

VILLAGE OF RYLEY
Regular Council Meeting (Video Conference), 2 March 2021, 6:45 p.m.
Livestream Video on Facebook Group: Village of Ryley
Telephone (778) 907-2071; Meeting ID - 974 6141 9019; Passcode - 874235

AGENDA

1. Call Regular Meeting to Order:
2. Additions/Deletions:
3. Approval of the Agenda:
4. Minutes of Previous Meetings:
 - 4.1 February 16, 2020 Regular Council Meeting
5. Delegation(s): None
6. Business from the Minutes:
 - 6.1 2020 Budget Status (Discussion)
 - 6.2 Ryley Fire Department Training Records
 - 6.3 Social Media Policy
7. New Business:
 - 7.1 RFD: Kids Help Phone Donation
 - 7.2 RFD: 988 Crisis Hotline Support
 - 7.3 RFD: Letter to Minister Requesting Date Change to Fill Vacant Council Seat.
 - 7.4 RFD: Appointment to Claystone Public Advisory Committee
8. Bylaws: None
9. Financial Reports: None
10. Correspondence:
 - 10.1 IN: Claystone Update
 - 10.2 IN: Municipal Accountability Plan
 - 10.3 IN: Decision on Ryley vs Lee, Alberta Court of Queen's Bench
 - 10.4 IN: Westlock County Letter on Alberta Energy Regulator
 - 10.5 IN: Budget Letter
11. Reports:
 - 11.1 Written
 - 11.2 Verbal
 - 11.3 CAO Follow-Up Action List (FUAL)

12. In Camera:

12.1 Discussion of Regional Agreement(s) MGA Section 197, FOIP Section 23

12Z. Agenda Additions

12Z.1 []

12Z.2 []

12Z.3 []

13. Upcoming Meetings:

13.1 March 16, 2021 Regular Council Meeting (Video Conference)

13.2 April 6, 2021 Regular Council Meeting (Video Conference)

13.3 April 20, 2021 Regular Council Meeting (Video Conference)

14. Adjournment

Ryley Council Meeting

2021 March 16

BUDGET 2020 Year-End Status

DEBENTURE OPTION

the advantage is that a debenture provides us with a safety net for our Capital Reserves and keeps us north of \$1M. This guarantees insulation against a volatile tax levy because if we cannot draw from reserves for budget 2021 or future, then we may find ourselves in a position to need a larger tax levy increase than desired. The disadvantage to getting a debenture is facing a possible application to the Court of the Queen's Bench if any interested party is not able to mobilize a petition but still wants to fight it. An application to the courts would hold everything up and we would not be able to move forward on 54th Avenue until the issue is settled. Further, if a petition is launched and even if it is not successful, then we also would lose time this year and will likely face higher costs in a re-tendering. We have a huge bargain deal on the table at present given the eagerness of companies to get to work now and we will lose this if we don't give the go ahead very soon.

NO DEBENTURE OPTION

the advantage is that we could move forward immediately on our 2020 Capital Project as soon as the budget is passed. Of course, an additional advantage to NO debenture would be saving the \$108K debenture payment per year from our Operating Budget that we could add to our amortization. The disadvantage is that we would need to draw down our Capital Reserves to a very low level: south of \$1M. We could possibly get as low as \$250K if all of stars lined up against us. This disadvantage is not very risky because we have a \$200K Line of Credit, because we are already making the moves to fix our capital debt, and because we have full control and could always return to our Operating Budget to make some adjustments for pressures if we found ourselves in danger.

OP BUDGET 2020 EXPENSES: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)

STRATEGIC PILLAR	BUDGET	EXPENDED	%	\$
ADMIN	\$298,455	\$257,177	86%	\$ 41,278
RYLEY LIVING	\$678,845	\$572,563	84%	\$106,282
BIZ & E.D.	\$140,505	\$ 82,251	59%	\$ 58,254
CAP MAINT	\$740,399	\$671,924	91%	\$ 68,475
TOTAL	\$1,858,204	\$1,583,915	85.2%	\$ 274,289

OP BUDGET 2020 REVENUE: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)

STRATEGIC PILLAR	BUDGET	RECEIVED	%	\$
GRANTS	\$122,732	\$122,732	100%	\$ 0
NEIGHBOUR	\$577,149	\$559,702	%	\$213,350
SERVICES	\$236,725	\$219,755	%	(\$ 16,970)
RESERVES	\$382,791	\$309,316	%	(\$ 73,475)
TAXES	\$538,807	\$538,807	100%	\$ 0
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,858,204	\$1,750,312	-6%	(\$ 107,892)
TOTAL SURPLUS	EXPENSE=	\$274289		\$166,397

CAP BUDGET 2020 EXPENSES: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)

DEPARTMENT	BUDGET	EXPENDED	%	\$
SOLAR	\$182,600	\$202,832	111%	(\$20,232)
52 Ave (Road)	\$378,117	\$299,835	79%	\$78,283
ROADS	\$666,753	\$356,347	53%	\$310,406
WATER (H14)	\$114,957	\$ 91,192	79%	\$ 23,765
SEWER	\$455,231	\$395,000	87%	\$ 60,231
STORM STUDY	\$200,000	\$169,435	85%	\$ 30,565
STORMWATER	\$211,092	\$205,148	97%	\$ 5,944
TOTAL	\$2,208,751	\$1,719,789	78%	\$ 488,963

CAP BUDGET 2020: REQUIRED FOR 2021

DEPARTMENT	BUDGET	EXPENDED	%	\$
SOLAR	\$182,600	\$202,832	111%	\$ 20,232
52 Ave (Road)	\$378,117	\$299,835	79%	\$ 78,283
ROADS	\$666,753	\$356,347	53%	\$310,406
WATER (H14)	\$114,957	\$ 91,192	79%	\$ 23,765
SEWER	\$455,231	\$395,000	87%	\$ 60,231
STORM STUDY	\$200,000	\$169,435	85%	\$ 30,565
STORMWATER	\$211,092	\$205,148	97%	\$ 5,944
TOTAL	\$1,359,828	\$916,809	67%	\$443,019

CAP BUDGET 2020: LIFT STATION UPGRADES

PROJECT	BUDGET	\$
LIFT STATION UPGRADES		
PHASE 2A (Grinder)	\$185,544	
Shovel Rdy	- \$113,250	
NET Budget	\$ 72,294	\$ 72,294
PHASE 2B (Rx Stn)	\$306,830	
AMWWP/ICIP	- \$83,326	
NET Budget	\$223,504	\$223,504
TOTAL	\$295,798	\$295,798

2021 CAPITAL FORECAST: \$476K

- \$443,019 = 2021 ROADS CAPITAL LIABILITY (52 & 54)
- \$295,798 = LIFT STATION UPGRADE CAPITAL LIABILITY
- **\$738,817 = TOTAL 2020 CAPITAL LIABILITY**
- **\$263,123 = INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS FOR 2021**
 - MSI CAP=\$184K // BMTG=\$29K // GTF=\$50K
- **\$475,694 = TOTAL CAPITAL LIABILITY**

Village of Ryley

REQUEST FOR DECISION

<p>Meeting: Council Meeting Date: 2 March 2021 Presented By: Glen Hamilton-Brown Agenda Item No: 7.1 Kids Help Phone</p>
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RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Council for the Village of Ryley provide a donation of \$250.00 to the Kids Help Phone.

OR

That Council for the Village of Ryley provide a donation of \$200.00 to the Kids Help Phone.

BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL

Attached is a request letter from Kids Help Phone and donation policy.

Village of Ryley Council has donated \$200 to the Kids Help Phone annually for the past number of years from GL 2-11-981 Council Donations. During COVID-19 Pandemic Village of Ryley donated twice in the year 2020 for a total of \$400. Considering inflation, Council may consider for 2021 a donation of \$250 as per the maximum set in the Donation Policy (2017-04-08).

COST / SOURCE OF FUNDING

Donations to Community Groups GL 2-11-981 has a budget of \$10K. This is a planned component of the budget. After this donation of \$250 the balance for GL 2-11-981 would be on budget at \$8750.

Author: Jocelyn Gates
Date: 25 February 2021

OFFICIAL VILLAGE OF RYLEY POLICY			
SECTION:	COUNCIL	POLICY NUMBER:	2017-04-08
SUBJECT:	DONATIONS	ISSUED:	
APPROVAL:		EFFECTIVE DATE:	15 May, 2017
Mayor <i>Lavonne Swenson</i>	Mayor's Signature <i>Lavonne Swenson</i>	REPLACES: (Policy #)	
Chief Administrative Officer <i>Michael Simpson</i>	CAO's Signature <i>Michael Simpson</i>	NUMBER OF PAGES THAT FORM THIS POLICY:	1

1. Purpose

To create a uniform donation format to ensure equity between community requests for donations for local events and functions which promote and enhance the Village of Ryley's quality of life.

2. Scope

The donation policy will apply to financial and in-lieu contributions by the Village.

3. Guidelines

During each budget cycle, Council will allocate a total budget amount of their choosing to be earmarked for financial contributions to community groups.

Community Support grants

Council may award equal disbursements of \$250 per request at their discretion until the allocated fund has been depleted.

Prizes-in-lieu

In the event of a request for supply of door prize items, Council may choose to donate a Village apparel item, or a combination of Village promotional and apparel items to an organization to a maximum retail value of \$100.

Rent-in-lieu

Council may choose to offer rent-in-lieu as a contribution for local groups requiring a facility for an event. The value of this contribution is recognized at the Village's current rental rates for community groups, as per Master Rates Bylaw 2016-918

January 18, 2021

Village of Ryley
PO Box 230, 5005 50 Street
Ryley AB T0B 4A0



Dear Friend,

What a year.

There are not enough words to express how grateful I am for you. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for supporting young people during this unprecedented year of upheaval, uncertainty and loss.

When the pandemic first hit last spring, your support meant we could react quickly, and give even more young people a safe place to turn during such a critical time.

But we had no idea just how much young people in Canada would need us – and you.

Almost instantly, the number of phone calls and texts to Kids Help Phone DOUBLED.

Back in 2019, we had 1.9 million interactions with youth. At the time, we thought that was astonishing! But during the chaos of 2020, that number increased to more than **4.5 million interactions.**

Thank you for making every single one of those calls and texts possible.

Because of you, kids in Ryley, Alberta and across Canada got the help they needed when the uncertainty and stress became too much to handle – whether they were feeling anxious about the virus, missing their friends, worried about family finances, or facing crisis situations like abuse and self-harm.

I wish I could tell you this is all in the past. But you and I both know this crisis isn't over. The demand for youth mental health support continues to grow. And when kids reach out to us for help, we must be there for them.

Thank you for everything Village of Ryley has done for young people during the challenges of 2020. Can I count on you to support our youth through the coming year with a life-saving donation of \$250 or \$300?

Despite dealing with unprecedented numbers and the challenges of working remotely, we did not take our foot off the gas pedal – not for a single moment. Instead, we kept moving forward and innovating new ways to connect with kids in the ways that feel best to *them*.

In fact, your generosity resulted in three remarkable achievements last year.

First, I am so excited to introduce you to Kip, our new Artificial Intelligence Chatbot. Kip's job is to help young people connect with the resources and support they need, faster. And when kids' lives are on the line, *every second counts*.

When a kid visits our website, Kip will greet them with an automated one-on-one conversation. Depending on which words and phrases the young person uses, Kip can direct them to the services that will best suit their needs, whether that's a resource they can find on our website, a text conversation with a crisis responder, or a phone call with a professional counsellor.

Kip can point kids toward some of the 30,000 resources we have available online, or a service near them, like a food bank or LGBTQ2S+ support group. And for those who are looking for ways to quickly relieve stress, Kip can recommend online supports like digital breathing balloons and worry rockets. Pretty incredible, right? Kip is a direct result of your unwavering support and commitment to Kids Help Phone.

Second, we introduced Facebook Messenger as an access point for young people to reach our crisis responders' texting platform. I know what you're thinking – do kids even use Facebook anymore? And the answer is – they do!

In Indigenous and Northern Canadian communities in particular, Facebook Messenger is commonly used as a communications tool by young people, especially in areas where cellular service isn't strong or where young people don't have access to data plans. Instead, they use their home, school or library computer to chat with their friends.

And now, thanks to you, they can use that same platform to reach out to us. Your support means more kids in remote communities can get the help they need, even without a phone or data plan.

Lastly, you were instrumental in the creation of our new Insights website. I hope you get the chance to check it out! It's a first-of-its-kind platform that shares data from the stories, conversations and support we provide to young people every day – all while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

Visitors to KidsHelpPhone.ca/Insights will be able to access multiple types of data, including the topics kids are talking about, national and regional trends, demographics, and quotes from young people.

Through Insights, you're telling young people they're not alone by letting them know hundreds of other people share some of their thoughts and feelings. And you're also helping guide services and programs for young people across Canada through evidence-based insights based on up-to-date data.

I can't stress enough how much I appreciate your partnership as we continue to innovate, grow and be there for as many young people as possible, in the way they need us.

As the storm around us continues to rage into 2021, we urgently need your continued support. Time lost is lives lost, which is why we must keep pushing forward, keeping up with the changing needs of young people and the accelerating pace of technology.

Let me tell you Dylan's* story as an example of the kind of life-saving support you can provide a young person in crisis.

It was 2 a.m. when Dylan reached out to one of our crisis responders, Etienne, via text. Dylan has had depression for a long time and had been seeing a therapist on a regular basis.

Even with regular therapy, Dylan struggled with his unrelenting anxiety and feelings of sadness. But knowing he had someone to talk to helped him keep going and get through each day. His therapist was a lifeline – a lifeline that was cut short by COVID-19.

When his therapy sessions were postponed due to the pandemic, Dylan quickly spiraled downward – to the point where he wanted to take his own life.

In his darkest moment, in the middle of the night, he reached out to Kids Help Phone and told Etienne what he was planning. **He was in immediate danger of suicide.**

With Dylan's permission, Etienne called emergency services. While they waited, he continued to text with Dylan, making sure the youth knew he wasn't alone.

After a few minutes, Dylan's texts stopped coming. But Etienne didn't give up. He kept sending encouraging texts, asking questions, and telling Dylan he *could* get through this crisis.

Then a text came through – but it wasn't from Dylan. It was from his mom, letting Etienne know emergency services had arrived ... and thanking him for saving her son's life.

The truth is, you saved Dylan's life that day. In fact, we facilitate an average of ten "active rescues" like this every day – which means *you save lives like Dylan's every single day.*

And you don't stop there. As you might imagine, conversations like these take a mental toll on our counsellors and crisis responders as well. Your donations provide the support crisis responders like Etienne need to debrief from tough conversations and take care of their own mental health – so they can continue to be there for kids in crisis.

*This is the true story of a young person. Their name, and the name of counsellor, have been changed for privacy and confidentiality.

Your 2021 gift will also ensure we can successfully launch our brand-new peer-to-peer program – an innovative new platform that will allow young people to speak to other young people in a moderated, safe and secure way.

It's all part of giving youth the kind of support that works best for them. Sometimes kids just want to talk to other kids who understand their struggles.

Peer-to-peer support empowers young people and helps them build resiliency by finding their own solutions. And, like Kip, having these alternate supports means more professional counsellors can be available for youth in urgent distress.

Can we count on Village of Ryley to donate \$250 or \$300 today to help us further these life-changing programs and ensure we're ready for whatever else comes our way this year?

As we move into the uncertainty and challenges of 2021, our young people need you more than ever. Please renew your support today, so kids will always have someone to talk to, whenever and wherever they need it.

Sincerely,



Katherine Hay
President & CEO

P.S. Young people rely on you like never before. Please give your very best gift today and make sure there is always someone here for them.

P.P.S. Please take the time to fill out the enclosed survey – your thoughts are extremely important to us!

Village of Ryley

REQUEST FOR DECISION

<p>Meeting: Council Meeting Date: 2 March 2021 Presented By: Glen Hamilton-Brown Agenda Item No: 7.2 988 Crisis Hotline Support</p>

RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Council for the Village of Ryley support the 988 Crisis Line with the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Federal government has passed a motion to adopt 988, a National three-digit suicide and crisis hotline;

AND WHEREAS the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for suicide prevention services by 200 per cent;

AND WHEREAS existing suicide prevention hotlines require the user to remember a 10-digit number and go through directories or be placed on hold;

AND WHEREAS in 2022 the United States will have in place a national 988 crisis hotline;

AND WHEREAS Ryley Council recognizes that it is a significant and important initiative to ensure critical barriers are removed to those in a crisis and seeking help;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Ryley Council endorses this 988 crisis line initiative; and that Staff be directed to send a letter indicating such support to the local MP, MLA, Federal Minister of Health, the CRTC and local area municipalities to indicate our support.

BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL

December 11, 2020 the House of Commons passed a motion through unanimous consent to bring a national 3-digit suicide prevention hotline to Canada. Municipalities must continue to put pressure on the government and radio/television and telecommunications giving the alarming rate of suicide in Canada which constitutes a national health crisis. Additionally, you can also support personally to the cause by signing the electronic petition at:

<https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-2772>

COST / SOURCE OF FUNDING

No additional cost beyond administrative time, effort, and supplies.

Author: Jocelyn Gates
Date: 25 February 2021



Ryley CAO <cao@ryley.ca>

Fwd: 988 Crisis Hotline Support Motion

1 message

Terry Magneson <t.magneson@ryley.ca>
To: Ryley CAO <cao@ryley.ca>

Tue, Feb 23, 2021 at 9:32 AM

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **James, Jessika (Kurek, Damien - MP)** <jessika.james.702@parl.gc.ca>
Date: Tue, Feb 23, 2021 at 9:09 AM
Subject: 988 Crisis Hotline Support Motion
To: Ryley <t.magneson@ryley.ca>

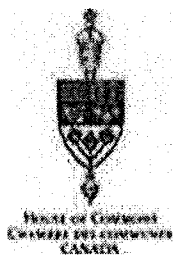
February 23, 2021

Good morning Mr. Magneson,

Last week, MP Kurek sent out an email asking for your council to pass a motion to support a 988 crisis hotline. It has come to my attention that this email may not have sent properly, so I was asked to send it again to be sure that you had a chance to read it. You can find the email below my signature.

My apologies if you have received this twice!

Thanks and regards,



Jessika James

Communications and New Media Assistant

Damien C. Kurek, MP

Battle River - Crowfoot

585 Confederation Building

Tel. : 613-947-4608

Fax : 613-947-4611

Subscribe to MP Kurek's E-Newsletter!

damien.kurek@parl.gc.ca

February 12, 2021

To Mayor Terry Magneson via email: t.magneson@ryley.ca

Dear Mr. Magneson,

Over the past year, I have heard about the challenges with maintaining strong mental health and the devastating consequences of that on people, families, and communities. Mental health is a serious issue that needs to be talked about more than just on awareness days.

Although there are some supports available, they are not widely known, and they need to be. In addition, they need to be accessible to everyone, not only to people in major cities.

While there have been significant steps taken in the past few years, it is not enough, and more needs to be done still.

On December 11th, 2020, the House of Commons passed a motion introduced by Conservative MP Todd Doherty, through unanimous consent, to bring a national 3-digit suicide prevention hotline line to Canada.

That, given that the alarming rate of suicide in Canada constitutes a national health crisis, the House call on the government to take immediate action, in collaboration with our provinces, to establish a national suicide prevention hotline that consolidates all suicide crisis numbers into one easy to remember three-digit (988) hot- line that is accessible to all Canadians.

I'm asking that all municipalities across Battle River – Crowfoot consider passing a motion similar to the one below. In order to make 988 a reality, we must continue to put pressure on the government and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

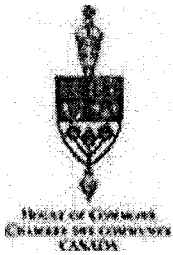
Personally, you can also support the cause by signing our electronic petition at: <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-2772>

The past year has been a challenging year and the mental health implications have been severe. As local leaders, and especially during this period of difficulty, our constituents are looking for leadership. This is one small step we can all take.

Please feel free to reach out if we can assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Damien C. Kurek, MP
Battle River - Crowfoot
4945 50 St Camrose AB T4V 1P9
Tel. : 800-665-4358



Text: 403-575-5625

@dckurek

Subscribe to my E-Newsletter!

damien.kurek@parl.gc.ca

Draft motion:

Support for 988 Crisis Line

WHEREAS the Federal government has passed a motion to adopt 988, a National three-digit suicide and crisis hotline;

AND WHEREAS the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for suicide prevention services by 200 per cent;

AND WHEREAS existing suicide prevention hotlines require the user to remember a 10-digit number and go through directories or be placed on hold;

AND WHEREAS in 2022 the United States will have in place a national 988 crisis hotline;

AND WHEREAS Ryley Council recognizes that it is a significant and important initiative to ensure critical barriers are removed to those in a crisis and seeking help;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Ryley Council endorses this 988 crisis line initiative;

and that Staff be directed to send a letter indicating such support to the local MP, MLA, Federal Minister of Health, the CRTC and local area municipalities to indicate our support.

Village of Ryley
REQUEST FOR DECISION

<p>Meeting: Council Meeting Date: 2 March 2021 Presented By: Glen Hamilton-Brown Agenda Item No: 7.3 Filling a Vacancy on Council</p>

RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Council for the Village of Ryley hold a by-election on Wed 16 June, 2021 to fill the vacant council seat created by the disqualification of Mr. Nikita Lee, unless the Minister of Municipal Affairs establishes an alternate date to fill the vacancy.

AND

That Council for the Village of Ryley directs Administration to send a request to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to set an alternate date to fill the vacant Council seat, requesting October 18, 2021, to coincide with the next general election.

BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL

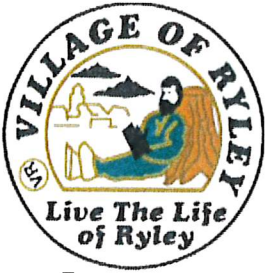
Cr. Lee has been removed from council by the courts and Ryley is required by the MGA s.165 to fill that vacancy within 120 days.

Attached is a draft letter for Council consideration.

COST / SOURCE OF FUNDING

Election Expenses GL 2-12-150 has a planned budget of \$3500. A by-election is not a planned component of the budget and in theory would cost similar to a general election, therefore, we can assume that a by-election should cost an additional \$3500.

Author: Jocelyn Gates
Date: 26 February 2021



"Come live the life of Ryley"

February 23, 2021

Minister of Municipal Affairs
Ric Mciver
10800 97 Ave NW
Edmonton, AB TSK 2B6

Dear Ric Mciver,

As you may be aware one of our councillors has been removed from council by the courts and we are required by the MGA s.165 to hold a by-election to fill that vacancy within 120 days. We have found that MGA s.605(2) says that the Minister may by order specify another number of days or another day when something in the Act is to be done. We would like to request that you consider granting the village an extension to set the date for filling our vacancy to the date of the next general election. Due to COVID-19 we are concerned about the risk this could cause for our residents.

Thank you for your time in this matter, I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Glen Hamilton-Brown
Chief Administrative Officer

Village of Ryley ~ Box 230, 5005-50 St., Ryley, Alberta, T0B 4A0
www.ryley.ca ~ Ph: (780) 663-3653 ~ info@ryley.ca

Village of Ryley

REQUEST FOR DECISION

Meeting: Council

Meeting Date: 2 March 2021

Presented By: Glen Hamilton-Brown

Agenda Item No: 7.4 Appointment to Claystone Public Advisory Committee

RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Council for the Village of Ryley appoint Cr. to the Claystone Public Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL

Village of Ryley Council is to appoint one member of council to the Claystone Public Advisory Committee.

COST / SOURCE OF FUNDIING

None

Author: Jocelyn Gates

Date: 25 February 2021



Municipal Affairs

Deputy Minister
18th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4
Canada
Telephone 780-427-4826
Fax 780-422-9561

AR96877

January 27, 2021

Mr. Glen Hamilton-Brown
Chief Administrative Officer
Village of Ryley
PO Box 230
Ryley AB T0B 4A0

Dear Mr. Hamilton-Brown:

Thank you for the email of January 20, 2021, regarding the completion of all non-compliant items identified in the 2019 Municipal Accountability Program (MAP) report for the Village of Ryley.

I commend the village for moving forward and addressing these items in a timely manner, and I am pleased to advise you the Village of Ryley 2019 MAP review has been completed to the satisfaction of the Minister.

On behalf of Municipal Affairs, I wish the village all the best for the future.

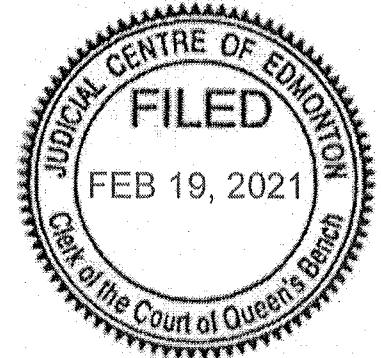
Sincerely,


Per Paul Wynnyk
Deputy Minister

cc: Honourable Ric McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs
Angel Matyachuk, Office Manager, Village of Ryley

Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta

Citation: Ryley (Village) v Lee, 2021 ABQB 130



Date:

Docket: 2003 03439

Registry: Edmonton

Between:

The Village of Ryley

Applicant

- and -

Nikita Lee

Respondent

**Reasons for Decision
of the
Honourable Madam Justice S. Leonard**

I. Introduction

[1] This is an application by the Village of Ryley (the Village) for an order declaring that Nikita Lee, an elected Councillor for the Village, is disqualified from serving as a Councillor and that his position is therefore vacant.

[2] The Village's position is that following his election, Mr. Lee became disqualified from remaining on the Council due to his failure to pay Village taxes and utilities. The Village claims that the failure to pay taxes made him ineligible for nomination as a candidate under section 22 of the *Local Authorities Election Act*, RSA 2000, c L-21 (the *LAEA*).

[3] Mr. Lee argues that this Court does not have jurisdiction to hear this matter because the Village's application was not made within the *nomination period*, as contemplated in the *LAEA*. In the alternative, he argues that the *LAEA* only required him to remain eligible on *nomination day*. Mr. Lee's position is that his Village taxes were current on nomination day and he is therefore not subject to removal from Council.

[4] For the reasons that follow, I find Mr. Lee ceased to be qualified to remain a councillor of the Village of Ryley. It follows that there is now a position on council that is vacant. I decline to exercise the Court's equitable jurisdiction to dismiss the Village's application.

II. Background

[5] In the fall of 2017, Mr. Lee put his name forward as a candidate for election to the Village Council. On September 18, 2017, he completed and submitted a Nomination Paper and Candidate's Acceptance form. The Village election occurred on October 16, 2017, and Mr. Lee was elected as a Councillor. Mr. Lee maintained his position from the date of the election to the present.

[6] Mr. Lee owns two properties in the Village that are subject to taxation and Village utility bills. On the date Mr. Lee submitted his nomination papers, his accounts with the Village were up-to-date. The parties do not dispute that Mr. Lee subsequently became indebted to the Village for unpaid taxes and utilities. He did not pay any taxes or utilities between September 16, 2017 and November 18, 2019. As of January 4, 2018, Mr. Lee owed the Village taxes in the amount of \$300.18. He continued to accrue utility and tax obligations beyond this date. As of September 1, 2018, his debts to the Village exceeded \$500.

[7] On October 9, 2019, the Village became aware of the issue. At a meeting of the Village Council Committee of the Whole, held on November 5, 2019, Mr. Lee was advised of the outstanding accounts and told that this could disqualify him from continuing to serve as a Councillor. Mr. Lee requested more information as to the nature of his indebtedness.

[8] On November 8, 2019, the Village sent Mr. Lee the Tax Roll Transactions for his two properties detailing the extent of Mr. Lee's debt.

[9] On November 19, 2019, Mr. Lee paid the Village \$3,059.32, representing the total amount of his indebtedness. Later that day he attended the meeting of the Village Council and advised that he paid the full amount owing to the Village. The Village gave Mr. Lee an opportunity to address the reasons for his disqualification. Mr. Lee denied that he was disqualified. The Village then gave Mr. Lee an opportunity to resign his position. Mr. Lee refused to resign.

[10] Pursuant to section 175(2) of the *Municipal Government Act*, RSA 2000 c M-26 (the *MGA*), the Village resolved to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an Order determining whether Mr. Lee had ceased to be qualified to remain a councillor, or an order declaring Mr. Lee to be disqualified from council.

III. Legislation

A. Local Authorities Election Act

[11] The *LAEA* governs the conduct of elections in Alberta. Section 21(1) of the *LAEA* deals with the qualification of candidates for election. It provides as follows:

21(1) A person may be nominated as a candidate in any election under this Act if on nomination day the person

- a) is eligible to vote in that election,
- b) has been a resident of the local jurisdiction and the ward...
for the 6 consecutive months immediately preceding
nomination day, and
- c) is not otherwise ineligible or disqualified.

[12] Section 22(1) provides a list of circumstances in which a person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate. Section 22(1)(c) and (d) are relevant to the issue of unpaid taxes and are relied upon by the Village in this application to assert Mr. Lee's ineligibility to continue as a Councillor. These subsections provide that a person is ineligible to be nominated if they are indebted to the municipality. These subsections are as follows:

22(1) A person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in any election under this Act if on nomination day

... ..

(c) The person is indebted to the municipality of which the person is an elector for taxes in default exceeding \$50, excluding from that amount

- (i) Any indebtedness for current taxes, and
- (ii) Any indebtedness for arrears of taxes for which the person has entered into a consolidation agreement with the municipality, unless the person is in default in the payment of any money due under the agreement;

(d) The person is indebted to the local jurisdiction for which the election is to be held for any debt exceeding \$500 and in default of more than 90 days;

B. Municipal Government Act

[13] The *LAEA* pertains only to elections. It does not address the subsequent disqualification of elected officials. Provisions dealing with the disqualification of elected councillors are found in Division 7 of the *MGA*.

[14] Section 174(1) of the *MGA* lists the circumstances in which a councillor might be disqualified from council. The subsections relevant to this application are as follows:

174(1) A councillor is disqualified from council if

(a) when the councillor was nominated, the councillor was not eligible for nomination as a candidate under the *Local Authorities Election Act*;

(b) The councillor ceases to be eligible for nomination as a candidate under the *Local Authorities Election Act*;

[15] Section 174(1) also lists a number of other circumstances in which a councillor might become disqualified from council. Section 175(1) directs a disqualified councillor to resign immediately. If this does not occur, the council can apply to the Court of Queen's Bench, pursuant to section 175(2), for an order determining whether the person has ceased to be qualified to remain a councillor or an order declaring the person to be disqualified from council.

[16] On an application pursuant to section 175, section 176(1) provides that the Court can:

(a) declare the person to be disqualified and a position on council to be vacant,

(b) declare the person able to remain a councillor, or

(c) dismiss the application.

D. Analysis

A. Is the Village's application premature?

[17] Mr. Lee argues that the Village's application is premature. He argues that there is no continuing requirement to remain qualified for nomination and that an application pursuant to section 174 can only be brought by the Village during the *nomination period*.

[18] Mr. Lee argues that recent amendments to the *LAEA* define the *nomination period* and have removed any ambiguity as to the interpretation of this period.

[19] Section 1 of the *LAEA* defines the nomination period as the relevant period referred to in section 25(2). Section 25(2) provides:

25(2) A person may file a nomination to become a candidate

(a) for a general election, within the period beginning on January 1 in a year in which a general election is to be held and ending at 12 noon on nomination day,

[20] Mr. Lee also points to section 28(1) of the *LAEA* in support of his argument. This subsection provides as follows:

Subject to subsection (1.2), nominations shall be submitted at the local jurisdiction office at any time during the nomination period.

[21] The next Village election is scheduled to occur in 2021. Mr. Lee states that the earliest a candidate could submit nominations for the next Village election is January 1, 2021. He says that the legislative intent of sections 25(2) and 28(1) of the *LAEA* was to clarify that qualification for nomination is not a continuing requirement outside of the relevant nomination period.

[22] I do not agree with this interpretation of the *LAEA*. The provisions of the *LAEA* dealing with the nominations and more specifically the nomination period, do nothing more than provide a time within which a nomination for election can be made. They do not curtail a council's

ability to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench pursuant to section 175 of the *MGA*. My finding is supported by section 175(3) of the *MGA* which imposes a time limit of three years within which an application such as this can be made. The application in this instance falls within the applicable time limit. As such, the Village's application is not premature.

B. Is eligibility for nomination a continuing obligation?

[23] Mr. Lee argues that eligibility for nomination is not a continuing obligation. His position is that councillors only need to be eligible during the nomination period or on nomination day. The Village argues that eligibility is a continuing requirement and that Mr. Lee's failure to pay his property taxes and utilities renders him ineligible to continue as a councillor.

[24] Mr. Lee points to two sections of the *LAEA* in support of the argument that a candidate must only be eligible for nomination on nomination day. Section 21(1), the Qualification of Candidates section, lists the requirements to be eligible for nomination. This section specifies that these requirements must be satisfied on *nomination day*. As "nomination day is 4 weeks before election day," pursuant to section 25(1) of the *LAEA*, Mr. Lee argues that he must only satisfy the requirements for nomination in time for the next nomination period.

[25] Mr. Lee mounts a similar argument with respect to the Ineligibility provision contained in section 22(1) of the *LAEA*. That section states that a person must not be indebted to the municipality for taxes exceeding \$50 or other debts exceeding \$500 on nomination day. On that basis, Mr. Lee argues that he is only required to be eligible in time for the future nomination period.

[26] I disagree with this proposition. As stated at the outset, the *LAEA* governs elections, including eligibility for elections. It does not deal with a situation in which an elected councillor ceases to be eligible for his position. For this, we must turn to the provisions of the *MGA*. Section 174(1)(b) says that a councillor is disqualified from council if he or she "ceases to be eligible for nomination as a candidate under the [*LAEA*]."

[27] To further support his position, Mr. Lee urges the Court to compare the provisions of the *LAEA/MGA* to the provisions of the *Metis Settlements Act*, RSA 2000, c M-14 (the *MSA*). He argues that whereas the *LAEA* does not require a councillor to remain debt-compliant, the *MSA* does. The relevant disqualification provision is contained in section 25(1) of the *MSA*:

A councillor is disqualified from remaining on the settlement if

(m) the councillor becomes indebted to any settlement for more than \$250, unless a written agreement has been entered into with the settlement to repay the debt and the councillor is not behind in payments under the agreement;

[28] Mr. Lee's argument is that this section does not refer to nomination day. In contrast, the disqualification provision contained in the *MGA* incorporates the eligibility provisions of the *LAEA*, which refers to nomination day. As such, he says that whereas the *MSA* requires continuing eligibility, the *LAEA* does not.

[29] I disagree with this proposition and find that eligibility is a continuing obligation under the *LAEA*. This is unaffected by the provisions of the *MSA*. The eligibility and disqualification provisions of the *MSA* are contained within the same act. The *MSA* does not rely on the *MGA* for this purpose. In contrast, the eligibility requirements for municipal council elections are

contained in the *LAEA* whereas the disqualification provisions for councillors are found in the *MGA*. Applying a plain reading to the relevant provisions, it appears that this may have been an attempt on the part of the legislature to simplify the provisions of section 174 (Reasons for Disqualification) by referring back to the eligibility requirements of the *LAEA*. However, it does not follow that this means the legislature intended to restrict disqualification to the candidate's eligibility on nomination day.

[30] Although there have been numerous amendments to the *LAEA* and the *MGA* over the years, the decision of this Court in *Edmonton (City) v Chichak*, 1990 CanLII 5489, 103 AR 205 (ABQB) (*Chichak*) remains relevant to the issue of whether or not eligibility is a continuing obligation. There, the court considered the phrase "ceases to be qualified" in the former section 29(1) of the *MGA*. The Court stated at para 11: "...Read as whole, I am persuaded that the intent of the Act is such that qualification for nomination is a continuing requirement; disqualification is not cured by the passage of time."

[31] In 1994, the wording, "ceases to be qualified" was replaced with the current wording now found in section 174(1) of the *MGA*: "ceases to be eligible for nomination". I am of the view that this change in wording did not change the intent of the section or the legislative scheme as a whole, and that the analysis in *Chichak* on this point is still good law.

[32] Further, this analysis is consistent with the plain reading of the remainder of the section which contains a number of reasons a councillor might be disqualified. Clearly, the reasons underlying the enumerated grounds in section 174 of the *MGA* for disqualification are ongoing requirements. For example, a person cannot be convicted of an offence and yet remain on council because the nomination period has not yet opened.

[33] The reasons for disqualification make it clear that the legislation is seeking to prevent situations of conflict of interest. Not only does section 22 of the *LAEA* deal with indebtedness to the municipality for taxes and other debts, it also contemplates ineligibility where a person is the auditor of the jurisdiction or an employee of the jurisdiction, for example. The risks associated with conflicts of interest were discussed in *Chichak* at para 37:

...The legislation establishing qualifications for nomination to a city council addresses the potential for conflict of interest and the risk of public perception of undue influence and unequal application of the law. The City Solicitor and other municipal officials are placed in a completely untenable position when called upon to collect tax arrears from a sitting alderman...

[34] The legislative scheme makes it clear that municipal councillors must remain eligible for nomination throughout their tenure. This ensures councillors are not in a conflict of interest with the municipality they are elected to serve. I find that Mr. Lee's failure to pay his taxes disqualified him from serving as a councillor pursuant to subsections 22(1)(c) and 22(1)(d) of the *LAEA*.

C. Despite Mr. Lee's ineligibility, should the Court nonetheless dismiss the Village's application?

[35] In oral argument, Mr. Lee contended that even if the court found that non-payment of taxes and utilities rendered him ineligible to serve as a councillor, the Court should nonetheless exercise its equitable jurisdiction to dismiss the Village's application on the basis that Mr. Lee's ineligibility was due to inadvertence or an error in judgment.

[36] The language of inadvertence and error in judgement comes from section 177 of the *MGA* which states:

A judge who hears an application under this Division and finds that the person is disqualified under section 174(1)(f), (h) or (i) may still dismiss the application if the judge is of the opinion that the disqualification arose inadvertently or by reason of a genuine error in judgment.

[37] Previous iterations of this section of the *MGA* did not limit the circumstances in which the court could exercise its discretion to relieve a councillor of his or her ineligibility. The current version of section 177 of the *MGA* came into effect in 1994. It limits the circumstances in which the court can exercise its jurisdiction to the following situations:

174(1)(f) situations in which a councillor becomes ineligible because he or she fails to vote on a matter when required to do so;

174(1)(h) situations in which the councillor has a pecuniary interest in an agreement that is not binding on the municipality; or

174(1)(i) situations in which the councillor uses information obtained through being on council to gain a pecuniary benefit.

[38] The legislation does not permit the court to dismiss an application on disqualification where the councillor was indebted to the municipality.

[39] However, the Village acknowledges that the Court retains equitable jurisdiction to grant the relief sought by Mr. Lee. In *Lac La Biche (County) v Bochkarev*, 2009 ABQB 400, a councillor was found ineligible to retain his position on council due to a pecuniary interest in a matter before council. In considering whether the Court could exercise its jurisdiction to dismiss the County's application despite the ineligibility, the Court stated at para 49:

...In equity, inadvertence and genuine error have always been grounds for relief by a judge from the strict interpretation of the common law. I hold that while I cannot rely on genuine error or inadvertence in and of themselves to dismiss the application where there is a contravention of section 172 of the *Act*, it is nevertheless something that can be taken into account in deciding whether to declare Councillor Bochkarev able to remain on Council instead of declaring his seat vacant...

[40] Mr. Lee says his failure to remain eligible to hold his seat is due to his inadvertence. He says that he did not understand that the law required him to pay his taxes in order to remain eligible for council. He says there is no evidence of bad faith and that disqualification would be unduly harsh.

[41] However, I find that Mr. Lee's failure to pay his taxes was not inadvertent. In *Chichak* at paras 15-25, the Court considered the meaning of "inadvertence" and "bona fide error in judgment." From this detailed review of the law, I distill the following:

- a) Inadvertence is accidental or unintentional. It occurs where a person is not properly attentive, inobservant or heedless;
- b) A bona fide error in judgment is an error that occurs in good faith or honestly. There is no fraud or collusion. It is a genuine error.

[42] Mr. Lee says that he misunderstood the law and that he did not know that he had to maintain his taxes in order to remain eligible for council. Ignorance of the law may come within the meaning of inadvertence in some circumstances: *Chichak* at para 26.

[43] In *Primeau v Jensen*, 1998 ABQB 385, the Court applied the *Chichak* reasoning to determine whether the respondent's conduct was inadvertent. There, the applicant applied for an order declaring that the respondent was disqualified from continuing as a councillor on the Elizabeth Metis Settlement Council because the respondent failed to file a disclosure statement on time. The respondent missed the deadline by three days because he failed to note the correct date in his calendar. The Court agreed inadvertence must be assessed based on the circumstances of the case and found at para 43 that the respondent acted inadvertently but "there was no evidence of corrupt intent or motive."

[44] In this case, Mr. Lee became indebted to the Village for taxes in default exceeding \$50 on January 4, 2018 (subsection 22(1)(c) of the *LAEA*). As of September 1, 2018, Mr. Lee was indebted in an amount greater than \$500 when his unpaid utilities and unpaid taxes were in default over 90 days (subsection 22(1)(d) of the *LAEA*). Mr. Lee did not pay his taxes and utilities for 22 months, until November 19, 2019, when he paid his outstanding balance.

[45] Mr. Lee was questioned under oath by the Village in anticipation of this application. He was asked a number of times to explain the inadvertence that caused him not to pay his taxes on time. On each occasion he declined to answer the question, stating that he did not pay the taxes on time for personal reasons. In the oral hearing of this matter, Mr. Lee provided a different account stating that he did not understand that a failure to pay his taxes would render him ineligible to continue as a councillor. Neither of these explanations could be considered inadvertence such as to engage the equitable jurisdiction of this Court.

[46] Mr. Lee did not provide evidence that he did not understand that as a resident of the Village he was required to pay municipal taxes. He acknowledged that tax assessment notices are sent out by the Village every summer. This is not a situation where the respondent mailed a cheque to the wrong address, overdrew his personal account and failed to meet the tax obligations, or mis-diarized the deadline to pay the taxes. Mr. Lee knew he had a balance owing to the Village and chose not to pay it.

[47] Mr. Lee argues that this application was brought by the Village as retaliation for Mr. Lee's attempt to demonstrate that the Mayor of the Village has an improper pecuniary interest in a matter that is before council. There is no evidence that the Village's application is retaliatory. The Village is acting in accordance with its obligations and has successfully brought an application pursuant to the provisions of the *LAEA* and the *MGA*.

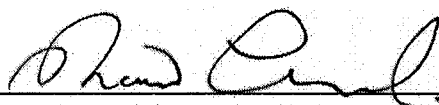
E. Conclusion

[48] Mr. Lee is an elected official in the Village of Ryley. He continued to occupy his position as a councillor for the Village over a period of 22 months while he remained indebted to the Village. This created a conflict of interest and at the very least, a perception that the law did not apply equally to Mr. Lee. I decline to exercise the Court's equitable jurisdiction to dismiss the Village's application. Mr. Lee is disqualified from being a councillor for the Village of Ryley. There is a vacant position on council.

[49] The Village is entitled to party-and-party costs pursuant to schedule C of the *Alberta Rules of Court*.

Heard on the 20th day of November, 2020.

Dated at the City of Edmonton, Alberta this 19th day of February, 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Leonard', is written over a horizontal line.

S. Leonard
J.C.Q.B.A.

Appearances:

Edmund Picard
Alberta Counsel
for the Applicant

Nikita Lee
Self-Representative
for the Respondent



February 23, 2021

Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) – Directive 067 Feedback
Suite 1000, 250 – 5th Street SW
Calgary, AB
T2P 0R4

Dear Regulator,

RE: Westlock County Concerns Regarding Proposed Changes to AER Directive 067

At the County Council Meeting of February 23, 2021 Westlock Council passed a resolution to forward a letter of concern to the AER. Westlock County has significant concerns regarding proposed changes to Directive 067 which fails to address non-payment of levied municipal taxes by Licence Holders of provincially regulated oil and gas properties.

Westlock County (for the tax years 2015 – 2019) has written off \$ 2,377,848 with an additional \$702,000 anticipated for 2020 for a total of \$3,079,848. The annual levy is approximately \$ 11,000,000.

These write-offs represent an average of 7% of our annual levy over the past four years.

Included in these write-offs is \$137,082 in uncollected School Tax and DIP Requisitions, which have been recovered through the PERC and DIRC Grant program. In addition, \$20,320 of uncollected Senior's Housing requisitions are included in the write offs and to date are not recoverable.

In principle Westlock County Council supports changes to this Directive which better protects the interests of all Alberta residents. The proposed changes to the AER that protect the required funding of the province's Orphan Well Fund and ensure the payment of all provincial fees and royalties is encouraging. It is disappointing though to see that the AER has elected to ignore calls (for more than three years now) from over eighty (80) rural municipalities seeking to ensure that the AER (and the Province of Alberta) act to protect municipal taxation and security powers relating to insolvent Licence Holders (or those continuing operations under bankruptcy protection).

Many operators are defaulting on municipal taxes owed (including School and Seniors Foundation levies) which are assessed by (and ultimately owed to) the Province of Alberta. It is disappointing that the AER has ignored these municipal calls and decided not to address these well documented and often communicated concerns.

Westlock County requests that the AER include the following three (3) necessary amendments in conjunction with the current update of Direction 067:

1. "Section 5 – Maintaining Eligibility" the AER should immediately revoke the licenses of continuing viable Licence Holders choosing not to pay all (or any) of their municipal tax obligations.
2. "Section 4.5) -Unreasonable Risk (Obtaining General Licence Eligibility)" the AER should not authorize or permit the purchase or transfer of any licences involving an existing oil or gas licence holder (or operator) currently in default of any municipal tax obligation anywhere in Alberta and
3. "Section 4.5) – Unreasonable Risk (Obtaining General License Eligibility)" the AER should initiate steps with the assistance of the Alberta Government (Municipal Affairs) to ensure that municipalities are recognized as secured creditors (through any bankruptcy involving Licence Holders) to secure and collect that municipality's (and the province's) taxes levied and owed.

Alberta's rural communities are the municipalities that own and are expected to safely maintain the important infrastructure necessary for the oil and gas industry to succeed. As a partner in this success the fair assessment and collection of municipal taxes (including provincial taxes levied for school and seniors) is foundational to the support and maintenance of this infrastructure by our municipality.

Sincerely,



Jared Stitsen
Reeve

cc: Glenn van Dijken, MLA
Shane Getson, MLA
Provincial Caucus
Member Communities – RMA
Member Communities - AUMA



ALBERTA

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Office of the Minister

Deputy Government House Leader

MLA, Calgary-Hays

Dear Chief Elected Officials:

I am writing to provide you with more information about Budget 2021, which my colleague, the Honourable Travis Toews, has tabled in the legislature. I would specifically like to provide you with details on the items in Municipal Affairs' Budget 2021 that affect municipalities the most.

To begin with, I am pleased to tell you that Municipal Affairs is investing more than \$1.7 billion overall to build stronger communities. Those funds will deliver important programs and services and will support effective governance and preserve public safety. I must also acknowledge that, as a result of several factors, including falling revenues and the ongoing costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to reduce government spending in Alberta. Our goal is to do this while also continuing to provide significant infrastructure funding in the near term to support our economic recovery and help municipalities adjust to new levels of funding in future years.

Over the next three years, from 2021-24, as we all strive to live within our means, municipalities will receive about 25 per cent less in capital funding than they did in 2020-21. In real terms, that means Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) capital funding will average \$722 million a year over that time. To support continued economic recovery and stimulus efforts, more of that funding will be made available up front, and less in subsequent years.

To help you adjust to a reduced average funding level, \$1.196 billion in MSI capital funding will be made available to municipalities and Metis Settlements in 2021, and \$485 million in each of the next two years. Additionally, municipalities and Metis Settlements will continue to receive the full \$30 million under the operating component of the MSI.

As you are aware, MSI was scheduled to conclude in 2021-22 and be replaced by legislated funding provided under the Local Government Fiscal Framework in subsequent years. Given the current circumstances and economic uncertainty, we are extending MSI for two years to stabilize provincial revenues before launching the Local Government Fiscal Framework in 2024-25. The baseline funding level for that first year of the LGFF will remain at \$722 million. We thank municipalities for understanding that this change was necessary to respond to the serious challenges we are all facing. The estimated 2021 MSI allocations are available on the program website.

.../2

I am also pleased to advise you that Alberta expects to receive \$255 million in federal funding under the Gas Tax Fund (GTF). The estimated 2020 GTF allocations are available on the program website. Links to the program websites with the MSI and GTF allocations are provided in the transmittal e-mail accompanying this letter.

MSI and GTF program funding is subject to the Legislative Assembly's approval of Budget 2021. Individual allocations and 2021 funding are subject to ministerial authorization under the respective program guidelines. Federal GTF funding is also subject to confirmation by the Government of Canada. You should expect to receive letters confirming MSI and GTF funding commitments in April.

To help municipalities respond to the requirements of the *Alberta Senate Election Act* and *Referendum Act*, our government is making \$10 million available to support costs associated with operating Senate nominee elections and referendums in conjunction with local elections. This funding will be available under the Alberta Community Partnership program, increasing the total program budget to \$25.4 million.

I am happy to say that funding to support local public library boards will remain stable, helping those groups provide a vital resource to residents through this especially trying time. I am also pleased to report that, due to some great work from our staff at the Surface Rights Board to reduce the backlog of landowner claims, we will be able to save \$600,000 in our yearly operating expenses.

This has not been, by any means, an easy time for Albertans. We understand the challenges that communities will continue to face in the months and years ahead. We remain committed to providing sustainable levels of capital funding to support critical local infrastructure, promote economic development, and enable local governments to continue to deliver the programs and services that Albertans depend on.

As Albertans, we are no strangers to adversity. We have overcome challenges in the past and we will continue to do so. I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that Alberta overcomes today's challenges and shares in a bright and prosperous future together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ric McIver".

Ric McIver
Minister