

Provincial budget will impact planned local projects ...

Continued from front

In December, then premier Rachel Notley pledged to build an interchange on Hwy. 43X, with Ryan Konowalyk, Alberta Transportation regional director, estimating \$40 to \$55 million would be needed.

The Hwy. 43X interchange and Hwy. 40 twinning aren't mentioned in the fiscal plan, but \$597 million is pledged over four years to "highway twinning, widening and expansion" throughout Alberta.

Toews said while the Hwy. 43 interchange or overpass "will not be happening this year," he recently gave Ric McIvor, transportation minister, a tour of the region.

Toews attempted to impress upon McIvor the importance of the local highway projects, and said he was convinced McIvor appreciated the need.

MSI funding 'stable' for now, law enforcement dollars provided

Total MSI funding is \$641 million (from \$668 million in 2018-19, according to the 2018 fiscal plan).

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) released a statement in response, arguing while MSI is "stable" this year it will be reduced in subsequent years.

"While the province reduces its budget by 2.8 per cent over the next four years, it has proposed reducing our infrastructure funding by almost 10 times that amount," said Barry Morishita, AUMA president.

"Despite a lack of consultation from the government on a new municipal funding framework, AUMA will continue to advocate for a framework that supports the province's financial goals while also meeting the needs and responsibilities of our communities."

"We ... expected the drop in MSI funding," said Sexsmith mayor Kate Potter.

Potter said municipal leaders have concerns about the government's new MSI formula.

"I think the reality is that we need to be very wise with spending in the coming years so that we can keep our tax increases to a minimum and still maintain our infrastructure," she said.

"It is going to take a lot of work from our council and administration to decide which projects get done when.

"We are moving into budget meetings this month, so I anticipate strong discussion."

The provincial budget highlights also promise "up to \$50 million increase for law enforcement over four years."

Potter said Sexsmith is interested in enhanced policing and council was waiting to see if provincial funding would be available.

"We were glad to see increased funding for policing, (and) it will take a bit of time to see what that looks like on the local level," she said.

"With the police funding model not settled yet, we hope that there will be an increase in boots on the ground and the ability to give local direction (and) perspective once that is released."

County grants larger budget for continuing regional rec master plan

By Brad Quarin
Town & Country News

County of Grande Prairie council voted last week to renew its contract under the Grande Prairie Area Joint Recreation Master Plan for 2020, said Christine Rawlins, county parks and recreation manager.

The cost to the county is \$23,707, with the county, city, Beaverlodge, Wembley, Sexsmith, Hythe and Greenview sharing a \$76,000 budget.

"It's been a very positive exercise with this Regional Recreation Committee," Rawlins said.

"Without (the committee), the county would not see any outcomes from the master plan, because we wouldn't have the manpower to implement it ourselves."

The master plan was adopted in fall 2016, initiated by the city and county, and the Regional Recreation Committee was created to apply the plan to satisfy local recreational needs.

Rawlins said the committee has an application process where a group can submit a project that could potentially meet recreational needs.

If the committee decides the entire region can benefit from a project, the committee will review it and decide if the member municipalities will support it, she said.

She said the committee has had some positive impacts so far, including bringing together ice managers from across the region to "increase utilization of existing facilities."

Specifically, Rawlins said the ice managers and committee put information on www.gprcc.ca for different user groups to consult where ice is available for booking.

The committee is also meeting quarterly with elected officials and has generated a lot of dialogue about each municipality's rec initiatives, she said.

Among the master plan recommendations the committee is concerned with is creating "a new conversation around regional cost sharing."

Other recommendations are for municipalities to bolster volunteerism, remove financial and transportation barriers to participation and to co-ordinate marketing.

According to information administration supplied to county council, the shared budget of \$76,000 is an increase from \$51,000 in 2018 and 2019.

Rawlins said the regional recreation co-ordinator (Krista Schuett) will be working three-quarters of full-time hours, whereas in past years it was a half-time position, accounting for the increase.

The co-ordinator is expected to have full-time hours in the committee's fourth and fifth years, resulting in a budget of \$101,000.

After the fifth year staffing for one full-time position (the co-ordinator) and one half-time position may be needed, for a budget of \$138,000, Rawlins said.

The county's share of \$23,707 is up from \$15,909 in past years.

According to information administration supplied to county council, Beaverlodge will be asked to contribute \$1,572 (from \$1,055 in 2019), Sexsmith \$1,681 (from \$1,128), Wembley \$1,007 (from \$676) and Hythe \$500 (from \$335).

Another \$45,737 and \$1,796 would come from the city and Greenview, respectively.

According to information administration supplied to county council, the share of administrative costs is based on both population and "equalized assessment."

Rawlins said the latter factors in the municipality's ability to pay.

Under the formula, the county is paying a greater share (31.2 per cent) than its population share of the region (24 per cent).

Beaverlodge is also paying more (2.1 per cent of the share to two per cent of the population).

The city is paying less than its share of the population (60.2 per cent of the share to 66 per cent of the population), as is Sexsmith (with 2.2 per cent to three per cent) and Wembley (1.3 per cent to two per cent).



Travis Toews, Grande Prairie-Wapiti MLA and finance minister, told *Town & Country News* he met with "many" local individuals and groups in the run up to his budget being unveiled. He said they spoke to him about "hospital facilities and care in both Grande Prairie and Beaverlodge."

Spending cuts come with promise of future surplus

According to the Alberta government's highlights, the budget is dedicated to "responsible fiscal management" with plans for balanced books in four years.

The 2019-20 budget projects revenue of \$50 billion, operating expenses of \$48.2 billion and other expenses of \$8.3 billion, with an overall deficit of \$8.7 billion.

Revenue is projected to be up from 2018-19's \$49.6 billion while operating expenses are cut from \$48.4 billion.

According to the highlights, the Alberta government is anticipating revenue in 2022-23 of \$57.5 billion, operating expenses of \$47.1 billion and other expenses of \$8.7 billion, with a surplus of \$600 million.

Projected revenues are based on "a modest but realistic oil price outlook, along with market access issues (e.g. pipelines)," according to the government.

According to the highlights, the Alberta government claims the projected revenues make spending cuts necessary.

The 2019-23 fiscal plan states the government also plans for an investment in infrastructure, with a capital plan of \$24.2 billion over four years.

There is also \$2.9 billion for roads and bridges (from \$3.3 billion in 2018), \$2.9 billion for health facilities (from \$4.6 billion, according to the 2018 fiscal plan) and \$463 million for post-secondary infrastructure (from \$641 million).

YOUTH OF THE WEEK

Pacem Hemingson

Grade 6
La Glace School

When "Youth of the Week" was brought to our staff's attention, the name Pacem Hemingson quickly emerged on our potential candidate list. Pacem is full of quality characteristics. Students and staff alike would say that Pacem is incredibly hard-working, extremely kind, superbly helpful and extraordinarily humble!

Additionally, Pacem competes competitively in rodeo and he has recently elevated his talents to new heights. Pacem placed third in Junior Mini Bareback at the Canadian Junior Roughstock Finals. This earned him a spot to

compete at the Junior National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas in December in the Junior Mini Bareback event.

Congratulations, Pacem! La Glace School is proud to have you as a student, and we will all be cheering you on at the NFR!

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