

December 28, 2017

Dear Mr. Curtis,

The Policy Committee for the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) has reviewed the available content regarding the City of Red Deer's 2018 Operating Budget. We offer a number of comments for your consideration in the following areas:

### **Parks and Recreation**

Red Deer has a tremendous park system that is accessible to citizens year-round. The newly reconstructed Discovery Canyon is a fantastic venue for families to spend a day with low or no cost. The growth of the park system and recreation facilities to meet the needs of people in all corners of the City is essential to improving quality of life and health outcomes for all citizens.

Accessibility continues to be a challenge for some individuals and families and increasing fees by 2 to 3 percent will further limit participation for some residents. We appreciate the City's decision to make recreation accessible to children and youth this summer with the Rip n' Rec Summer Pass. Can you report on how many people purchased a pass? Regarding the City's fee assistance program, while we appreciate that it increases access for many families, we continue to advocate for this to expand to include families whose combined income is below the living wage of \$57,000 and scaled according to family size.

### **Utilities**

We were pleased to learn that Social Planning staff are involved with City's Utility Services to explore the ongoing challenges of utility shut offs from the poverty prevention and reduction lens. There are models for low-income utility assistance programs that are worth considering. Developing a utility program where a qualified customer could receive assistance with security deposits, a disconnection grace period and an arrears payment agreement would reduce the likelihood of homelessness. Recognizing that the family's income may be affecting other aspects of their lives it is optimal for local social agencies to provide wrap around supports. We are optimistic that the City will ensure fair treatment of utility customers.

### **Transit**

As you know, CAPRA has advocated to the province for increased investment in transit, as we understand that provincial funding is essential to improve accessibility. A recent report from Youth HQ on the needs of youth identified transportation as one of the top four challenges. Regardless of the decision from the province, we ask you to consider extending the time during the day that youth are able to access public transit using their student pass. If youth were able to travel to and from their activities in the evening, it would improve equitable access to services; increase their sense of belonging and overall quality of life.



## **Neighbourhoods and Housing**

While we appreciate that most of the costs associated with social housing and emergency shelters falls to the provincial and federal governments, the City of Red Deer is explicitly central to all decisions affecting the entire range of housing from market housing to emergency shelters. According to the Social Policy Framework, the City has primary responsibility for housing, as evidenced by the role of the Social Planning department in developing and overseeing the Integrated Housing model and administrating the federal and provincial housing funds through the Community Housing Advisory Board.

We noted in that backgrounder on the operating budget, that several action items related to housing. However, there was no evidence that the City plans to work with the community to identify local solutions to the pervasive issues of sufficient affordable housing and homelessness. We recommend that the City re-establish partnerships with local programs, services and agencies that deliver housing services to enable the success of the Integrated Housing model.

## **High-Cost Alternative Financial Services**

Although the economy is improving, many families are struggling financially. In 2014-15, CAPRA advocated to members of Council with the City of Red Deer, requesting that a change to the Land Use Bylaw be made to restrict the number of payday lending businesses that could take up business in a given city neighbourhood. Councillor Ken Johnston and former councillor Paul Harris put forward a notice of motion in July 2015.

Since then, there is increasing evidence of the negative impact that other high-cost alternative financial services have on vulnerable residents. These services include rent-to-own financing, installment loans, pawn loans, cheque cashing, title loans and auto loans. We recommend that the City make changes to the Land Use Bylaw to restrict the number of high-risk, high-cost lending providers in specific neighbourhoods.

## **Social Impact**

We thank you for the continued investment of the 211 system to ensure all citizens have access to information regardless of their language. This program will soon offer texting as an additional means to gathering information about services.

We hope that this City will continue to invest in and be involved with the Welcome and Inclusive community initiative. This is a proactive approach to addressing all forms of discrimination.

Sincerely,



Lori Jack, M.S.

Community Impact Development Officer

lori.jack@caunitedway.ca

Ph 403-343-3900 Ext. 122

On behalf of

