



Town of Onoway

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August 10, 2023

Onoway Taxpayers Association

PO Box 1254

Onoway, Alberta

T0E 1V0

Mr. Winterford,

In response to the correspondence dated July 20, 2023, Council reviewed the request at their Regular Meeting of August 10, 2023, and have authorized the release of the information below. Administration and Council have asserted that the request was to provide answers to the article placed in the Lac Ste Anne Bulletin on June 26, 2023.

Question 1

Recently a request to repair the fence at Shaul Park (about \$300.00) to prevent toddlers from escape under it and onto Lac Ste Anne Trail (an incident reported). Why did administration advise that, because it was not in the budget, it could not be fixed? Meanwhile approximately \$3,500 is being spent on painting a crosswalk that serves one group. The paint will fade and maintenance of another thousand or more yearly will be required if it is to stay. Isn't public safety a priority?

"Administration advised that because the cost was not within the budget, the fence could not be fixed was never stated by a town staff member," was never stated by a town staff member.

The resident that notified the CAO of the deficiency at Shaul Park, was provided the assurance that Public Works would be notified to investigate repair. With the change in staff in Public Works and other pressing matters, the repair was completed the end of May and then additional material brought in to landscape that area where the fence has pushed up by the fire hydrant.

The resident asked about completely fencing Shaul Park. They were advised that to completely fence Shaul Park was not in the 2023 budget but could be presented to Council in 2024.

Regarding the crosswalk, the contractor hired to paint the sidewalk did not complete the project to specification. They were compensated for a portion of the labour but not the contract. The original resolution of Council was in 2021 to review the placement of a crosswalk and it was installed.

Question 2- Why paint a crosswalk when a flag would do? There are over 20,000 special interest groups is the intention to include them?

Original motion of Council

May 6, 2021 Council Meeting

Motion #187/21 - MOVED by Deputy Mayor Lynne Tonita that, further to the presentation and request at the April 22, 2021 meeting, the Town recognize Pride Month in June 2021 by purchasing and flying a Pride flag on a street light near the gazebo. Council agreed to consider painting a crosswalk in honour of Pride Month, pending funding. CARRIED

This council has continued to support a community of inclusion by painting the crosswalk. As of the meeting of July 13, 2023 Council have passed a resolution that staff paint the sidewalk near Centennial Park to recognize inclusion in the Town of Onoway. As an aside, this project has created a conversation around expansion of this project to paint portions of the sidewalks in Onoway. A report will be presented to the Economic Development and Tourism Committee to review and make a recommendation to Council for further discussion soon.

Question 3-With 70% of the town's reserves gone how does the town hope to maintain services, equipment repair, repairs on roads, sewers, property management etc.

As reported in the 2022 Audited Financial Statements under Note 9. Reserves, the Capital Reserves decreased by 3.81% or \$17,124 (\$448,865 (2021 Amount)-\$431,741 (2022 Amount)). This was to purchase AFRACS radios for Onoway Regional Fire Services. The operating reserve decrease was \$344,539 to cover contractual obligations and purchase of the Septage Receiving Station. This is a 58% reduction in operating reserves although overall a 34% reduction in reserves.

The reserve policy presented by Bloom CME during their contract as Interim CAO, and adopted by Council, collapsed the reserves, which means there are not individual reserves but Operating and Capital reserves. The reserves had to be collapsed to be able to pay for the contractual obligation arising from Council and the previous administration's decisions. A review of the reserves found numerous reserves had been created without significant justification or rationale. The reserves are now segregated into operating and capital with a policy that clearly identifies the justification for each reserve. This approach allows for a strategic approach to long-term reserve planning. The new strategic plan identifies a long-term tax strategy as one of

council's objectives. This strategy will address the replacement of reserves. It is not abnormal for municipal reserve balances to fluctuate as needs arise. The use of the reserves was required to meet council direction and in alignment with responsible financial practices. The use of those reserves in no way adversely effect services or capital maintenance.

There remain additional restricted reserves of \$60,000 that will be used for parks and recreation upgrades based on the donation from Academy Fabricators donated in 2017. There has been no detailed discussion or planning in the time this administration has been in place to enhance parks in the Community due to other pressing projects.

The Council and staff are creating process, efficiencies, completing projects in house, reducing the use of outside contractors where applicable and practical. Collecting information for asset management, asset condition and future expansion is currently taking place in order to ensure that replacement and renewal of infrastructure is prioritized and planned in a proactive manner rather than reactive. There are infrastructure challenges that have not been addressed over many years. The creation of annual maintenance programs and documentation to extend the lifecycle of current aging infrastructure. There has been an increase in service level due to increased maintenance, especially of overland drainage areas being cleared of silt, debris, and trees. The public works staff are creating policy, procedure, creating and implementing maintenance programs to allow for proactive response to issues in the community.

The Town now has a comprehensive reserve policy with rationale for reserve requirements. The strategic plan identifies financial goals that will support the development of funding strategies to strengthen the Town's reserve balances. Having a comprehensive reserve policy and the beginnings of a funding plan, puts the Town in a strong position to meet Council's goal of long-term financial sustainability.

Question 4 – Why has almost \$700,000 been spent? Was it to payout staff who were unjustifiably dismissed and the legal costs incurred? What amount would you place on the years of experience lost? How much did the temporary CAO and company cost Onoway and is this company still given contracts? Why, despite numerous requests, have these numbers not been provided.

The amount referred to is inaccurate. The total operating budget in 2022 was \$3,728,073, 2021 was \$3,662,479. As presented to Council in 2022 the 2022 Budget Challenges/Drivers were:

2022 BUDGET CHALLENGES/DRIVERS

- Returning to “normal” service levels, reinstatement of items reduced due to COVID i.e. fully operational programs
- Rising inflation for cost of goods and services
- Administrative turnover
- Organizational review
- Organizational change, outcomes and implementation
- Learning phase for new staff
- Aging infrastructure – continued costs of assessments of assets
- Long range reductions from Province for MSI Capital Grant; future funding strategies within taxation to compensate for reductions coming
- Eliminating some contractor positions for improved efficiency and customer service

Council and administration cannot respond to the accusation of “unjustifiably dismissed.” The question is an opinion and due to Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy on personnel matters, personnel matters cannot be discussed. The decisions made by Administration and Council were in the best interests of the municipality. The Town is now fully staffed with Bloom’s recommended restructuring and significant improvements to many processes have been/are being implemented. All new staff hires were planned for at a budgeted amount less than past year's budgets.

The numerous requests referred to for information were not made in the appropriate manner. This would require a resolution of Council to release the details of the contracts. There was never a formal request made to Council. Bloom President, Tim Duhamel has offered to provide the financial details of the Bloom contract numerous times but requires a formal request to Council to release information. Mr. Duhamel has explained that requirement to both Council and residents.

The contract with Bloom CME, was well below what previous Administration costs were. Within the Interim CAO contract, in addition to the scope of the contract, Bloom CME created a Reserve Policy, Employee Code of Conduct, Tax Rate Bylaw, Strategic Plan, Vision Action template was provided to administration to ease the process of creating staff’s projects to support the strategic plan, and the CAO Hiring Process all at no additional charge to the Town of Onoway. Bloom CME also offered free courses to staff as Interim CAO and continues to support the Town of Onoway Administration. This is a service that Bloom CME offers their clients to support education and success of municipal administrative professionals. Bloom CME continues to provide support when requested. Additionally, all additional staff resources supplied by Bloom were absorbed by Bloom at no additional cost to the town. Bloom provided the Town expertise from four associates at no charge.

The statement that Bloom has billed over the agreed upon contract amount or received additional contracts after the CAO contract was complete is incorrect. The majority of Council has rated the quality of Bloom’s work as excellent and the effort provided for the Town went above the scope of the contract.

As for a dollar value on the years of experience lost, that is an arbitrary answer that would be biased on all parties therefore will not be addressed.

Question 5 – According to the last Council meetings renovations for the office are planned. Has this been budgeted?

There are tentative plans to create offices in the south portion of the administration building. The estimated amount for budget included adding adequate electrical, telephone and network capabilities as well as three walls for offices. New paint and flooring, as the flooring is in poor condition. Commercial grade furniture was also an option.

Unfortunately, structural issues that have been present for many years and not addressed or repaired, require further investigation by a professional engineer and are preventing the expansion of office space at this time. The expansion of the office would create offices for senior administration, continue to advance the progression of Onoway as a professional organization that is open for business and support the pillars of the Strategic Plan of good governance, financial sustainability, support economic and business growth, service excellence and sustainable infrastructure. An amount of \$20,000 was approved by Council and communicated in the May 2023 Tax Newsletter.

It should be noted that the past administration rented and utilized the planned office space for individuals that supported the Town. The staffing restructure, planned for all duties previously provided by contractors to be delivered by Town employees and recognized that there would be a need for additional space. Creating expertise (grants, tax rate bylaw, elections, finance etc.) and investing in our own Town staff members will significantly strengthen the Town's service delivery ability.

Question 6

What efforts are being made to encourage new business in Onoway and what is being done to promote existing businesses?

Council created the Economic Development & Tourism Committee in 2023. This Committee is creating a workplan in 2023 for implementation in 2024. Mr. Dale Johnson is the chair of the committee. Two members of Council are members of the new committee. Additional committee members will be added soon. The committee did not meet in the summer months. The Economic Development Committee was inactive for many years prior to this administration. Mayor and Council should be commended that they have prioritized Economic Development as a strategic priority for the Town of Onoway and recognize Mr. Johnson with gratitude for volunteering to chair the committee.

Onowaves is the newsletter published monthly by the Town of Onoway, distributed with the utility bills and posted on the Town website. The Town works with businesses to promote their business and highlight the services provided to the residents and surrounding community. The Chamber of Commerce is active in the community as well to assist and promote local businesses. The local paper is mailed to over 7,700 residents is used as a media communication form as well.

Question 7

Currently the office has far more administrative staff than in previous years. This while the town has fewer people. What is the need and with the increased staff, what does that mean to taxpayers like me?

The overall budget has not increased due to the required staff restructure. Savings in wages from the previous CAO contract and additional charges for Wildwillow support, allowed for the creation of the ½ time Administrative Assistant Position. The Town previously paid for numerous charges annually for duties that are typically done by Town staff. This included grant applications and the completion of the tax rate bylaw. Those duties have now been allocated to the permanent staff compliment. Utilizing contractors for duties that are required annually is neither efficient or effective and put the Town at risk from a business continuity perspective. Investing in our own staff's knowledge and skills is less costly and more sustainable over the long term, then the utilization of contractors.

The position of Director of Corporate and Community Services was created utilizing current wages budget. This position is responsible for Emergency Management, projects are being completed inhouse instead of being contracted out. The creation of the Tax Rate Bylaw, which was an additional charge under our previous CAO, was completed by Bloom CME within their contract. Staff were able to utilize this updated bylaw and not contract this work out. The additional staff allows time for administration participation on the Economic Development & Tourism Committee. A request has been made that this administration be appointed to participate in the Regional Wastewater Committee representing the interests of the Town of Onoway.

This administration has also revamped the application process for FCSS to ensure compliance and reporting. Interim CAO Tim Duhamel implemented the Request for Decision process and reporting for Council meetings, this has been continued and expanded to ensure Council has the ability to make informed decisions that presents applicable history and administration's recommendations based on experience and best practice. These reports also present financial implications. This is industry best practice. Also these reports through transparency increase communication to residents and businesses. Administration is currently updating the website for ease of access to information. There are many projects being managed by this administration in addition to the day-to-day tasks required through legislation. Your

administrative team is responsive to the needs of residents and businesses and are looking forward to continue to enhance the service delivery through our office.

As a taxpayer, you are receiving more information through communications, legislative compliance, enhanced updated policy and procedures. You are receiving the benefit of a staff that is able to deliver services inhouse and reduce contracted projects to outside sources.

I firmly believe, as Chief Administrative Officer, that the restructure has resulted in significant knowledge and service delivery improvements.

Question 8

What plan does the town have to improve sports facilities and parks for kids' safety? The skateboard park is vandalized daily with broken glass and stolen bike etc., and nearby is a hangout for druggies and kids smoke up. How is this being handled?

Sports facilities are not owned by the Town of Onoway. There are in-kind services provided to community groups who maintain these facilities. Some of these in-kind services include grading, snow removal, water subsidies, and grass cutting. We work well with all partners and if there is a specific safety concern, please provide documentation.

Vandalism is an issue in a lot of community spaces, not just our community. As a resident, if you see suspicious activity or know of "hangouts for druggies" we encourage a proactive approach to call RCMP or Community Peace Officers and report. If crime is reported in the community, RCMP can make requests for an increase in services to increase their staffing. If suspicious activity is not reported, the RCMP are not aware that there are public safety concerns within our community.

Administration presented a graffiti awareness campaign to Council on to provide information to assists in the removal of graffiti. Record, report, remove are three essential tools that should be used. This information has been posted on the Town's Facebook page and the Town of Onoway website.

The Town contracts out bylaw services. We will review the concerns you have noted and discuss what can be done under the scope of bylaw.

Question 9

For almost five months Onoway went without policing. Why? Why wasn't the public informed?

There was no lapse in policing services provided by the RCMP. This is an incorrect statement.

An Enforcement Services agreement between the Town of Onoway and Lac Ste. Anne County (LSAC) expired on January 31, 2023. Before renewing the agreement, contract options were explored including a cost-benefit analysis as enforcement service costs were increasing significantly. During this time the public was informed to contact the RCMP. An Enforcement Services agreement was renewed between the Town and LSAC and reinstated May 1, 2023. That is a lapse of three months for CPO and Bylaw services not policing.

In correspondence dated September 26, 2022 LSAC referenced correspondence to the Town of Onoway from September 27, 2021. This administration started the beginning of October 2022, received additional correspondence from LSAC on November 22, 2022. The correspondence was submitted to Council for review at their December 8, 2022 meeting. This administration will accept responsibility for not being aware of the correspondence from September 26, 2022 and it not reaching Council in a timely manner due to the crossover in Administration. The rate in the September 26, 2022 letter of \$107.25/hour was a significant increase therefore Council did request the analysis, although the original request of Administration was on October 28, 2021.

At the October 28, 2021 meeting Council passed the following motion.

Motion #441/21 – October 28, 2021

MOVED by Councillor Robert Winterford that the Town agree to a fee increase from \$62.50 per hour to \$88.50 per hour for the 2022 year for Community Peace Officer Animal Control services provided by Lac Ste. Anne County, and further that Administration investigate options for the Onoway having in-house Officer(s) going forward. **CARRIED**

It is only with the additional administration staff that the cost-benefit research and analysis was able to be completed in a timely manner and presented to Council as soon as information was gathered.

Council directed Administration to request an extension to review the contract and negotiate with Lac Ste Anne County on December 14th, 2022. Lac Ste Anne County advised they were unable to extend the contract and the original termination date of January 31, 2023 stood.

This Council and Administration are committed to ensuring that contracted services are fair and a review of contract costs was warranted. The service level that LSAC is providing the Town of Onoway in shared services, creating economies of scale is appreciated. The Town of Onoway and Lac Ste Anne County continue to build relationships to serve residents, business, and visitors of the region.

Question 10

In the last tax bill sent out, the numbers included were inaccurate and off by almost 60%. What as this and why wasn't there notification of the error or an explanation?

There was an inaccuracy due to an incorrect formula in excel referencing incorrect cells. The correction was presented to Council at the Regular Meeting of June 8, 2023 as an information item. The correction presented to Council is attached. The correction was posted in Onowaves May 2023 edition.

Administration would like to note that while we strive for accuracy, at times there is a calculation error and it is corrected as soon as is practicable.

* The note at the bottom of the article submitted to the Lac Ste Anne Bulletin that the "OTPA is asking for a referendum of Forensic Audit to be placed on September's By-Election ballot." For more information on the process that needs to be followed in accordance with *The Municipal Government Act*, Municipal Affairs is available to provide advice. At the meeting of August 10th, 2023 Council did vote to add a question to the ballot with is non-binding under Section 236(1) however the validity of the question needs to be confirmed as it a financial question and there may be exemptions in the *Municipal Government Act*. The question will read similar to "Are you in favour of the Town of Onoway conducting a forensic audit?"

Sincerely,

Jennifer Thompson
Chief Administrative Officer