



Mayor's Monthly Message

March 2020

This month has certainly been dominated by the COVID-19 public health emergency and what feels like near daily announcements of further changes to our lives. The Village will continue to publish regular updates on the website as needed. I thank our small but mighty public works and office teams for their very quick action to close public facilities, keep essential services going and adjust to the new reality of working with social distancing. The office is operational and staff are there to assist you by phone and email. I also want to express my appreciation to all residents for their patience with the operational changes in the Village and to all those who have embraced the requirements being published by public health officials to deal with a closed school, limited social interactions and other significant disruptions to their daily lives.

A hearty congratulations to Devynn and Brian Bohn on the recent opening of their Hickory Street restaurant. An amazing transformation of this important store front business in our community. The true southern BBQ menu and unique atmosphere has already become a local favorite and is sure to become a draw for the whole region. While the dining room is now closed pursuant to provincial requirements, delivery and takeout options are available.



We are fortunate to have a number of great small businesses in our community like ATB Financial, Street Side Market, Village Dental, Flex Fitness, Stirling Self Storage and the Country Barn B&B. In addition, there are many exciting home based businesses in Stirling. The more you can “buy local”, the more you are helping to sustain these entrepreneurs and ensure a diverse range of services remain available right here in our community. All business owners are coping with the challenge of the current situation so your support of our local businesses has never been more important.

Did you know there is a business directory on the Village website listing all the services available in our community? We will be updating the directory soon. When you renew or obtain your business license, you receive a listing in the directory for free. Is your listing missing information or outdated? Be sure to let the Village Office know so we can keep our business directory current and serve as a reliable source of information for residents. You can review the directory here: <http://stirling.ca/business/directory>



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Council approved revisions at 1st Reading to the Fire Bylaw this month that are mostly administrative in nature. The amendments align the appointment of the Fire Chief as part of the responsibilities of the CAO rather than Council which is consistent with provincial law. In addition, new provisions for fire permits for open fires in “large lot residential” or “agricultural” designated lots have been added under certain limited conditions.

The Stirling Fire Department was also informed this month that a grant was approved by the province to support their training plans this year. The department continues to invest in officer/leadership training as well as more technical programs like responding to wildland fires. Stirling is also working collaboratively to offer access to specialized training programs for other volunteer fire departments in our region.

Council also approved 1st Reading of a Municipal Library Board Bylaw that is also mostly administrative in nature. The Bylaw essentially authorizes the creation of a Library Board to manage the operations of the Library. Although Stirling has long had a volunteer library board for this purpose, we are required to formally establish the board through a bylaw. Construction of the new library space is mostly complete and the focus of the work will shift to moving shelves, furniture and books over to the lower level of Stirling Lions Community Centre as resources permit.

A surprise development in late February was the introduction by the provincial government of Bill 2 – the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act. This bill, when passed, would repeal section 54 of the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act and was to be effective on April 1st this year. (The passage of the bill will likely now be deferred to the fall.) That section of the Act is a legacy of prohibition in Alberta and, until now, effectively prohibited the ability for businesses to obtain liquor licenses in parts of Warner County and Cardston County. For example, in Stirling, community groups could only obtain a temporary liquor license for a specific event at approved locations. The province plans to harmonize rules across the province and, thereby, open the possibility of liquor licensing changes in previously “dry” communities like Stirling. Stirling also has restrictive covenants on title of properties as a legacy from when the community was founded. Council is investigating the potential implications of all these recent changes and will seek public input should an application for either permanent liquor retail or regular liquor service be received.



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In March, I met with the Chief Superintendent and District Officer for Southern Alberta of the RCMP. I reiterated Stirling's priorities around rural crime as a focus for the local detachment. We discussed Council's concerns about being asked by the province to contribute towards additional funding under revised policing funding models without assurances that it would result in additional human resources being deployed to our community. I also expressed appreciation for the positive working relationship we have between the Raymond/Magrath detachment and Stirling's administration.

As the sunshine continues to last a little longer each day, it will soon be everyone's favorite season again... road construction! The key priority for this season will be the complete replacement of sewer, road base and pavement on 3rd Street from 4th Avenue to 5th Avenue. (Otherwise known as the block in front of the school.) This will be a major project that will see new underground infrastructure as well as new streetscaping along the whole block. We thank everyone in advance for their patience during construction and for respecting safety barriers once it begins. More details will be provided on the Village website once a schedule is confirmed.

Residents would also have received notification for a public hearing scheduled for April 8th. It is time for Village and County to update our Inter-municipal Development Plan or IDP. A draft has been prepared and we are seeking public input on the long-term vision for development around our community. The notification is posted on the Village website. You can also download a copy of the proposed IDP by clicking this link: <https://www.orrsc.com/county-of-warner-and-village-of-stirling-idp-draft-february-2020/>. Council meetings including this public hearing will be conducted virtually moving forward for the foreseeable future on the ZOOM platform. Details on how to join the meetings from the comfort of your own home will be posted soon.

Despite increased financial pressure from the recent provincial budget and more recent concerns about a global economic slowdown, I'm still optimistic about our longer-term future. Stirling has seen inquiries for new housing development, has witnessed new business investment and with low municipal debt, our community is well positioned to take advantage of opportunities that come our way when this current crisis passes. There is certainly increasing risk ahead in light of global events but working together, we are well positioned to weather the storm.

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