

**County of Vermilion River Taxpayers Association**

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12th August 2016

**Members of Council**

**County of Vermilion River**

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Canada

Members of Council,

Letters sent on behalf of the County of Vermilion River Taxpayers Association to Council dated December 30, 2013, March 17, 2014 and January 15, 2015, in which we sought changes or improvements to policies and administrative procedures, have been viewed by Council as “information only”. Very little has been done to implement any changes although all 10 items raised were in line with your stated goals of being open, transparent and accountable to your citizens. For your immediate reference, we have attached copies of these letters.

We had hoped that through these communications, you would be aware of and concerned about the level of dissatisfaction felt by taxpayers, residents and businesses within the County. The near-collapse of the oil sector and its’ impact on businesses and job loss, both directly and through ripple effect, has hit our communities hard. When so many of us are facing financial hardship and the reality of failed businesses or unemployment, we need to know that through policy and administration, our tax dollars are being spent wisely and frugally. It is not council’s money, it is the taxpayers’ money and sadly transparency has further deteriorated.

The role of the County of Vermilion River Taxpayers Association (CVRTA) is to work co-operatively in a positive, constructive and friendly manner with Council and Administration, to keep taxpayers informed of County issues of current concern, and to assist taxpayers and groups who wish to bring issues to public attention.

We submit the three concerns below for your review and response in regards to action that will be taken. If you wish your responses to be included in any publications which may be undertaken on behalf of and for the benefit of County taxpayers, please email your documentation to **cvrtaxpayers@gmail.com** by the end of business on August 31st, 2016.

Respectfully,

County of Vermilion River Taxpayers Association

## Council Policies

- Council Meetings have dropped to once a month in 10 of the 12 months in the 2016 calendar year. The CVR website states meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month, except Aug & Dec, which is not occurring.
- Although the amount of council meetings have dropped by half, councillor basic honorarium paid to attend council meetings remains the same (Policy # LE 001)
- Agenda and meeting minutes prior to January 2016 are not available on the CVR website. Technical difficulties have been cited as the reason for this since June 3, 2016. It is unacceptable that taxpayers are being kept in the dark.

## In-camera Sessions (private meeting of council which excludes the public, no minutes are taken)

- Information regarding in-camera sessions is not complete in the agenda and council meeting minutes. Quoting only the FOIP section provides insufficient information to the taxpayer for an understanding of the specific topic being discussed. The agenda should contain a 'Confidential' heading and then provide a brief description of the topic and state the section of the FOIP Act that allows the topic to be discussed in-camera.
- Information from Municipal Affairs regarding what should appear in an agenda and minutes for an in-camera session can be found in the following documents:

[http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ms/A\\_GUIDE\\_FOR\\_PREPARING\\_A\\_COUNCIL\\_MEETING\\_AGENDA\\_2016.pdf](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ms/A_GUIDE_FOR_PREPARING_A_COUNCIL_MEETING_AGENDA_2016.pdf)

[http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ms/IN\\_CAMERA\\_DISCUSSIONS\\_OF\\_COUNCIL\\_2016.pdf](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ms/IN_CAMERA_DISCUSSIONS_OF_COUNCIL_2016.pdf)

- The number of in-camera sessions entered into by Council is very high in comparison to other counties of similar or larger size in Alberta. Councils are required to conduct their business openly with very limited exceptions. Council is accountable to the citizens who elect them and it is essential that we are allowed to take an active interest in the development and direction of the County local governments and express our views.

## Council & Committee Minutes

- Request all CVR council and committee minutes be posted online within 3 business days by using water mark or similar method clearly stating they are "un-approved/draft". This process is used by multiple counties in Alberta already.
- Once "draft" minutes are approved at the next Council meeting, they should be changed to "final" from "draft" and updated online immediately. The length of time it takes for approved minutes to be posted online is too long. Example: June 7/16 minutes are posted online as unapproved event after the next council meeting concluded on June 28/16.
- Consider implementing live webcast of all council and committee meetings as used by other counties in Alberta. This process is of great benefit to taxpayers to receive timely information when unable to travel or attend meetings due to personal obligations.
- Request ACE project documentation and meeting minutes be added online so taxpayers are able to follow its progress
- No Intermunicipal Liaison Committee minutes after June 26/15 are posted on the CVR website