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1. Upcoming Meetings/Events

Mar. 22, 2011 SATA Monthly Meeting
Apr. 9, 2011 BINGO 4:45 – 9:30

The March 22nd meeting will feature Bob Russell as the guest speaker. You told us defining essential services and encouraging Council to not to spend on non-essentials is of primary import to you. Bob will talk about his views on essential vs non-essential services. You will then participate in a brief workshop to clarify your definition.

SATA monthly meetings are held at 7:30 pm at the St. Albert Community League Hall, 17 Peron Street.

2. Garbage Collection Controversy

This year the City is introducing major changes to the existing garbage collection practices. The most significant of these changes are the collection of organic waste, and the introduction of new trucks with automated arms to empty the garbage totes that will be provided to residents. Under the proposed plan, our current weekly collection of solid waste will be done bi-weekly by City staff. Overall the proposed changes mean significant increases to our already high utility bills.

On March 7th Councillor MacKay made a presentation to Council and Administration to consider what he believes would be a more cost effective solid waste collection option. Citing studies and several examples of municipalities that achieved substantial cost reductions,

Councillor MacKay put forward a motion asking the Administration to issue a request for proposal from private contractors for the collection of the City's solid waste.

That sounds like a great idea, and it's something that should have been done much earlier!

Well ... Dave Graham, who represents City public works employees that belong to CUPE Local 914 doesn't think so. In a March 14th news release, using strong language, Mr. Graham falsely accused Councillor MacKay of attacking city workers and CUPE during his presentation. Those who attended the presentation did not portray Councillor MacKay's comments as an attack on CUPE or its staff.

Assuming that Mr. Graham is posturing to protect the interests of his constituents, i.e. members of CUPE Local 914, he should understand that Councillor MacKay, as an elected representative of the residents of St. Albert, is striving to protect the interests of his constituents. Mr. Graham might even find that some of those CUPE Local 914 members who reside in St. Albert and pay property taxes and user fees in this community, support the position taken by Councillor MacKay!

3. More Money for Non-union Staff

On March 2nd, the City of St. Albert issued a News Release that Council supported the City Manager's recommendation to provide a 1% cost of living increase for the City's non-union staff.

It is easy to see how some observers might think a 1% increase is reasonable, until you start looking at recent City pay increases.

From 2006 to 2010 the Alberta Consumer Price Index (all items) increased by 9.73% (<http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/econ45a-eng.htm>). During the same period the sums of total annual increases for the various City employee groups were as follows:

Inside Workers (Non-union)	20.08%
Fire Fighters (Union)	26.39%
Canadian Union of Public Employees (Union)	19.25%

The comparison shows that over the past 5 years pay increases for City employees were more than double the rate of inflation. This, over a period spanning a major recession when many Canadian private sector workers were losing their jobs and pensions.

In addition, non-union staff is on a pay grid system. This means that within each salary range for each group of jobs, with each year of service, employees move up the grid to the maximum pay level for their position. This represents further wage increases over and above inflation adjustments.

The recent pay increases should also be considered against the backdrop of the 2010 Compensation Study done by Hay Group Ltd. One of the significant findings of the report was that pay levels of St. Albert's non-union staff were above levels set by policy for 11 of the existing 12 pay levels!

All together, this is a lost opportunity for Council to say enough; let's start the adjustment process right now by holding the line on salaries. Let's start to make up for the large increases we gave staff all through the recession, and provide NO cost of living adjustment for 2011. But, Council chose not to, suggesting that the tough, but right decision was just too much for Council to handle.

4. Taxpayers' Friend

Many taxpayers have probably heard of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) through the organization's widely publicized National Debt Clock now touring across Canada. The Clock shows the rate at which federal government adds to Canada's steadily increasing national debt.

While the CTF has focused most of its energy and resources on issues of federal and provincial government spending and taxation, recently CTF has also become a source of information and advice for taxpayers concerned

with how their tax dollars are being spent at the local, municipal level.

Based on recent reports, municipal spending in many Canadian municipalities is out of control. This leads to rapidly increasing property tax burden. Between 2002 and 2009, St. Albert's spending on municipal operations increased 92.5%, which in turn resulted in City's revenues from residential and non-residential property taxes increasing by 91.6%! At the same time St. Albert's population increased by only 11%. The rapid rates of growth in spending and taxation are clearly unsustainable!

In response to calls from taxpayers looking for answers and advice on to how to address local government concerns, in 2010 the CTF created a guidebook titled Municipal Ratepayers Guide. The booklet provides advice on how to form a focused and effective community taxpayer groups dedicated to monitoring municipal spending and taxation.

If you would like to learn more about the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and check out some of the organization's resources go to <http://taxpayer.com>. There you will find, among other materials, a copy of the Municipal Ratepayers Guide. If you would like to get involved in the St. Albert Taxpayers Association send us an e-mail to flannie@shaw.ca.

5. Bingos... HELP

We need VOLUNTEERS! Join our fundraiser!

Our 2011 bingo schedule is shown below. All bingos are held at the Bingo Hall in Grandin Mall.

Weekday	Date	Time
Saturday	April 9, 2011	4:45-9:30
Sunday	May 8, 2011	10:45-3:30
Sunday	October 2, 2011	10:45-3:30
Saturday	December 10, 2011	4:45-9:30

We need 7 volunteers for early bingos and 8 for the evening event. Please let us know which bingos you can attend. Sign up at our meetings or contact George at gvalan@shaw.ca, or by phone at 780-691-1459 or 780-418-5659.