

Stephenville Crossing Town Budget 2003

On Dec. 11, the Town Council of Stephenville Crossing passed its balanced budget for the year 2003. This budget totals \$926,850.13 and its primary focus is to solve the problems associated with the water and sewer systems.

Property tax remains unchanged from last year at 7 1/2 mills but council has deemed it necessary to increase water and sewer rates from \$304 to \$325 per year. That means an increase of \$1.75 per month per household.

The rationale or explanation is that the water system has undergone considerable improvements with the construction of a new tank and a chlorination system. However, the pumping system was not upgraded because qualified engineers told the town in 2000 that the system was quite adequate. Presently, there exists a 300,000 gallon tank that cannot be filled on a daily basis and also meet the daily demand of consumption by the citizens of the community. Therefore, plans were formulated to make some necessary improvements.

In December 2001, number six well was drilled. To date it has not been hooked up. Ministerial approval was given 13 months ago, but action has not been taken by the provincial government to tender this job. "It is critical that number six well be on line before any improvements or repairs can be made to the existing system," says Vince Parsons, chairperson of finance.

Once this is done, pumps for wells four and five have to be upgraded to accommodate number six well. These three wells can produce enough water daily to make the system work and then work on well number one can commence. This well needs a new pump and well number two needs servicing.

With all these changes the system then has the capacity to provide over 600,000 gallons of water per day. The town's daily consumption is around 300,000 gallons. With the capacity to fill the water tank on a daily basis, water pressure in all areas of the town, especially upper Brook Street and Seal Cove Road, will improve considerably.

Having a situation where some residents have to collect water from streams to flush indoor toilets is totally unacceptable in this day and age," says Councillor Parsons. "Changes have to be made, and they have to be made in 2003." Citizens of Stephenville Crossing are probably aware the government of Newfoundland and Labrador proposed funding of over \$500,000 to develop four new wells. The council has turned this down.

"We don't need four more wells," says Mr. Parsons. "We need the present system working the way it was designed to work." If council had accepted government's offer, it would have been responsible for 40 per cent of the cost of the project; this was totally unacceptable. The town of Stephenville Crossing has been very fiscally responsible over the years and feels it deserves a better deal such as an 80/20 cost sharing arrangement.

But, because the town's mill rate is at 7 1/2 mills and not 9 1/2 (provincial rate standards) and because the town's water/sewer rate is \$325 and not \$364 (provincial rate standards), the town does not qualify for better cost sharing arrangements.

"We are being penalized for being fiscally responsible," says Mr. Parsons. The water/sewer lift stations are aging and new pumps are needed. Council has initiated a plan to replace the pumps in lift stations over a two-year period. For 2003, lift stations in Seal Cove Road and Main Street will be replaced. Other areas of the town will be replaced in 2004.

Other highlights of the budget include annual funding for recreation, playground improvements, conservation, beautification, the fire department, and community marketing.

Restrictions will be placed on travel for council, and council will continue to lobby provincial and federal agencies to promote job creation initiatives. Due to lack of government funding, council has had to put on hold-prioritized projects, which deal with sidewalk repair and street paving.

Council assures its citizens that the town is financially stable. The debt load is 1/5 of the total budget; this is due to the town's citizens and businesses who are diligent in prompt payment of their taxes.