

To: Town of Vermilion Council and Administration

RE: SNOW REMOVAL

First off I would like to start off by saying that I know snow removal will never be perfect and there is no way that you can please all of the people all of the time, however it seems like winter hit us hard and fast this year which exposed some cracks in the system.

We have had some questions and comments brought forward to the Chamber office by members and we would like to share them with you.

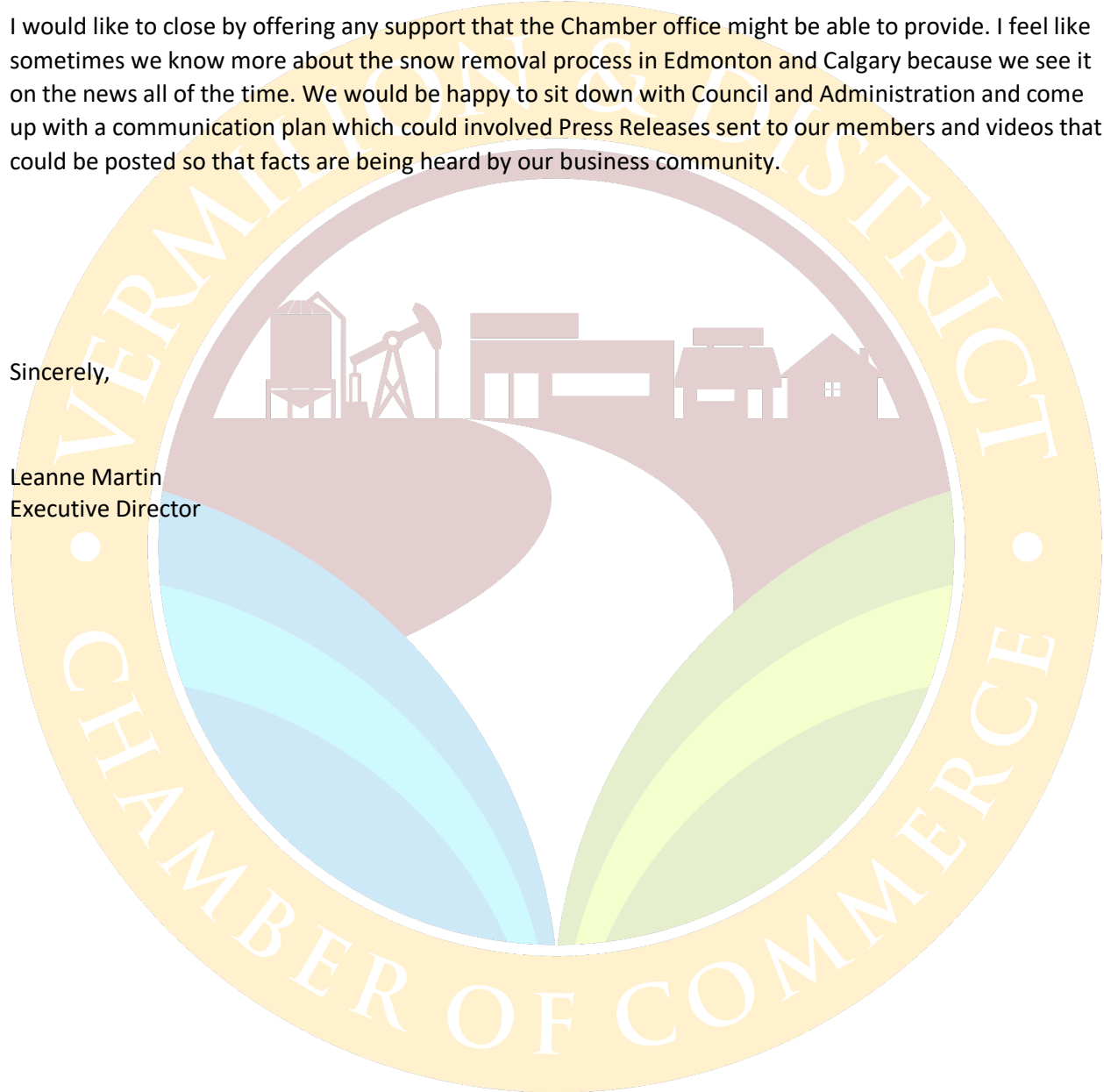
1. When the first snow fall arrived it seemed like snow clearing was slow to start which was explained away by the fact that the grader operator was away. Business owners understand that everyone deserves a holiday but they are wondering why only one person on the snow removal crew can operate the grader. Is there plans to start cross training employees?
2. The first time that snow was removed from the downtown core this year winter is was done with the loader which is fine however many businesses owners and customers alike where upset that it was occurring as businesses were trying to open for the day which caused issues. Many communities clear snow in the downtown core between 2am and 6am would it be possible for this to be done in Vermilion?
3. Most business owners have no option but to shovel their snow onto the curb and many have noted that this year with the snow removal rotation this snow has been allowed to build up higher which has cause safety issues. Business owners have noted that seniors are having a hard time maneuvering the snow and getting to the sidewalks. The handicap parking spots at times have been virtually inaccessible, and with the snow being piled higher it has made it very easy for some vehicles to drive up onto the sidewalks.
4. Communication from the town has been virtually nonexistent and customer service from town office staff has been low. One business owner was told that "main street isn't a priority" when they called the office. When the business owner asked if it just wasn't a priority that day or always the same statement was just repeated by the office staff member. Sometimes a little communication can go a long way. By providing the correct information to business owners and members of the public a lot of the speculation and rumors could be stopped before they even start. I also think that the front end staff honestly don't know what to say sometimes when they receive phone calls and visits to the office; would it be possible to provide them with up to date information so that they could also better convey information?
5. We also find it interesting that in the midst of trying to clear snow Administration is also trying to write and pass a new Snow Removal Bylaw. Since this is the first snow season that some of Administration and staff have dealt with wouldn't it be wiser to see what worked and didn't

work this year before writing a new bylaw? I think that they are also a few things in the new bylaw which will end up causing issues such as the amount of snow pack which will need to be in place before snow removal happens and leaving windrows in place for longer periods of time. I would like to thank council for not just rubber stamping the approval of the new bylaw and for pointing out that the current bylaw hasn't been adhered to this snow removal season.

I would like to close by offering any support that the Chamber office might be able to provide. I feel like sometimes we know more about the snow removal process in Edmonton and Calgary because we see it on the news all of the time. We would be happy to sit down with Council and Administration and come up with a communication plan which could involved Press Releases sent to our members and videos that could be posted so that facts are being heard by our business community.

Sincerely,

Leanne Martin
Executive Director





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Leanne Martin

February 13, 2023

Re: Vermilion and District Chamber of Commerce letter

Thank you for taking the time to reach out to the Town of Vermilion. We are always interested in what our local Chamber of Commerce shares with the Town.

In response to your questions, we have formulated the following points.

1. During the first snowfall, several factors contributed to the slow start. Vacation contributed to an already severe illness suffered by several other town staff. The Town runs a crew of four public works staff, and during the first week of the snow season, we were down to two staff members, which limits our ability to do significant snow removal.
2. The snow removal for downtown has been worked on starting at 4 am when we begin the downtown core, and we aim to be out by 8 am. Depending on the snowfall amount, it will depend on how much we do downtown in one day so that we can focus on the mornings. The loader and the truck were an attempt to improve the downtown while short-staffed.
3. This comment is acknowledged and is standard for most municipalities' downtown core.
4. Staff relay to residents and businesses the priority routes and that we will get to their area when it is within the next priority zone. For instance, downtown is currently the second priority in the snow removal policy. When a business calls from downtown, the typical response is that we will be there when priority routes are complete. Frontline staff are to connect callers to a department, not answer specific questions concerning operations. We

encourage the Chamber of Commerce to share our daily updates during our snow removal periods.

5. The policy was brought forward mid-season to address the snow removal budget being lowered for 2022 and again for 2023. The policy does not have the budget to support successful delivery, which was the driving factor in its proposal. While it may have been poor timing to propose an update to the policy, it is not a reflection of individual staff members as this is a team effort amongst public works for what has worked in the past and what has not. Thank you for your comments on the windrows and snowpack. We encourage you to contact Ben McPhee to elaborate on these concerns.

The Town welcomes collaboration on the communication for snow removal. We also understand that snow removal is difficult to plan and advertise more than two days in advance as volumes of snow can vary between streets. It is common to have a goal for what public works thinks could be achieved in a week. Then adjusted day by day to reflect the conditions being encountered. This allows for fluid adjustment to schedules without over-promising. This is a widespread practice amongst municipalities for snow removal and street sweeping.

Warmest Regards

Mayor Greg Thronson

Cc:
Town of Vermilion Council
KL, AW, BM, MP