

MEDIA RELEASE

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MUNICIPALITY OF CHESTER HOLDS TAX RATE IN 2015-16 FISCAL YEAR

MUNICIPALITY OF CHESTER – Council is announcing their 2015-16 Capital and Operating Budget more than a month earlier than last year – impressive. What’s more impressive is that they have approximately 14% more in capital projects over last year, a net investment of more than \$800,000 to reserves, and an increase of 2.2% in mandatory payments to the provincial government; all without an increase in the property tax rate!

Despite a rise in net expenditures of 2.7%, the Municipality is able to deliver on their priorities and maintain service levels in the coming year. Much of the increase stems from capital spending, marginal rises in general operational costs, grants to community projects and economic development initiatives. The Municipality makes mandatory contributions towards provincial services, such as education, policing, and assessment services among others. The amount is 62.58% of our general tax revenue, equaling \$6.96 million dollars.

An extra 3% in tax revenue (\$400,000) allows for the stability in area rates, fees, and property taxes, which are already among the lowest in Nova Scotia. All rates and fees will remain the same except for tipping fees at the Landfill, which will drop to \$68.54/tonne (users within the Municipality) and streetlight area rates that have decreased across the Municipality. The only other exception is the area rate for waste collection, which is now the same for all residents at \$0.093 (a marginal decrease for some and a marginal increase for others).

Wind Energy projects will generate an estimated \$970,000 in revenue for the Municipality this year, from both the Kaizer Meadow COMFIT project, as well as the South Canoe Wind Farm. After operating expenses for the Kaizer Meadow Turbine are netted out, the balance (\$479,530) is directed to Reserve Accounts. Reserves are a municipal “savings account” for future projects. Using reserves to fund projects eliminates the need to borrow for projects and thus, avoids the cost associated with borrowing (interest).

Earlier this year, Council reassessed priorities identified in their four-year Strategic Plan that ends October 2016. Those rising to the top include economic development projects, infrastructure improvements, Municipal Plan Review, and a “one counter” service level for residents. This refocus is certainly reflected in this year’s Budget.

“Yes, this year’s Budget is aggressive,” admits Warden Allen Webber. “But, so are our strategic goals. We want to put the Municipality in the position of financial responsibility, investment readiness, and economic leadership. I think we are achieving that.”

Most notable in the Budget is \$4.7 million in capital projects. With assistance from nearly \$2 million in infrastructure grants, including gas tax, the Municipality will improve public sewer systems in Western Shore, Chester, Chester Basin, Mill Cove, and Otter Point. They will also perform upgrades to trails, Municipal Offices (including Gold River), Chester Basin Wharf, the Corn Hill retaining wall, Landfill systems and equipment, municipal roads in Mill Cove, and Zoe Valle Library. Other projects include potential acquisition of prime land for public space, Phase 3 of the Duke Street sidewalk, flood risk aerial mapping, and tourism signage.

Operationally speaking, work programs and service levels will be aligned with strategic priorities to ensure quality delivery to residents and businesses. Additional programs to come include the option of electronic tax bills, delivery of multiple services at one “counter”, Age Friendly housing initiative, a marketing strategy including municipal rebranding, and availability of community space at the Municipal Office in Gold River.

The Budget, along with highlights, is available to all residents at the Municipal Office, online at www.chester.ca, and in the upcoming *Municipal Insight* newsletter in mailboxes next month.

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