

To the Residents of Onoway and the Municipal Community

Attached, please find responses addressing the concerns raised by the Onoway Taxpayer Association (OTPA).

1. Reserves

The OTPA observes a reduction in reserves from \$1,033,000 to \$411,000.

- The number OTPA cites is incorrect as the reserves are currently at \$678,000 according to the 2023 financial statements.
- Major reserve draws included staff severance packages and the purchase of an SRS lagoon machine. The SRS machine (\$232,000) was a decision made prior to this Council's term.
- Staff firings and severance packages are not the responsibility of Council. The decisions were the responsibility of the former Administration.
- The SRS machine issue was explained by the former Administration as an unsuccessful grant application, necessitating the use of reserves. The SRS machine is in the process of being sold.
- The reserve reductions are primarily not due to the actions of the three Council members subject to the recall legislation.

2. Bloom Interim CAO Contract

- The Bloom Interim CAO contract, priced at \$15,000 per month (2022), compared favourably to the former Administration's contract, and additional charges averaged approximately \$18,500 monthly (2021). The Bloom contract resulted in a financial saving for the Town, evidenced by a budget surplus at year-end 2022.
- The Bloom Interim CAO services were comprehensive, providing expertise in municipal finance, legislative services, executive administration, communication, and governance. Bloom provided no less than five associates to support the Town with interim CAO services.
- To obtain information on Bloom's contract, a request must be made to Council in an open council meeting to approve the information for release.
- Tim Duhamel offered to provide contract information upon an official request in an open session with Council, yet no such request was made. Bloom followed up with an individual requesting the information on no less than two occasions and planned to schedule them in at a council meeting. The individual never responded.
- The Bloom contract costs were covered from budgeted CAO contract funds due to the position's vacancy. There was no net budget impact on the taxpayer.

3. OTPA Staffing Comments

- Contrary to OTPA's claim, the office was not solely run with three staff members. The former Administration charged for additional services beyond the CAO contract, including grant applications, financial support, legislative work, etc.
- Reorganization efforts by Bloom during the 2022 budgeting process aimed to ensure the Town could deliver municipal services at the highest level without relying on contracted services.
- The addition of staff and office reorganization resulted in a net budgetary saving from the former Administration contracted services while improving services and delivering better-trained staff.

In conclusion, the information provided by OTPA appears to be misinformed. We hope this clarification sheds light on the decisions and actions taken for the benefit of the town of Onoway.

Challenging the Loud Minority to Stand Up for What is Right – Say No to Recall

A Letter to the Town of Onoway Residents and the Alberta Municipal Community

by Tim Duhamel

Municipal government is the lifeblood of our communities across Canada. No matter the size of municipality, municipal councils are often the catalyst for real and lasting change in communities. In places like Onoway, where council divisions can be sharp, the impartiality of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Administration is crucial. Split councils are often the catalyst for a municipality being labelled as dysfunctional. Unfortunately, the media often overlooks the positive contributions of council members and administrations, focusing instead on the negative, which amplifies a distorted view of dysfunction fuelled by a minority. Too many good people have been hurt by this business, and it's time the municipal community challenges misinformation and dysfunction and stands up for what is right.

Bloom has had the privilege of working with the Town of Onoway. As we served as interim CAO for approximately five months, I have a unique perspective on the Town, as I am not quite an insider or an outsider. As my team worked in Onoway, we faced false allegations and abusive behaviour by a minority of Council. They and their supporters alleged that myself, the Bloom Centre for Municipal Education team, and CAO Jennifer Thompson had been party to poor administrative practices and mismanagement of funds. The individuals making these accusations requested a forensic audit. Bloom, the CAO, and I are fully cleared of any complaint of wrongdoing through a forensic audit completed by the accounting firm, MNP. The press release states, "Bloom and Jennifer Thompson's work was in the best interest of the town."

The forensic audit, however, has discovered misappropriation of funds by the former Administration. There is a filing of proof of loss due to those misappropriation of funds, and the investigation continues.

Since the allegations and hearsay toward myself, Bloom, and the CAO are proven to be false and fabricated, the focus of the debunked accusers has now shifted to the three Council members who are accused of mismanagement and ineffectiveness. This has led the local taxpayer's association to demand that the Town use recall legislation against these Councillors. As a municipal expert with decades of experience working with elected officials, I believe the recall of these elected officials is undeserved.

Despite facing undue criticism, I have personally observed the three Council members show respect for Administration and the public, display great leadership, and achieve notable improvements in Onoway's governance, including:

- Consulting with experts in the municipal governance field before making decisions;
- Responding positively to expert advice on legal issues, governance, and regional cooperation;
- Shifting the Council approach from administrative to governance;
- Directing Administration to create an Economic Development committee to support the growth of the Town; and
- Requesting a financial review and changes, which enabled the budget to be improved and become more efficient.

These efforts, among others, demonstrate the Council's commitment to prudent, effective management and community development. The targeted Council members have shown exemplary dedication and resilience in their roles. "If you do what is easy, life becomes hard. If you do what is hard, life becomes easy,"¹ perfectly describes their tenure—they have taken the difficult but necessary steps to secure a prosperous future for Onoway. I stand by these Council members, the CAO, and the Administration as they continue to guide the community with integrity.

The challenges posed by a split council are significant yet not insurmountable. Success is possible if all members prioritize the community's best interests. This letter marks the beginning, not the end, of my efforts to highlight the truth behind the challenges we face in municipal governance.

¹ Kim, Kalama (2019, March 2). *Be Phenomenal or Be Forgotten*. [Coldwell Banker Pacific Properties Presentation.]