

Mayor's Column
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I've heard it said that this is Moose Jaw's decade where we will see growth and development of a magnitude that we haven't seen in years. Construction activity in housing and business is already evident across the city and with considerable investment and major projects already announced in and around Moose Jaw, we clearly have the opportunity to make this statement a reality. This is an exciting time to be a resident of Moose Jaw and an exciting time to be involved in our municipal government.

The challenge for the city is to be prepared for the coming activity with good planning along with options for development. While it may sound fairly straightforward, it includes a broad array of initiatives. Options for development, good planning for services, infrastructure, housing, environmental impact and recreational activities that go along with development supporting residents and sustainable growth are needed. These are just part of the considerations when developing the City of Moose Jaw's budget, along with direction provided in the City's Strategic Plan. This year's budget builds on those initiatives.

While there is an increase in some areas of city revenues this year, from assessment growth and an increase of the provincial Municipal Operating Grant revenue sharing, those increases are offset by a slight reduction in the municipal surcharge on natural gas.

While infrastructure replacement and renewal is ongoing, we need to be planning long term. To accommodate the longer term planning, the budget contains a proposal to move \$300,000 into an infrastructure deficit reserve fund to prepare for federal and provincial government infrastructure programs expected in the next two years that require matching funding. Council, in its deliberations, felt the resources were better spent now to address growing needs in the City's infrastructure. Long term planning will continue and any expenditure to match senior government programs will be dealt with when programs are announced.

This budget also contains a number of initiatives to improve services to the citizens of Moose Jaw, centralize customer information and an ongoing review to update bylaws and improve communications. Increased access to recreational programs and arenas fits into the strategic priority of community wellness and supports a goal of increased physical activity. Internal reviews will be done on the city's tendering policy along with continued Safe Workplace initiatives, proactive building maintenance and a number of continuous improvement projects to streamline and update processes used by the city.

Major initiatives providing continuing supports in the budget include the Green Plan with a focus on curbside recycling, alternative energy, composting and disposal of toxic chemicals. The Neighbourhood Renewal Plan which includes reviews of the City's Transit and Special Needs Transit Plans, and the Utilities Master Plan will lay out the long term plan for rebuilding and replacing our aging infrastructure both above and below ground.

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Mayor