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Background Notes from the Mayor's Desk - January 31, 2016

What is a Strategic Plan? It is very much like the business plan you might develop to take to the bank for financing a new business venture. It demonstrates that you are thinking about the big picture, you have done your "homework" and you have considered as many factors as possible to be successful in the upcoming year and beyond.

You might soon read that the Town of Sundre Council and staff have just completed their annual Strategic Plan review. This plan guides our decisions about what we want to do in the next year, as well as further into the future. It is a plan that drives our budget process for multiple years. We look at what has been accomplished, what needs to be done, set priorities, and give direction to staff. We set the tax rate based on what we require for the upcoming year to accomplish goals and projects - and we must set aside money for future projects on our future priorities list. We can't simply keep taxes low and not set aside replacement savings - or we condemn future Councils with bringing in huge tax increases to do emergency projects. It is a balance, just like putting savings away to look after repairs on the family house or car. The goal is to save and pay cash in the future to replace or fix things that just need to be done, instead of taking on future debt for maintenance.

Town staff play such an important role in informing Council about what must be addressed now, as well as later, because they are really the people who do the real work of providing services to everyone. Council and staff have to work together to be better informed, so that Council can make supportive and progressive decisions.

We are in the second year of our "first ever" multiyear (2 year) budget. We have to look at whether we are able to accomplish what we forecast, and whether we can be flexible and deal with issues we did not see coming - like two new governments at the provincial and federal levels, struggling economic realities and changes in our income and expenses. We had predicted a growth in our assessment value (the revenue we get from taxes) as well as revenue from groups and organizations that rent space in Town buildings. That may change and we have to take those revenue changes into account in our plans.

We had thought we would try a three-year budget in 2017, 2018, and 2019 but we have decided to do another two-year budget for 2017 and 2018. We will take what we have learned from our first two-year budget in 2015/2016, and we will improve upon it with another two-year budget before trying a three-year budget. After the next election in October of 2017, the next Council may wish to do a longer term budget. This Council would like to assist the next Council by having the second year of a two-year budget in place by the first year of a new Council's term, and to allow the new Council to decide to change to a longer term budget if they choose.

If you are interested in more details about the Strategic Plan, you will soon find it posted on our website, posted on the back wall of Council Chambers, and posted in front of every desk in Council Chambers. Ask any of us about details. We want to hear from you as to whether we are "on track". As always, please call me at home at 403-638-3535 if you want to talk further about this article, or any other issue of concern to you.

Terry Leslie, Mayor
Town of Sundre