
County of Wetaskiwin No. 10

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

April 28, 2022

Clarifying the Changes to Fire Billing in the County

The County of Wetaskiwin has received many inquiries regarding the recent change back to billing for Fire Protection Services. The County of Wetaskiwin began charging the owner/occupant of the land or the person(s) responsible for the fire with fire protection charges in 1998. Billing for Fire Protection Services continued until 2018 when during Strategic Planning in 2018 for 2019 budget, Council discussed the option of covering Fire Protection Services through a special fire tax. At the time, it was calculated that the County would need to collect \$217,993 based on a four-year average, in order to cover the cost of Fire Protection Services through taxes instead of billing individuals for the cost of Fire Protection Services with the exception being if the owner/occupant was found negligent or in contravention of the Fire Services Bylaw. In that case they would receive a bill for the full cost of the Fire Protection Service.

During this review in 2018 Council also considered what surrounding municipalities were doing and found that Clearwater and Camrose County had a user pay system where citizens were billed for Fire Services and Leduc, Brazeau, and Ponoka County covered fire services through taxes. In 2019, Council approved a new Fire Services Bylaw that would covers the costs of Fire Protection Services through a special fire tax with an approximate budget of \$300,000 annually. In 2019, the actual cost of Fire Protection Services was \$197,381. In 2020, Council reduced the Fire Protection Services budget to \$200,000. This reduction was reflected in a reduction in the special fire tax amount charged to County residents. Below is a breakdown of the budget and actual costs related to providing Fire Protection Services from 2019-2021.

	Fire Protection Service Budget	Fire Protection Service Actuals
2019	\$300,000	\$197,381
2020	\$200,000	\$234,412
2021	\$200,000	\$443,124

At the end of 2021 and early 2022 Council began discussing options for funding Fire Protection Services. On April 5, 2022, Council approved a new Fire Services Bylaw that re-instated the Fire Protection billing that had been in effect from 1998-2018. "It has become evident" stated Reeve Bishop "that by covering firefighting costs through taxes is leaving available money on the table where properties covered by insurance for these costs cannot be billed if we do not charge for the

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service. This leaves the residents still stuck with the costs through both taxation and insurance premiums. Additionally, rising costs and more frequent incidents would have led to a further increase in the fire services levy.”

Effective May 1, 2022, County Residents will be charged for costs related to fire protection up to \$10,000 provided that the fire was not caused by gross negligence or in contravention of the Fire Services Bylaw. If gross negligence or contravention of the Bylaw is confirmed, the party responsible will be liable for the entire cost of the fire. Charges for Fire Protection Services will not be billed in the event of medical first response.

Residents should check with their insurance provider to ensure that their policy includes firefighting insurance to cover firefighting costs up to \$10,000 at a minimum.

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