

Red Deer Advocate

City council approves capital budget

By [Crystal Rhyno - Red Deer Advocate](#)

Published: November 25, 2014 9:02 PM

City council gave the green light to a \$173.3-million capital budget for 2015 after a 10-hour session on Tuesday.

The 105 single-year and multi-year projects range from the small-ticket items such as \$42,000 for a market feasibility study in Riverlands, to the \$21.5 million to replace the Red Deer Arena.

Mayor Tara Veer said the budget is highly responsive to community feedback on several fronts. She said the budget accommodates some of the core infrastructure challenges but also moves the community forward in a cost efficient manner.

“In our new economic normal we need to find new ways of moving the community forward in a financially responsible manner,” said Veer.

She said this was established with the capital budget savings plan and a stronger emphasis on community partnerships that were established in the budget.

This budget takes in consideration pressures of growth alongside the necessary amenities for the city. Councillors said the 2015 budget offers a great balance between investing in core infrastructure like roads and underground work and community amenities.

Council heard the roof on Red Deer Arena is reaching its lifespan and a decision must be made on its future. Council reasoned it makes better financial sense to knock down the building and build a new one than to renovate and pay more in the long run.

Some councillors said building a new arena will open up the possibility to new partnerships and sponsorships including securing naming rights.

Other items approved in the budget included \$15.2 million towards roadway construction and crown paving, and \$15 million for the relocation of two city fire halls.

Coun. Tanya Handley was most vocal during the debate as she unsuccessfully tried to trim the budget by questioning items like the \$4.9 million for the street light conversion to LED project.

City manager Craig Curtis said there will be cost savings in the long run. But Handley wasn't convinced that throwing out good lights out was the best solution. She favoured a phased in approach for when the old lights reached their life cycle.

Like other councillors, Handley questioned the \$8.8 million price tag for the planned North Red Deer Regional Community Centre. Handley said she was happy with the location at 77 Street and Taylor Drive but she had too many questions about staffing, and the planned amenities.

“The high cost of the facility could potentially make it not affordable for kids who need a place to go versus a skate park or spray park which is free,” said Handley. “For me it didn’t quite hit what I thought was the intention of a community centre which is to provide an affordable (place to go).”

Coun. Frank Wong said the project would have been cheaper if the work was completed years earlier. Footing the bill for a natural gas fueling station to service the city fleet sparked some more debate. Council passed a motion to switch to compressed natural gas from diesel earlier this year.

Councillors Paul Harris and Ken Johnston had voted against the move and stood their ground when discussing the fuelling station. Harris said he is not convinced it is the right technology. He would rather delay the project for another year because he does not support the research. He called the move “costly and irresponsible” because the city will likely have to switch technologies again.

Coun. Lynne Mulder said it may not be the right technology but the city has to start somewhere. The transit department will apply to the provincial GreenTRIP program to help with the costs.

Council will discuss the 10-year capital plan at workshops in early 2015 around the growth options and the communities amenities plan. As it stands now the potential capital projects for the next 10 years rings in at about \$1.73 billion based on current projections.

A project in the 10-year plan does not necessarily mean it will go ahead. Rather it means that the city is considering, planning and financing options for it.

Coun. Buck Buchanan said he looks forward to the workshop because there are items that were not in the 2015 budget including a multi-use aquatic centre that he would like built sooner than later. A multi-use aquatic centre is placed as a line item for consideration in 2020.

Likewise Harris would like to see the pool moved up in the 10-year plan. Harris said he looks forward to determining the scope of a potential concert hall in the city. Harris called the budget a “giddy up and go” and “coming of age” budget.

Operating budget deliberations will begin on Jan. 6, 2015.

2015 Budget Highlights:

- Red Deer Arena replacement – \$21.5 million
- Timberlands residential development – \$12.4 million
- North Red Deer Regional Community Centre – \$8.8 million
- Crown paving - \$8.2 million
- Fire station relocation – \$7.9 million (fire station #3) and \$7 million (fire station #4)
- Land purchase (residential development) – \$6.95 million
- Riverview Park bank stabilization - \$6.3 million
- Street Light Conversion to LED – \$4.9 million
- Taylor Drive Linkage – \$5.3 million in order to establish the entrance into Riverlands. It also includes land acquisition. This is part of the Riverlands Area Redevelopment Plan.
- Fleet Fuel System infrastructure – \$3.7 million as part of the city’s switch to natural compressed gas from diesel
- 30th Avenue projects – \$3.1 million (roundabout at 67th Street) and \$1.8 million (Northland Drive to 67th Street)
- 53rd Avenue completion – \$2 million for the building and the paving of the road as part of the Railyards Plan
- Red Deer Airport runway expansion – \$1.7 million (subject to County of Red Deer matching)
- RCMP downtown detachment – \$1 million to develop the second floor due to growth

- River Bend Golf and Recreation Society – \$711,000 for course equipment, upgrades to sewer, addressing drainage issues, tree replacement and driving range infrastructure etc.
- Community library at Ironside School – \$600,000
- Bower Ponds (Riverwalk) – \$520,000 for the reconstruction of the trail and to restore landscaping next to the Red Deer River in Riverlands that will be removed as a result of the burial of the Alta-Link powerlines. Design work is also included in the cost.
- Red Deer Public Library – \$510,000 downtown branch roof replacement
- Legion Track Repairs – \$280,000
- Sports Fields Upgrades – \$260,000 for upgrades and renovations of neighbourhood sports fields.
- South Hill Community Centre Demolition – \$215,000

crhyno@reddeeradvocate.com