

The 2020 Interim Budget reflects Council's commitment to building economic resiliency and delivering quality services to residents

December 3, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: During a Special Meeting of Council held on December 3, 2019, Town Council approved an Interim Budget for 2020 that continues to focus on strengthening and building resilience in the local economy, providing enhanced levels of services to residents while exercising strong fiscal management of Town resources and tax dollars.

Town Council is pursuing innovative concepts and strategies to diversify the economic landscape in order to create an environment and opportunities for business attraction, incubation and investment. Working closely with Drayton Valley's business community as well as provincial and federal representatives, Town Council continues to advocate for initiatives that result in stable long-term economic growth. Strides have been made on various projects that achieve these goals including education and developments in the hemp and cannabis industry.

In February 2019, Town Council launched the Zero Fee Tuition pilot program. This innovative concept aims to boost the economy in Drayton Valley through the establishment of a college community which will leading to increases in market demand for housing and other social amenities. Providing opportunities in education by removing barriers that prevent students from attaining a post-secondary education allows students and mature learners to remain in the community and attracts students from the surrounding areas and provinces. Making Drayton Valley a choice community for education and encouraging families to relocate and individuals to remain in the area will help bolster the community and will see the future growth of the town. Town Council is thrilled to announced that courses are set to begin in January 2020 in the Business Administration and Health Care Aide programs at the Clean Energy Technology Centre (CETC). With a successful uptake in registration for the winter semester, preparations are already underway to set programming for the fall of 2020.

Following the legalization of cannabis in 2018, Drayton Valley has welcomed two cannabis retail stores into the business community. In 2019 Noble Growth Inc. began the process of retrofitting an existing building that once supported the energy sector and adapting its function to allow for the cultivation and production of pharmaceutical grade cannabis. Town Council is excited to see local entrepreneurs take advantage of a new commercial opportunity which will help diversify the local economy and provide stability in the community. Mayor Doerksen welcomed Noble's ingenuity and added that "The Town is open for business and we welcome new industries to take root in Drayton Valley." In October and November of 2019, multiple international delegates, as well as investors from British Columbia have visited Drayton Valley with an interest in establishing a full-scale business park dedicated to hemp innovation and cannabis production and training. Creating diversity, encouraging development and promoting a business-friendly environment will, in turn, set Drayton Valley up as an economic hub in the province, resulting in job creation and attracting families and new-comers to the community.

Managing the infrastructure needs of the community while considering significant capital projects that enhance quality of life for residents, Town Council, at each fiscal year, continues to allocate funding towards the development of a new aquatic facility. Weighing this vital investment in the community along with other capital infrastructure demands and requirements, Town Council has estimated that the proposed construction of the aquatic facility could proceed as early as spring 2021, subject to the receipt of grant funding.

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Through the development of a prioritized capital plan, funding has been allocated towards the necessary improvements and rehabilitation of Town assets. Investing in and maintaining Town owned facilities and infrastructure not only supports the current demands but prepares for anticipated growth in the community. As part of the 2020 Interim Budget, resources have been allocated to the development of a new aquatic facility, the sustainable operation of the landfill, infrastructure upgrades including the rehabilitation of the Ring Road and the extension of the trail system and improvements and upgrades to the RV Park. Following a challenging construction season in 2019, work will continue in 2020 to complete capital projects identified as part of the 2019 Budget including the south sanitary trunk twinning as well as improvements to 62 Street. Major capital projects will be, in part, funded through grants received from the province as well as the federal government. The impact of the United Conservative Party's cutbacks in spending for 2019-2020 by 2.8% brings about a transformative approach as to how the Town must adjust and realign its own budget and capital project initiatives.

At the direction of Town Council, Administration reviewed the budget from an operation and capital perspective and identified areas of efficiencies and cost savings. These efforts have resulted in nearly \$600,000 in operational savings for the Town. A thorough review of the budget on an annual basis ensures the sustainable operation of the Town and effective fiscal management of tax dollars.

In 2019 Town Council approved a ten percent relief in municipal taxes for both residential and commercial property owners as the community continued to feel the effects of the economic downturn. Looking to the future, the 2020 Interim Budget reflects Town Council's commitment to strong fiscal management with tax dollars being allocated to projects that build and diversify the local economy, improve infrastructure and provide sustainable services and recreational opportunities. A proposed 5% decrease relative to 2018 taxation levels will allow Town Council to build a resilient economy and ensure the appropriate capital is in place to undertake a prioritized investment plan for Drayton Valley. The final decision will be made in the spring following a review of the provincial budget, Brazeau Foundation's requisition, the Alberta School Foundation Fund requisition, which account for thirty three percent of property taxes, as well as the establishment of Brazeau County's tax rates.

"These are challenging yet exciting times for Drayton Valley," commented Mayor Michael Doerksen, "opportunities in new industries and Council's dedication to diversifying our economy are laying the foundation for a community to bounce back and become sustainable."

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