

CITY OF PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE – 2024 BUDGET SPEECH

As presented by City Finance Chair, Joe Masi

Your Worship and fellow members of Council, it is my pleasure as Chair of the Finance, Legislative and Property Committee to present to you the 2024 City of Portage la Prairie budget.

Wrapping Up Construction on Saskatchewan Ave West

We have reached the final year of construction for the Saskatchewan Ave West Project. The \$41 million multiyear investment included the renewal of utility infrastructure, enhanced land drainage systems, sidewalks, parking spaces, medians, boulevards and bike paths. While this project has involved the planning of prior councils, the improvements to both the active transportation network and the esthetics fall within the current Council's strategic plan initiatives, specifically quality of life and showcasing our community.

As a reminder this project has been funded through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program in partnership with the Federal and Provincial governments, with the City contributing the balance of the funds for this project. This partnership along with the planning of both our current and prior Council's has resulted in the investment being completed without the need to increase taxes due to this project.

Investing in Infrastructure

In total, the City plans to expend \$25.7 million on capital projects and purchases in 2024. While the Saskatchewan Ave West Project is the largest of the investments currently planned for 2024, the budget also includes large investments to our utility infrastructure which align with Council's strategic initiatives related to economic opportunity. These investments include upgrades to the Water Pollution Control Facility.

The City has secured funding through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program for the upgrade to the Water Pollution Control Facility. We will continue to work with the province to overcome obstacles that have delayed progress on this project. For more information regarding this project please visit the Projects page on our website.

The City looks forward to continuing to work with our partners, the province of Manitoba, and our regional industries to ensure we are building facilities that have capacity for our future growth while meeting our environmental responsibilities. Please see the Projects page on our website for updates as these initiatives move forward.

Other Capital Projects

In addition to the completion of the Saskatchewan Ave West project and ongoing work on the Water Pollution Control Facility, the City is working in partnership with the Manitoba Water Services Board to complete the detailed design for the expanded Water Treatment Plant. This project is in alignment with the Council's strategic plan initiatives related to economic opportunities. This \$3 million project is being funded at 50% by the MWSB while the City will be responsible for the balance. This is the first step to increasing the City's capacity for producing treated water.

As part of Council's strategic plan initiatives quality of life and the development of great neighbourhood's was identified as a priority. The City will be investing in the design and construction of new street, in preparation for the development of the former Agassiz Land. An application for grant funding through the Municipal Economic Development Infrastructure Program (MEDIP) for the \$2 million project has been submitted to the province.

Other capital projects of note:

- Completion of Phase 2 of the Accessibility Project at City Hall including installation of a lift from the main floor to the second floor, upgrades to the Council Chamber and installation of an accessible washroom.
- Completion of City Hall renovations including both interior and exterior paint, interior and exterior lighting, flooring, replacement and reconfiguration of front service counter, and repairs to the northwest entryway stairs and doors.
- Completion of renovations to the Fire Hall which includes the office, operations and maintenance areas within the facility.
- Replacement of the Fire Rescue Command Vehicle.
- Continued enhancements to our generator capabilities to ensure we can provide power to our infrastructure in extreme weather events similar to the 2019 winter storm.
- Assisting with the design and rebuilding Koko Platz Community Centre.
- Contribution to the Junk Yard Dogs Cycle Park Project to secure the new site with proper fencing.
- Installation of a concrete sidewalk to connect the new Saskatchewan Ave West sidewalk to West Park School and intersection at Walmart.
- Enhancement of existing Garrioch Creek Trails infrastructure.

Community Partnerships and Grants

The City works with a variety of partners in delivering services to its residents and businesses. A complete listing of funding to be provided to community and partnership organizations and City committees will be posted on the City's website in the following days. In total, \$2.45 million is being expended in this area. We will be contacting each organization who applied for this funding to notify them of Council's decision regarding their application.

The Business Storefront Improvement Grant intends to help business owners in Portage la Prairie improve the face of their businesses by providing funds for exterior building upgrades. In addition to improving the appearance of an individual building, these upgrades are expected to contribute to overall business enhancement. The Business Storefront Improvement Grant is a matching grant offered by the City of Portage la Prairie that will provide up to 50% of the project cost with a maximum municipal contribution of \$3,000 per project, from a total fund of \$15,000. Please watch our website for more information on how to apply for this program.

Community Safety

As part of the Council's Strategic Plan, community safety and well-being has been identified as one of the top five initiatives. 2024 will see the implementation of a Community Safety Officer program. The intent of the CSO Program is to enhance public safety, reduce the impacts of crime in our community and improve the city's relationship with our businesses. As was highlighted in the December 11, 2023, council meeting additional public safety funding from the province, received in 2023, was earmarked to fund the expected upfront capital expenditures for the program in 2024.

We continue to partner with the RCMP and the School Division to fund our School Liaison Officer Program offering additional support to students, parents, and teachers in our region.

Expanding Staff Complement Due to Growing Infrastructure and Increased Building Assets

In recognition of the City's growing infrastructure and increasing number building assets, Council is adding two positions to our workforce.

The first is an additional staff member in our Facility Maintenance division, responsible for the ongoing maintenance and repair of our utility assets as well as other City-owned facilities. This will increase our ability to perform preventative maintenance which reduces the likelihood of critical failures occurring.

The second will be an additional Transportation division employee, responsible for road maintenance and snow clearing. The new position will result in additional frontline resources to address transportation-related issues.

New Snow Clearing Strategy

As part of the 2024 Budget funding has been allocated to improve snow clearing along Saskatchewan Ave. The City is working in partnership with the Province of Manitoba to double the current service level for removing built-up snow from parking lanes and snowbanks on the sidewalks along Saskatchewan Ave. As stated previously we have increased our staff complement in our Transportation Department, to assist with providing a higher level of service to our citizens. We will continue to work with our businesses to communicate the snow clearing expectation on property frontages.

As a reminder to our citizens, when we have a significant snow fall event our first priority is always our main roads that provide access to our hospital, schools and essential services. Once those are clear we will move on to our secondary and residential areas, these will be cleared on the day following your waste collection day. Please ensure that you are not parking on the street on these days and remember to bring in your garbage cans and recycling bins.

The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff for their excellent work after the last major snowfall event.

2024 Property Taxes

2024 is not a general assessment year, if the assessed value of a property has not changed due to significant renovations, construction of new buildings or demolition of existing buildings owners can expect to see the **municipal portion** of their property taxes increase by 1.74%.

Reserve allocations have been increased as part of the 2024 budget. As a result of inflationary impacts seen across all sectors and within our citizens' homes, it is prudent to increase these allocations to prepare for the future infrastructure costs and capital requirements. Due to the province increasing municipal operating grant funds, we have been able to achieve this with minimal impact to taxpayers.

Impacts of Changes to Provincial Education Tax Rebate

Property owners can expect to see changes to the way the Province of Manitoba is issuing the Education Rebate to property owners. As part of a media release issued in December of 2023, the province indicated that they will no longer be mailing out cheques to property owners but will be applying the discount directly to your property tax statements. This will result in most properties seeing a reduction in the net taxes on their property tax statements.

Budget Summary

In summary, the 2024 budget:

- For the general fund, the net operating budget is \$13.5 million, and the capital budget is \$16.4 million.
- For the utility fund, the net operating budget is \$16.3 million, and the capital budget is \$9.25 million.

This proposed budget will result in an increase of 1.73% to property owners' municipal taxes, substantially lower than the current level of annual inflation. The year over year increase for a residential property with an assessed value of \$250,000, for both 2023 and 2024, will be \$40.28, which is approximately \$3.36 per month.

The next step in our 2024 budget process will be to await receipt of the Portage la Prairie School Division's budget. This is used to finalize our financial plan and determine the total mill rate. Your final tax bill will be impacted by the Province of Manitoba's decisions to discontinue issuing rebate cheques for the Education portion of your property taxes, in 2024 you will see the rebate applied directly to your tax bill.

We are expecting to complete our 2024 Financial Plan by April, and after a public hearing to approve this document, submission to the provincial government will occur. Your tax bill will be mailed to you by early June and as usual, and we will provide you with various tools to calculate your 2024 taxes in advance on the City's website.

The 2024 budget speech will be posted on the City's website in the next few days.

In conclusion, I am proud of the teamwork between City Administration and City Council to put forward a progressive budget that continues:

- To encourage sustainable growth through development of great neighbourhoods;
- To further develop and enhance our recreational and cultural opportunities, green spaces and expand our active transportation network;
- Investment in community safety and well-being;
- Strong investment in our infrastructure to encourage economic investment in our community;
- Investment in beautification projects to showcase our community;
- And importantly, respects our citizens ability to pay in these difficult inflationary times.

Again, thank you to my fellow Council members and Mayor Knox for your support of this budget. I look forward to accomplishing great things with all of you for our community in 2024.