

December 19, 2018

Dear Mr. Curtis,

RE: City of Red Deer's 2019 Operating Budget

The Policy Committee of the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) has reviewed City of Red Deer's 2019 Operating Budget. We respectfully request that you consider the following items when deliberating the budget in the new year:

Parks and Recreation

The link between poverty and health outcomes is indisputable. One area in which the City of Red Deer makes a positive impact on wellbeing is with its park system. Discovery Canyon, Bower Ponds, playgrounds, outdoor gyms, skate parks and the extensive walking trails are all amenities that are free and accessible. The park system in Red Deer allows all citizens opportunity to engage in outdoor activities for low or no cost all year round.

We noted that recreation fees are due to go up 3% in 2019. We are concerned about the capacity of the fee assistance program for several reasons:

- The slow projected economic growth in the city,
- The largest industry in Red Deer is retail trade,
- Wages are lowest in sales and service occupations, and
- The living wage for Red Deer is more than two dollars above the minimum wage for both a single parent family and a two-parent family.

The operating budget reports that there was a 10% increase in usage of the fee assistance program in 2017. With 1 in 10 people living in poverty, we anticipate further increases. The accessibility of the fee assistance program is pending available funding. What has the City done to ensure assistance is available to all eligible citizens?

Please consider adjusting the fee assistance program to meet the rising cost of living, the general increase in fees, and the challenging economy.

Transportation

We recognize that there have been no new investments from the provincial government for transportation in the past two years, which is essential to improve accessibility. The unrestricted bus passes for youth who need transportation outside of regular school hours is a benefit to all families who require these services. The fee of \$94 may be prohibitive for low-income families particularly those with more than one child. While \$94 for a year may appear manageable, it is not, if the amount must be paid at one point in time. Families living on a low or limited budget struggle daily to meet their basic

needs and many parents find September to be a particularly challenging month, with so many school-related costs. As such, we ask that this fee be included in the City's fee assistance program or eliminated.

Fee increases this fall have a direct impact on low-income individuals and families. We are confident that CAPRA's needs assessment will demonstrate that transportation hinders low-income citizens from gainful employment, leads to social isolation, and can be a barrier to low-income families and individuals in accessing health, education, government and other services. Please consider increasing subsidies for low-income families and individuals to offset the \$2.00/month increase for students and seniors, as well as the \$3.00 increase for the unlimited pass.

We have heard from partners outside of Red Deer that transportation to the city for employment or services can be a challenge. The expansion of transit services to other municipalities, such as Sylvan Lake, would create an affordable transportation system in the region that supports citizens and contributes to the economy.

Housing and Homelessness

The current plan to End Homelessness ended earlier this year and to date there has been selective community engagement to review the current plan. We recommend that the next long-term plan involve a broad section of the community in the development and implementation stages.

We support the proposed plan to have a new entity to govern and lead the Integrated Housing Supports in Red Deer. This will change the City's involvement in housing and may allow for a greater leadership role in advocating for affordable housing and reimagining City resources in order to leverage an increased supply of affordable housing.

The recommended 2.5 percent tax increase will directly affect renters and homeowners. The recently published Poverty Snapshot reports more than 4,680 households at risk of becoming homeless and a sizeable numbers of renters and homeowners are spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Increasing taxes will put more people at risk of being homelessness.

We recommend that the City explore measures to offset tax increases on low-income households. This might include a property tax deferral program and referral to financial supports for renters. Furthermore, we recommend that part of the revenue be invested into local poverty reduction initiatives.

Living Wage

We appreciate the City's Social Planning department published the latest living wage report for Red Deer. As an employer of more than 400 individuals, does the City intend to be a living wage champion? By ensuring all City employees receive a living wage, you show leadership in the community and align yourselves with a stated community goal:

We believe in inspiring action. Together we can make a difference and reduce poverty.

A broad range of employment and related opportunities exist to support upward economic mobility and provide sufficient wages in an equitable manner, so that individuals and families can afford a dignified standard of living and have opportunities to contribute to the well-being of others.

City of Red Deer Social Policy Framework, Jobs and Wages goal

Furthermore, we would recommend reviewing the City's procurement practices to ensure that contracted services are also living wage employers. The use of a social procurement model will ensure that tax dollars and investments support community goals outlined in the Social Policy Framework.

Through the City's leadership, individuals, businesses and organizations will recognize that everyone plays a role in ensuring Red Deer is a vibrant community is one where all citizens are able meet their needs and maintain a good quality of life.

Social Impact

With the one-time funding from the City of Red Deer, CAPRA has contracted Social Innovations to complete a community needs assessment. This investment is the first step towards Red Deer developing a poverty reduction strategy. As we explore and determine the root causes of poverty in our community, we look forward to working together on a made in Red Deer response. We look forward to sharing the results of the needs assessment after its completion in December 2019.

If you would like to speak further on any of the items, you can contact me at email or phone number listed below.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of



cc: Mayor Veer and City Councillors

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