

## 2020 CITY OF REGINA & REGINA POLICE SERVICE BUDGETS MONDAY DECEMBER 9 2019 FLORENCE STRATTON

A better budget for a better Regina: That is what I am calling for.

What do I mean by “a better Regina”? I mean a city that is actively striving to live up to its vision statement to be “Canada's most vibrant, inclusive, attractive, sustainable community.”

To realize this vision, Regina will need a better budget in a number of areas. I will focus on three of these.

### **FIRST BETTER PUBLIC TRANSIT**

Public transit is the solution to many of Regina's problems. For example:

**Rush-Hour Traffic Congestion:** Even though Regina is a relatively small city, many rush-hour traffic commutes take 30 minutes or more. More people using transit is the solution.

**Downtown Parking:** The ever-growing number of parking lots gives downtown Regina a desolate and abandoned look. Still, people have a hard time finding parking. More people using transit is the answer to this problem.

**Texting While Driving:** In 2018, Regina police issued 1,800 distracted driving tickets for drivers using mobile devices. The fine for distracted driving is about to go up to \$580 for the first offence. That's enough to buy 6 monthly adult bus passes. You can text to your heart's content on the bus with no safety or ticket worries.

**Environmental Sustainability:** Transit cuts carbon emissions.

**Inclusion:** Public transit is inclusive. Anyone and everyone can ride the bus.

If transit is the solution to these and other problems, why are more people not using transit? The good news is that transit use in Regina is, in fact, growing, with a projected increase in ridership of 6% in 2019.

The challenge is to further grow ridership. Here are two tried and true ways—just to get us started.

- a) **First, more frequent service:** Studies show that lots more people take the bus when buses come every 15 minutes.
- b) **Second, free transit:** This is one of the most effective strategies for getting people out of their cars and onto public transit.

I learned recently that some Regina high school students miss weeks of school during the winter because their families can't afford the Youth bus pass which costs \$64 a month.

Victoria provides free transit to anyone under the age of 18. That could be Regina's starting point for a free transit plan to completely eliminate fares in stages over a five year period.

### **CLIMATE ACTION IS MY SECOND FOCUS.**

In 2018, Regina City Council voted unanimously to Make Regina a 100% Renewable City by 2050. 2050 is much too late.

Then, rather than taking climate action, the city decided to host a conference—and to invite the oil and gas industry!

According to last month's report from the World Meteorological Organization, if nothing is done to stop rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels, global temperatures will increase by 3 – 5 degrees Centigrade above preindustrial levels this century, bringing wide-spread and destructive climate impacts.

To borrow a phrase or two from Greta Thunberg: "Our house is on fire!" "We need to panic!" By which I very much doubt she meant sitting down with oil company executives at a conference table.

Greta, along with many Regina youth, is calling for urgent climate action—which in Regina would include: better sidewalks, more bike lanes, more money for public transit, replacing diesel buses with electric buses, solar panels on municipal buildings, retrofitting city buildings.

### **ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN REGINA IS MY THIRD AND FINAL FOCUS.**

Regina's Plan To End Homelessness requires an investment of \$63 million over 5 years in a Housing First program, with \$25 million coming from the federal government and \$38 million from the provincial government.

The problem is that neither the provincial nor the federal contribution is likely to be immediately, if ever, forthcoming.

We can't wait for the federal government! We can't wait for the province! The matter is far too urgent!

A few weeks ago, I was introduced to a woman whom I will call Rose. Rose told me that she is in her late thirties and that she has been homeless for about a year.

Rose also told me that her health is failing. Do you know that the life expectancy for a homeless person in Canada is 39 years, more than three decades shorter than the average life-expectancy?

According to the Plan, 2,200 people were homeless in Regina in 2018. How many of them have since died from homelessness?

Rose left these words ringing in my ears: "It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century! How can anyone be poor and homeless in Regina!"

Indeed!

At the very least, the City of Regina can provide a model for the other levels of government by making an annual contribution to the funding of the Plan over its 5-year time-span. How about \$5 million—the amount of city tax dollars going annually to pay for Mosaic Stadium.

**A BETTER BUDGET WILL COST A LOT OF MONEY.**

Where might the money come from? Here are three suggestions:

1. **Impose a 4% property tax increase:** Many people see taxes as a burden. But taxes pay for those things we do together. For example: ●Parks ●Libraries ●City roads and sidewalks ●Street lights ●Public transit ●Swimming pools ●City water lines. Paying taxes is a contribution to the common good.
2. **Levy a personal vehicle tax:** Private vehicles are heavily subsidized by the city. It is Regina taxpayers who foot the bill for road infrastructure and maintenance.

Regina's 2020 roadways capital budget is \$31 million, while only \$800,000, or 2.6% of the total allocation, is allotted to investment in buses.

In Toronto, a private vehicle tax was in effect from 2008 – 2010, with a \$60 annual tax for a vehicle. The money collected went into a fund specifically for public transit.

3. **Defund Regina Police Service:** The 2020 budget allocates \$96 million to the RPS. That's \$3.6 million more than in 2019 and over 20% of the budget. We keep handing the police ever-increasing amounts of money and nothing changes because the root causes of crime are not being addressed.

Please Mayor Fougere and City Councillors, in 2020, let's have a better budget for a more "vibrant, inclusive, attractive, sustainable" Regina!