



Other than one very cold week this has been quite a mild winter, and no one minds not having a lot of snow to shovel, however drought is currently a big concern in many parts of the province but especially in the south. Discussions are already underway with the Provincial Government, irrigation districts and other major water users regarding water sharing agreements and protocols for the coming year. Bow Island's water originates in the mountains in the southwest and is delivered by the St. Mary's River Irrigation District who went into this winter with seriously low reservoirs and stream flows. Our own reservoir, south of Centennial Park, has a lot of capacity and was filled more than normal last fall in anticipation of a tight supply in 2024. In case conditions don't improve Council is reviewing our Water Restrictions bylaw, that was last used during the water shortage of 2001. This would affect lawn watering and other outdoor uses. If widespread restrictions are imposed on irrigators, there will be a major impact on the southern Alberta economy. While planning and preparation for potential water shortages is crucial, we must remember Mother Nature holds all the cards.

Council's budget planning and deliberations have been ongoing, and both the operating and capital budgets should be passed in a few weeks. We do have some major projects planned for this year that will be funded by grants, donations and reserves, meaning no borrowing should be needed. I won't know the total spending amounts until the budgets are passed but I doubt we will be requiring a mill rate increase. The Provincial budget comes down at the end of this month when we will find out what the Education Property Tax will be. One of our major projects will be installing the underground infrastructure for the new development on the west side. Costs are being worked out now and a design and lot prices will be established soon. We will be welcoming interested developers and builders to ***Build Now in Bow Island***.

The Health Minister and Premier have announced that the structure of AHS will be revamped and split into 4 areas: primary care, acute care, long term care and mental health & addictions. They are currently seeking public input and feedback by hosting 50 public sessions around the province. While the southern sessions are complete, we can still provide our input online at: [Refocusing health care in Alberta | Alberta Online Engagement](#). This is an opportunity for us as individuals to share our experiences in the current system, our ideas for improvement and what we would like to see in the new organization. Please take 20 min and do the survey.

I recently contacted Alberta Transportation to inquire about the planning for our section of Highway 3. They had previously indicated that they will be looking for a consultant this year to work on the design. The latest update is that they are waiting until after the budget is passed to put out requests for proposals from consulting engineers, so the process won't begin for some time. I have been assured that the design process will involve a more robust public consultation than the last time.

Congratulations and thanks to the Bow Island Elks on another successful Steak Night fundraiser. This popular annual event continues to bring the community together for some fun and to raise money for the many projects the club supports. I also note that their Pin Night Celebration in December brought together and recognized members' years of service, some as high as 65! Thank you for what you do for our community!

Last April it was my pleasure to welcome Lyle Tuchscherer back to Council and now it is with regret that all of us on Council bid him farewell. Lyle and Bonne have decided to downsize their home and relocate to Medicine Hat. Lyle was first elected to the Bow Island Council in 1980 as one of the youngest ever members. His twenty years of service included a stint as mayor during one of his terms. Lyle brought common sense, practicality and dedication to the job on Council. His experience, input and good humour will be missed at the Council table. We thank Lyle and Bonne for their life-long devotion to our community and wish them all the best in this next chapter of their lives. A decision about a by-election will be made in the coming weeks.

Apparently, the famous rodents were right, so be careful out there! ❄️ ***Mayor Gordon Reynolds***