

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 5, 2021**

## **Town Council passes Final Budget during a Special Meeting of Council**

Town Council passed the 2021 Final Budget during a Special Meeting of Council on May 5, 2021. Following a thorough and comprehensive review of capital projects and operational expenses, Town Council's priorities will focus on core service delivery, upgrading outdoor recreation amenities and initiatives that encourage economic growth and support the business community while continuing to hold taxation at 0%. 2021 will be approached as a planning year following a busy construction season in 2020 that saw the completion of a number of high priority projects in the community.

Town Council remains sensitive to the limited financial capacity of many homeowners and businesses and is committed to reducing financial pressures through these challenging times. For the fourth year in a row, Town Council has directed Administration to adjust the budget to allow for a zero percent increase in municipal taxes for 2021 which still carries a 10% reduction from previous years. Over the last few years, Town Council shifted to a cost recovery model for the delivery of water services and waste collection, these operational improvements reduced the financial burden on taxpayers and ensures that services are funded through more equitable and sustainable means. Further, Administration rescheduled non-critical capital projects to be completed in the coming years.

Town Council continues to invest in the future and resiliency of the community through strategies that encourage growth and diversify the local economy while supporting existing industries through provincial and federal advocacy efforts. Updates to Bylaws and streamlined processes are creating a business-friendly environment, attracting business and development, increasing job availability, and creating stability in the local economy. The Town acted quickly to establish simple guidelines that would allow for outdoor patio dining following changes in provincial COVID regulations; Town Council also waived permit fees in an effort to cut red tape and speed up the process. Resources have been dedicated to setting up a robust asset management system that will enable Council to budget for large projects and schedule maintenance or replacement of infrastructure and equipment, improving planning and preparing for necessary upgrades that keep town operations running smoothly. The Town of Drayton Valley and Town Council were instrumental in coordinating the establishment of the Alberta Hemp Alliance, a non-profit association dedicated to the development of a sustainable and diverse economy in Alberta. Town Council also supported a local project to obtain specialized equipment that will position Drayton Valley as a critical component in Canada's hemp supply chain. Building on the momentum and successes achieved in education in the last year, the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension will be undertaking a two-year research project, supported by a \$659,174 federal grant, that will examine the impact the zero-fee concept has in Drayton Valley. Making education accessible allows for the reskilling and development of the local workforce which will attract families and students to the area and promote economic growth in the community.

Retaining or improving core service delivery and seasonal maintenance will be a key focus in 2021. As approved by Council in 2020, old equipment was replaced with new, dual purpose machines that were safer and also reduced down time and repair costs. Council also approved the purchase of an asphalt hotbox trailer in 2021 allowing public works crews to complete minor road repairs in house and extend the life of the repair. Maintenance schedules were reviewed, and adjustments will be made wherever possible to improve road conditions and ensure parks and greenspaces are well maintained for the enjoyment of our residents and families.

Although capital spending was reduced for 2021, many important community projects are still going ahead. Pedestrian bridges are being replaced, Watino and MacKenzie Parks are receiving upgraded playground equipment, a mosquito ball diamond is being added at Lion's West Valley Park, new boards are being installed at the outdoor rink, the basketball area at Discovery Park will see some upgrades, a columbarium is being installed at the cemetery, yearly maintenance for roads, sidewalks and trails will also continue this year. Town Council has prioritized upgrades to parks and outdoor recreation spaces as they provide an outlet for families and youth to enjoy during the warmer months and while current provincial regulations remain in place. Recently, Town Council supported a local initiative to install a disc golf course in Ivan To Park, making it the second course in the Drayton Valley area and expanding a growing list of outdoor recreation options.

Extending the life of the landfill and also planning for the community's future needs at the site has been a priority of Town Council for a number of years. This important asset services the Town of Drayton Valley as well as the communities in the surrounding area. Collecting the appropriate revenues ensures that money is available for the responsible management of the landfill including expansion and closure costs. In the near future, the development of an additional cell will be required as well as closure costs on the current cell. Legislated by the Provincial Government, post closure costs are additional fees for the mandatory maintenance and monitoring of the cell for a minimum of 25 years after the cell has been closed. Considering the long-term operational needs of the landfill, fees for out-of-town users, including residential and commercial haulers will be increasing by 20%. This will build reserves for anticipated growth and future landfill requirements.

Directed by Council during its first year in office, Administration pursued grants to fund capital projects allowing tax dollars to be reallocated to support other community initiatives. As first announced in 2020, the Town received funding through the federal governments Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) grant that will fund two major projects that are set to begin in 2021. \$1.7 million was received that will fund 73% of the required rehabilitation of the wastewater lagoon. Construction of the Aquatic Facility is proceeding following the approval of a \$7.5 million grant. This, coupled with the Town's commitment of \$5 million and Brazeau County's contribution of \$5 million allowed the project to move forward with preparations on the building site already underway. Investing in amenities of this scale ensures that Town infrastructure is modernized and working efficiently while large recreation facilities will attract visitors and families to the area and make Drayton Valley an attractive community to live, work and invest.

*"As Council comes to the end of a four-year term, I can't help but reflect on all that we've achieved during this time to support the community and build a foundation for Drayton Valley's future", stated Mayor Michael Doerksen. "Our list of accomplishments over the last four years is a long one, and one that I'm personally very proud of. Council's dedication and forward thinking has set us apart and allowed us to lead in a world that finds itself at a standstill. We have prioritized the safety of our community by adding two additional RCMP members to our detachment and spent tax dollars on major infrastructure projects, increased seasonal services and upgraded our playgrounds and parks and added new recreation facilities."*

*“Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of this Council is securing the funding necessary to move forward with the construction of the Aquatic Facility. This would not have been possible without Council’s financial commitment and working with our municipal neighbours as well as our provincial and federal representatives. Investing in large recreation facilities is essential to building a sense of community and creating a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. Amenities of this scale are important for a few reasons, not only because they draw families, events, businesses and employees to the area, but also because recreation contributes to the healthy development in children and promotes a healthy lifestyle for adults; we are investing in ourselves and taking pride in the community in which we live.”*

*“In addition to the Aquatic Facility, several important infrastructure projects have been undertaken and completed in the last four years that support the anticipated growth and development of our community. Major upgrades to the high lift pump station and twinning the south sanitary trunk line were completed to support the efficient operation of the Water Treatment Plant and the delivery of water services in our community, we also allocated funds for the rehabilitation of the Ring Road, the extension of the walking trails, upgrades to 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, the UFA road and 62<sup>nd</sup> Street. New playground equipment was installed in our parks, a walking trail was added around Sunrise Pond, and a new Pump Track was built, the largest paved track in Canada.”*

*“Another important priority for Council over the last four years was supporting the business community as the economy has been slow to recover. Since being elected, this Council committed to keeping taxes low and even reduced taxes by 10% and managed to continue operations, without impacting service levels. As the events of the last year began to unfold, it became clear to us that more was needed, and we allocated an additional \$2 million from reserves to fund additional projects using local businesses to help create work and keep people employed through what was arguably the most challenging year we have faced in recent memory. Further to this, the Town applied for additional provincial funding for shovel-ready projects that would help get our community back to work and refunded annual business license fees for 2020.”*

*“Improving service delivery has always been a high priority for Council over the course of our term, and every year we instructed Administration to find where efficiencies could be created, and how tax dollars could be best utilized. Resources for seasonal maintenance, including personnel and funding, was increased to ensure a high level of service was being provided to residents, and recycling collection was increased to further improve service delivery. A Recreation Fee Assistance Program was implemented in 2020 to improve recreation access for all residents and ensuring everyone has a chance to participate in our diverse recreational opportunities.”*

*“2020 presented many challenges to Drayton Valley, but also presented an opportunity to reflect on where we can improve and afforded us the chance to demonstrate yet again how resilient our community is. Over the last year, Town Council made a firm commitment to support the community through changes to the 2020 budget, and this commitment will continue into 2021. Priorities will remain on core service delivery, initiatives that encourage economic growth and projects that set Drayton Valley up for future success.”*

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