

December 20, 2019

Dear Mr. Seabrooke, Mayor Veer and Council,

RE: City of Red Deer's 2020 Operating Budget

The Policy Committee of the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) has reviewed the City of Red Deer's 2020 Operating Budget. We respectfully request that you consider the following items when deliberating the budget in the new year:

1. Increases in property tax and utilities

As you know, Red Deer's top industry is retail trade and the top occupation is sales and service. These are typically low wage positions where people must work multiple jobs to make ends meet. These increases, while within the Council recommendations, are beyond the means of a significant number of local citizens.

In the *Poverty in Red Deer: A Needs and Opportunities Assessment* completed earlier this year thanks to a one-time grant approved by Red Deer City Council, it was identified that 13% of Red Deerians earn less than \$30,000 a year which is 4,860 households. Furthermore, this report outlined the core housing needs in Red Deer (12.1%) are higher than the provincial average (11.4%) and two areas in the city are significantly higher at 24% (downtown) and 33.3% (South Hill). These are households that cannot afford an increase in the cost of housing.

**Recommended increases in property taxes and utilities must be kept to 1.5%.**

2. City's strategic plan – economic leader

News reports have stated that the City of Red Deer wants to become known as a top tourist destination, which is verified with the event hosting strategy.<sup>1</sup> While CAPRA supports diversifying the local economy, tourism will lead to more part-time, seasonal work in the retail trade and accommodation & food services industries. These are traditionally low wage jobs. The 2016 census information for Red Deer showed that more than 50% of people who are employed work part-time or only part of the year. Increased tourism will lead to the need for more low-cost housing and wrap-around services. In addition, the City must recognize that it cannot put undue tax and utility burdens on its citizenship.

**Is there a plan to address the potential economic and social implications of this strategy?**

### 3. City's strategic plan – safety and socially responsible

The Operating Budget report referenced that *the budget process is tied strongly to the strategic plan which identifies Council's areas for change and focus*. The safe community strategic priority appears focused on enforcement related to the social disorder described on the City's website. However, to be a socially responsible city we also need leadership from the City to address racism and discrimination. These intolerant attitudes are ugly and unsafe to those experiencing them and will most certainly affect tourism.

In Edmonton's robust poverty reduction strategy, they openly address racism and discrimination. The plan identifies that "confronting and eliminating racism is a critical part of ensuring that everyone can fully engaged and participate in our community."<sup>2</sup> Mayor Iveson has used his position to speak out against discrimination and the poverty reduction strategy has created a number of pathways to address social injustices.

**CAPRA respectfully requests that City Leadership honor its signatory status to end discrimination by taking a strong public stand decrying racism and discrimination; and develop robust municipal and community policies that model a zero-tolerance position for these disgraceful attitudes and behaviours.**

On behalf of CAPRA, I would appreciate a response to these points. You can contact me at the email or phone number listed below.

Sincerely,

Lori Jack, M.S.  
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& Chairperson for CAPRA's Policy Committee  
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On behalf of  **capra** | Central Alberta  
Poverty Reduction Alliance  
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<sup>1</sup> rdnewsNOW (August 20, 2019). *Moving forward to make Red Deer a top tourism destination*. Retrieved December 19, 2019 from <https://rdnewsnow.com/2019/08/19/moving-forward-to-make-red-deer-a-top-tourism-destination/>

<sup>2</sup> End Poverty Edmonton. *Justice for all*. Retrieved December 19, 2019 from <https://www.endpovertyedmonton.ca/justice-for-all>.