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County council denies request to waive portion of property taxes

By Kevin Sabo
STETTLER INDEPENDENT

Ratepayers who purchased a 10-acre parcel of land in the spring of 2021 had quite the tax shock in 2022, and will have to pay the full amount according to a council decision in their July 13 meeting.

The parcel of land was previously used as farmland and when taxes rolled out in 2021 the assessment had not been updated leaving the new owners of the property paying only the \$50 minimum tax charged previously on the property.

However, the new owners are not farming the land but have instead put a pad for their fifth-wheel on it and use the property for camping.

When the assessor was getting taxes ready for the county for the 2022 tax season, he noted the change in status of the land

from farmland to market land. This status change caused an assessment change; taxes on the property shot up to nearly \$740 for the year. This amounts to a nearly 1,400 per cent increase.

The property owners, whose names have been redacted in the agenda package presented to council, submitted a letter asking if council would consider reducing the tax portion of the 2022 assessment.

“Our assumption was that as long as we did not build and/or add services to the property our tax assessment would not increase (subject to inflation),” wrote the owner.

“We are asking the county council to consider reducing the tax portion of the 2022 assessment. We understand that next year we will be looking at the new assessed payment. We understand the cost of living is going up, but an increase of (1,368) per cent is a lot for anyone.”

Councillor Justin Stevens, who recently completed assessment review board training, said that the law is pretty clear.

“It can’t be taxed as agriculture if it’s not being used,” said Stevens. Stevens noted cases where farmers have rented out parcels as lay-down yards for construction or storage.

“At that point it is no longer agriculture,” said Stevens. “The courts have decided they can no longer be assessed as farm land.”

Councillor James Nibourg agreed, noting that with camping spots in campgrounds averaging anywhere between \$25 and \$50 a night, \$740 for a year of camping was still pretty cheap.

Under Section 347 of the Municipal Government Act the County of Stettler council does have the authority to reduce or waive taxes, if they deem it “equitable to do so.”

Ultimately, council concluded that doing so would not, in fact, be equitable, and upheld the full amount.