



President's Report

SATA

2nd Annual General Meeting

November 23, 2010

Our Vision: A St. Albert where all can afford to live: taxes are affordable AND municipal spending is in the best interest of the majority of taxpayers rather than special interest groups.

Our Mission: Accountable Municipal Government ... For the Benefit of All Taxpayers

First, thank you all for your support over the 2½ years since SATA was formed. With a lot of help from others, your executive has worked hard on many issues and projects. We think that the election results are in part due to our efforts. It is unusual to see incumbent councillors replaced by new faces.

We have made good progress in the three priority goals of our strategic plan, as decided by SATA membership in June 2009:

- 1st Priority - **To encourage better spending by our Council as well as accountability of City managers in creating "value for the money they spend" and the associated tasks.** These move toward our strategic objective of "*Affordable taxes with sustainable levels of spending and service areas*"
- 2nd Priority - **To hold Council accountable for decisions, primarily through the election process.** This to move us closer to our strategic objective of "*accountable government*".
- 3rd Priority - **Communication and membership, particularly in increasing the public's knowledge of tax and spending issues and through building membership.**

My report covers our fiscal year, September 1, 2009 to August 31st, 2010. It is hard to report on just one fiscal year, just as it is difficult to report on one specific goal. Years overlap one another as do our strategic goals. For example, the 2010 election spans two of our fiscal years! But much of what we have done in the last 2 years culminated in the October elections, so I will report a bit on what was successful during the election even though its officially in the current fiscal year.

In addition, it is important to note that we have completed a lot of "tasks", but the importance of doing so is achieving results and that's where I will begin in each goal area. As a note, we are continually bringing the same message to Council, that it is not good enough for administration just to complete a lot of tasks in meeting Council priorities. For anything to change, those tasks must have associated concrete measurable results.

1. "*Affordable taxes with sustainable levels of spending and service areas*"

RESULT:

- We influenced Council to change their mind on off-loading \$95 million of infrastructure costs for the annexed lands on current St. Albert taxpayers. If the issue had not been raised, the by-law would likely have been passed (as the recommendation to offload the \$95 million was made to Council in February and recommended in the Administration report that went to Council).

WHAT DID WE DO?

- We raised the issue as part of the Erin Ridge North ASP, made presentations to Council, wrote letters to the editor, picketed city hall and filled the gallery with people who spoke up about the “broken promises” if this went ahead (note the mayor recently took me to task for using those words as being inappropriate for Council presentations).

RESULT: We influenced Council to consider seriously their record of tax hikes and spending and to moderate them:

- We started in May 2008, when our tax increases were based on a budget increase of 8.77% for 2008
- In 2009, Administration's 8.9% proposal got whittled down by Council to 5.5%
- In 2010, Council directed to Administration to bring in a less than 3% budget, which resulted in a 2.89% increase for 2010
- Currently the new Council is whittling away on a 3.6% proposed increase for 2011
- We believe we also influenced property taxes becoming a key issue in the 2010 Municipal Election

WHAT DID WE DO?

- For the 2009 and 2010 budget years, we monitored the budget and made budget presentations on both the capital budget and what we saw as unnecessary spending (e.g. Heritage Park, administration buildings, library etc,) and operating budget increases (including utilities)
- During budget debate and throughout the year we hammered home the history of expansion of taxes, expenditures and staff; we asked for expenditures on needs vs. the wants of many special interest groups, and we made submissions on subsequent budget motions to Council e.g. on the surplus, on “extra expenditures” prior to tax setting that raised the % increase in the budget
- Throughout the year, we made presentations to Council and to other groups (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, SUN) and wrote letters regarding taxation statistics in St. Albert, to raise the profile of the issue. We received a good reception by SUN and Rotary
- We monitored Council meetings, and spoke on expenditures that we believed were not in the best interest of taxpayers, or represented lack of accountability by managers (examples, the debacle of Riel Park quadrupling in cost, costly recycling initiatives when other alternatives were available, the 70 Arlington issue)

2. Accountable Government:

RESULT:

- We believe we successfully influenced the election issues to Taxpayer priorities, i.e., lower taxes, wise spending on needs and reduced spending on “special interests”, accountability for their record and curbing waste
- We believe we were partially responsible for greater turnover on Council with the election of 4 new Council members rather than 2 (replacing only those who resigned from Council). It is very unusual to see incumbents defeated

WHAT DID WE DO?

- We identified election issues up front, developed an election plan and followed through with our message in all our activities
- We kept our issues on the public agenda, through speaking out, through asking new candidates to speak to our issues at our meetings, through our questionnaire to Candidates; through a series of guest commentaries in Saint City News, and in September and October, a highly successful forum and taxpayer education (advertising) campaign
- We encouraged voters to get out and vote

3. Educate the taxpayer on issues; build strong membership

RESULT:

- Increased membership: Our membership increased to 65 dues paying members (from 38)
- We improved our credibility in the community
- We influenced change in the tone of editorials in local media. Previously editorials almost always were in support of Council, and that has changed to more perceptive questions are being asked and commentary made

WHAT DID WE DO?

- We increased the profile of municipal issues in the news media, with members and with taxpayers
- We improved SATA's profile in the media, where we are called on issues for comment, and our issues make the news
- We maintained our factual approach to issues, and our non-partisan approach during the election
- We reached out to other groups, with some success with SUN, SACL (financial) and Akinsdale
- We took the high road when "attacked" by special interests
- Improved services to members, with a redesigned website, newsletter, and Speakers meetings.

What Could We Have Done Better?

- St. Albert Taxpayers Association took some hits ...a smear campaign by some of the "special interest groups" and their "mouthpieces". But some say that "all publicity is good publicity". Of special note is one AH&F supporter who continues to actively undermine SATA with Council
- Our messages could have been better balanced with credit to Administration and Council where it was due
- We could have been more active in recruitment of new members
- We encouraged voter turnout, and while the percentage of those voting was still poor at 34%, perhaps we influenced who turned out to vote for change

Next Steps?

- SATA's new theme: Moving forward. It is a new Council and we have the opportunity to balance our approach, to support stuff done right, as well as continue with our message on wise spending, accountability and moderating tax increases. We began this theme in our recent presentation to Council on the budget 2011-2013
- Increased focus on broadening of our membership and improving our fiscal sustainability

(including through grant applications)

- Review, update and priority setting associated with our Strategic Plan. In that context we want to hear from you on what is important to you, the key directions you think we should take in revising our Strategic Plan, and what you think we need to do next.

Upcoming Issues

- Budget, budget, budget ... 2011 - 2013
- Participation in the proposed improved consultation and communication Council initiative
- Supporting and promoting the idea of efficiency audits in city hall, and/or improved budget processes
- Capital spending, DARP, Administration buildings, staff compensation

Last But Not Least: Thank You

- To those dedicated Members and Affiliates who gave of their time to help us with the 13 bingos we worked which provided us with dollars to help with our programs
- Donors including those who:
 - donated dollars to support our advertising and programs (including one donation of over \$900, one around \$200 and another of \$450)
 - donated professional time to design our advertising, keep our books straight, and design and maintain our wonderful website as well as our logoThe donations mean we can apply for a community spirit grant and gain matching funds from the provincial government
- To My Birdie for its free advertising, and support of our issues, and St. City News for providing room for our 6 columns, and a break on advertising rates
- To Board Members who kept our organization running
- To all members who volunteered to write articles for our Newsletter, write letters, make submissions, do research to support and further our objectives
- To all members and affiliates for your involvement

In summary, thanks to you all for giving your time and resources, and for taking the time to be here.

Lynda Flannery, President
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<http://www.stalberttaxpayers.org>