



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE IN RESPONSE TO PROVINCIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW POLICE FUNDING MODEL

Municipal leaders not briefed on fast-track of program; concerned over resultant impacts to rural ratepayers.

Sangudo, Alberta, Thursday, December 5, 2019 – The Councils of Lac Ste. Anne County and adjacent municipalities have today issued a joint response to the United Conservative Party’s December 4th announcement regarding its intent to download policing costs onto rural Albertans. Municipal leaders had not been briefed by the Province prior to this decision, and are now focused on determining the resultant bottom line for regional ratepayers.

“We were not part of the announcement,” stated Joe Blakeman, Reeve of Lac Ste. Anne County. “We heard about it the same way everyone else did: in the news. In fact, it feels like we weren’t even part of the Province’s consultation process. Numerous concerns were voiced by rural municipalities over the past year; none of which are reflected in their media spin as ‘a brand new day for rural Alberta.’”

Secrecy and Sparse Detail Precede Provincial Announcement

At the end of the Province’s consultation process in October, and during the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Fall Convention in November, Alberta’s Minister of Justice and Solicitor General (JSG) Doug Schweitzer reassured municipal leaders that the police funding model was still in its consultation stage, and that further conversations would occur to determine how the model *might* look if it were to go ahead. At the time, it was stated that:

- Consultations are ongoing and no decisions have been made yet on a new police-costing model
- The model has not been finalized and the province is only at the beginning of the consultation process

“The County feels blindsided by the news, and disappointed in how it was disseminated,” continued Reeve Blakeman. “We had been told repeatedly by Minister Schweitzer and his team that they are still consulting, contemplating, and playing with formulas. Now all of a sudden the trigger is pulled and it’s out in the public domain without any prior notice to those impacted most by the plan. It’s interesting to note how critical it was to Justice Minister Schweitzer that municipal leaders took part in the consultation piece; yet apparently we had no business knowing about its outcome.”

“There is little doubt in my mind that the engagement process was a mere formality,” shared Reeve Blakeman. “In the final analysis, none of our concerns were addressed, and none of the Province’s reassurances rang true. Now we’re left holding the bag, and our ratepayers are stuck with the bill.”

It is the position of Lac Ste. Anne County Council that the policing initiative places yet another financial burden on resource-strapped rural municipalities. The County seeks to remind the Province – and taxpayers in rural Alberta – that the new police funding model will result in increased municipal tax rates, reduced service levels, re-evaluation of intermunicipal agreements, and closer scrutiny of policing efficiencies.

Reeve Blakeman voiced a common sentiment among municipal leaders regarding the cold, hard reality of the Province’s decision. “Let’s be clear: this is a tax expense, and it is going to cost rural Albertans an additional \$200 million,” stated Blakeman. Our job on Council is to now determine how we are going to shoulder this new tax hit, and what value we are receiving as a result. Fewer sanders on the road next winter? A property tax increase? This is another sucker punch to rural Albertans who are already dealing with job loss, failed crops and numerous other setbacks. These are the same rural Albertans who, may I remind Premier Kenney, form the bedrock of the United Conservative Party.”

Storm Clouds of Regional Dissent

Neighbouring municipalities are joining ranks with the County to determine outcomes of the police costing model, and to communicate these impacts to residents and business owners who will ultimately pay the price. Mayerthorpe Administration voiced concern about the impact of this new program, in addition to other increases outside of the Town's control. Administration expressed that this is the worst possible time to implement this tax with the downturn in the economy and people struggling to make ends meet. Mayerthorpe will be separating policing costs on our tax notices similar to third party requisitions so that ratepayers can see that this is a tax being paid directly for RCMP policing.

Janet Jabush, Mayor of the Town of Mayerthorpe, welcomes a stronger police presence in rural Alberta and understands that the costs for this presence should be shared. However, she questions the logic of laying such a heavy burden on battle-fatigued Albertans on the heels of drastic budget cuts from Premier Kenney's recent omnibus bill. "We are not opposed to municipalities chipping in for policing costs," she states, "but you cannot cut, cut, cut and then just download a tax hit onto rural Alberta. If the general idea is to cripple small municipalities and the businesses and industries within, then by all means carry on."

In addition to the tax implications of the Province's new program, Reeve Blakeman questioned the likelihood of adding an additional 300 RCMP officers when present staffing levels are already woefully inadequate. "The Province is spinning this drastic move as good news," he added. "We're being told (via media sound bites) that it gives Rural Alberta a true seat at the table. If it's the same seat we had during their perfunctory consultation process, we'd like another table."

Known Program Details to Date

In the coming weeks, municipal leaders expect to receive more detail from the Province regarding how costs and policing resources are aggregated to each municipality. As it becomes available, this information will be posted on the Lac Ste. Anne County website at [LSAC.ca/police-funding](https://www.lsa.ca/police-funding). At time of publication, the following details were made available by the Province:

- Municipal allocations are based on a formula that uses 50% equalized assessment and 50% population
- Modifiers are included to reduce costs based on crime severity, distance from detachment, shadow population, and existing enhanced policing positions
- The overall amount collected will be 10% of the overall costs of frontline police officers under the PPSA. This will increase to 15% in 2021, 20% in 2022, and 30% in 2023. At this time, there is no indication the costs will increase above 30%.
- The new model is intended to be implemented on April 1, 2020, with annual increases on April 1 of each subsequent year
- A provincial police advisory board will be formed, which will include municipal representatives from each of the four RCMP districts in Alberta. No details on the function or scope of this board are known.

Impacts to the Lac Ste. Anne region of the contemplated police funding model are shown on the following page. News updates and related resources — including contact information for the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland — are available on the Lac Ste. Anne County website at [LSAC.ca/police-funding](https://www.lsa.ca/police-funding).

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