will come to council for approval in the spring.

Utility Rates

Innisfail has relatively low water rates compared with many other communities in central Alberta. To continue to provide a safe water supply to residents and businesses, and to build reserves for future infrastructure replacement projects, water rates will increase this year from \$2.30 per cubic metre to \$2.50 per cubic metre. Included in this is a \$.05 increase in the rate charged to the Town by the **Mountain View Regional Water Commission**. For most households, this total increase will mean an average of an additional \$2.00 on the water portion of an average monthly utility bill. Council has held the water flat rate at \$10.00 per metered site.

Wastewater (sewer) rates will increase from \$3.15 per cubic metre to \$3.20 per cubic metre. This \$.05 increase reflects an increase in rates charged by the **South Red Deer Regional Wastewater Commission**. The wastewater flat rate will also remain the same at \$10.00 per metered site.

The move to automation in 2019 has allowed for more efficient household solid waste removal and the Town will continue to encourage residents to utilize the new system more efficiently and effectively with the goal of reducing the town's overall waste (measured in tonnes). Household solid waste basic rates will remain the same at \$23.00 per month per site.

Council will be presented with a proposed amendment to the utility bylaw to include a storm sewer flat rate, with the possibility for introduction in 2020. The intent of this stormwater funding program is to establish a fair and dedicated funding mechanism to replace aging stormwater infrastructure.

2020 Capital Projects

Key projects were identified as priorities in the upcoming year, and grant money was available for many of these even though the overall amount of funding available decreased. Despite this challenge, council has managed to move many of these projects forward. Among those slated for completion in 2020 are:

- **surface improvements to 61 Avenue**
- **repairs to 53 Avenue Close and 38 Street**
- **trail replacement at 52 Avenue**
- **purchase of a new gravel truck**
- **gateway landscaping improvements**
- **upgrades to the Innisfail Arena**
- **improvements to the Innisfail Aquatic Centre**

"Given the tough economic circumstances, this truly is a good-news budget. We've all heard of cutbacks and tough economic times, and Innisfail is not immune to such external influences. But make no mistake, the Town of Innisfail is not standing still. In fact, quite the opposite. We've managed to lay out a busy and productive year — and in the absence of raising taxes. We've been able to achieve this thanks to some solid fiscal management by the Town in recent years, and some savvy — and at times very difficult decision making — in the process. Innisfail, as a result of this budget, remains well positioned to achieve the prosperity outlined by council's strategic plan, and we look forward to yet another strong and successful year."

— Mayor Jim Romane

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