

Greetings! Sharing my (grab a coffee first) Update with a 2019 Recap, 2020 Goals and Full 2019 Highlights:

Our TOP 2019 RECAP ITEMS include:

- A change in our name to Foothills County,
- Rolling out our enhanced policing project with results,
- Approving a Zero-increase municipal budget with no decrease in service levels... with a slight plot-twist added by the GoA new police-tax,
- Approving Secondary Suites, and
- Getting work done amid weather challenges.

1. **NAME CHANGE:** As of January this year, we changed our name. We went to Foothills County instead of The Municipal District of Foothills No. 31, because County is internationally-known and needs no explanation. We believe it will be easier to say and recognize going forward. We took first steps toward replacing gateway signage, in much need of repair or no longer standing. Due to weather, this will be completed next year.
2. **ENHANCED POLICING PROJECT:** In February, we officially began an Enhanced Policing program after a 3-month trial, seeing that it worked to create a police presence in the community and provided an effort to help tackle rural crime. We purchased additional RCMP overtime hours, which includes the officers and their vehicles in our 3 detachment areas, to respond to high priority locations and situations and do increased visibility enforcement. We are pleased with the results – more in the next section...
3. **ZERO INCREASE 2020 BUDGET:** It's GOOD NEWS... a hold-the-line "0" increase budget along with no reductions in service levels! On November 27, 2019, Council passed a motion to adopt this first pass at our 2020 Municipal Budget, as our operating budget. When we dive into more details on operations and capital, Council and Staff may still make adjustments to include more roads on our road matrix list (permanent dust control surface) or make alterations or additions to the items we have reviewed. Also, we're waiting for more information from the Province, which we won't know until February-ish 2020 (assessment values, education tax requisition amount), and whether we have a surplus or deficit from 2019 (it's looking like we won't have a deficit from 2019). Our goal is to maintain the "0" increase to be responsive to the difficult economic times that many residents find themselves in, even though we may yet have to rework some things. Thank you to our Council for their input and to our Departments for all their work to provide this comprehensive and thoughtful budget estimate. ... HOWEVER: That said, we have now encountered a "plot twist" on our budget, despite our best efforts. Residents and council asked for help with addressing rural crime, so the Province has announced a new policing cost model, as one of their measures, that is aimed toward getting 300 new RCMP & 200 staff to tackle rural crime. Thanks – I think? ...So, this means that a new provincial tax will be collected by us, similar to the education portion of your property tax bill. We'll separate it out on your tax notice so you can see it. As we plan for a 1% increase that will be tagged onto our 2020 taxes, we await the results to see if this equals more service or any new officers in our area. Further, we will be increasing taxes up to 3% from this requisition alone, over the next 3 years in order to pay for 30% of this new policing cost. Our required portion, approximately \$644,000 will scale up to \$2,000,000 by year three. There will be a new police advisory board, which will see representation for us by the Rural Municipalities Association. The rate of tax will be subject to review every 5 years, so it's a wait and see on a number of fronts, including: results and payments over time.
4. **SECONDARY SUITES APPROVED:** In April, after much effort and consultation, Secondary Suites were approved. We're moving forward to bring two types into effect: secondary suites in the primary dwelling and secondary suites in an accessory building. Secondary Suites will be a discretionary use on Country Residential parcels over 2 acres. On Agriculture parcels, suites will be a permitted use. Size requirements for secondary suites are a minimum of 37 sq. m. (400 sq. ft.) and maximum of 83.6 sq. m. (900 sq. ft.).

5. **WEATHER CHALLENGES:** The summer of 2019 was notably wet and cool, which affected the work list for many of our departments. Despite the weather, a lot of work has been accomplished, and even within budget. We are certainly a winter wonderland this year, catching us all by surprise with such early snowfalls that have continued since September, resulting in farmers struggling to get crops off and with getting us into snow-removal mode before the fall work was even done, also with the added-challenge of roads not being frozen underneath snow. We've had more snow before Christmas this year, than all of last year.
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Our TOP GOALS for 2020 include:

- Continuing to develop the Hwy 2A Industrial Corridor by getting water and fiber optic internet services up and running,
 - Supporting residents to tackle rural crime,
 - Getting some permanent dust-control roads on our matrix-list done, and
 - Surviving the workload to do the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board growth plan which is due by December 2020.
1. **CONTINUE to DEVELOP our HWY 2A INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR:** In an effort to diversify our assessment from a heavy reliance on a residential-base, we want to prepare to diversify assessment to commercial. We've made advances towards our goal of developing the Hwy 2A industrial corridor by obtaining water licence, getting approvals under way for water and wastewater, and investigating the use of our municipally-owned fiber we installed in the corridor to provide high speed internet service. We have entered a contract with O-NET to help us plan and roll-out service in the area very soon. ... **Water Servicing Plans:** While we cannot give you all the details yet, Okotoks and Foothills County are collaborating to provide water servicing for future growth in our Central District, Hwy 2A Industrial Corridor and Okotoks. What's new is that it was determined that there is no piped-water option from the City, so we have continued to look for available water licence, study options for sourcing raw water from the Bow River south of Calgary and make plans for scaling upgrades to infrastructure. The key thing is that we are working together to create a win-win for our water-challenged area. We hope that the scenarios we are studying will equal results shortly, which would bring opportunity and certainty to investment in our communities. Of course, any work that will be undertaken must yet be approved by our councils and would then be subject to the Alberta Environment review process.
2. **SUPPORT RESIDENTS to TACKLE RURAL CRIME:** We now have a year of experience behind us with obtaining Enhanced RCMP Policing through over-time shifts. After the dust settles on paying for these shifts and seeing some fine revenue, we think it is worth giving it the go-ahead for 2020. We will continue to watch that the fine revenue offsets the overall cost of approximately \$250,000, as we await the revenues to flow in over a number of months to cover approximately \$100,000 of our outlay. With this type of extra policing, we can measure the amount of hours, location and results of a greater police presence and faster RCMP responses. Since we do not know if the new police cost model will provide any new officers or increase in service here, we will continue with this initiative until we know more from the province.
3. **GET SOME DUST-CONTROL ROADS DONE:** We're hoping to apply permanent dust-control surface to some more roads on our MATRIX list. We'll look for efficiencies, so we can make some of these roads happen in 2020. **HOWEVER,** we have to keep in mind that we may have a potential reality check from the effects of Mother Nature and any increase in oil prices, where a 1 cent increase will cost us approximately \$50,000.
4. **SURVIVE the CALGARY METROPOLITAN REGION BOARD:** We're hoping to survive the ambitious workload to complete the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board growth plan which is due by December 2020. Our staff and councillors put in a lot of time towards the CMRB. Foothills County is one of 10 members of the CMRB, which is tasked with developing a long-term plan for managed growth in the region. The CMRB must develop Plans by December 31, 2020, so, many meetings and studies are under way in order to accomplish this.
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2019 FULL HIGHLIGHTS:

When I was Looking back over 2019, I was amazed at how much we have accomplished and how much has gone on in Foothills County! By no means have I captured it all, but here is my expanded 2019 Recap...

This year was filled with change, new relationships, and diverse projects and events:

- All of our departments have taken care of business to provide excellent service throughout the year and keep us on budget – including Community (+fire, ag services, protective services), Corporate (finance, human resources, assessment, taxes, utilities), and Legislative Services, Planning (+GIS, safety codes), and Public Works (operations, services, infrastructure, utilities, landfill).
- All of our boards and committees have worked diligently to serve our area, in: recreation, utilities, services, provincial and regional affairs, distributing of gov funds, supporting education and inter-municipal projects.
- As of January this year, we changed our name. We went to Foothills County instead of The Municipal District of Foothills No. 31, because “County” is internationally-known and needs no explanation. We believe it will be easier to say and recognize going forward.
- Working Water Well and Septic System workshops were held in the first months to provide residents a learning opportunity on these topics, critical to rural landowners.
- In February, we officially began an Enhanced Policing program after a 3-month trial, seeing that it worked to create a police presence in the community and provides an effort to help tackle rural crime.
- We took first steps toward replacing gateway signage, in much need of repair or no longer standing. Due to weather, this will be completed next year.
- Foothills County agreed to contribute \$500,000 from municipal reserves toward the proposed community hub, as part of the modernization of Blackie School. However, this is now on hold due to a provincial change in priorities.
- In March, we said good-bye to former Reeve Roy McLean. Roy served as Reeve for the last 10 years, of his 21 years on council, from 1989 – 2010.
- FireSmart education and management plans continued, with direction from Community Services and our Foothills Fire Department.
- A NEW - Responsible Dog Owner Bylaw came into effect, which gives Foothills Patrol Peace Officers improved ability to deal with the high number of dog-related complaints that we receive.
- In April, after much effort and consultation, Secondary Suites were approved. We’re moving forward with 2 types, on parcels over 2 acres: Secondary Suites in the primary dwelling and Secondary Suites in an accessory building.
- We assisted with a Wildlife Conflict Solutions Workshop in May, which focused on fencing options.
- Spruce Meadows held their inaugural year showcasing the first professional sports team in Foothills County. The Canadian Premier League’s CAVAL-RY Football Club did us all proud in their great display of talent during this season. Spruce Meadows brought them online with great ceremony and many new fans now take in this sport. Plans to grow the venue for soccer are now in the works.
- The Calgary Metropolitan Region Board has kept us busy this year: Foothills County is one of 10 members of the CMRB, which is tasked with developing a long-term plan for managed growth in the region. The CMRB must develop Plans by December 31, 2020, so, many meetings and studies are under way in order to accomplish this.
- In May, June and July, with the County Float in tow, staff and councillors participated in the Little Britches Parade in High River, the Diamond Valley and the Okotoks Parades, a Canada Day celebration in Blackie and the Little New York Daze in Longview.
- Scott Seaman Sports Rink hosted a Stampede Breakfast and many of our communities celebrated Canada day, Stampede Breakfasts and other events with a little assistance from our staff and councillors.
- On July 20, the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 first moon landing was celebrated with great fanfare at our local Rothney Astrophysical Observatory. Excellent presentations and displays on science and technology highlighted the event.
- The summer of 2019 was notably wet and cool, which affected the work list for many of our departments. Despite the weather, a lot of work has been accomplished, and, even within budget.
- In the last few months, our NEW Provincial government hosted Agriculture consultation, a Rural Broadband Tour and a Rural Crime Tour to get our ideas on taking action on these matters. Many councillors and residents participated in these meetings. Next up is their Fair Deal for Alberta public meetings.

- Foothills County has also continuing to partner with our 3 local Rural crime watch groups and to promote this prevention effort to county residents.
- We've made advances towards our goal of developing the Hwy 2A industrial corridor by obtaining water licence, getting approvals under way for water and wastewater, and investigating use of the FIBER we installed to provide high speed internet service in the area.
- Due to high winds & dry conditions, we had a multiple-event FIRE day on October 25. Thanks to our Emergency Management team, Fire Department, all emergency responders and our local farmer-talent for getting this under control.
- Due to resident interest, we investigated the details of keeping Backyard Hens on parcels under 3 acres. And, we continue to deal with the planning considerations to allow Cannabis operations.
- We are certainly a winter wonderland this year, catching us all by surprise with such early snowfalls that have continued since September, resulting in farmers struggling to get crops off and with getting us into snow-removal mode before the fall work was even done, also with the added-challenge of roads not being frozen underneath snow. We've had more snow before Christmas this year, than all of last year.
- In October, Larry Spilak stepped down as Reeve of Foothills County. We thank Larry for serving us with his 9 of 12 years as Reeve and for his continued work on council.
- Also in October, our Council gave me the opportunity to represent Foothills County as Reeve, by voting me in at our annual organizational meeting. The title "reeve" originates from British history, but currently indicates the role of the elected president of a municipal council, in Canada, similar to a "mayor". Because a few people have inquired, I'd like to clarify that I will continue to serve you as your Division 4 Councillor - just have some more homework, meetings and chair the Council meetings. I thank Council for their support and look forward to working with everyone in this new role.
- In November, we lobbied successfully at our Rural Municipalities of Alberta Convention, where we were active on 4 of the 24 Resolutions. RMA will now support us on these important requests for: an Alberta Environment process change, allowing Peace Officer access to RCMP encrypted radio channels, 911 Cell Phone user fees to cover NexGen 911, and to re-consider the mandatory growth boards.
- Also in November, we approved our hold-the-line, "0" increase budget for 2020, along with no reductions in service levels! We wanted to be responsive to the difficult economic times that many residents find themselves in. Thank you to our Council for their input and to our Departments for all your work to provide this comprehensive and thoughtful budget estimate.
- That said, we have now encountered a "plot twist", despite our best efforts. The Province has announced a new policing cost model that is aimed toward getting 300 new RCMP & 200 staff to tackle rural crime. So, this means that a new provincial tax will be collected by us, similar to the education portion of your property tax bill you currently pay. As we plan for an approx. 1% increase that will be tagged onto our 2020 taxes, we await the results to see if this equals more service or any new officers in our area.
- In November and December, our staff made a beautiful Christmas Tree for the Sheep River Health Trust and designed some inspiring entries for the new Christmas Gift Basket competition. Congratulations to all for their teamwork and creating fun results that were auctioned off to benefit local families.

That brings us to TODAY:

As we celebrate the Christmas Season and look towards the New Year with *2020 vision*, I appreciate this opportunity to share my thoughts on this hope-filled theme.

Remembering the past with gratitude:

So many people contribute to our community in a positive way. I thank and recognize: our dedicated Foothills County council, staff and partners who work tirelessly to deliver services to our residents. I thank and recognize: individuals and organizations within our region who support those in need, the many volunteers who serve on our local boards and associations to make this county a great place to live, and the elected officials and staff from our neighbouring municipalities and jurisdictions who collaborate with us to bring advances to all our communities.

Living in the present with enthusiasm!:

We have the ability to make our world and ourselves much better when we live our life with purpose and share with others, even amid the many difficulties we have faced this year. When we use our gifts and talents for our families, workplace and community, we share in creating a community that cares. That is the real gift that keeps on giving. Let's reach out to assist those, who need a helping-hand.

Looking to the future with confidence:

With our capable, hard-working team at Foothills County, I know that we will rise to the occasion in 2020 and beyond. Together, we will bring creativity in the face of challenge, champion our rural perspective, and strategize for a beneficial future for our residents.

Best Wishes for a hope-filled, Happy New Year!

Suzanne Oel

Reeve & Division 4 Councillor

Foothills County

309 Macleod Trail

Box 5605

High River, Alberta, T1V 1M7