



Town of Nanton

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January 7th, 2020

Honourable Doug Schweitzer
Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Deputy House Leader
Office of the Minister
Justice and Solicitor General
424 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

E-mail: ministryofjustice@gov.ab.ca

Dear Honourable Minister:

RE: Imposition of a Police Tax upon rural municipalities

While increasing police numbers to generally tackle rural crime is a positive step to be applauded, our respective communities are not being offered any guarantees or evidence that the additional taxation will provide tangible local benefits at the detachment level. It could be argued that this lack of tangible benefit from higher property taxation represents an invitation to some municipalities for the consideration of new local regional police forces instead of the RCMP.

While there may be a committee for local government input, the new funding model does not guarantee that:

- Existing detachment staffing shortfalls will be filled;
- Existing detachment staffing will actually grow and the funding will not simply fill existing vacancies;
- The detachment will be better equipped and supported;
- Response times will be reduced;
- That all new police and support staff recruited will be living and working in communities that facilitate maintained or improved response times;
- The Town will have any greater influence over policing priorities than today (which is minimal);
- Major capital decisions like detachment building replacement will be expedited at the federal level.

The impact on Nanton

From a financial perspective the new police tax will not be welcome. In 2020 it will mean a 1.5% increase to the operating budget and in five years it will mean a 4.5% increase to the budget. For the average single-family dwelling this will mean an additional \$47 in 2020 – in five years the new tax will mean an added \$140.

While many residents and businesses understand well the municipal function of collecting certain provincial taxes or levies (and that these collections are not related to municipal taxes or service costs set by local elected officials), many more do not. It is for the Province to publicize and defend the rationale behind the Police Tax on behalf of rural communities, not the collection agency. Council hopes that information backgrounders and inserts will be made available for municipalities to minimize the potential damage to



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their own tax room for vital local services. Furthermore, the rumoured amalgamations of detachments in our region (which began at the same time as the Police Tax was announced) means that small town residents and businesses may find themselves paying higher property taxes for re-organized RCMP services that potentially carry longer response times by **fewer** members based in the local area. This will be a challenge for any elected official to defend.

Small towns like Nanton may be tempted to review, reduce or eliminate the Peace or Bylaw Officer presence in their communities in order to make property taxes less expensive. However, small communities cannot expect the RCMP to pick up any subsequent bylaw enforcement slack – that is not their job. Such moves would be counterproductive to community safety.

The timing of the introduction of Police Tax may also have a chilling effect on ‘fair deal’ cost sharing discussions under the *Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework* legislation, potentially resulting in more small urban municipalities either settling for unfair cost-sharing settlements or opting for costly arbitration come April.

In closing, while the police funding approach put forward by the Province is reflective of messaging in the Mackinnon Report - avoiding driving up provincial debt when municipalities still have room to levy higher property taxes – the assumption had been that this message implied reductions in capital funding grant aid like MSI, not major new provincial tax requisitions on the rural property tax base that place substantial indirect fiscal tax room constraints on municipalities. In this context, it is critical that a community like Nanton unequivocally benefit from the new revenue raised by its own taxpayers for policing.

On behalf of Council, I urge you and your colleagues to execute the commitment to increased rural policing with clearer, tangible small-town benefits, without such drastic impacts downloaded to the rural property tax base.

Yours sincerely,
Town of Nanton

Jennifer Handley
Mayor

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cc: Roger Reid, MLA Livingstone Macleod
John Barlow, MP
AUMA President and Board
RMA President and Board
MD of Willow Creek