

Town gives County green light to purchase United Church building

CATHY WEETMAN

At their October 28 regular council meeting, The Town of Drayton Valley gave Brazeau County the green light to purchase the former United Church Building for one dollar.

On October 6, Brazeau County sent a notice to Town Council indicating their intent to acquire the United Church property.

Section 72 (1) of the Municipal Government Act states: "A municipality may acquire an estate or interest in land outside its boundaries only if a) the Council of the municipal authority in whose boundaries the land is located consents in writing to the acquisition, and b) after the written consent is given, the Council that wishes to acquire the estate or interest in the land authorizes the acquisition."

In response to the County's letter, the Town sent a letter dated October 14 requesting clarification on the intended use(s) of the building on the property and invited a County representative for a discussion regarding the property to the Town's regular council meeting on October 28. Town Administration confirms the subject property is located in the General Residential land use district of Town of Drayton Valley Land Use Bylaw. In accordance with Section B6, of the bylaw lists several discretionary uses from modular homes and duplexes to places of worship and home businesses.

Senior planner Matt Ellis's recommendation stated, "Due to the lack of clarification regarding the County's intended use(s) of the building on the subject property, Administration is unable to provide a recommendation at this time."

At this point, Brazeau County Reeve Bart Guyon said the purchase of a half million dollar building for one dollar was just one way of saving money and could be used for a library. However, Ellis said the property is not zoned for that use. County CAO Jocelyn Whaley added there is a deadline with the United Church members for the purchase of the building.

County Councillor Marc Gressler was also at the meeting

and stressed he was not there as a councillor but a citizen who for many years was involved with the United Church, including acting as board chair. He added the church was built by community members in 1955 and to lose that building would be a shame.

With some fairly hot discussions taking place, Mayor Doerksen took a few moments to express his dissatisfaction with the County's decision with the change in recreation sharing.

"Since being elected as Mayor, this council has kept money in the pockets of taxpayers, improved our infrastructure significantly, all while putting a few dollars in savings.

To be more specific, relative to 2017 levels, we have kept almost \$3 million dollars in the pockets of our taxpayers, and if Council votes for a 0% tax increase for 2021, that number would grow to \$4 million.

We have completed the raw water pump station, which was the first infrastructure project in North America to adopt the IPD process, which saved the Town \$3 million. We completed work on the Ring Road, which, through lobbying the Alberta government, saved our taxpayers \$1.6 million by allowing the current road to stay open and not reroute north of Esso. We are nearing completion of the South sanitary trunk line, which will increase capacity and help reduce sewer back pressure for our residents on high volume rain events.

We have planned, and will start building the new aquatic facility next year, the first major recreation project in our community in over 20 years. We did all this while increasing our Net Financial Assets from 2017 to 2019 by \$6 million dollars, compared to the County who reduced their financial assets by \$13 million dollars during the same period. Putting that into context, from 2017 to 2019, Brazeau County collected \$76.5 million dollars in taxation revenue and still managed to reduce their net financial assets by \$13 million. In comparison, the Town collected \$34.4 million in taxation while increasing our net financial assets by \$6 million, all the while improving our commu-

nity while subsidizing County residents in water and sewer and recreation.

Perhaps we should ask the County where all their money is going, other than paved roads and \$10 million dollar water systems for Cynthia, or perhaps we just need to ask George Cuff.

So comparing the two track records, I find it comical when the County comes riding in on their hypocritical high horse and tells us we don't know how to manage our money in our recreation facilities, after giving them all the information as humanly possible.

All the County's issues are legacy issues that this council sorted out. We changed our reporting system to line up with what the County wants; any discrepancies were removed.

I implore the County to provide an outstanding list of issues with the 2019 recreation costs. And if they are going to cherry pick facilities to compare us to, at least be as transparent as we have been and provide a breakdown of their facilities so we can compare apples to apples.

In closing, I will keep educating our public on the issues, and the Town of Drayton Valley will continue to do its due diligence on a go forward approach, one of which will be the dissolution or amalgamation of our communities to make sure the residents of both communities are kept top of mind and not a political ploy."

In the end, a motion was made to write a letter of support for the County to purchase the building. Councillors Corey Peebles and Bill Ballas voted against the motion.

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