

**April 26, 2019**

***Municipality of Colchester Approves 2019-20 Operating Budget***

After careful scrutiny, the Municipality of Colchester has approved the 2019-20 Operating Budget at its Council Meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April.

Council's aim was to achieve a balanced budget that affords delivery of excellent municipal services while investing in reserves, as well as in many community organizations and events. This has been accomplished.

Colchester enjoys one of the lowest rates of property tax in rural Nova Scotia. This budget affirms that status with a ½ cent increase to the residential tax rate. This amount will result in an additional annual charge of \$5.88 for residential property owners with properties of average assessed value. Properties valued higher, for instance, at \$200,000, will see an increase of \$10 on their annual bill.

"We set our Operating Budget in a context of competing needs, requests, opportunities, and anticipated revenues; but it is important to note that there are some costs and revenue streams that are not within our control." says Colchester County Mayor, Christine Blair.

Nearly 48% of taxes collected by the Municipality are sent to the Provincial Government for services such as schools, housing, libraries, and policing. This year the County had to accommodate an increase to its mandatory payments to the Province of \$184,952. This would equate to an additional tax rate increase of just under 1 cent, if Council chose simply to pass it along to citizens or business.

Policing services charges increased by 1% under the contract with the RCMP that is negotiated by the Provincial Department of Justice. Council is concerned that current service levels do not match expenditures. To this end, it is requesting a full review of service levels and value for payment. It will also assess alternatives for service delivery.

Colchester County is an Atlantic regional leader in waste management, including diversion processing for itself and other municipalities. However, in 2018, changes in world markets led to an unanticipated shortfall in revenues for Colchester from recycled materials. The shortfall for 2019/20 is projected to be \$500,000. Rather than increase taxes to compensate for this downturn, which would have required a 3 ½ cent tax rate increase when added to the inflation of mandatory Provincial charges, Council and staff have worked hard to find budgetary efficiencies.

With the announced closure of Tarkett North America (formerly Crossley Carpet Mills) in Truro, Council expressed deep concern for the well-being of those directly affected. As well, it recognizes the vital need to grow and diversify our local economy. It will continue to work with its neighbouring jurisdictions and business community, especially through the Truro-Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity. Council has decided to make a confident investment in economic development by allocating additional resources to its staffing in this area.

"Our Council is very proud to point to the fact that in this budget we will again financially support vital work being done in every corner of Colchester County by our hard-working community organizations," remarked Mayor Blair. The Municipality provides extensive funding for facilities, programs, events, and many not-for-profit community groups in the County. "It's investments like these that make our communities wonderful and caring places to live in and visit."