



## **City Council News** January 16, 2019

### **Have your say on the City's budget**

Municipal and Regional District governments all over the province are now in the throes of developing their annual budgets. While the main focus of these exercises is on the current fiscal year, these budget deliberations also examine and develop a five-year financial plan for both capital and operating expenses.

Of course, you can't have expenses without identifying where the money is going to come from to pay for them, and, for local governments, that means determining the taxation levels needed to fund any planned capital expenditures (e.g. new or rebuilt roads and sidewalks, major sewer and water system upgrades, major equipment purchases, etc.) and to maintain or improve quality services and programs (police, fire, waste management, snow removal, development services, road and sidewalk maintenance, parks and playground maintenance, etc.).

So, local government budgets are a balancing act: elected boards and Councils must balance citizen's expectations for quality core infrastructure and public services and programs against property ratepayer's willingness to pay more taxes. Unfortunately, in general, people have very high demands and expectations and a very low tolerance for taxes of any kind.

This year, Quesnel City Council's job of developing a prudent budget that results in the lowest tax increase possible for property owners is compounded by the need to include the tax increase for the new Public Works Facility that was approved by the vast majority of the electorate in the last election. This long overdue and absolutely necessary initiative will result in an increase of 3.14% in taxation alone (or about \$15.50 per \$100,000 assessed value for residential ratepayers).

Council develops the City's budget through a rigorous process that is led by the Financial Sustainability and Audit Committee (FSAC). This Committee works with staff to first develop a capital budget (the bulk of which is generally funded from reserves and, sometimes, from provincial and federal grants) before turning its attention to the operating budget. All budget recommendations by FSAC must be deliberated and approved by Council in open public meetings -- only Council can approve the final budget. The work of FSAC is also, with very few exceptions, done in full public view, as the Committees' schedule, agendas, and minutes are all published on the City's website.

As FSAC deliberates on the budget over the coming months, we need your guidance and input. Unfortunately, we don't often get much feedback from the public during our budget deliberation process, regardless of the form of engagement we've tried. But, last year, we tried, for the first time, an online budget survey and had more uptake

from this form of public engagement than any of the others we've tried in the past.

The online survey for this year's budget is now available on the City's website and I hope you will take the time to engage in our budget deliberations using this survey. Please read the introductory material provided in the survey carefully and keep it in mind as you answer the survey questions and make additional comments. Last year, we found that most of the commentary provided was related to provincial and federal programs and investments (e.g. bypass, schools, hospitals, childcare, health care, etc.) rather than local government infrastructure and programs. While that feedback is helpful in framing our dialogue with these higher levels of government, it doesn't directly assist Council to develop the City's budget.

Please, take the time to have your say on this year's budget by filling in our online survey. It's your City and your budget!

Take the survey here: [www.quesnel.ca/budget](http://www.quesnel.ca/budget)

Mayor Bob Simpson