

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. Upcoming Meetings/Events
2. 2012 Capital Budget Unveiled
3. What We Stand For
4. Council Columns No Substitute for Meaningful Engagement
5. Efficiency Reviews Watered Down
6. Membership Renewals

### 1. Upcoming Meetings/Events

Sep. 27, 2011 SATA Monthly Meeting

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

### 2. 2012 Capital Budget Unveiled

With fall just around the corner, Council and Administration have begun the 2012 Budget review process. During the September 19<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting, Administration unveiled proposed changes to the 2012 Municipal Fees and Charges, and the 2012 - 2014 Municipal and Utility Capital Budgets.

In general, the proposed fee structure for 2012 would increase total revenues from fees by 3%. Across the board increases in transit fares are estimated to bring \$267,000 in extra revenue. Although Servus Place membership rates are unchanged, increases in facility rental rates would generate \$149,000 in new revenue. All proposed changes to the existing fee structure have to be approved by Council.

The new 3-year capital budget has \$69.2 million allocated to 2012 funded municipal capital projects. In addition the plan includes \$31.0 million in unfunded projects, as well as \$21.4 million and \$6.9 million respectively, for funded and unfunded utilities projects. The single largest municipal capital project included in 2012 is the acquisition of land and construction of the South Transit Park and Ride Station, to be located at Campbell Road

and St. Albert Trail. The cost of this project is estimated at \$34.8 million. The City is also planning to start construction of Stage 3 of Ray Gibbon Drive which is estimated to cost \$17.2 million.

The 3-year municipal and utility capital budget totals are tabulated below.

Budget	Amount (\$1,000's)		
	2012	2013	2014
Municipal			
Funded	69,248.2	16,753.8	17,567.8
Unfunded	31,023.4	48,353.7	93,402.5
Utility			
Funded	21,408.4	14,850.3	8,974.3
Unfunded	6,913.2	5,129.9	2,398.1

The new Park & Ride transit centre scheduled for completion in 2014 is to include a 1,650 stall parking lot, and is intended to replace the Village Transit Station. The new facility has been given priority to proceed to alleviate the shortage of parking at the Village Transit Station.

The entire 2012 – 2014 Budget, including the Operating Budget, will be released to the public on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Those wishing to comment on the City's spending plans will have an opportunity to do so at the Town Hall Meeting, which will be held on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

### 3. What We Stand For

In the past, SATA has been criticized for only being concerned with cutting City spending and not offering a positive vision for the City. To address this criticism, SATA surveyed its members to determine what they considered to be the most important areas for city spending. Their responses were compiled and summarized in a statement describing what SATA stands for.

The essence of the statement is that City property taxes should be at levels that make St. Albert accessible to citizens of all income levels, and that spending should focus on infrastructure needs and disadvantaged members of our community. SATA does not oppose using tax revenue to support recreation and athletics, or heritage and

fine arts. However at this time City resources should be directed towards maintaining what we already have.

The release of the public statement outlining SATA's position on public spending was timed to coincide with the start of 2012 Budget process. You can find the full statement at <http://www.stalberttaxpayers.org/aboutus.htm>.

#### **4. Council Columns No Substitute for Meaningful Engagement**

As you may have heard, Council recently decided to purchase space in the Gazette to share Council members' views, reasoning and opinions with the public. Initiated on a trial basis over the next 12 months, the column's purpose is to "enhance City's public engagement and consultation practices".

Reading this makes one wonder whether Council members understand what residents are asking for when they seek meaningful engagement with Council and Administration. Council's latest initiative does nothing to promote meaningful consultation that would allow residents to influence Council decisions on major issues.

Then there is the issue of wasting taxpayer dollars.

In the September 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Gazette*, Mr. Norbert Van Wyk harshly criticized Council's decision to buy space for a Council written column. As he points out, Council will be spending \$3,000, when they already have many other ways to voice their opinions.

What's significant about Van Wyk's letter is that as a former St. Albert City Manager, he knows what he's talking about. Particularly, when he mentions how Council could just as easily get their message out by speaking up at council meetings, writing their own letters to the editor or just talking to residents. With all these avenues available, why do we need taxpayer funded Council columns?

#### **5. Efficiency Reviews Watered Down**

During SATA's All Candidates Forum held at the Arden in the days leading up to the 2010 civic election, incumbent Mayor Nolan Crouse raised everyone's hopes when he said that he would call

for a complete efficiency review of all departments at City Hall. During the Q&A session, referring to the City corporation he said "... we have to peel all the layers off the onion and get right down to what are the key efficiency changes that have to be made from the beginning to the end."

Well, on September 6<sup>th</sup> Council passed a motion formally approving Policy C-CAO-15 Continuous Improvement Program, and received as information a related Administrative Procedure. Since we are told the City was already committed to ongoing continuous improvement, how will formalizing the program by creating new policy and procedure documents bring about the desired efficiency improvements at City Hall? Most will agree that this announcement falls short of what was expected after the mayor's campaign promise.

#### **6. Membership Renewals**

With our latest fiscal year coming to a close on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, Board members would like to use this opportunity to thank SATA members and supporters alike for their continued support.

We believe that in part through our efforts to engage St. Albert residents, we have been able to bring focus to the need to slow the pace of residential property tax increases in our community. We also believe that by speaking out in Council Chambers and through the media we have been able to affect some moderation in spending and property tax increases.

In the months ahead we intend to continue our efforts to promote the views of St. Albert taxpayers consistent with SATA's Mission and Vision statements.

We are encouraged by increasing membership within SATA, and we hope you will continue to support our efforts. If you have not already done so, we ask that you renew your membership. We also welcome all donations.

You can renew your membership in person during any upcoming general meeting. Or, if you would prefer, you can renew by mail, or on-line using PayPal. For details please visit our website at <http://www.stalberttaxpayers.org/membership.htm>