

There are no shortage of issues out there for us to be concerned about, but I think the main one on the minds of most people in our community is the local healthcare situation. With one physician plus some locums carrying the load we are just getting by. The residents in long-term care and Alfred Egan are being looked after as well as the occasional acute care patient. Having the emergency department closed during the week is certainly not ideal and that won't change until we get more full-time doctors that can cover the hospital as well as establish clinical practices. One of the challenges facing the clinic in its recruitment efforts is the lack of a business or corporate structure managing the operation which includes hiring staff, providing space, equipment, software and other essentials. Currently, Dr. Tawfeeq is carrying the financial load on his own. In an effort to provide a stable structure, the Town is proposing to form a Municipally Controlled Corporation (MCC) to operate the clinic. The stability the Town is hoping to create will help in both recruitment and retention of physicians in the short and long-term. The MCC will be wholly owned by the Town and be operated at arm's length from the Town operations. Staffing and other operating costs will not be part of the Town budget. While Council will have some representation on the Board of Directors, the intent is to appoint other individuals with background in business and the medical field.

The Town, the County of Forty Mile, and the Village of Foremost have established a Joint Health Care Recruitment Committee that is working collaboratively to develop and implement strategies to attract and retain family physicians. To get the clinic over some financial hurdles at the outset, the Town has qualified for grant funding from Alberta Health that will provide \$200,000 for the clinic that must be matched by municipal dollars. The Town, County and Village have established a formula for sharing in that matching requirement so there is not a burden solely on the Town.

New physicians beginning a practice, whether they are Canadian or International graduates, often have limited funds to start with but must pay registration fees, insurance premiums, clinic fees, find living accommodations and transportation as well as trying to establish a credit record. One of the roles of the MCC and the municipalities will be to help those new doctors navigate some of those things, possibly providing some initial relief to help them get established. Recruitment of healthcare professionals has become very competitive with many communities in similar situations to ours. As a result, financial assistance will be an important part of the recruitment process, along with finding someone who is a good fit and selling them on the merits of our community. Healthcare is not a direct duty of a municipal council, but we cannot stand by and wait for the Province to solve this problem for us. We must act and work with them to get qualified healthcare professionals into the community. Creating a stable clinic environment is part of that. The proposed business plan for the MCC, along with a 2-page factsheet, is on the Town website and there will be a public hearing on Monday the 11th at 6pm in the Town office, to hear your questions and your thoughts.

Property taxes are due August 15th and as always, I remind you that there are two components to your tax bill. The Town sets a tax rate for its portion and once again has been able to slightly lower the rate thanks partly to our growth. The Province sets the other portion, ostensibly for education, and this year it has risen by 14%, with another 10% anticipated in 2026. The enclosure with this month's utility bill has a little more detail and includes a graphic showing that 68% of your tax bill is set locally with 31% going to the Province.

Municipal elections take place every four years in Alberta, and this is an election year. Nomination day is September 22nd with voting to take place on October 20th. Information packages, including nomination forms, are available at the Town office for residents interested in shaping the future of our Town.

Let's hope the weather settles soon so harvest can get rolling!

Mayor Gordon Reynolds

