



I was very shocked to learn this past Sunday of the sudden passing of **Mayor Lorne Buis** of the Village of Foremost. Lorne was very dedicated to his community and worked hard for its betterment as a businessman, firefighter, EMT, Councillor and eventually Mayor. Lorne's passing will have an impact on the whole Village and he will be missed at regional meetings. Our thoughts and prayers are with his friends and family, especially his wife Kerri.

Last summer the Town applied to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) for grant funding under the **Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF)**, a Federal program designed to encourage local initiatives to speed up the building of more homes. Although it has been obvious that we have a shortage of housing, especially rental spaces, the Town commissioned a needs assessment to help determine the type and number of units needed. This study supported the application, and it indicated our gap is in the Missing Middle category which is defined as duplexes, multi-unit homes, secondary suites, and low-rise apartment buildings. Our CAO Dave Matz did an excellent job of completing a very complicated application for funding that secured \$1.5 million over 4 years to help us reach a target of 60 living spaces in this higher density category. **Build Now in Bow Island** is being launched with this grant providing the funding.

Council has developed a 4-year spending plan that will see the underground infrastructure for the subdivision installed this spring. The funding will also cover the costs of updating the Land Use Bylaw to provide more clarity as well as more zoning and development options. We have also approved tax incentives for developers and builders of this type of housing. As far as specific building designs go, I think it is fair to say that everything is on the table right now and the message to developers is that the Town is willing to work with you to move projects ahead in an affordable manner.

This past weekend the Town had a booth at the Medicine Home & Garden Trade Show for the second time. This has been a great opportunity to tell people about our community and promote what we have. This year we certainly focused on housing opportunities and found there was quite a bit of interest. There were lots of comments about the golf course, the splash park and campground as well as various positive remarks about the Town. As always, we met many fans of the bakery and chatted with former residents and people who had ties to our community. My thanks to the Councillors who were able to join me at the booth and a big thanks to Abbey Riddell who volunteered her services. Now we are looking forward to the **Bow Island Chamber of Commerce Spring Trade Show on April 12th!**

We shared a large space at the trade show with the **Highway 3 Twinning Development Association** and had many people excited to hear about the progress that has been made. Physical preparation for Taber to Burdett is under way with power lines being moved and properties being cleared. AB Transportation very recently hired a consulting engineer to do the design work for the Medicine Hat to Seven Persons section. Hopefully that means twinning can begin there after Taber to Burdett, but the timing will likely depend on the Province's finances. A consultant is expected to be hired this year to re-visit the plan for Bow Island. I am certain the 4.3km bypass will not happen and am fairly optimistic the current alignment will remain for now, although AB Transportation would still like the community to consider a closer bypass. Once the consultant has been hired, we will provide them with **lots** of community feedback.

Council has passed both the operating and capital budgets for the coming year. The 2024 operating budget comes in at \$5.277 million, up 4.9% from last year. Overall tax revenue is up due to growth and inflation, but our tax rate will likely remain similar to last year, possibly with a slight drop in the residential rate. Non-tax revenue is expected to be up about 2%. The highest spending increases will be in Water & Sewer (29.6%), Recreation & Community Services (21.9%) and RCMP (50%). The higher Water expense is related to the Water project for the new subdivision. The Recreation expense is largely due to wages being tracked more closely by department. The RCMP increase is out of our control but a little easier to swallow since we are seeing a return to a better staffing model. Incidentally there will be 2 members living in Town. The rate for the Provincial Education Property Tax will remain the same as last year.

Capital projects this year will include costs for the new development, planning for a new Public Works shop, road and sidewalk repairs, water line replacement and equipment replacement. \$1.473 million is the planned spending on parks and recreation with \$1.368 million coming from Grants and Donations and only \$105,000 coming from reserves. We are very grateful for the donations from the Troy Loney Group, Minor Hockey and others, as well as the hard work put into grant applications by our staff, volunteers and Councillor Mitchell. There will be no new borrowing this year.

This is shaping up to be a very busy and good year for Bow Island.

Mayor Gordon Reynolds