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Brazeau County 2017 Interim Budget invests in the community

BRAZEAU COUNTY — On November 29, Brazeau County Council passed an interim budget for 2017, re-affirming Council's commitment to community health and wellness along with infrastructure improvements while keeping tax rates and fees unchanged.

The interim operating budget is \$47.8 million, with \$20.1 million going towards capital projects. Of that \$20.1 million capital budget, 41% has been dedicated to road infrastructure.

At budget meetings November 23rd, 24th, 28th, and 29th, Brazeau County Councillors and Administration went over the operational needs and capital requests for 2017. With the current economic climate, especially in our community where the oil and gas sector that employs so many of our residents is experiencing economic challenges, both Council and Administration approached the budget looking to minimize the impact to our citizens and businesses.

Council passed an interim budget in order to proceed on approved operational and capital projects in the period between now and when the County receives final property assessment information from Accurate Assessment Group in the spring.

"Due to the economic slowdown, assessments may change, leading to a reduction in tax revenue," says Chief Administrative Officer Marco Schoeninger. "Because Council and Administration took a proactive approach, we were able to adapt the budget to accommodate lower tax revenue without raising taxes or halting work on important projects."

All departments found efficiencies and presented operating budgets reduced from 2016 levels. Overall, Administration presented Council with a budget that had an overall decrease in operations expenses of 1.6% from 2016, following a 4% reduction in 2015. In addition, Council withdrew \$10.1 million from restricted and unrestricted surplus accounts – the municipality's savings accounts – to account for potential loss in revenue.

In 2017, Brazeau County will be investing 82 per cent of the capital budget in core infrastructure, including lagoons and sewer line replacement and upgrades to ensure the health and wellness of residents. The full list of approved capital projects will be made available on the County website at www.brazeau.ab.ca following the Dec. 20 Council meeting.

“As a Council we’re happy we were able to approve a budget that invests in our community through our capital projects,” says Reeve Bart Guyon. “Health and wellness of our citizens is our first priority, but the added benefit of our \$20.1 million in capital spending is that there is an opportunity for local businesses to participate in these projects and help alleviate the effects of the economic downturn.”

The final 2017 Budget and Tax Rates will be determined next April once Brazeau County has received its final assessment information.