



MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: Amherst town council tackles unsightly premises, town's drug problem in its 2021-22 operating budget

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – Commercial, residential and resource tax rates in the Town of Amherst are going up by 1.5 cents per \$100 of assessment as the town takes steps to deal with unsightly premises and the town's drug problem.

Council established the overall tax rates for the 2020-21 fiscal year at \$1.67 per \$100 of assessment for residential and resource properties and \$4.47 per \$100 of assessment for commercial properties when it met on June 7, 2021.

At the same time, council adopted the final stage of the budgetary process when it approved an overall operating budget of just under \$18.6 million.

The tax rate to raise the money for the general operating budget was set at \$1.197 per \$100 for residential and resource properties and \$3.997 per \$100 of assessment for commercial properties.

The tax rate for the community support budget, which funds grants to organizations, a grant to the Cumberland YMCA, the town's tax exemption and tax reduction police and community events, was set at 7.1 cents per \$100 of assessment for all property types, the same as last year.

Earlier this year, council approved a mandatory provincial contribution tax rate of 40.2 cents per \$100 of assessment on all properties. This rate raises the money the town is required to collect on behalf of the province for education, corrections, housing, property valuation services and the regional library.

The general budget tax rate, mandatory provincial contribution tax rate and the community support tax rate are combined to make the overall tax rate.





The increase in tax rate will enable the town to continue providing its services at the same level as the previous year while enabling it to deal with unsightly premises through the hiring of a dedicated dangerous and unsightly premise administrator, whose job will be to deal with unsightly and/or dangerous properties complaints.

In addition, council decided to reallocate a portion of the funds it had previously set aside to hire an onsite energy manager to the Amherst Police Department for a two-year pilot project that will see the department reassign an officer, currently working as a crime prevention officer, to the major crime unit in order to help tackle the town's drug problem.

The crime prevention officer's duty will be taken over by a qualified civilian employee who is to be hired in the near future.

"The public has been urging council members to take steps to get a handle on the unsightly premises in town and to address the town's drug problem," Mayor David Kogon said. "This small increase in the tax rate and our decision to forego hiring an onsite energy manager will enable us to address these issues.

"In addition, the budget passed tonight is balanced and it enables us to continue providing all existing services despite the inflationary pressures the town is facing."

"Staff have presented a budget that balances the need to provide quality services and infrastructure to Amherst residents and businesses, while limiting the financial impact on all taxpayers of the town," Interim CAO Jason MacDonald said.

"While tax rates are increasing by 1.5 cents per \$100 of assessment – half a cent increase to the mandatory provincial contribution rate and 1 cent for the addition of a dedicated dangerous and unsightly premises administrator – this is an increase of less than one per cent and will result in increased services for our customers."

MacDonald thanked all the town's senior managers "for their co-operation, especially when we asked them to make budget reductions in their departments, sometimes more than once."

The Interim CAO also thanked the town's new CFO Mike Hunter and senior accountant Sarah Wilson for their efforts in preparing the budget and the town council for their support and co-operation in developing the budget.





“While some tough choices had to be made, council once again proved that they work as a team and have the best interests of the town in mind,” MacDonald said.

The general operating budget contains the budgets for corporate services (\$2,643,339), police (\$4,554,907), fire (\$1,829,540), economic development (\$234,303), recreational facilities (\$1,457,339), community well-being (\$463,726), operations (\$2,455,701), planning (\$118,734), strategic initiatives (\$200,000), environmental stewardship (\$46,987), sewage (\$1,247,429), solid waste (\$591,795), mandatory provincial support area rate (\$2,167,470) and community support area rate (\$581,640).

Council also approved the Amherst Water Utilities operating budget at slightly more than \$2.2 million.

In approving the water budget, council noted the water utility rates, which are set by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board, in the 2021-22 fiscal year will be unchanged from the 2019-20 rates.

They also noted a new water rate study, which could impact future water rates, is currently being conducted, as required by the provincial review board.

The uniform solid waste charge, wastewater treatment facility uniform charge and sewage rates also remain unchanged for the 2021-22 fiscal year, MacDonald said.

Council also approved a general borrowing resolution that authorizes the borrowing of up to \$7.7 million to meet the day-to-day expenditures of the town until such time as the taxes are levied and collected. The resolution does not mean the money will be borrowed, but can be borrowed if needed. This credit facility is almost never used.

In addition to approving the operating budget, the council, after receiving an additional \$672,000 in gas tax revenue from the federal government, added several paving projects to their capital budget. The projects are:

- North Adelaide Street, at a cost of \$200,000
- Victor Street - \$50,000
- Pender Street - \$40,00
- Industrial Park Drive, between the CNR tracks and Southgate Street - \$100,000
- Fire Station Parking Lot - \$80,000



TOWN OF Amherst NOVA SCOTIA

- Central Avenue - \$75,000
- Robbs Basketball Court - \$35,000

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