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NOTES FROM COUNCIL

Dear Residents & Ratepayers,

On May 1st I attended an in-person consultation on groundwater provided by the Oldman Regional Watershed Council and Living Lakes Canada. The Alberta Groundwater Water Program is a pilot project whereby a framework will be developed to identify priority groundwater aquifers. In addition to public consultation, individuals can register their own wells to be monitored as part of the project. There are a lot of unknowns with groundwater and this type of extensive investigation develops a better understanding of how aquifers are connected, as well as how recovery of water capacity occurs across the region. For more information, visit: <https://livinglakescanada.ca/project/alberta-groundwater-program/>

At the first council meeting in May we gave First Reading to the draft Municipal Development Plan that will receive Public Hearing on June 4th. The draft document can be found on my website as well as the Vulcan County website. Please contact myself or any other councillor, as well as Administration, if you wish to discuss. Please attend if you wish to speak at the Public Hearing.

Also, at the first meeting in May, Vulcan County Council appointed Kayley Dick and Douglas Headrick (the current Director of Protective Services) as bylaw officers for purposes of municipal enforcement. Both individuals have extensive training and Mr. Dick will be a fully authorized Community Peace Officer (CPO) once his appointment is formalized by the Province. Kayley Dick fills the absence created when Justin Vallee took a new position with Wheatland County. It is hoped that by appointing Doug Headrick as an additional bylaw officer, Vulcan County will have some necessary organizational capacity when one of the CPOs is away. Vulcan

County does try to maintain a complement of two Community Peace Officers.

Continuing with protective services, the County was able to find a wildland unit from Dependable Emergency Vehicles for \$144,000. This vehicle will replace the one that was stolen from Station 20 (Champion) and recovered after extensive damage. The bulk of this cost should be paid by the County's insurance provider given the circumstances, however, if necessary, any remaining costs will come from the capital reserve for protective services.

County Ratepayers will have received their tax and assessment notices this month. This is the first year where a new assessment class for Small Business Properties is in effect. For 2025, these properties will have a tax rate that is 85.7% (or 14.3% less) of other non-residential rates. Under legislative requirements, the province allows this difference to drop to 75% (or 25% less), which I would like to see us get closer to given that linear assets will no longer be taxed for recreation and fire special taxes as of this year. While the general municipal tax rate was maintained for residential and farmland properties, there is an increase of 2.94% on non-residential properties. Administration is of the view that it is better to be conservative on the savings for Small Business Properties relative to the bulk of the non-residential assessment base, and that is certainly reasonable. However, I think we could have pushed this somewhat further and hope this will be considered by the next municipal council for 2026. While I voted against the tax rate bylaw for this reason, given the overwhelming support of council and the potential of another strike by Canada Post, I saw no reason to not support allowing Third Reading and the passage of the bylaw in the same meeting.

Sincerely, Christopher Northcott